

Learning from Serious Case Reviews

Do you have
significant
concerns
about
a child?



0330 240 1727

This briefing is based on the findings from the recent five SCR's, Children O, R, AC, L and N. From the information extrapolated from the reports;

- 5 out of 5 identify episodes of poor communication and information sharing between agencies
- 5 out of 5 noted that 'assessments' were either not thorough or comprehensive and did not always contribute to effective decision-making and action
- 5 out of 5 Neglect was a feature
- 3 out of 5 Domestic Abuse was a feature

Poor communication and information sharing between agencies

All of the SCR's identified episodes of poor communication and information sharing between agencies. This included families moving across geographical boundaries which caused a loss of focus on the child. Agencies that hold a rich mix of information on children should consider how they can store that information in a format that can be shared effectively when there is an appropriate requirement.

Assessments

All of the SCR's noted that 'assessments' were either not thorough or comprehensive and did not always contribute to effective decision-making and action. In some of the cases family history, chronology and genealogy were not considered as part of the assessments.

Where a child is subject of more than one statutory plan, it is important that the managers of each plan ensure there is effective coordination between each other and that the identified risks are being managed effectively.

Neglect

Neglect was a feature in all of the SCR's, in some cases intergenerational neglect. For some young people that experience neglect over a long period of time they may present in behaviours which place them at increased risk of harm by engaging in risk-taking behaviour including drug and alcohol misuse and offending. Children and young people not in school, due to poor attendance or exclusion, can be especially vulnerable. Neglected children may not speak out or tell anyone what is happening. They may hide and minimise the abuse they are suffering; they may need to keep quiet to survive.

Domestic abuse

Domestic abuse features in 3 of the 5 SCR's. The impact of all domestic abuse is harmful to children and young people and it can have a serious impact on a child's behaviour and wellbeing. Parents or carers may underestimate the effects of the abuse on their children because they don't see what's happening. In one of the cases the child had directly witnessed domestic abuse.

Managing Risk

Recognising and Assessing Risk and Need is a theme across all of the SCR's. Understanding the vulnerability of children and identifying some of the factors that place them at a higher risk of abuse and neglect. For example; children and young people that are not in school due to poor attendance or exclusion, children with a disability or additional health needs. Assessing risk requires an understanding of underlying issues and chronology, not just the current incident.

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Risk and protective factors in the parent and the wider environment need to be understood, with a focus on the impact on the child. In one of the SCR's the known risks for care leavers and their ability to appropriately parent were not considered. Professionals working with pregnant and new mothers need to consider the long term impact of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse on future parenting capacity.

Responding to Risk and Need. In several of the cases there was little professional curiosity and scepticism around fathers and other males. Significant change (such as a new partner or non-attendance at appointments) is a cue for reappraisal of risk assessment.

Lack of engagement from families

Many of the families in these cases had a history of poor engagement with children's services and other services and included failure to attend medical or other appointments or a lack of take-up of supportive services (Early Help) lack of engagement with school staff which meant that many of the children were left at risk. In some of the cases the families were reluctant or resistant to engage, in circumstances such as this the child's welfare should remain paramount at all times. All staff working with families need to be familiar with the Working with Uncooperative Families - Disguised Compliance Policy.

Education

The reports highlight specific learning for schools and education providers. School staff are perhaps best placed to notice how children are because they commonly have contact with the same child on an almost daily basis (but only if children attend school regularly). Educational establishments need to be aware of the recommendations from the serious case reviews in relation to Attendance Plans and the need to consider an Early Help Assessment when attendance falls below 85% - and record the reason if not proceeding with this. This is also in line with the recently updated 'Keeping Children Safe in Schools and Colleges' document.

One report highlights the need to support vulnerable children throughout their transition from Junior School to Secondary School and outlines the need for transition plans to record the voice of the child.

Themes drawn from all of the SCR's

- Recognising and Assessing Risk and Need - Professionals working with pregnant and new mothers need to consider the long term impact of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse on future parenting capacity
- Responding to Risk and Need - in one of the cases there was very little professional curiosity and scepticism around fathers and other males who associated with changing, high need or complex families particularly where there has been a history of sexual exploitation or abuse
- Quality of Assessments – initial and ongoing assessments must be thorough, timely, gather multi-agency information, inform decision-making and take account of historic context of the family
- Service and Geographical Boundaries - in one of the cases the family moved between geographical areas and between service areas, this caused a loss of focus on the child

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- Use of Early Help in Schools – in one of the cases the secondary school did not positively embrace the take up and implementation of the Cumbria LSCB Early Help strategy. The development of the Early Help panels allow schools to more easily refer 'stuck' Early Help Assessments and work is being undertaken to encourage key educational establishments to attend the panels as panel members
- Transition arrangements from Junior School to Secondary School
- Effectiveness of Attendance plans
- Recognising persistent absence as a potential indicator of Neglect
- Working with Children and Young People in secure settings
- Working with Children and Young People who misuse substances - professionals who work with children and young people, where there is suspicion of substance misuse, must use this information when considering risk
- Working with resistant families - insufficient professional curiosity
- Care leavers possible compromised capacity to parent

Sharing learning from serious case reviews in order to improve safeguarding practice is vital. We use the recommendations from case reviews to improve safeguarding of children & young people.

If you would like to discuss this briefing or any of its contents then please speak to your line manager, your representative on the LSCB or contact the LSCB Office. 1st Floor - Lower Gaol Yard, The Courts, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 8NA Email LSCB@cumbria.gov.uk

The LSCB will conduct a number of workshops and a conference to raise the profile of the lessons in this and the other SCR being published