



Professional Curiosity & Information Sharing Briefing – Learning from multi-agency review Child E

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Child E

Multi-Agency

Learning Review

Background

DSPP Conducted a multi-agency learning review to consider the history and lived experience of Child E following concerns she may have suffered abuse or neglect. Professionals wanted to understand how Child E's voice could have been better heard. Agencies sought to know whether Child E's needs and those of her family were correctly identified, and whether professionals could have worked better together to meet these needs.

The family were known to several agencies, with Child E and siblings being subject to Child Protection Plans due to relationship issues between mother and stepfather, mother's mental health presentation and the associated instability for the children.

It was identified that potential conflict between mother and stepfather meant that the needs of the children were sometimes overlooked.

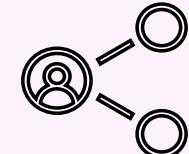
It was agreed a briefing focusing on professional curiosity and information sharing should be produced to including learning from the case.

What is Professional Curiosity?

Professional Curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.



View our resources on Professional Curiosity [HERE](#)



Information Sharing

Sharing information is crucial to safeguarding – information sharing between organisations should follow these 7 principles

Necessary &
proportionate

Adequate

Timely

Relevant

Accurate

Secure

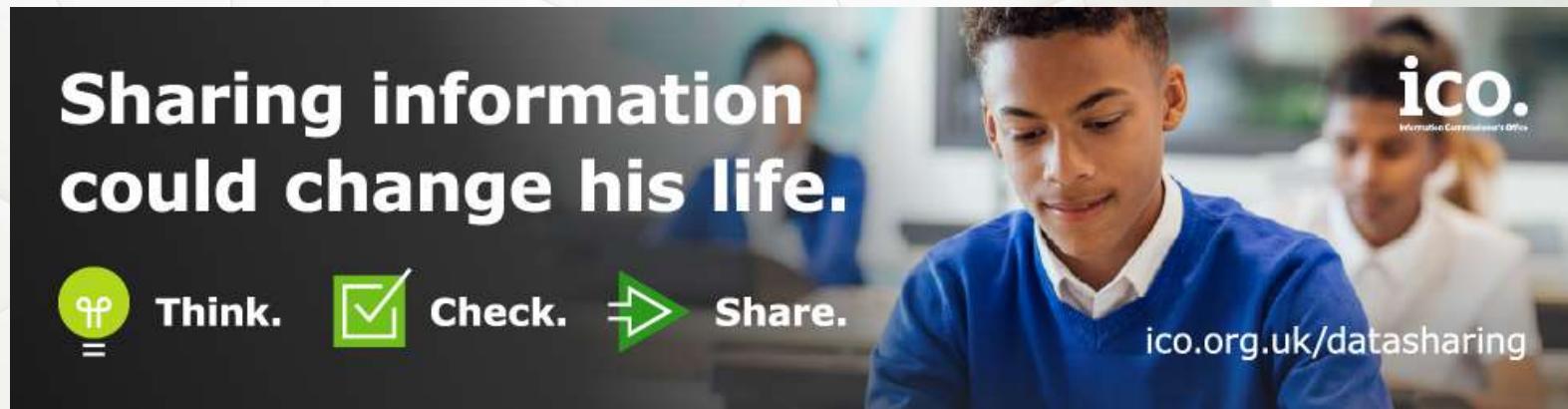
Robust

See our [Safer 7](#) for
more information

Information Sharing

The ICO have published a 10-step guide to sharing information to safeguard children. It includes practical advice on data protection as part of the safeguarding process. Remember – it can be more harmful not to share information that is needed to protect a child or young person.

Click the image below to view the guide



Common myths that hinder effective information sharing

Data protection legislation is a barrier to sharing information

No. The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR do not prohibit the collection and sharing of personal information, but rather provide a framework to ensure that personal information is shared appropriately. In particular, the Data Protection Act 2018 balances the rights of the information subject (the individual whom the information is about) and the possible need to share information about them.

