

Guidance: Family History Quick Guide

1. Introduction

Research studies, Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and file audits have repeatedly shown that family historical information is not given the attention that it should be given in assessing the needs of children (Rose and Barnes 2008, Reder and Duncan 1999).

Relevance of family historical information

- Important information not shared, missing or lost particularly when family moved geographical boundaries or transition new case recording systems
- Historical information not referred to, analysed to see emerging patterns of risk/harm
- Information not checked with family members to ensure accuracy
- Not to focus solely on the 'here and now'

2. Reasons for gathering and making sense of family historical information

- **Prediction of future harm** – (best guide to future behaviour is past behaviour)
- **Exploring the significance of events** (highlight past conflicts which may still be impacting on family functioning)
- **Increasing reliability of evidence** (separate out fact, opinion, and hypothesis)
- **Assessing motivation and parenting capacity** (partnership working with parents can facilitate access to vital information)
- **Therapeutic value** – (adults have coherent story of their past. Children have clearer sense of belonging and self and can contribute to ongoing social and emotional development)

7. Tools to assist in obtaining history

- [Chronology](#)
- [Genogram](#)
- [Eco map](#)
- [Social GRRRAACCEESSS](#)
- [LUUUTT model](#)

6. Guidance

- Each agency should have systems that ensure that practitioners read and evaluate historical information held by e.g., other LAs, health, education, probation etc
- Supervision /case consultations to include discussion of family history
- No assessment should be authorised by a Supervisor/ Manager without the history being documented
- Supervisor/Managers should ensure that historical information is included into assessments /plans
- Agency recording systems to identify that history has been considered in assessing risk
- Pre- birth /Initial should include section on family history
- Agencies have agreed processes in identifying and retrieving hard copy files



5. Historical Information to be Included in Referrals/Assessments

- Current referral or incident/concern must be considered in the context of background and all historical information considered
- Episodic individual incidents should be avoided, pay attention to identifying patterns of behaviour /injuries. Information about significant events in a child or his or her family's history is one of the most useful tools in effective analysis of risk.
- The recording /assessment must evidence historical information and family context, and sourced. Gaps in history, should be identified and the significance of this highlighted.

3. Gathering Information

- Gathering information in childcare assessments has been likened to building a jigsaw puzzle (for example, Munro 2008). However, this analogy assumes that the practitioner knows what the picture is that they are trying to complete and that they will know when they have all the pieces (Helm 2010)
- Too little information may result in dangerous gaps but too much information can be unwieldy and inaccessible.
- Many professionals feel that they do not have the right or mandate to ask families about their history

4. Practice Challenges

- Lack of time
- Lack of skill and knowledge
- Recording less likely to be rigorous and structured
- Uncertainties about why, how, and when to share information
- To whom is the information significant and in what way
- Lack of shared theoretical framework to bring consistency and congruity to interpretation of historical information
- Lack of access to hard copy files /information
- Chronological detail going unnoticed