

**Pan Bedfordshire
Safeguarding Children Boards**

**Guidance for Practitioners
Completing Chronologies and
Genograms**

Practice Guidance: Chronologies

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this practice guidance is to provide practitioners with an outline of what a chronology is, how they can be used and what their limitations are.
- 1.2 Chronologies have a long history in working with both children and adults, particularly within Social Care and Health. Findings from numerous Serious Case Reviews enquiries, and reports into the care of children and vulnerable adults have concluded that a chronology could have supported the earlier identification of risks to the child or adult. This guidance provides a chronology format for use by all agencies to promote consistency of practice across Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Boards partnership agencies, to support our integrated working processes. In addition it includes a dedicated section on Court Chronologies.

2 What is a chronology?

- 2.1 A chronology is a tool that practitioners from a range of disciplines can use to help them understand what is happening in the life of a child, adult or family. Simplistically it is a list, in date order of all the major changes and significant events in a child's, adult's or family's life. It provides a brief and summarised account of events to give an immediate overview.
- 2.2 Chronologies can be compiled by a single agency or be multi agency/integrated, pulling together the knowledge and information held by agencies involved with the child, adult and family. They can also represent significant events regarding a child, a sibling group, an adult or a family.
- 2.3 Chronologies in themselves are not an assessment; however they are a useful part of an assessment. The chronology should not replace case notes or records which include more detailed and sensitive information. There should be a clear distinction between the case record and the chronology.

3. The Purpose of a Chronology

- 3.1 The purpose of a chronology is:
 - To gain an overview of events and changes in a child's, young person's or adult's life.
 - To help practitioners understand the impact, immediate and cumulative, of events and changes on the child's or adult's progress.
 - To provide accumulative evidence of emerging needs and risks and flag when a multi-agency response may be required.
 - To support the early identification of patterns and issues. This can support and is part of assessing and managing risk and is particularly useful in cases where there may be no single incident i.e. in neglect.

- To support assessments in considering past events and their relevance to the child's, adult's or family's current situation.
- To assist in the process of assessment, analysis, planning and review when working with a child, young person and family.
- To promote and strengthen working with children and their families and can help a child and family make sense of their life.

4. What is recorded in a Chronology?

- 4.1 The chronology should start with the child's or adult's essential details, the date the chronology was started and if it is to be shared with the person or family, the date it was last shared with them.
- 4.2 It can include a genogram of the child's or adult's family as this can help support clarity of the family composition and understanding of the child's or adult's circumstances (see appendix 1).
- 4.3 The chronology should record all significant events and changes in the life of a child, adult or family and should include:
- Key dates of birth, life events and moves including changes in family composition, household members, carer, educational establishment, health issues/treatment.
 - Factual information, e.g. when a child starts or moves school, when a child or adult becomes subject to protection procedures.
 - Transitions and life changes.
 - Brief summaries of key professional interventions e.g. assessments and interventions (i.e. anger management, parenting programme or input on dietary needs), referral to other agencies and the outcome/ending, meetings and reviews, prison sentences.
 - Issues for the child or adult e.g. developmental issues, significant illness, out of school/training/employment episodes, incidents re bullying, gender, culture.
 - Family or health issues e.g. bereavement, separations, financial problems, domestic violence, substance misuse, illness/accidents, homelessness, imprisonment, missed appointments.
- 4.4 There can be variations depending on the purpose of the chronology; the events included must be considered significant to the child, young person or adult. What to enter into a chronology is a matter of professional judgement, a suggested list of areas for agencies to consider recording is located in Appendix 2. Ideally a chronology should contain no opinion, these can be included in the case records as the key task of chronologies is to report facts/times/dates.
- 4.5 The chronology can either draw on detail from an individual agency file, or information from a number of agencies working with the child and/or adult and their family; it should also involve the child, adult and the family themselves.

4.6 The chronology should be balanced and record positives as well as negative events in a child's or adult's life. Recording positives and protective factors is important as it can support the assessment process by highlighting the lack of or wealth of positive events in a child's or adult's life. The child or adult and family's perspective of these events should also be included as they can shed light on family strengths and support factors.

5. **Key Factors for an effective chronology**

5.1 **Accurate**

A chronology must be based on up-to-date and accurate case recording. Any inaccuracies or deficiencies will impact on the composition of the chronology and limit its usefulness. If any inaccuracies are discovered, clarity should be sought and if required the chronology amended.

5.2 **Up to date**

Chronologies should reflect the best knowledge about a child's or adult's history at a point in time. It will need to be amended and updated in light of any new information received. Each agency should review and update their chronology on a regular basis, best practice is to add the information about the significant event or change as they occur.

