

A faint, stylized illustration of five diverse children of various ethnicities and ages standing in a circle, holding hands. In the background, there is a simple house and a tree. The children are drawn in a soft, watercolor-like style with muted colors.

# **Learning from serious child safeguarding incidents - why it matters**

# Aims of the session

- Why the 10 Principles of learning from serious child safeguarding incidents are critical to keeping children safe, and how they apply to your role
- How you have a role to promote the welfare and safeguarding of children
- Why children's rights to have their wishes and feelings listened to in decision making that affect their lives matters



# Background - the national picture 2018-19

- 126 Serious Case Reviews (SCR) were published
- Over 500 notifications of serious child safeguarding incidents
- 244 safeguarding partnerships reported that children had died and 294 reported serious harm.
- Out of this latter group, 77 incidents were considered near misses i.e. the child could easily have died as a result of the serious incident.
- 46% of children who died or were seriously harmed were not known to children's social care
- 13% of cases (70) children were on a child protection plan
- 15% of cases (80) children were looked after at the time of the incident.



# Characteristics of the 538 children notified to the national child safeguarding practice review panel 2018-19

- 35% Domestic abuse/violence
- 21% Addiction
- 17% Diagnosed mental ill health of parent
- 13% Sexual abuse
- 12% Child(ren) with disability
- 9% Child(ren) going missing
- 11% Perpetrator had criminal history
- 7% History of child abuse by either or both parents
- 7% History of intergenerational abuse
- 4% New baby with previous sibling removed
- 1% Returned to parents after removal



# Animation



# Group work

In groups, take 10 minutes to:

- Reflect on the 10 Principles and how they relate to your role.



# 10 Principles for learning

1. Keep clear and detailed records
2. Never make assumptions
3. Always share information
4. Don't be afraid to challenge decisions
5. Consider convening a multi-agency meeting
6. Clear, concise and consistent communication
7. All need training to work with challenging and evasive parents
8. Support your staff
9. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility
10. Keep listening to the voice of the child



# 1. Keep clear and detailed records

Learning from case reviews highlight that:



- Effective record keeping is critical to identifying any risks or problems that puts the child at risk, and the steps taken to deal with them, so that colleagues who use the records have all the information they need to inform their decision making;
- Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it, whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose;
- Common pitfalls in recording are:
  - Case records are out of date
  - The child is "missing" from the record
  - Facts and professional judgements are not distinguished in the record
  - Lack of clarity about the function and purpose of recording
  - The record is not used as a tool for identifying actions to be taken

## 2. Never make assumptions

Learning from case reviews highlight that:

- It is all too easy to assume that someone else is doing something
- This leads to assumptions that there is no need for the individual to take action.
- Key themes about not making incorrect assumptions are around:
  - Thresholds for referral and assessments
  - Poverty
  - Backgrounds, culture and beliefs
  - Lack of professional curiosity



### 3. Always share information

Learning from case reviews highlight the importance of:

- Taking a rigorous approach to information sharing;
- To have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities, the pathways for information sharing, and when sharing the information you hold is critical;
- Recognising that information sharing often becomes more complex when families are receiving services from both adult and children's services;
- Recognising that information with families or individuals with transient lifestyles may require escalation if no response from other local authorities;
- Having a clear multi-agency picture of the household - the varying perceptions of different professionals on issues like neglect can create conflicting accounts and a confused picture of the household and their acceptability.



## 4. Don't be afraid to challenge decisions

Learning from case reviews highlight the importance of challenging decisions, and key themes of learning are:

- Children's behaviour is the voice - challenging parents/carers;
- Management oversight - challenging decision making;
- Legal advice and medical opinion -interprofessional challenge;
- Professional disagreement -resolving differences;
- Effective use of supervision or similar opportunities for reflection;
- Procedural checks and balances - applying internal procedures and multi-agency protocols to safeguarding practice.



# 5. Consider convening a multi-agency meeting

Learning from case reviews highlight:

- How parental behaviours can influence interactions and decisions to safeguard the child which might include reluctance, disguised compliance or open hostility.
- Presenting issues can be additionally complex when families' involvement in services is accompanied by fear or anxiety about the consequences.
- Key themes of learning are:
  - Children subject to care proceedings
  - Effective multi-agency partnership working
  - Lead professional role, especially when working within complex professional networks



## 6. Clear, concise and consistent communication

Learning from case reviews highlight that:

- Communication barriers can sometimes prevent professionals from safeguarding the child;
- We can't avoid having difficult conversations with children and families;
- Being part of a multi-disciplinary network and attending inter-disciplinary training helps to have a shared understanding and a common language.



# 7. All need training to work with challenging and evasive parents

Learning from case reviews highlight:

- How behaviours can influence interactions and decisions to safeguard the child;
- Includes reluctance, disguised compliance or open hostility
- Key themes of learning are:
  - Importance of resolving barriers to engaging with families
  - Negative experiences of statutory agencies
  - Disguised compliance - how to identify and address behaviours
  - Working with fathers who have previous convictions of violence



## 8. Support your staff

When practitioners are working with deeply disturbing cases, or following a serious incident it is:

- Critical that organisations support and safeguard their staff effectively so that they can safeguard children confidently;
- Key themes for learning are:
  - Personal challenges
  - Service changes and fractured arrangements
  - Lack of space for reflection
  - The role of debriefs and support systems
  - Multi-agency training



# 9. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

The S.11 duty under the Children Act 2004, sets out that organisations and agencies should have in place arrangements that reflect the importance of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including:

- A culture of listening to children and taking account of their wishes and feelings, both in individual decisions and the development of services;
- Clear whistleblowing procedures;
- Clear escalation policies;
- Established processes information sharing;
- Supervision and support to fulfil their child welfare and safeguarding responsibilities effectively;
- Safe recruitment practices;
- A culture of safety, equality and protection within the services they provide.



# 10. Keep listening to the voice of the child

Learning from case reviews highlight the importance of:

- Professionals not only looking at what has happened to the children in the past but what the implications are for meeting their needs now;
- What it means for the help they are likely to need as they grow up;
- Exploring the underlying causes of children's lived experience; and not letting the needs and behaviour of parents/carers deflect attention from their care;
- Providing children with support in their own right.



# E-learning

To learn more from serious child safeguarding incidents and how to respond to neglect, abuse or extra-familial harm take up this free e-learning module:

[virtual-college.co.uk/courses/safeguarding/learning-from-serious-case-reviews](https://virtual-college.co.uk/courses/safeguarding/learning-from-serious-case-reviews)

