

Reunification – Guidance on developing the analytical chronology

The purpose of the analytical chronology is to analyse the case history, focusing on the risk and protective factors associated with the child returning home and evidence of parental capacity to change. The chronologist will use the chronology table template to organise the information gathered, before writing up their analysis in Section 1 of the Return Home Assessment Report.

Writing the chronology involves systematically gathering and analysing data from sources from before the child became looked after and afterwards such as:

Before looked after

- If on a care order - the court legal bundle
- If section 20 – the assessments; Child in Need plans; Child Protection Plans; HOSDAR reports; Permanence Panel documents e.g. minutes

After becoming looked after

- Care Planning documents
- Contact records
- Review records – start here for timeline
- Case chronology

Case records on full or half siblings should also be used as sources to inform the chronology.

Information should be gathered on the following inter-related areas:

- Assessments already completed
- Parents' history, including their own experiences of abuse and neglect (if available)
- Abuse, neglect and other adversities experienced by the child and siblings
- Risk factors and protective factors that mitigate those risks (refer to messages from research above)
- Existing evidence of parental capacity for change in order to parent their child/ren effectively
- Support and services that have been tried/ completed in the past and their success or failure and how well the parent/s engaged with services
- Previous failed returns
- Attachment of child to parents, caregivers, step-parents, siblings and other relatives
- Any special needs of each child.

The chronology should be presented as a critical analysis of these themes in the family's history, and not a list of events. The chronologist will seek to bring out the underlying reasons for the parents' difficulties.

The evidence available needs to be probed and explored to establish its accuracy and meaning. Action should be taken to address any gaps in the information. This may involve interviewing those with direct knowledge of the child and family.

It is recommended that the chronologist has limited contact with the child or family in order to eliminate any bias. Workers will share their findings and update each other when new information is found and analysed. The chronology should be updated throughout the case, by the chronologist in Stages 1 and 2, and then by the social worker

Tips for producing a high quality analytical chronology

Remember the purpose

The purpose of the chronology is to consider the risk and protective factors associated with the child returning home and the support and services that will be needed if return home is to be safe and stable. This should be borne in mind when filtering and analysing information that is included in the chronology.

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The chronology is key to equipping the child's social worker to make judgements about the parents' level of honesty and understanding of professional concerns. It will also help the child's social worker to tailor their assessment sessions around the most pertinent issues. The chronologist needs to maintain good communication with the child's social worker throughout the process.

Conduct a comprehensive file read

It is important that all available information is read when completing the file read to ensure that no key details are missed. The chronologist should ask questions where information is missing – other agencies may hold those details or the absence of information may be telling in itself.

The chronologist should read the files and analyse the information first before deciding which information should be presented in the chronology.

Recording

When producing the final chronology workers should:

- Be succinct
- Provide a key to all abbreviations
- Be consistent in the use of terms
- Be clear about source. Where information was found, who provided information and their profession/role
- Record when events actually happened (not only when they were recorded)
- Distinguish between fact, opinion and hearsay.

Analysis

The chronologist should highlight risk and protective factors, pull out themes and patterns in the history, identify evidence of capacity to change and consider quality/reliability of the evidence.

Hindsight may suggest a need to challenge the analysis provided at the time of a recorded incident – the worker should include the new analysis and explain why they have reached this conclusion.

Balance

Risk *and* protective factors and evidence of improvements and deterioration need to be included in the chronology.

The Factors Associated with Future Harm table is helpful in understanding and interpreting how these factors might impact on parenting and the child's experiences. A balanced view will enable a thorough and fair assessment which can consider all the options for meeting the best interests of the child.