Tayside Multi-Agency Practitioner's Guidance: Chronologies

Document Control

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Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative Priority Group 5 (Safeguarding and Child Protection) would welcome any feedback you may have on this Guidance which you can send to the Angus, Dundee City or Perth & Kinross CPC Lead Officers.

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Introduction

This *Tayside Practitioner's Guidance: Chronologies* has been developed to provide all practitioners and managers, working with and / or involved with children, young people and their families across Tayside, with clear practice guidance on the effective use of Chronologies.

This guidance is for *all* practitioners and managers working in the public, private and third sectors across Tayside and provides minimum standards aimed at ensuring a consistent practice approach to Chronologies. This guidance should complement, not replace, any existing service / agency Chronology guidance.

This guidance has been developed under the auspices of the Tayside Regional Improvement Collaborative Priority Group 5 (Safeguarding and Child Protection) and in partnership with:

- Angus Child Protection Committee
- Dundee City Child Protection Committee
- Perth and Kinross Child Protection Committee

Legislative and Policy Context

This guidance reflects the national child protection legislation and policy context, findings from Inspection and in particular the following *key* publications:

- Protecting Children and Young People: The Charter (Scottish Executive: 2004)
- Protecting Children and Young People: Framework for Standards (Scottish Executive: 2004)
- How well are children and young people protected and their needs met? (HMIe: 2005)
- How well do we protect children and meet their needs? (HMIE: 2009)
- National Risk Framework to Support the Assessment of Children and Young People (Scottish Government: 2012)
- How well are we improving the lives of children and young people? (Care Inspectorate: 2014)
- The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Practice Guide to Chronologies (Care Inspectorate: 2017)
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and
- A Quality framework for children and young people in need of care and protection (Care Inspectorate: Revised 2019)
- The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 (Scottish Government: 2021)
- Getting it Right for Every Child (Scottish Government: 2022)

Definition and Purpose

Chronologies provide a key link in the chain of understanding needs and risks; including the need for protection from harm, abuse and exploitation.

Setting out key events in sequential date order, chronologies give a summary timeline of a child or young person's family circumstances, patterns of behaviour and trends in lifestyle, that may greatly assist any **assessment, analysis** and **planning**.

They are a logical, methodical and systematic means of organising, merging and helping make sense of information. They also help to highlight gaps and omitted details that require further exploration.

Chronologies can and should also be used to promote engagement with the service / agency users. The content of chronologies is however determined by **professional judgement** as to what is in fact **significant** in a child or young person's life. They should not replicate, or attempt to substitute for case recording, but should provide a clear outline of the most important elements of individual or family circumstances.

Chronologies can be **single-agency** or **multi-agency** and can be used for a variety of purposes.

A good chronology is a critical tool in helping make sense of the complexity of a child or young person's family life and circumstances. It also establishes a sound foundation for future understandings and analysis where professional staff change, or new staff / services / agencies come on board.

Chronologies are, however, not an end in themselves; they constitute one key element of the suite of tools that we use to inform the analysis of needs and risks in assessments and interventions. Chronologies also inform planning. As dynamic tools, chronologies should be accurate, informative and up-to-date.

Chronologies can be initiated at different times, depending on individual service / agency guidelines. For example, Health Services may start a chronology from birth; Education Services may start a chronology when there are concerns about a child or young person and Social Work Services may start a chronology from pre-birth, as this can show emerging patterns of need and risk before the baby is born.

Getting it Right for Every Child

[Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)](#) is the national approach in Scotland to improving outcomes and supporting the wellbeing of children and young people by offering them the *right help, at the right time, from the right people*. At its heart is the [GIRFEC National Practice Model](#) which provides the foundation for identifying concerns, assessing needs and initial risks and making plans for children and young people in all situations.

Each service / agency involved with a child, young person and their family should collate key information into a **single-agency chronology** and where working with partner services / agencies, actively work to combine and consolidate this proportionately into a **multi-agency chronology**.

In relation to this last point, the worker carrying out the role of **Lead Professional**, in consultation with Named Person, should collate and share the information from practitioners, services / agencies involved with the child, young person and their family and should combine them into a **multi-agency chronology**.

Information Sharing

Practitioners must understand:

- **when** to share information
- **what** information to share
- **how much** information to share
- **who** to share the information with and
- **the way in which** the information should be shared.

Practitioners must also understand the possible adverse consequences **of not** sharing information.

Proportionate information sharing can assist with the successful implementation of *Getting it Right* by ensuring that children / young people *get the right help; at the right time; from the right people*; *when they need it and for as long as they need it*. The **welfare** of all children and young people is paramount.

Practitioners must understand the legislation underpinning information sharing which includes The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR); The Data Protection Act 2018; The Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

Legislation *supports* lawful information sharing and should not be seen as a barrier.

GDPR is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing (sharing) of *personal data (information)* and *special category data (information)* of individuals within the European Union (EU).

