Chronologies: Practice Guidance

1. **What is a Chronology?**
   
   A chronology is a list in date order of all the major changes and events in a child's life to date, drawing upon the knowledge and information held by social care and other agencies involved with the child and family.

2. **Why chronologies are need?**

   Social work assessments must consider past events and their relevance to a person or family's current situation and a good chronology assists in understanding the case history by identifying and dating key events and patterns. Past life events are found in most of the indicators of risk which have been produced. An accurate chronology can assist the process of assessment and review. It is not an assessment, nor is it an end in itself rather it is an analytical tool which professionals can use to help them to understand what has and is happening in the life of a child or adult. Chronologies support the early identification and likelihood of risks.

3. **When is a Chronology Required?**

   The purpose of a chronology is to provide workers, supervisors/managers, children and their families (and possibly the 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 and welfare and home environment. This enables the reader to quickly gain a picture of formative events and patterns of behaviour, and to analyse the implications of the overall history to improve decision-making and avoid delay.

   - All open cases must have a chronology;
   - The MASH should complete a chronology on all new referrals (that is of previous social care involvement and contacts for cases where one does not already exist). The 3 month rule applies and the expectation is that cases previously closed to CSC will have an up to date chronology when the case is closed.
   - A chronology must be kept up-to-date at all times;
   - Chronologies are required on all cases so practitioners have an overview of the case history at a glance. They are a tool that can assist direct work with families and are specifically required for Child Protection Case Conferences and Legal Planning Meetings.

4. **How to Compile a Chronology and What to Include?**

   A chronology is not expected to be a repetition of the narrative contained in process or case recordings, but bullet points indicating incidents, events or issues within
a family or which significantly affect a child's life (either directly or indirectly). Information should be summarised, for example stating how many contacts have been missed in a specific timeframe rather than listing every individual contact unless the information warrants it.

It therefore requires familiarity with the case information, and analysis to identify the critical moments in a child/family's life experience. It must be relevant and succinct so that important events are not lost in insignificant and irrelevant details.

A chronology should draw on various sources of information such as archived social work files and information from the family and other agencies. It is really important to involve the child or young person and his or her family in the process of completing the chronology. The involvement of family members provides an opportunity to check the accuracy of information and it can assist the practitioner in obtaining family members’ perspectives on particular events and to develop an understanding of their impact on individuals within the family. This does not apply to social workers compiling chronologies in the MASH due to the nature of their role, however they would seek to gain relevant information for the chronology prior to the referral to social care.

The prompts below indicate the types of issues which might feature in any chronology:

5. Parents and Family

- **Parental Family History (pre-child)** including marriages, births, deaths, serious illness and changes in the make-up of the household including new partners and separations. This may start with events that occurred prior to the child's birth where significant;

- Summarise and include parental care history, health, including physical, emotional and mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence issues and history of relapse; include specific dates and incidents;

- Police logs detailing pertinent info re family members/family home e.g. reported incident of domestic violence; drunken behaviour of carers etc.

- Change in family composition including pregnancies and births;

- Contacts and referrals about the child and/or family;

- Change of address with dates and addresses in full;

- Emigration/immigration details as appropriate;

- Criminal and civil proceedings and outcomes;

- Services offered, e.g. family support etc;

- Specialist assessments and their outcomes;
And positives such as:

- Parents self-referral for help/guidance support with relevant agencies
- Recorded positive events or strengths showing family capacity to work in partnership and engage with professionals;

6. The Child

- Allocation of social workers and transfer/ closure of case;
- Child's changes of address/school, school attendance and exclusions;
- Change of address with dates and addresses in full;
- Changes in GP (e.g. this could be particularly significant in cases of Fabricated and Induced Illness), health visitor, medical provision, attendance/admittance to hospital;
- Strategy meetings (including reason), Child Protection Conference, child protection plan registration(s) dates for the child and siblings;
- Critical Incidents (Police /CP investigations) giving rise to concern including injury and neglect events for child and siblings;
- Child absconded/missing
- Birth of a new baby
- Significant observations during home visits e.g. the frequent presence of unknown adults; evidence of damage to the property

And positives such as:

- The child’s presentation significantly improves; including physical, emotional and educational progress.
- Child self-reporting improvements
- Positive reports received from parents, extended family, schools, health and other agencies

The above list is not exhaustive nor does every item listed have to be included and professional judgement must be exercised based upon the child and family's individual circumstances.

The information in a chronology does not have to be repeated in other documents. Reference can be made to the chronology which should accompany assessments and court statements.
A simple test is that the chronology should not confuse or mislead in assisting with a clear understanding of the case. When the chronology has been completed it should be checked to ensure that crucial events have not been omitted.

7. Updating a Chronology

- Chronologies should be regularly updated, at a minimum: prior to any review, planning, child protection or strategy meetings in respect of Child in Need and Child Protection cases, and at the point of case closure.

- Existing chronologies on closed or newly opened cases must be updated at either the point of referral or as part of the Single Assessment;

- Chronologies on Looked after Children should be updated, as a minimum, prior to each Looked After Review.

- Managers have responsibility to ensure that the chronology is up to date in line with this guidance at each stage of authorisation of assessments/plans and via supervision.

8. Where should a Chronology be held and what should it look like?

Chronologies must be held on CareFirst (Carestore) under 'Child/Key Information' and the following indicates the required format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronology</th>
<th>Event Date</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is the period (Year)</td>
<td>Date the event happened</td>
<td>Details of what the event is</td>
<td>The outcome in relation to the event</td>
<td>Where the original information came from and where full reference is stored</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Information can be added retrospectively
- Information recorded in a chronology should be relevant and succinct so as not to be lost in a mass of insignificant and irrelevant events.
- Where individual names are given, the relationship to the child needs to be stated
- Entries should be as short as possible and normally less than 2 lines.
9. Quality Assurance

Ensuring that all allocated cases have an up to date chronology is an indication of good practice and persistent failure to achieve this standard will be addressed formally as a performance issue.

The incidence and quality of chronologies should be regularly reviewed as part of supervision processes; file audits and expectations of them being presented at the meetings.

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