



CASE SCENARIO - MATTHEW

Notification criteria

Brain injury (serious injury).

Age

6 months

Theme

Neglect, parental addiction, parenting capacity, risk assessment, child protection plan, working with fathers.

Case Scenario

Matthew, a six-month-old twin baby, is admitted to hospital with a fractured skull and is in a critical condition. The paramedic described the baby as 'floppy' and unresponsive when called to the home address. Matthew was assessed by the paediatrician in the emergency department (ED) and the initial assessment identified a significant brain injury. There was no forensic evidence or witnesses to assist the investigation, however, the paediatrician felt that the likely mechanism was 'shaking'.

Matthew's mum Chiara, discharged herself from hospital the day after the twins were born. The twins had been born prematurely and were diagnosed as having neo-natal abstinence syndrome, described as a group of problems that occur in a newborn exposed to addictive opiates while in the womb. They received appropriate treatment, including use of morphine. Chiara visited regularly and provided care.

During this period the first Child Protection Conference (CPC) review made the decision to remove all four children's names from the Child Protection plans (CPP) and step down to Children in Need.

The twins were discharged to the family home to live with Chiara and their siblings. The discharge plan outlined the required pattern of visiting by agencies, including an Early Help worker to support with practical tasks. Chiara's brother and her adult son were regarded as playing a significant role in supporting her in caring for the four children.

Concerns were raised when Chiara left the twins in the care of others, who were regarded by agencies as unsuitable carers. It also became known that Chiara was again using heroin and close family members raised concerns about her drug use. They shared information about one of the twins falling from her knee while she was injecting.

Prior to the incident, it is known that five people had, or potentially had, care of him in the previous 24 hours.

The other children were removed into care following medical opinion that the injury was a non-accidental injury. Following Matthew's discharge from hospital, he joined his three siblings, who had remained in the care of a family member.

The relationship between Chiara and the twins' father had ended before their birth. It is unclear as to whether he ever lived in the same house as Chiara.

The older children were described very positively by their teachers. However, it was known that they had been exposed to domestic abuse and had lived with adults, including their mother, with problematic drug use. There is information to suggest that they had seen their mother injecting. Information indicates that she had, at times, found it impossible to prioritise the needs of her children.