



Children's Safeguarding and Family Help

Information sharing: practice
guidance for social workers

1 Introduction

Good information sharing between agencies working with children and families is key to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children as it:

- supports informed decision-making, effective multi-agency working and integrated service delivery
- enables social workers to gather important information in order to make key judgements on risk and harm and to assess children's needs leading to better interventions and outcomes for children
- helps social workers establish an open and honest working relationship with parents
- enables the professional network to ensure the family gets the right support and services in a timely manner.

Social workers need to share information in a way that is lawful but respects the rights of families whilst and supporting partnership working and trusting relationships. Guidance on this is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>

2 Legal basis for processing information

- The Data Protection Act 2018 allows agencies to gather and use personal information about a person where they have a legal basis to do so.
- CSFH has a legal basis to gather and use information about the families they work with because they are carrying out a legal duty under the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004.
- This includes special category personal data such as race, ethnicity, religious and political beliefs, their physical and mental health, sexuality and genetic and biometric data.
- This enables social workers to request information from other agencies when making enquiries or carrying out assessments of children.

3 CSFH principles for sharing information

- Camden aims to work with families in an open and transparent manner that respects their rights and reflects the principles of Relational Practice and partnership working. Social workers should strive to retain families' trust by ensuring sensitive and confidential information provided by families and others is kept safe and secure and shared within the spirit of the legislation.
- Although CSFH has a legal basis for gathering and sharing information about children and families without consent, it is an expectation that social workers should inform parents when information needs to be shared with third parties.
- Social workers should explain to parents:
 - the legal basis that CSFH has for sharing information and that this may be without consent
 - what information will be shared, with whom, why and in what circumstances so that they understand the importance of information sharing in respect of providing services
 - that social workers will need to gather information from other services about the child in order to safeguard their welfare.
- This is to ensure that service users are confident that any information shared with social workers will be kept confidential and that they are informed when any information is being passed on to other agencies.
- When CSFH first starts to work with a family, social workers should discuss of issue of information sharing with parents and ensure they understand that CSFH does not require consent to share information but will inform families of the following beforehand:
 - what information is being shared
 - why this information is needed,
 - what it will be used for
 - to whom it will be disclosed.

- Social workers should ensure that the family is made aware of the CSFH privacy notice that sets out our approach to information sharing, available at: [Social work services - Camden Council](#)
- When sharing information with third parties, social workers should consider what information is necessary and proportionate in order to safeguard the child and only share relevant information with those professionals who need to know.
- Social workers should record any instance of information sharing with third parties on the child's MOSAIC record in line with the *Recording policy*. [Recording Policy and Guidelines](#)
- Parents have a right to know when CSFH will share information with third parties. The only circumstances where social workers may gather or share information **without informing parents** are:
 - where the child has suffered harm and there are real concerns that seeking consent will place the child at risk of further harm
 - where seeking consent may prejudice the investigation of a crime
 - where it would not be reasonably practicable to seek consent taking into account all the circumstances known to the social worker at the time (for example it would cause undue delay in acting)
 - where disclosure has been ordered by the court.
- Only authorised social work staff should disclose information about a service user from CSFH records. This will normally be the allocated social worker or their supervisor so it is important that where other team members are working on case files, they are aware of what information may be disclosed and information that may not be shared. It is recommended that this information is included in any case summary and is easily accessible to all team members.
- Where information is shared with members of the professional network details of this should be recorded in case note.
- Families should be informed whenever sensitive information has been shared with a third party.

- When receiving information from a third party, social workers should note the name of the professional providing the information, details of the information and details of any restrictions on the further disclosure or use of that information.

4 Consent to share third party information

- CSFH will often receive written information and reports from other agencies and professionals. This information belongs to the agency or professional who wrote the document and can only be shared with parents or other members of the professional network or used in care proceedings with the written consent of the author.
- Social workers should always discuss the issue of sharing information from third party documents with the relevant agency or professional to agree what information can and cannot be shared with parents and other professionals and written agreement sought to evidence consent to share. Legal advice should be sought where it is unclear whether or not it would be lawful to share the information.
- If a third party document is to be distributed to parents or other professionals but contains information that cannot be shared the social worker and their manager are responsible for redacting the information before the document is sent out. If the child concerned is subject to a Care Order the document should also be sent to Legal Services for redaction before being sent out.

5 Network checks

Camden has a legal basis under the Children Act 1989 to take out network checks in order to gather information when there are safeguarding concerns about children; however, it is Camden's policy that parents are informed when these checks are to be carried out prior to taking up checks unless this may:

- put the child at further risk;
- interfere with a criminal investigation;
- cause undue delay in safeguarding a child.