



Dudley Safeguarding
People Partnership

Child Safeguarding Practice Review Practitioner Briefing

Learning from a case involving head trauma

WHO SHOULD READ THE BRIEFING?

Any practitioner and manager whose work brings them into contact with children, young people and their families. The messages are just as important for those working in adult services (where service users are parents or carers). The term 'children' includes children and young people up to 18 years of age. For further information on CSPRs visit the Dudley safeguarding website.

HOW WE DID THE REVIEW

This review was carried out using an approach called Appreciative Inquiry. This is used in order to understand what has happened, and to make sure that all people involved can have their say.

It looks at what works well as well as challenges, here are some of the areas looked at:

- What does it mean when families don't engage?
- What do we need to do more of to understand how families are affected by their own childhood and how this can affect their own parenting?
- How do we work with families where there is neglect?
- How do we make sure that there is challenge and 'respectful uncertainty'?
- How do we make sure that practitioners get good supervision?
- How do we make sure that we know what it's like for children in the family?

OVERVIEW OF LEARNING

- Understanding trauma and a trauma informed way of working will help practitioners to think about the language they use and how this can sometimes cause barriers with families.
- When working with families, much of the information about the family comes from them directly and is '**self-reported**'. Professionals need to ensure that they check out what parents are saying by looking at the facts, gathering evidence, and communicating well with everyone.
- When working with vulnerable children and their families, it is important to think about who may hold relevant information that could help to give more understanding of the role of the father in the family, his own experiences, how these might potentially impact upon parenting, protection and risk for the child(ren).
- Understanding the potential impact of new information or changes in a family is fundamental and should be shared.
- Professionals should record when they have received new information, and how they think this will affect their decision making, what factors they have taken into account and why they are reaching a specific decision. This will promote **evidence-based decision making**.

- It is important to understand parents' social history and childhood circumstances and make sure that this is part of assessments.
- There should be a fresh assessment and review in Early Help when there have been lots of cancelled and rearranged appointments.
- **Respectful challenge** and understanding **respectful uncertainty** are a key skill. There should be clear discussions with parents about what needs to change and by when. Whilst building a relationship is vital it is important to be able to challenge 'respectfully'.
- Supervision is both necessary and vital to help practitioners to think clearly and think about what is happening for the child.
- Group supervision and multi-agency reflective discussions can be even more important to think about decisions and observations.
- The Team Around the Family meetings should have the right people with the right skills attending.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That agencies are using tools for assessment and analysis that have been tried and tested.
- That the Quality and Assurance Framework collects the right data and information to show the best outcomes for children.
- That there is support and training on understanding trauma informed practice, especially the language we use.
- That all partner agencies show that they always think about what it is like for the children when they are supporting and supervising practitioners.
- That there is evidence of changes made to the Domestic Abuse Referral Team (DART) in terms of how referrals are looked at and screened.

This was a complex case and highlights the challenges faced by the Early Help team. It emphasises the importance of supervision and reflective practice.

Research from the University of Lancaster¹ on disguised compliance and working with families who are described as 'hard to engage' has recommended the need for greater understanding of parent's social history, by exploring parents' childhood adversity and building this into assessments.

Terms such as resistant, and hard to engage can unconsciously lead to practice that reinforces fixed thinking and as discussed earlier, can lead to a lack of focus on the children.

MORE INFORMATION

Further information for practitioners relating to learning from this case is available on our website.

<https://dudleysafeguarding.org.uk/learning-zone/>

Please see the DSPP Learning Zone for learning materials including Safer 7's on Disguised Compliance, Professional Curiosity and Professional Challenge and Resolution and access to our training offer.

¹ Parental Non-Engagement within Child Protection Services—How Can Understandings of Complex Trauma and Epistemic Trust Help? Claire Mason , Danny Taggart and Karen Broadhurst Oct 2020