A guide to compiling Multi-Agency chronologies

What is a Chronology?

A chronology is a record in date order of all the significant events and changes in a child or young person's life.

A chronology should be started as soon as a case is open.

They are a live tool for improving practice in any case. Its overall purpose is to support the analysis of the history of a case with reference to the current state of work on the case.

Why should you write a chronology?

There are three main reasons for writing a chronology.

1) It can be used in order to make sense of the life events which have been important for a child and their family, as part of any kind of assessment and to assist with decision-making and intervention.
2) It is a tool that allows the worker to identify, and make sense of, patterns of events or behaviour in the life of a child and their family.
3) It is a tool which can enable reflection and analysis on the part of the worker and others, sometimes in the midst of work on the case, and sometimes after a serious incident in the case.

In addition, practitioners and their supervisors will find chronologies particularly helpful to use in supervision:

- When workers describe a "feeling of unease" about a case and are struggling to make sense of either events or what is happening within a family. This may be characterised by workers saying things like "they can't see the wood for the trees" or saying that there is an atmosphere within the home or a phrase a child has uttered has given them "goosebumps".
- When previous decisions made about a child are being questioned because they appear to be inappropriate or the envisaged outcomes are not being achieved.

- When considering escalation or de-escalation, multi-agency chronologies can assist contextualisation of the issues and assist decisions.

As the function of a multi-agency chronology is to assist the professionals in analysis and decision making, it is important to include positives in terms of the impact of changes in circumstances and outcomes of intervention rather than with the aim of presenting a 'balanced view' which may be of more relevance for a single agency chronology.

When to write a multi-agency chronology

A multi-agency chronology should commence as soon as concerns are identified and partners meet together to discuss them. This can be done at multi-agency meeting in order to share the task and so that any emerging patterns can be seen at the earliest opportunity.

What to include in a chronology

Critical incidents and key decisions made about a child or family should always be included. The temptation to "include everything" may be attributable to the fact that it is often only with hindsight that one can see which events in a child's life have been significant for them. However this temptation should be avoided in order to make the chronology a workable and useful document for both the workers and the child and family. As important as the events themselves are it is the actions that were taken that helps pinpoint what has been effective or ineffective in the past.

The following list provides a guide to what should be included:

☐ Family history, births, marriages, new partner, separations, bereavements, changes in household composition, employment/unemployment, moves of address & homelessness

☐ Referral history & outcomes

☐ Assessments undertaken and outcomes

☐ Evidence of engagement or non engagement with agencies

☐ Education, behaviour, exclusions, change of school

- ☐ Admissions, missed appointments, Emergency Department attendance, hospital
- ☐ Domestic abuse incidents
- ☐ Substance misuse issues
- ☐ Criminal Justice activity, parents, carer or Young Person
- ☐ Statutory meeting i.e. Initial Child Protection Conference/Review CPC & outcome
- ☐ Periods subject to Children Looked After process
- ☐ Missing episodes of child or family member
- ☐ Concerns regarding suspected specific issues (Child Sexual Exploitation,Trafficking etc)
- ☐ History relating to violence including convictions for such
- ☐ Any concerns regarding Adults at Risk or in need of services and support
- ☐ Child Protection enquiries & outcomes
- ☐ Court appearances, hearings and orders
- ☐ Key management decisions and brief reasons
- ☐ Any other relevant concerns or positive improvements
- ☐ Sex Offender Registration – known to MAPPA or MARAC
- ☐ Disability, illness & mental health
- ☐ Multi-agency meetings and outcomes

The chronology should

•   Focus on events and changes in circumstances that had a positive or negative impact on the child.

•   Include home visits only if something significant happened or concerns identified. Unsuccessful home visits.

•   Not include copied and pasted case notes or lists of dates of visits.

•	Group significant events together eg: Between April–June 2018 there were 23 incidents of absconding which increased in frequency and duration each week; rather than listing all 23 separate incidents.

•	Highlight a response or explain if no response was made.

•	Bring together information from a variety of sources (identify the source).

Note lack of engagement with services such as drug or alcohol services, missed appointment or positive / negative drug test results.

Other points to note:

The chronology should <u>not</u> include all telephone conversations and should focus on the main events.

Professional judgement is required to decide on the relevance of an event for a particular child or family.

The chronology should be a balanced document and should include parental strengths as well as weaknesses.

What is significant?

'Significant' means 'considerable; noteworthy or important or having a particular meaning; indicative of something.

Regarding 'Significant Harm'. (Bentovim) suggests "A compilation of significant events, acute and longstanding, which interact with the child's on-going development…" and DoH (1991) that the significance of harm suffered by a child can lie either in the seriousness of the harm itself or in the effects of the harm.

Deciding what is important or significant is a matter of professional judgement. Chronologies need to have a sense of purpose. There is a difference in recording "failed" home visits as part of a chronology in order to "cover the worker's back", as opposed to recording this as part of a pattern to evidence lack of parental engagement and co-operation. Effective and concise summarising is key to the

production of a working document. Chronologies should contain facts alone, without analysis or interpretation of the facts. While the chronology itself should exclude professional judgement, such judgement will need to be exercised in deciding what is relevant to include.

Chronologies should not be a repetition of detailed case records, but rather brief bullet points. Workers need to be familiar with the historical case information and be able to identify critical incidents and events in the child's life.

A chronology needs to be regularly reviewed in order to improve analysis and reassess the relevance of recording an event in a child's life. Sharing the chronology with the child and their family should be part of this review process. Chronologies should be routinely updated at multi-agency meetings to assist assessment and inform decisions and planning.

Using Chronologies

Effective chronologies enable us to see the ways in which an individual child or a family have functioned over time and to examine how families have managed their own circumstances, as well as how professionals have managed the case over time.

A chronology is only as useful as its accuracy and the frequency with which it is maintained. A good chronology will meet a wide range of needs if it can be used as a reflective tool to plan sensitive and helpful work with children and their families, considering the welfare of the child as paramount.

Compiling Multi-Agency Chronologies

Each agency is expected to compile a chronology to reflect their own agency involvement and what is known about the child and family when a case is opened.

Single agency chronologies should be brought together as soon as the need to provide a multi-agency response is identified e.g. referral to Early Intervention panel or referral to Children's Social Care. Bringing the chronologies together will be the responsibility of the lead professional and may take place at the first panel discussion or multi-agency meeting. The combined chronology may then be

updated at future multi-agency meetings. As parental agreement will be required to share information as part of the multi-agency response at Level 3 of the Continuum of Need, this will incorporate a shared chronology.

To assist merging of the individual chronologies, it is important that the following headings are used.

Agency Making the Recording	Date	Time	Source of Information	Subject: Child/Adult Family Member	Significant Event, Action and Outcome (include reference to whether child was seen, with whom or alone)	Comments
This is the agency completing this part of the chronology. When the chronology is merged with others, this will show who was involved at this time.	Put in the date of the significant event (e.g. 1/11/14) and note any subsequent or consecutive dates in the Comments section	Put in a specific time but leave blank if not significant	Where did you obtain the information? (e.g. Health Visitor, Records, Assessment Report etc)	Write the name of the person to whom the entry refers. If more than one person, include all names.	Summarise the key information relating to the child. Summarise the services offered/provided and decisions reached.	Add any other information here