The common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 prevent the sharing of personal information

No, this is not the case. In addition to the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR, practitioners need to balance the common law duty of confidence and the Human Rights Act 1998 against the effect on individuals or others of not sharing the information

Consent is needed to share personal information

No, you do not need consent to share personal information. It is one way to comply with the data protection legislation but not the only way. UK GDPR provides a number of bases for sharing personal information. It is not necessary to seek consent to share information for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of a child provided that there is a lawful basis to process any personal information required.

IT systems are often a barrier to effective information sharing

There are many IT systems that support the sharing of information, such as the Child Protection Information Sharing project (CP-IS). It is important that the sector continues to work with IT suppliers to ensure that their user needs around information sharing are factored into priorities for system enhancement.

Personal information collected by one organisation/agency cannot be disclosed to another

No, this is not the case unless the information is to be used for a purpose incompatible with the purpose for which it was originally collected. In the case of children in need, or children at risk of significant harm, it is difficult to foresee circumstances where information law would be a barrier to sharing personal information with other practitioners

Professional Curiosity

Professionals should always make every attempt to speak to children alone and clearly record the circumstances in the child's notes

Professionals should challenge barriers to seeing the child and hearing their voice:

- Explore other ways to engage families
- Speak to them independently to allow safe opportunities to disclose
- Consider if the child is echoing the views of the parent/carer
- Explore different ways to engage a child who may be discouraged from talking to professionals by parent/carer

NSPCC Learning: [The voice of the child](#)

What do we mean by 'the child's voice'?

The voice of the child refers not only to what children (including pre-verbal and non-verbal) say directly but to their behaviour as a whole.

It means making sure the child's views, opinions and preferences are sought and listened to when decisions are made which impact their life.



Child's Lived Experience

Simply recording a disclosure or what a child says is not enough, professionally curiosity must be used to gain further insight into the lived experience of the child.

See the [DSPP Professional Curiosity](#) webpage for information and resources.

Let children know you are listening. Given them your full attention. Take your time, slow down. Show you understand.

See the [NSPCC Learning](#) animation on responding to a child's disclosure of abuse [here](#).

Safeguarding supervision and reflective practice are opportunities for support, challenge and learning.

Ensure discussions and outcomes are effectively recorded and actioned.

No single practitioner or agency can have a full picture of a child's needs and circumstances.

"be proactive in sharing information as early as possible to help identify, assess, and respond to risks or concerns about the safety and welfare of children." *Working Together 2023*

Be confident in your judgement and always outline your observations and concerns to other professionals. Be courageous and challenge their opinion of risk if it varies from your own.

Escalate ongoing concerns to your manager.

Use available processes to challenge decisions about the child which you do not agree with.

[DSPP Professional Challenge and Resolution Policy](#)

Sustained Professional Relationships

A key professional should be identified to support a child through their journey for as long as possible. This would reduce the need for the child to retell their story to new professionals.

Whilst there was evidence of some outstanding practice, with some professionals ‘going the extra mile’ to develop relationships and make Child E feel safe, there was a pattern of professionals identifying a need that Child E had and referring to an agency for a specialist service.

Once work was complete the agency ended services with the family. This meant that Child E did not always have the opportunity to build sustained relationships with a professional which would have supported her to share intimate details of her life, should she have wished to do so.

Despite some positive relationships forming, there were a significant number of professionals involved in Child E’s life which proved challenging for her.



“Child E had said she was losing faith in the system with having to constantly repeat herself to different people”

Child E was impacted by the changes in professionals around her and reported having to “retell” her story each time. This impacted on her ability to have sustained professional relationships.

Parental Responsibility

Professionals need to establish the appropriateness of adults attending appointments with children. Clarify if they have parental responsibility or that the young person wants them to attend. This needs clear recording in the child's notes.

Primary Carer – the parent or person who spends most day-to-day time with the child in order to meet their care needs.

