



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Social work chronologies practice guidance

1 Definition and purpose

- A chronology is a sequential list of events, recording significant facts and changes in a child or young person's life, how they impacted on the child, and the ways in which agencies responded to these events; this includes positive changes and achievements.
- The purpose of the chronology is to give an overview of the child's life and circumstances and the family's history over time. The chronology should be used for recording significant events in the child's life in order to gain insight into patterns and emerging problems in the child's home environment, and to monitor the impact of services on outcomes for the child.
- Chronologies should also be used as an analytical tool to help understand the impact, both immediate and cumulative, of events and changes on the child or young person's developmental progress. It can help structure information to inform an assessment, professional judgment and decision making.
- Chronologies can provide social workers with insight into:
 - patterns of family relationships
 - the child's lived experience
 - protective factors and sources of past support from the family or community
 - patterns of abuse or problem behaviours
 - factors that promote resilience or vulnerability
 - evidence that thresholds of intervention have been reached
 - impact of past interventions and capacity for change within the family.

2 Good practice for writing a chronology

- A chronology should begin on a case whenever a child and family assessment starts, and should usually start from the child's birth.
- However, in some cases the chronology may start before the child's birth if there is relevant information from the family's past, for example where an older sibling was removed from the parent's care, which should be included as part of the social history within the assessment.

- Where there has been a long history of CSFH involvement with a family, the chronology should also contain historical information taken from previous files/records.
- Where a family have been known to other local authorities and who may have relevant information, this should be requested.
- Chronologies should be regularly reviewed and updated and particularly at the following points:
 - prior to formal reviews of children's plans
 - prior to case transfer or closure
 - following major incidents or events
 - as part of legal proceedings.
- Where possible, information about significant events should be recorded as contemporaneously as possible; general recording policy is to record within 5 working days for CIN and CLA cases and 2 working days for CP cases.
- However in some cases, for example neglect cases where there are no significant events but concerns about cumulative harm, social workers may find it beneficial to record retrospectively in order to gain a better understanding of the impact on the child.
- In order to provide a clear overview, the chronology must be succinct but comprehensive in its scope, containing all relevant information but with concise individual entries covering only the basic facts. Entries should be a list of significant events and should not duplicate case notes, although the chronology can refer to case notes for a fuller description. The result should be a short, concise history of the family and their involvement with CSFH.
- The chronology should record only factual information rather than opinion or judgements. The chronology is used to inform an assessment and analysis, but this should be recorded separately. If it is necessary to include an opinion, it must be clear as to the source of this opinion.
- The chronology should give a clear history of significant changes in the child's life (such as changes in family composition or legal status and placement history) and details of significant events (such as injuries, domestic abuse). The chronology should also record any CSFH involvement with the child, including details of all key actions and interventions that were taken.

- As a visual aid, social workers may consider RAG rating entries in a chronology to indicate the severity of the incident or the level of risk involved by highlighting entries in Red, Amber and Green.
- A chronology should draw on sources of information from social work records and information from other agencies. The source of information needs to be identified and any relevant documents referenced.
- Information contained in the chronology should be shared with parents to ensure it is accurate and as a means of sharing with them what progress has been made to date. It should therefore be written in accessible language avoiding the use of jargon.

3 Information to include

- It is not possible to specify every event that could or should be included in a chronology because every case is different and different audiences have different information requirements. For example, a chronology for a child protection conference would focus on evidence that the significant harm threshold has been reached.
- The relevance of particular 'significant' events may vary according to the purpose of the chronology and the time span being covered. Social workers should use their professional judgment in deciding what is significant and relevant and what level of detail is required.
- Examples of information that should be included are given in appendix 1, although these are not exhaustive lists and should only be used as a guide.
- Where a chronology needs to cover information about historical events prior to the child's birth or whilst living in another borough, this should be recorded as a short entry at the beginning of the chronology summarizing the family's history based on information from previous records and any information from other boroughs. This should be part of the social history taking required for a child and family assessment.

4 Using chronologies

Chronologies are a key social work tool that can be used for analysis and to present information to other professionals in a variety of forums. Information contained in a chronology can be put to a number of uses and can be adapted for presentation to include more relevant information, for example for a child protection conference or care proceedings.

As an analytical tool

Chronologies allow social workers to “step back” and take a view of a case from an objective distance, allowing them to identify patterns, risks, protective factors and form a view on capacity to change. It can also help identify when thresholds have been reached for escalation or where social work intervention is no longer needed.

Supporting relationship-based work

Chronologies can be used as a tool for social workers to:

- explore themes and issues from the perspective of the family
- allow them to look back on historical information to help them form an understanding of what has happened and how they can effect change
- explain decision-making
- illustrate any progress that has been made.

Life-story work

- Chronologies can provide important information for children about their history that can be explored during life-story work in order to give children information about their early years and birth family and explain the reasons for decisions taken about their future care.
- It can provide information about their care experiences, such as where they have lived and the key people involved in their lives like foster carers. It can also be a source of knowledge about the child’s achievements and aspirations. Further, the information from the chronology can be used to inform the contents of the “later in life” letter.

Extra-familial harm

Where a young person is at risk of extra-familial harm, chronologies can provide an insight into the source of risks within the community, including people and places, provide evidence of increasing risk and the nature of exploitation and help social workers identify potential protective factors.

Neglect

Chronologies can be particularly important in cases of neglect where there are no significant events but the cumulative impact on children may only be discerned from patterns emerging over time.

Chronologies for Court

- Court chronologies need to focus more closely on the events that led to care proceedings and give a succinct summary of key events and issues. The summary may also aid the drafting of court statements and provide an overview of the case for interim hearings.
- Court chronologies are normally expected to cover only the previous 2 years with historical information summarized in a single entry and should be analytical, focusing on evidence for the threshold being reached.
- The chronology should be updated throughout the proceedings by adding an addendum before any contested interim hearing [subject to court's directions] and the final hearing. Other parties may also contribute to the chronology, which is a key document contained in the court bundle.
- Court chronologies should be recorded as a word document using the chronology template available on MOSAIC. This is so that Legal Services can edit the document. The document should also contain Camden's logo in order to be accepted by the court.

5 Information for chronologies

Key professional interventions	Referrals, significant concerns raised by professional network, child protection interventions such as police protection, sec 47 investigation, CP conferences and plans, entry to care and LAC reviews, dates of social work involvement (allocation, transfer), case closure etc, threats or incidents of violence to staff, lack of engagement/appointments missed with SW or other key professionals
Significant events and changes in the circumstances of the child and family	Marriages, divorce, separation and changes of partner, births, deaths; changes in family and household composition; significant family rifts and domestic violence; changes of residence (temporary or permanent), episodes of homelessness; changes in carers, involvement with criminal justice system, prison sentences etc, evidence of drug dealing, substance misuse
Child's/Parents health history	Significant diagnosed health conditions and impairment, significant health events/illnesses, accidents, contact with accident and emergency, pregnancy, periods of hospitalisation and relevant medical examinations.
Education, training and employment	Child's educational history, changes of school/educational establishment; significant educational events, such as EHCP or PEP's, periods of exclusion and absence; any changes in parents/carers employment status that have significantly impacted on the child and family.
Change in the child's legal status and placement history of looked after child	Looked after status, court applications, hearings and orders, changes of placement, dates and decisions of any care planning panels. e.g. Adoption or Fostering.
The child's voice	The child's expressed views, observed behaviour, when their views were sought