5.3 **Detail**

A chronology should contain sufficient details about a significant event or change but it should not be a substitute for recording in a case file or professional records. Chronologies should NOT be repeats of the case file, be time consuming to compile, so detailed they are difficult to read or so overwhelming that important issues or patterns are lost amongst the detail. Deciding detail of an incident or change is a matter of professional judgement.

5.4 **Multi agency/integrated chronologies**

A multi-agency/integrated chronology brings together chronologies created by different agencies and presents them coherently. Effort should be made to seek out and confirm information from a variety of sources; the child, the adult and family, agency records and information held by other services. It is particularly important that multi agency/integrated chronologies include the source and date of the information, with a record of the justification for why information was shared.

5.5 Multi agency/integrated chronologies can be important in identifying critical events in the lives of children or adults and assist in decision making when working together with vulnerable children or adults and families. They can give a more rounded picture, for example a single incident may take on a far greater importance in the life of a child or adult when placed in the context of a proper, time lined integrated chronology.

5.6 Each service or organisation involved will need to provide their own accurate and up to date chronology and agree which agency will be responsible for the collation of the individual chronologies and producing an integrated chronology. Timescales for producing the multi-agency /integrated chronology should be agreed, this may be linked to assessment, intervention and reviews. Each service should continue with their individual agency chronology.

5.7 The multi-agency/integrated chronology should be regularly reviewed, analysed and updated. This should be a shared responsibility between the practitioners for gathering, recording and passing information onto the person who has agreed to collate the chronology and can be completed at meetings and reviews. Compiling a multi-agency/integrated chronology needs careful co-ordination and close working between the agencies involved, and requires individuals to note all matters which may constitute a significant event.

5.8 If a multi-agency/integrated chronology is to be compiled it is good practice to obtain consent from family members before contacting other agencies for information. For support and guidance on information sharing refer to your agency's information sharing policy and the national guidance ['Information Sharing: Guidance for practitioners and managers' \(2015\)](#)

5.9 **Involving the child and family**

Chronologies are a part of recording and as such should be available to the person they are about. Involving the family in the chronology provides opportunity to check and ensure accuracy of information in a chronology. It also promotes and strengthens working together with children, adults and their families, as it helps to obtain family members perspectives on events and develops an understanding of their impact on individuals in the family. Sharing the chronology with the family can support them to reflect on the content and help develop their understanding of the child/adult/family as well as identify progress or lack of progress.

5.10 **Single Person and Sibling Group /Family Chronologies**

There are two basic types of chronology, one focuses on a single child or adult and the other a sibling or family group. Suggested formats of both types of chronology are outlined in Section 9 of the guidance. The agency and practitioner roles and responsibilities will impact on the type of chronology used however those using a single person chronology should be mindful of the broader issues. For example chronologies compiled on an adult who has parenting/caring responsibilities should always include information about the child or children. A child or adult chronology can be used to support the collation of a sibling or family chronology.

6. **How is a chronology used?**

6.1 A chronology should be a working tool which supports practitioners to analyse information to support risk assessment and management. It can also be valuable for planning and supervision as well as promoting engagement and understanding when working with children, adults and families.

6.2 The chronology should be used by the practitioner in conjunction with the other assessment tools to provide evidence and support for the analysis and planning being undertaken at the time. Chronologies provide structured data to help inform assessment and analysis by examining and identifying patterns. This supports the earlier identification of actual or potential risks and helps in decision making. Chronologies are also particularly important to assessment and oversight of people whose circumstances are complex and constitute a risk to self or others.

7. **Review and Analysis**

7.1 Review and analysis of a chronology is essential. If it is not reviewed and analysed, the chronology would serve little if no purpose. A chronology helps structure information which informs analysis and decision making; as such they are an essential tool in effective assessments and interventions.

7.2 The supervision process can be used to review and analyse a chronology. They can also be subject to peer review where staff review each others chronologies and determine if any patterns, timescales and risks which could be identified.

8. **Court Chronologies**

8.1 Chronologies prepared for care proceedings whilst largely follow the guidance as above, are drafted in a different format and are much shorter in length.

8.2 Practice Direction 12A to the Public Law Outline 2014 states that a court chronology should contain the following:

- A succinct summary of the significant dates and events in the child's life in chronological order - a running record up to the issue of proceedings;
- Information under the following headings-
 - i) serial number;
 - ii) date;
 - iii) event details;
 - iv) witness or document reference (where applicable)

8.3 The court chronology should usually not be older than two years before the date of issue of proceedings unless the dates and events are significant and reliance is placed on them in the local authority's evidence. Where possible, court chronologies should be limited in number of pages. If you are unclear about anything to do with drafting a court chronology, please seek legal advice.

