

Early Help Service

Practice Guidance

Chronologies

Reasons to construct a chronology

1. To make sense of life events which have been critical to the child and family;
2. To enable workers to make sense of, and identify patterns of behaviours and events; and
3. To enable reflection and analysis for the people involved in the case, including the child and family.

When is a chronology required?

- All open Early Help cases must have a chronology.

Whose responsibility is the chronology?

- The Lead Professional (Key Worker) is responsible for ensuring that a chronology is started.
- The chronology must be kept in the child or young person's file.
- All professionals involved in the case can contribute to a chronology. If new information is added it is the responsibility of the professional adding the information to ensure that the Key Worker is aware of the additions.
- The Key Worker's line-manager is responsible for quality-assuring the chronology.

When should the chronology be updated?

- Chronologies should be updated whenever anything new and/or significant has happened for the child, young person or family.
- It is good practice to update a chronology after each Early Help Review.
- Chronologies must always be updated before a case is transferred to a new Key Worker, before a case is closed (to inform that decision) and before a case is stepped up (to inform that decision and to ensure that Children's Social Care have the most up-to-date picture).

What format should a chronology take?

- The Early Help Service will use the same chronology format as Children's Social Care, to ensure consistency when cases are stepped up and down. The form is available in the Professionals section of the Together for Children Early Help webpage.
- It would be helpful if other deliverers of early help could use the same format, but they are free to choose an alternative if preferred.

What should be in a chronology?

- a. The purpose of a chronology is to provide workers, supervisors/managers, children and their families (and possibly a court) with a chronological list of significant events in a child's or their family's life. A significant event is an incident that impacts on the child's safety or

welfare and/or on their home environment. A chronology therefore enables the reader to gain quickly a picture of formative events and patterns of behaviour and to analyse the implications of the overall history to improve decision-making;

- b. A chronology is not expected to be a repetition of the narrative contained in assessments, plans or case notes, but rather a **series of single sentence descriptions of incidents, events or issues within a family or which significantly affect a child's life**. These must be relevant and succinct so that important details are not lost in insignificant and irrelevant details. Good professional judgement is required to identify critical moments in a child's/family's life experience;
- c. A chronology should draw on various sources of information such as previous case notes, historical social work files and information from partners (health, education, housing and so on). The child or young person and their family should also be involved in the process of completing the chronology. The involvement of family members provides an opportunity to check the accuracy of information, to obtain the family's perspective on events and to develop an understanding of the impact of events on individuals in the family;
- d. Each entry in a chronology should be **dated and numbered** for ease of reference;
- e. The names of family members should be used as well as their position in the family with every entry eg "June (Mum)". The full names and titles of professionals should be used with every entry eg "Dr Andrew Smith (GP)". This is to ensure clarity for the reader.

The prompts below indicate the type of issues which might feature in a chronology – there will be others:

Parents and Family:

- Family history – births, deaths, marriages, serious illnesses and changes in the make-up of the family such as separations, divorces, new partners, regular visitors. This may start with events before the birth of the child in question;
- Serious stress factors – unemployment, bereavement, accidents, prison, deaths;
- Parental history and diagnoses, especially care history, mental and psychological health, crime, substance misuse, domestic abuse issues and history of relapse or repeated behaviours;
- Police information – relevant incidents at the family home or in relation to family members such as domestic violence or drunken behaviour;
- Criminal and civil proceedings and outcomes;
- House moves with dates and addresses in full;
- Take-up / non take-up of services and support offered to the family;
- Positive events or strengths showing family capacity to work in partnership and engage with professionals;
- Specialist assessments and their outcomes.

The Child or Young Person

- Child's voice regarding issues and whether the child has been seen alone;
- Change of address or school and details;
- Child's attendance or lack of attendance, where this is significant; any exclusions from nursery/school with dates and reasons; is young person NEET?

- Change of carer;
- Change of health professional such as GP, or referral for medical assessment (eg CYPS);
- Any Children’s Social Care involvement with dates, reasons and outcomes;
- Dates of Early Help Assessment, Family Support Meetings, Plans, Reviews etc and any change in status (eg case stepped up or case closed);
- Relevant medical examinations and attendance at hospital for any reason, or A&E with dates, reasons and outcomes;
- Any Child Concern Notifications (CCNs), with dates and reasons;
- Positive information about the child.

What should NOT be in a chronology?

- Opinions which are not supported by evidence or a pattern of behaviour;
- List of tasks undertaken;
- Record of telephone contacts or e-mails unless containing significant information.

The information in a chronology should not have to be repeated in other documents. Reference can be made to the chronology eg “See point 7 in chronology”. The chronology should then be read alongside other case-file documents.

A good chronology should not confuse or mislead, it should assist a clear understanding of the case. A chronology should be checked by a Key Worker’s manager as part of case-file supervision to ensure that it can be understood by someone unfamiliar with the case.

Highlighting very significant incidents

In order that patterns of concerning behaviour are quickly spotted by workers, managers and others reading a chronology, very significant incidents should be highlighted as follows:

- Physical injury to a child, including when proven to be accidental, should be highlighted in pink
- The appearance of an otherwise unknown male in the household should be highlighted in yellow
- Incidents related to the toxic trio (parental mental ill-health, substance misuse or domestic abuse) should be highlighted in light green

Each time an incident is highlighted, the case should be reviewed and consideration should be given to escalation, depending upon the number and nature of incidents highlighted. Escalations must always be discussed with a line-manager, but the absence of the line-manager must not be a barrier to raising a safeguarding concern or referral if appropriate.

Will all chronologies look identical?

No, although all should follow the same format. The format is available on the Professionals section of the Together for Children Early Help webpage.

As Early Help chronologies exist to ensure that we offer the right support at the right time at the right level, and to identify patterns which might suggest that a higher level of support or intervention is required, they will be more uniform than those used in children’s social care.

Combining chronologies after a significant incident

If something very serious happens in a child's life, it is usual for agencies to be required to contribute to one lead chronology. This is normally generated by children's social care. For this reason, it is essential that the information contained in an Early Help chronology can be extracted easily, is succinct, relevant and that the outcomes match the events.

Monitoring chronologies

Chronologies will be monitored as part of routine case-file supervision. Managers will expect chronologies to be up to date, with patterns of behaviour or concerns highlighted and appropriate action noted and taken. Failure to complete chronologies or to act appropriately on their contents will be dealt with under competency or disciplinary procedures, as appropriate.

Case-file audits will also be undertaken by an independent team and will look at the quality of chronologies alongside assessments, plans and reviews. The purpose of audit is to identify trends, themes and training needs across the service.