Stereotypes – despite significant social changes, stereotypically women continue to be viewed as the primary, and sometimes only protective carer, for their child.

Fathers – if someone introduces themselves as the father, or if the child/young person refers to them as the father, seek clarification regarding the relationship. Do not make assumptions.

Think Family – see beyond stereotypes. Each family composition should be considered independently, without presumption around who undertakes the primary carer role.

Parental Responsibility – enquire who has parental responsibility and record. Routinely ask and record carers with consideration that caring roles can be interchangeable.

Safeguarding - Consider the potential impact on the life and well-being of the child/young person and the adult if there are changes in the family dynamic.

Supervision

Professionals involved with families should use professional curiosity to explore and proactively understand what they are being told and are able to act upon all the information they are given. They need to be supported to ‘think the unthinkable’ when working with families.

Group supervision is extremely effective in promoting professional curiosity. Practitioners can use this space to think about their own judgements and observations. It also allows teams to learn from other’s experiences.

Principles:

- Encourages reflective conversations
- Invites thinking below the surface and ‘outside the box’
- Resists problem solving (encourages ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’)
- Fosters professional curiosity from multiple perspectives
- Facilitates no-blame cultures and the idea of ‘vulnerable competence’ which does not expect workers to get it right all the time, given the complexity of practice



Tips for practice

- Offering an alternative perspective/hypothesis
- Looking at a situation from the child, young persons, parent/carer or another family members perspective
- Recognising time pressure as a barrier – look at workload/planning
- Recognise when risks and concerns are escalating and taking appropriate action

Think the unthinkable, believe the unbelievable



Listen to what the child/young person is saying, and importantly what they are not saying.

How do they look? How are they acting? What behaviours are you seeing? What non-verbal clues are they demonstrating? What's the tone of their voice? How are they communicating with others?



Don't take things at face value. Never assume and be wary of assumptions already made.

Establish the facts and gather evidence about what is happening.
Seek to test and triangulate information, build evidence to support your thinking.



Trust your instinct. If something doesn't feel right, acknowledge this and seek to build evidence that may support or challenge your feeling.
Be professionally curious about yourself/your practice also and why you may be feeling this way.



Consider different perspectives or hypothesis about what is happening. Does what you see support/contradict what you are being told?

Have others heard/seen/been told or felt the same as you.
Explore these ideas with other professionals or in supervision.



If you still feel something is not right or you don't understand something, ask "what else can I find out?"

Ask for help, speak to other professionals involved. Speak to your manager.
Think professional curiosity and professional courage.

Role of Parents / Carers

Agencies to make sure that birth fathers, particularly if not living with the child, are appropriately involved to support the child.

Child E was at the beginning of rebuilding a relationship with her birth father, she was happy about this.

Some agencies were aware of his involvement and engaged with him, others were not.

The importance of recognising the role of birth father is not fully understood, particularly if not living within the family home or being estranged from individual children.

[NSPCC September 2022 – Unseen Men: learning from case reviews](#) identifies that men can play a vital role in their children's development and wellbeing and have a major influence on the children they care for. However, an analysis of serious case reviews shows that fathers, male caregivers and male partners sometimes go 'unseen' by services involved with children due to:

- A lack of professional engagement and curiosity
- An over-focus on the quality-of-care children receive from their mothers
- Inadequate information sharing between services.

DSPP recognise this learning is also relevant to families with different dynamics, for example parents/carers in same sex relationships.

Professionals should apply the same professional curiosity to all adults involved a child's life.

Policy and Procedure

Professionals should use appropriate accredited assessment tools available dependent upon an individual child's circumstances. This will better inform decision making for children based on identified evidence.

The [Safeguarding Children's Procedures for the West Midlands](#) should be used where necessary. The procedures apply to all children and young people aged 0-18 years, as well as unborn children.

Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership's [local procedures](#) are available online.

GCP2 is the recognised tool used by the Partnership to accurately identify [neglect](#).

The DSPP [Child Exploitation](#) Screening Tool is available on our website.