GDPR describes the principles which must underpin information sharing practice and the basis (formerly known as conditions) upon which information can be shared.

All practitioners must understand the **principles** and **basis** for sharing information.

Practitioners should always refer to and comply with their own service / agency information sharing guidance.

Practitioners should always consider whether or not there is a legal requirement to seek Consent to share information.

Significant Events

Professional judgement is key for determining what is (or is not) a *significant event* for a child or young person. Any events, which are considered to have a *significant impact* on the child or young person, whether the event is positive or negative, or a strength or a weakness, should be considered for inclusion in a Chronology.

A *significant event* could include *changes* in a child or young person's:

- protection status, including child concern reports, vulnerabilities, needs, risks, protective factors and resilience

- Child's Plan

- referrals and legal status

- family circumstances including separation, divorce, bereavement, changes in the immediate family structure and / or the presence of any significant adult (s)

- domestic living arrangements and / or environment / frequent changes of address

- physical, mental, emotional or sexual health, including chronic health, acute admissions, failed and / or missed and / or did not attend and / or was not brought type of appointments

- developmental growth and / or normal patterns of behaviour / additional support needs (ASN)

- educational performance including non-attendance and / or exclusion and / or removal from education and / or home education / going missing

- parents / carers physical and / or mental health, employment status

- incidents of domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, learning difficulties

- service supports, including changes of key workers, gradual or sudden withdrawal from service support

- parents / carers behaviour that is seen as difficult, hostile, evasive, non-engaging, threatening, non-compliant and / or uncooperative including any criminality

Single-Agency Chronology

A *single-agency chronology* should be produced and maintained by all practitioners, services / agencies that have a role with the child or young person and their family. A *single-agency chronology* provides a brief description and summarised account of *significant events* in date order.

It should be used as an analytical tool to assist in the understanding of the impact of life events and to inform decision making.

Every child or young person, who has a Child's Plan, should have in place an up-to-date *single-agency chronology* and a *multi-agency chronology*.

The Named Person should always continue to maintain a chronology.

Multi-Agency Chronology

A *multi-agency chronology* should be produced at the earliest opportunity, where two or more services / agencies have an involvement with a child or young person and support is being provided through a [Child's Plan](#) under the coordination of a worker carrying out the role of *Lead Professional.*

A *multi-agency chronology* may be produced as part of a specific multi-agency intervention and will include only information extracted from *single-agency chronologies* that is considered to be *relevant.*

A *multi-agency chronology* should only include information that is *relevant, necessary, legitimate, appropriate* and *proportionate* for sharing with other practitioners, services / agencies to support a specific intervention.

To be useful, a *multi-agency chronology* must be kept up-to-date through the contributions of all relevant practitioners, services / agencies and there *is an expectation that it is the responsibility of each practitioner, service / agency to contribute towards the maintenance of a multi-agency chronology.*

National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021 – Chronology Guidance[1]

Chronologies

Definition and outline guidance on use of chronologies in child protection assessment and planning.

A chronology is:

- a summary of events key to the understanding of need and risk, extracted from comprehensive case records and organised in date order

- a summary which reflects both strengths and concerns evidenced over time

- a summary which highlights patterns and incidents critical to understanding of need, risk and harm

- a tool which should be used to inform understanding of need and risk. In this context, this means risk of significant harm to a child

A chronology may be:

- single-agency
- multi-agency

A multi-agency chronology must comply with information sharing guidance and protocols in the way that it is developed, held, shared and reviewed. It must be accurate, relevant and proportionate to purpose.

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[1] Source: [The National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021](#) (Scottish Government: 2021)

A multi-agency chronology:

- is a synthesis which draws on single-agency chronologies
- reflects relevant experiences and impact of events for child and family
- will include turning points, indications of progress and/or relapse
- will inform analysis, but is not in itself an assessment
- may evolve in a flexible way to integrate further necessary detail
- may highlight further assessment, exploration or support that may be needed
- is a tool which should be used in supervision

A chronology, whether single- or multi-agency:

- is not a comprehensive case record and cannot substitute for such records
- is not a list of exclusively adverse circumstances

The lead professional will consolidate a multi-agency chronology for each Child Protection Planning Meeting. Contribution to the chronology is a collective responsibility. Forming a chronology should assist a shared understanding with and between those involved in developing a Child Protection Plan about strengths, needs and concerns over time, for the purpose of reducing risk of significant harm to a child.

The lead professional must therefore be clear about the purpose of the multi-agency chronology; the nature and sequence of the facts that should be captured at this juncture. The perspective of child and family at the centre of the child protection process should be explored to gain understanding of impact of events and to check their perception of accuracy.

The format of a chronology should record purpose, authorship and date of completion. It should include the nature and sequence of events; outcomes or impact on child and family; sources of information; and responses to events as necessary for the purpose of this product (Practice Guide to Chronologies, Care Inspectorate, 2017).

