Learning from Reviews and Audits

Safeguarding Children

With thanks to Terri Cartwright, Practice Lead Safeguarding for some of the content for this briefing.

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Context

- Learning from reviews and audits conducted in Swindon in the past year have identified several recurring themes.
- The aim of this resource is to highlight some of the main themes and signpost to resources to improve practice.
- This provides an opportunity for the themes to be considered individually and within your agency/service to improve outcomes for children and families in Swindon.
- Some of the learning themes will also be relevant to practitioners working with adults at risk.
- It is recommended that this document is viewed in its entirety as there is a cross over with several of the themes highlighted.

A lack of professional curiosity

This included:
- Not taking account of the child/family history and cultural identity and what this meant in relation to risk and impact on the child/children's lived experience.
- Hidden children – see slide voice of the child.
- Not gaining a social history in respect of parents.
- A failure to explore the reasons for parental behaviour and the impact on the child to subsequently inform effective planning for the child/children.
- Not undertaking checks of new partners within a household.
- A lack of focus on the person causing harm especially when they have left the family home and potential risk posed.
- Not cross-referencing information with partner agencies.

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A lack of professional curiosity

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This included:
- Not considering the intersectionality of risk factors e.g. domestic abuse, mental health and self-neglect.
- Basing decisions on parents self reporting without testing the veracity of information provided.
- A lack of triangulation and checking of the information from a variety of sources and a failure to more robustly share information across agencies to inform risk assessments.
- Not appropriately challenging thinking and decision making, this may be the person you are working with, other professionals or organisations or your own thinking.

Voice of the Child

This included:
- Not listening to what children tell us either in words or behaviour.
- Having listened to children, there has been a failure to appropriately respond to their concerns.
- Not responding to the voice of siblings and a failure to give weight to their concerns about abuse of their siblings.
- 'Hidden Children' consent is given to work with one child but not another within the same family and living in the same household. All children in a household should be considered individually.
- Not exploring the cultural identity of children and families.
- This leads to a lack of a holistic understanding of the child's lived experience.

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A failure to recognise or understand…

This included:
- A lack of understanding in relation to emotional harm
- A failure to recognise neglect and the cumulative harm of neglect.
- The impact of sexual abuse on children's lived experience.
- Adolescents can still be at risk from poor parenting despite their age.
- Misunderstanding of consent.
- Parents' behaviour and capacity including a failure to consider history of domestic abuse and mental health concerns. In some examples the risk presented by perpetrators of domestic abuse was not considered.
- Intersectionality of risk factors e.g. domestic abuse, mental health and self-neglect.
- Dealing with concerns in isolation and failing to consider the holistic picture for the child.

Professional Practice

This included:

- A lack of professional respect towards other professionals and a failure to give weight to their safeguarding concerns.
- A lack of awareness of neurodiversity and the impact on children and parenting capacity.
- Poor record keeping.
- Poor supervision and management oversight.
- Failure to use family chronologies in identifying patterns of risk and harm meant that appropriate thresholds for intervention and planning were not in place.
- A failure to adhere to the SSP <u>Multi-Agency Process for the Resolution of Professional Disagreements Relating to Safeguarding Protection of Children (Escalation Process)</u>

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Any or all of the identified learning themes can lead to…

- **Over optimism:** The 'rule of optimism': means professionals can tend to rationalise away new or escalating risks despite clear evidence to the contrary

- **Start again syndrome*:** which prevents practitioners from having a clear understanding of a child's lived experience based on past information.

*This can be compounded by high staff turnover and changes of worker.
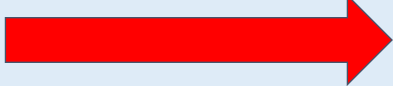
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Implications for Practice

The importance of history and the family story

This provides an opportunity to:

- Understand who the family are and what their lived experience has been.

- Understand any trauma or loss the family may have suffered.

- Identify who is important in the family.

- Evidences any patterns of behaviour.

- Highlights any cumulative harm.

Process vs Practice

- **Records not up to date** ➡️
  - Incomplete picture of the child and their situation.

- **Poor supervision** ➡️
  - Lack of:
    - meaningful and reflective discussion.
    - planning and risk of drift and delay for the child.

- **Threshold Application** ➡️
  - Children's needs are not met and they are left in harmful situations.