9. **Suggested Format for Chronologies**

Date of Commencement of Chronology:

Details of Professional co-ordinating chronology:

Date/s reviewed:

Reason for compiling the chronology:

Have subjects consented to information being shared from agencies involved? Yes No

If No, record justification for sharing information without consent:

Single Person (child or adult) Chronology

Date/Time	Details of Service and Organisation providing information	Child/Adult Seen?	Event	Comments/Analysis

9.2 Sibling or Family Group Chronology

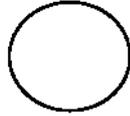
Date/Time	Details of Service and Organisation providing information	Name of Child, Young Person or Adult	Child/Adult Seen?	Event	Comments/Analysis

Appendix 1
Practice Guidance: Genograms

Genograms
Genogram Symbols



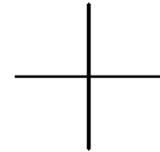
Male



Female

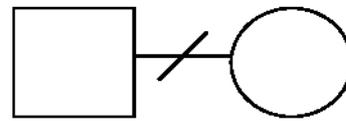
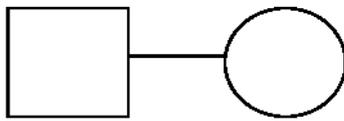


Gender unknown
(e.g. pregnancy)



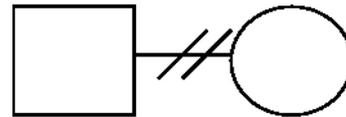
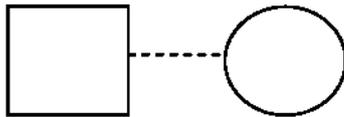
Death

Enduring relationship
(marriage or
Cohabitation)

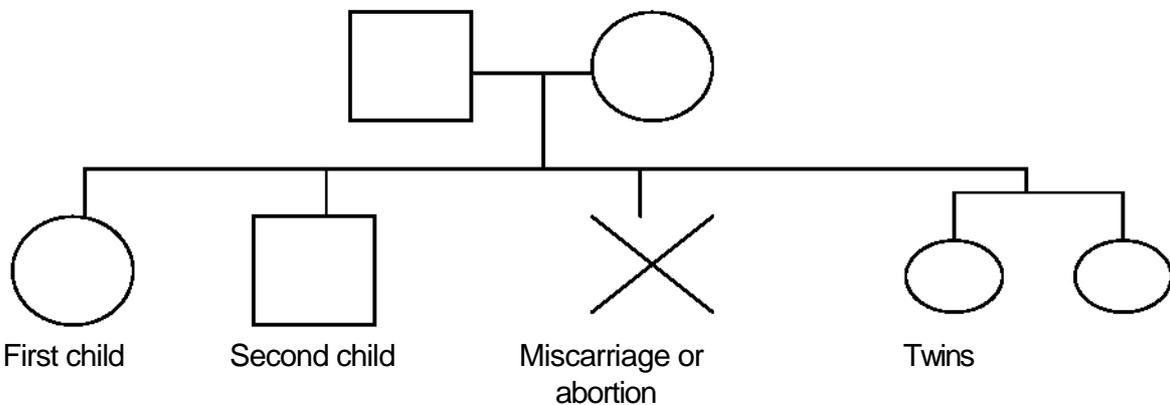


Separation

Transitory relationship



Divorce



A dotted line should be drawn around the people who currently live in the same house.

Compiling a Genogram

A genogram of a family tree covering three or more generations may be compiled using the above symbols. Other relatives in addition to the parents and children can be involved in compiling the genogram. More than one session may be needed if the exercise is used to discuss the family's history in more detail and to enter significant dates and other information. Working on a genogram also provides the practitioner with the opportunity to observe family relationships; for example how open family members are with one another, how well they respond to each others needs, how flexible they are and how much they know about one another.

Above taken from DOH (2000) Assessing Children in Need and their Families, The Stationary Office.

