

# **Manchester Safeguarding Children Board — Practice guidance for use of chronologies within case records**

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MANCHESTER SAFEGUARDING  
CHILDREN BOARD

[www.manchesterscb.org.uk](http://www.manchesterscb.org.uk)

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A chronology seeks to provide a clear account of all significant events in a child's life to date. This brief and summarised account of events provides accumulative evidence of emerging need and risks and flags up when a multi-agency response might be necessary.
- 1.2 As part of effective recording, all practitioners who work with children, young people and families should maintain a child's chronology of significant events as part of the case record.

## 2. What is a chronology?

- (i) A list, in date order, of all the significant events and changes in a child or young person's life drawing upon the knowledge and information held by agencies involved with the child and family, recorded as brief 'headlines' to provide an immediate, visual overview
- (ii) An important part of the whole case record about a child. A chronology is **not**: the detailed case recording; a diary/ list of dates; an assessment; an end in itself.

## 3. What is a significant event and what should be included in a child's chronology?

- 3.1 Professional judgement is required to decide whether particular circumstances or events are significant for a particular child and family. Below is a guide to the type of things to include in a child's chronology; this is not an exhaustive list and practitioners should consider each child's circumstances individually:
  - (i) A significant event is anything that has a positive or negative **impact** on the child. It does not have to happen directly to the child but can be any change in circumstances or events that have, or may have, consequences for the child.
  - (ii) Previous history of involvement/ receipt of services from an agency.
  - (iii) Incidence where a child is considered to have suffered harm/ or is at risk of harm.
  - (iv) Child absconded/ gone missing.
  - (v) Any episodes of self harm.
  - (vi) Any significant parental factors (domestic abuse; substance misuse; mental ill health) that may have an impact on the child.
  - (vii) Significant child health issues.
  - (viii) Changes of GP.
  - (ix) Non attendance at appointments, non availability at home visits.
  - (x) Attendances at A&E/ out of hours services/ excessive use of health services etc.
  - (xi) Education training and employment history (including changes in school/ absences/ exclusions etc).
  - (xii) Any changes in a child's legal status.
  - (xiii) Changes in where a child lives, including placement history of children in care.

- (xiv) Changes in family structure, people living in child's home, excessive visitors.
- (xv) Any history of offences.
- (xvi) Dates of meetings or professional activities (e.g. conclusions of assessments, receipt of referrals) where important decisions are made about a child's life.
- (xvii) Any other events and changes in the circumstances of the child and family deemed to be significant, or potentially significant, for the child.

### 3.2 What is the purpose of a chronology?

- (i) Done effectively it helps to place children at the centre of everything we do.
- (ii) An effective chronology can help identify risks, patterns, issues in a child's life. It can help in getting a better understanding of the immediate or cumulative impact of events.
- (iii) It helps to make links between the past and the present, helping to understand the importance of historic information upon what is happening in a child's life now.
- (iv) Good chronologies enable new workers to become familiar with the case.
- (v) Importantly a good case chronology can, at a later stage, help children, young people and families make sense of their past.
- (vi) A good chronology can draw attention to seemingly unrelated events or information.
- (vii) Using chronologies in practice can promote better engagement from children and families.
- (viii) Accurate chronologies can assist the process of assessment, care planning and review.
- (ix) When carried out consistently across agencies good chronologies can improve the sharing and understanding of the impact of information about a child's life.

## 4. Good practice for maintaining case chronologies

4.1 How chronologies are compiled and how they are used and referred to in practice will make a significant difference to improving outcomes for children. This next section provides some practice guidance on how best to compile chronologies and use them in practice.

4.2 Some practitioners in studies have commented that "chronologies had become repeats of the file, they were arduous to compile and, once completed, were so detailed workers could not see the wood from the trees" (2010). To avoid this perception:

- (i) Commence chronologies at the start of involvement in a case.
- (ii) Enter relevant information as it occurs.
- (iii) Enter information throughout involvement in the case, an out of date chronology cannot provide full information for further analysis and planning.
- (iv) Be brief in chronologies, normally one line.

- (v) Reference where in the case records more detailed information can be found.
- (vi) Consider the dimensions within the domains of the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and Their Families (2000), to help judge whether there is significant information or events relating to these dimensions.

“A chronology that is not reviewed and analysed serves little purpose”.

- (i) When adding information to case chronologies consider its relationship and relevance to previous information. (E.g. numbers of missed appointments; A&E appointments; police call outs to a home; numbers of injuries over time etc).
- (ii) Build in regular reviews of the chronology to assist in case planning and evaluating progress, for example in preparation for reviews.
- (iii) Share the information being placed in chronologies with children, young people and families as appropriate. This can be to **a)** check for accuracy of information **b)** check children and families’ views and perceptions of the information/ events.
- (iv) Remember to specify the date of the event/ information received.
- (v) Identify/ evidence the source of the information.
- (vi) Make sure the name and job title of the person inputting to the chronology is recorded.

## 5. Expectations in the use of case chronologies:

- 5.1 To ensure the best outcomes for children and young people through effective assessment analysis and planning Manchester Safeguarding Children Board (MSCB) expects all agencies working with children and families to maintain case chronologies on each child who is in receipt of services beyond the universal offer.
- 5.2 MSCB recognises that agencies have their own recording systems and requirements, and many have developed chronology templates within this recording.
- 5.3 Below is a suggested template for a single agency chronology that will capture the important issues in chronologies as outlined above and will support the production of multi-agency chronologies.

Date	Significant event/ information	Source/ evidence	Impact on the child	Recorded by

## **6. Multi-agency chronologies**

- 6.1 Practice and research has shown that multi-agency chronologies can be extremely important in identifying critical events in the lives of children and young people and can assist professionals in decision-making when working together with vulnerable children and families. A single incident, no matter how significant or insignificant it may appear in itself, often takes on a far greater importance in the life of a child when placed in the context of a proper, time-lined integrated chronology.
- 6.2 The creation of a multi-agency chronology should be considered at the outset of assessment for complex cases. It is likely that the key worker will take on the responsibility for creating the multi-agency chronology following discussion with multi-agency partners. This will be collated from the individual agency chronologies.

## **Appendix 1 - MSCB Practice guidance for use of chronologies within case records**

I confirm that I have read the Manchester Safeguarding Children Board '*Practice guidance for use of chronologies within case records*'.

My organisation agrees to comply with the standards outlined in the guidance and to ensure this guidance is shared with all relevant staff

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Name:**

**Designation:**

**Organisation:**