Two practice insights on this topic have been drafted to illustrate and explain key practice considerations, offer a resource, prompt reflection and signpost selected sources. They can be found in the Practice Insights supporting document alongside this Guidance.

Care Inspectorate's: Summary Characteristics of a Chronology[2]

In summary, the Care Inspectorate's Guidance says a Chronology is:

- *a useful tool in assessment and practice*

- *not an assessment, but part of assessment*

- *not an end in itself, rather a working tool which promotes engagement with people who use services*

- *accurate and relies on good, up-to-date case recording*

- *detailed enough but does not substitute for recording in the file*

- *flexible so that detail collected may be increased if risk increases*

- *reviewed and analysed – a chronology which is not reviewed regularly is of limited relevance*

- *constructed differently according to different applications, for example current work and examining historical events*

- *recognising that single-agency and multi-agency chronologies set different demands and expectations*

- *recording what was done at the time (many chronologies list events, dates and so on but do not have a column setting out the action taken at the time - this column should also include a note when there was no action)*

Tayside Practice Guidance

A Chronology is:

- a dynamic tool for understanding needs, identifying risks and emerging patterns

- an essential tool in assessment, analysis, report writing, decision making and to inform planning

- an effective aid to multi-agency partnership working, intervention and support

- a useful tool for direct discussion with children, young people and their families

- helpful in supporting workers to maintain a focus on the child or young person

- helpful in supporting professional judgement, skills and knowledge

- always factual, kept current, accurate and evidence-based

- logical, informative, methodical and simple in format

- kept in a neutral language, suitable for practitioners, managers, children, young people and their families to read and understand

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[2] Source: Practice Guide to Chronologies (Care Inspectorate: 2017).

- presented in time and date order, starting with the earliest available information and the source of the information

- simple and concise and only contain events which are considered to be *significant* – if every concern, event, milestone, circumstance or transition is recorded then the chronology loses its value and impact

A Chronology is not:

- a replacement for individual practitioner professional judgment; common sense or gut feeling

- a list of all contacts, visits, meetings or events

- an administrative task – it is a professional responsibility

- a substitute for recording or detailed record keeping

- an end in itself – it is a dynamic working tool

A Chronology can:

- be critical in the legal process and must therefore be factually correct

- be extremely important in identifying critical events in the lives of children and young people and can assist practitioners in their decision making

- provide a clear timeline in terms of practitioner / service / agency involvement and demonstrates the effectiveness, or otherwise, of previous interventions, involvements and support

- help to highlight delay or drift for children and young people

- provide practitioners with a valuable tool for considering the immediate / cumulative impact of events on a child or young person, both in the short and longer term

- support new workers to understand the complexities of a case and avoid 'start again' syndrome

- promote multi-agency working and a shared professional understanding of concerns, particularly at key meetings

- provide a clear account of all events in a child or young person's life to date, drawing upon the knowledge and information held by each practitioner, service / agency involved with that child or young person

- identify protective factors, resilience, strengths or weaknesses in a child or young person's life

- provide an early indication of an emerging pattern of concerns, which could indicate that a child or young person is on a pathway to harm

A Chronology can also be required for:

- organisational reviews – to identify improvement, outcomes or otherwise

- practice reviews to identify good practice

- Learning Reviews evidencing recommendations and decision making for children and young people, i.e. Children's Hearings; Child's Planning

Meetings; Child Protection Case Conferences; Core Groups; Adoption, Fostering and Permanence

- Subject Access Requests by individuals in order to understand past events in their childhood / life

Assessing Impact

It is important that each *significant event,* whether single or recurring, whether positive or negative, are considered in terms of the impact on a child or young person. What may be *significant* for one child, may have more or less significance for another. *Professional judgement* should be adopted when determining impact.

Practitioners may also find it helpful to seek peer and / or Line Management support when trying to identify impact and may also wish to ask themselves the *"so what?"* question.

Professional supervision is an additional essential tool in this process. If the impact of a *significant event* on a child or young person is not immediately evident, the worker can consider:

- asking the child, young person or a family member what they think the impact is

- using a tool, such as the Wellbeing Web, to ascertain the child or young person's view

- using advocacy support to gauge the impact on the child or young person

- updating this information at a later date if impact becomes more evident over time (always avoid viewing impact *in the moment) – think longer term*

Recording a Chronology

It is important that chronology information is recorded and reviewed regularly. Whilst service / agency systems may invariably be different, it is vitally important that the following *key information* is recorded and can be produced as and when required:

- the date the *significant event* took place / was discovered

- the source / name of the person providing the *significant event* information

- the date of entry of the *significant event*

- a brief description of the *significant event*

- brief description of the action taken / outcome of the *significant event,*

all of which informs assessment, decision making and planning.