**How to ... construct a chronology**

**Introduction**

A chronology is a record that lists in date order the significant events in a person's life. Chronologies are commonly used for children and young people where social work is involved. As such, a chronology can be a key part of an assessment as it enhances an understanding of what is happening in the life of the child or young person. Chronologies provide a picture of a child including transitions and interventions; all of which impact on that child's life. It is important to note, however, that what might be a significant event in one child's life (for example, sustained school attendance after a period of exclusion) will not be relevant to another child. Therefore, the person completing or updating the chronology will need to use professional judgement when deciding what is significant and what is not.

Chronologies help to identify patterns of behaviour or repeated incidents of risk or concern that may be harmful and impact negatively on a child's health, safety or well-being. This can be particularly important where a child is or has been subject to neglect, abuse, poor parenting and/or other adversity. As a chronology is a dynamic record, it should be reviewed and updated on a regular basis. Indeed, a chronology is an analytical tool which helps to understand the impact, both immediate and longer term, of events in a child's life and the analysis of an updated chronology is essential to informing the ongoing assessment of needs, risk and strengths. This helps the planning process.

**What should be included in a chronology?**

A chronology should be holistic in that it provides a comprehensive overview of a child's life, not just disconnected periods of time or discrete incidents or service interventions. Therefore, it is important to include all life events. To give a holistic view of the child or young person, it is important to include all life events. For example, changes in family composition, deaths, house moves, changes in schooling, illnesses or injuries, periods of time in care, criminal offences, and so on.

Accuracy is a vital element of a chronology and mistakes, particularly concerning names and dates of birth, can present in records and then be replicated over and over in assessments. This can be confusing for practitioners and distressing for families and so every possible effort should be made to ensure that the chronology is as accurate as possible. It is important that both positive and negative events are included, particularly as these help to show patterns and triggers, but also as the impact of events can help children to develop resilience. In terms of how much information should be included, the only guide is that information should be sufficiently detailed, but not as full as case records.

Chronologies should not just be constructed from social work records and practitioners' knowledge, but should also contain information from other services in order to build that holistic picture. Consent should be gained from family members before contacting other agencies for information. Bear in mind that different agencies and local authorities will have their own formats for chronologies.

Here is a suggested format for a chronology for twelve year old Amy Allen:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date/**  **Time** | **Event/service intervention** | **Outcome/Impact** | **Source of information** | **Action** |
| 1.1.15 to 10.1.15 | Single assessment | No indications of neglect. Amy and Sue (mum) are isolated since moving to the area. | Referral by Jo Jones, Teacher, Wilshaw High School | Assessment completed. Signposted to Youth Centre. Case closed. |
| 11.1.15 | Amy refusing to go home. Visit to Wilshaw High School | Amy's father died in 2014. Amy is experiencing grief, but mum refused to let her attend bereavement counselling. | Referral Jones, Teacher, Wilshaw High School | Home visit undertaken. Mum agreed to bereavement counselling.  Case closed. |

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