Process vs Practice

- **Child is absent in the recording.** →
  - Child becomes lost and parent becomes the focus.
  - Child is left in harmful situations/does not have their needs met.

- **No evidence of use of history.** →
  - Missing pieces of the jigsaw – child's life is not properly known.
  - Can lead to wrong decision.

- **No Chronology, Genogram or Ecomaps.** →
  - The child's history/culture/make up is poorly understood.
  - Cumulative harm is not recognised - start again syndrome occurs and children suffer prolonged neglect/abuse.

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Resources to find out more

Professional Curiosity

- **SSP webpage:** Professional Curiosity includes links to additional resources and recordings.
- **New eLearning:** Being professionally curious

Briefings/learning resources:
- Professional Curiosity Learning Resource SABN
- Professional Curiosity Resource Pack
- Professional curiosity poster

Voice of the child

- **Day in the Life Tools** can help you to work with children and families to make sense of an individual's lived experience and gain a better understanding of what is happening in families.
- There are six versions, each specifically written for the following cohorts of children:
  - Day in my life – Unborn baby
  - Day in my life – Baby
  - Day in my life – Pre-school child
  - Day in my life – Primary school aged child
  - Day in my life – Adolescent
  - Day in my life – Child with disabilities
- This guide provides more information on how to use these tools.

SSP Resources:
- Guide to safeguarding and supporting young people
- Adultification - September 2024
- SSP Practice Brief: Capturing the voice of the child in records

Information Sharing and Consent

- SSP webpage Information sharing and consent

- Other resources include:

  - Information sharing - 7-minute briefing

  - Information sharing - seven golden rules

  - Information sharing - consent and information sharing briefing

  - Gillick Competence and Fraser Guidelines - 7- minute briefing

- SSP Training: Legal training 1 - Consent, capacity and information sharing

No quick fixes: Multi-agency working to improve information-sharing on men and keep children safe

- This is a recent article exploring the ongoing challenges of multi-agency collaboration in safeguarding children across England.
- It focuses on improving information-sharing between services such as children's social care, health, and the police, particularly in relation to men who may pose risks. The authors identify three critical factors for success:
  - Strong organisational commitment and adequate resources
  - Clear and effective communication between professionals
  - Careful navigation of consent and confidentiality issues

- The paper argues that structural reforms alone are insufficient; cultural and relational aspects remain vital for effective safeguarding.

Read the journal article: No quick fixes: Multi-agency working to improve information-sharing on men and keep children safe

Myth of the Invisible Men published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

Resolution of Professional Disagreements

- Working with children, families and adults with care and support needs is often complex.
- Occasionally professionals from different backgrounds may hold different professional opinions.
- Different perspectives have the potential to cause conflict and lead to poorer outcomes.
- There may be no right, or wrong solution and practitioners may exercise their professional judgement differently and have differing opinions of what the right approach should be.

Resolution process:
- **Primary aim:** professional disagreements are resolved at the lowest possible level, by those working directly with children/families and adults.
- **Applies to and used by:** ALL agencies who work with children, families and adults with care and support needs in Swindon.
- **Reaching a resolution:** essential that at all times, disputes are approached in a considerate manner and respects and seeks to understand the views and concerns of others when engaging with the young person, their family and adults with care and support needs.

Process for children:
Multi-Agency Process for the Resolution of Professional Disagreements Relating to Safeguarding Protection of Children (Escalation Process)

Other related resources

Supervision and Management Oversight
- Defensible decision-making in children's social care - resource pack for practice supervisors: Frontline Briefing (2022) – includes a link to download a resource pack and may be useful to partner agencies.
- Neglect supervision guide
- Neglect strategy - Appendices 2 and 6
- Supervision management oversight - Learning from audits

Chronologies:
- SSP chronology guidance

Other briefing:
SSP practice brief - Making a good referral

SSP webpages

- [Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Case Learning leaflets](#)
- [Self neglect](#)
- [Neglect](#)
- [Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Request for help and support guidelines and contact information](#)
- [Information sharing and consent](#)

Your Feedback

- We hope you have found this resource useful and would really like your feedback.
- Please click on the link below or use the QR code to give us your comments
- Learning from Reviews_audits_ Recurring Themes
- It will only take a couple of minutes!