Appendix 2

The following areas have been identified by key agencies as considerations for inclusion in chronology for a child but not every area will be recorded for every child only where it is a key event. Remember to include the positive and negative events.:

Education

- Changes in family/ care structure separation/ divorce/ bereavement/ custodial sentence.
 - Changes in family circumstances e.g. housing / birth of sibling.
 - Physical and mental health and wellbeing of child / parents / carers.
 - Referrals to Specialist Services e.g. Pupil Support (Behaviour or Learning Support), Psychological Services etc.
 - Changes in attendance.
 - Changes in performance, attainment or achievement.
 - Changes in parental presence, engagement or support with child's learning. •
- Episodes of exclusion or re-integration.
- Significant periods of absence e.g. illness, pregnancy, etc.
 - Social inclusion within the school setting including evidence of bullying or positive support networks.
 - Decision to initiate a Common Assessment framework (CAF)/Early Help Assessment.
 - Outcomes of any internal assessment or joint support meeting.
 - Any change of teacher or other key member of staff from the child's school. •
- Change of school.
- Threats or actual incidents of violence to staff by parents or child. •
- Other relevant concerns or positive improvements.

Health

- Information relating to health or way of life of parents and carers that significantly impacts on the child.
 - Changes in family/ care structure e.g. through separation/ divorce/ bereavement/ custodial sentence etc.
 - Changes to child's physical or emotional wellbeing.
 - Changes in family circumstances e.g. housing / birth of sibling, emotional well being. •
- Referrals to Paediatric Services, Therapy Services, other agencies. • Attendance at Accident and Emergency, Out of Hours and GP. • Hospital admissions. • Childhood illnesses.
- Positive or negative changes in disability. •
- Dates of immunisations and screening.
- Appointments for ante-natal, post-natal appointments, immunisations, child health assessments, hospital appointments.
 - Health assessments e.g. developmental.
 - Any change to the Health Visitor, School Nurse or other key staff member working with the family.
 - An established pattern of missed appointments without acceptable reasons, including refusal of entry.
 - Any threats or actual incidents of violence to staff.
 - Any other relevant concerns or positive improvements.

Social Work Services

- Information relating to health or way of life of parents and carers that significantly impacts on the child.
- Changes in family/ care structure e.g. through separation/ divorce/ bereavement/ custodial sentence etc.
- Changes in health related problems such as disability, substance related issues, mental health issues etc.
- Changes in family circumstances e.g. homelessness/ birth of sibling.
- Referrals to Children's Centre's, MALT i.e. Community CAMHS, voluntary sector services or other agencies.
- Dates of Social Work Services Involvement e.g. start date, closure of case and reason.
- Lack of engagement.
- Any child concern referrals.
- Dates of child protection referrals / enquiries / investigation.
- Dates of child protection related meetings e.g. case discussions, case conferences, core groups.
- Dates and reason for child being looked after and accommodated.
- Change of social worker or other key worker from the service. •

Changes to legal status.

- Contact / conditions of no contact.
- Change of address including foster placement and temporary accommodation
- Date of court hearings and outcomes
- Date of planning meeting and/or review dates including LAC.
- Any threats or actual incidents of violence to staff including verbal threats.
- Date when summary statements / working agreements / risk assessments are completed.

Housing

- Changes in family/ care structure separation/divorce/ bereavement/ custodial sentence etc.
- Changes in family and housing e.g. relocation, eviction, transfer to private tenancy etc.
- Changes in maintenance of tenancy agreements.
- Changes in neighbour relations or anti-social issues. Where this has led to further action being taken, for example ASBO, then this should be recorded.
- Evidence of, referrals for suspected drug dealing, drug taking or excessive alcohol use.
- Reports of anti-social behaviour on the child or parents.
- Reports from members of the public, Police or Anti-Social Behaviour Staff regarding anti-social behaviour.
- Any concerns about the safety or welfare of children or young people noted directly by Housing staff or passed to them by others in the community e.g. children left unattended, poor standards of household cleanliness, children wandering the streets or being out in poor weather without adequate clothing.
- Any threats or actual incidents of violence to staff.
- Any other relevant concerns, positive events.

Above based on Getting it Right for Every Child in Ayrshire, practice notes: chronology guidance.

References

Ayrshire, Getting it Right for Every Child in Ayrshire, Practice Notes: Chronology
Guidance

DOH (2000) Assessing Children in Need and their Families, The Stationary Office

Hartlepool Borough Council, Children's Services Practice Manual: Chronology

Social Work Inspection Agency (2010) Practice Guide Chronologies; improving practice in Scotland, SWIA

Suffolk County Council (2006) At a Glance Guide Chronologies in Children and Young People's Services, Good Practice in Children's Services

Warwickshire SCB and NHS Warwickshire, Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust, George Eliot Trust, South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS Trust (2008) Guidance for Compiling Chronologies

Write Enough, Chronologies, www.writeenough.org.uk