

Education Safeguarding Guidance

Child Protection - Information and Record Keeping

The purpose of this document is to enable the designated person to ensure that all child protection information is kept in an appropriate and useful manner. It is in addition to the WSCB Model Child Protection Policy that is a part of the county child protection procedures.

Deficiencies in record keeping have been regularly identified by government reports (following the death of Lauren Wright and other children) as a problem area that needs attention from all agencies. The Ofsted evaluation of fifty serious case reviews between 2007-8 highlighted significant concerns, particularly the quality of record keeping in schools and education establishments and the failure of establishments to pass on information when children and young people left. High quality contemporaneous record keeping is essential in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of pupils, particularly with regard to children who have a child protection plan.

The Designated Person for Child Protection should open a child protection file where concerns about the child's welfare reach a level not constituted as a 'low-level concern'. Low level concerns can be recorded and stored in the child's personal file (using Form C) but should be monitored regularly by the designated person to ensure that an accumulation of such concerns is not becoming a child protection issue.

This document seeks to answer the following questions:

- What kind of information should be recorded?
- How should notes and reports be made?
- Where should child protection information be kept?
- Who should have access to child protection information?
- How long should information be kept?
- What should happen to the information when a child leaves the school?
- What would an auditor look for in a good child protection file?

1.0 What kind of information should be recorded?

- 1.1 If a referral is made to Children's Services or the Police, a completed confirmation interagency referral form (found on the WSCB website) should be kept by the school. Copies should be sent to Children's Services within 24 hours, confirming the referral, and to the Education Safeguarding Children Manager.
- 1.2 Not all child protection information results in a referral. A record should be made of any information, including hearsay and 'nagging doubts', which give you cause for concern about a child (use green 'Form C'). Much of this information may not appear to be very significant on its own, but could contribute to a 'jigsaw' picture of the abuse that should not be ignored. This information should be passed to the designated person so that it can all be kept together. (The person making the record may wish to keep a copy for him/herself, which should be kept in a confidentially safe place).
- 1.3 If a child protection record is started for an individual child, the record should have a front sheet in the file, which records the child's full name, date of birth, address and information about family members. (Use cream 'Form B') For example, if John Smith has a sister called Jane Brown, make clear on the file what their relationship is. It would also be good practice to cross-reference files. If any piece of information is lifted from a file for some reason, a card should be placed indicating where the information has gone, and who has it.
- 1.4 To help with the continuity of a case it is good practice to include a Key Events/ Chronology Sheet in the front of the file (use white 'Form A').

Key events would include for example:

- Child protection file started
- Logging a concern - [Form C] (green paper) added to file
- Referral made to children's services - Copy of WSCB referral form
- Outcome Reports (blue paper)
- Case Conference - Minutes of Initial Case conference (green paper)
- Review conferences - Minutes of review conferences (yellow paper)
- Relevant letters
- School reports for conference
- Core group meetings - minutes
- Unexplained absence (and a record of action taken to be included in file)
- Monitoring records (see 5.4)
- Discussions with agencies/ colleagues/ parents

Please also see enclosed 'Guidance for compiling chronologies' from the WSCB website.

- 1.5 If more than one file exists in relation to an individual child, this should be noted on each file. Also, each file should be dated, and indicate the number of volumes e.g. January 1996, Vol. 1 of 3.

2.0 How should notes and reports be made?

- 2.1 It is impossible to say, at the time of making a child protection note, who will eventually have access to it, or when. It may be consulted months or even years after it was written. Always bear in mind that someone who is a complete stranger to you and your school may need to read your record at some stage in the future. (A court may release the papers to the parent).
- 2.2 Hand written logs of incidents, disclosures and notes should be clearly legible and written in black ink. All notes and reports must contain the following: (use green 'Form C').
- Name and date of birth of the child concerned (use separate forms for each child)
 - Date and time of the record being made
 - Printed name & signature of person making the record
 - Job title of person making the record
 - A factual account of what happened, and the location where the incident took place (include the actual words spoken by the child here if possible)
 - A note of any other people involved e.g. as witnesses
 - Action taken, and any future plans e.g. monitor and review
 - Any other agencies informed?
- 2.3 The source of the information should be identified e.g. 'Mrs Bell, a midday supervisor, informed me that.....' Or 'I saw John in the playground at break time....'.
- 2.4 Opinion is acceptable provided that you can give some justification for holding it (e.g. 'Sam ran and hid under the table when his mother arrived to take him home, and clung to me when I tried to get him out. He appeared to be frightened.')
- 2.5 Make a note of what you have done with the information (e.g. 'I consulted the Head Teacher, Mr Wilson, and he said he would.....')
- 2.6 Try to avoid specialist jargon (e.g. 'he is at level 2') which someone from another agency would not necessarily understand.

NOTE: Records must be made as soon as possible, and certainly within 24 hours of the incident giving rise to concern (This is important, in case the note is needed for submission to court).

It is IMPORTANT they are:

- Factual
- Using Child's own words where possible
- A record of what you saw and heard
- Contemporaneous

2.7 The Designated Person should complete their section on the 'Logging a concern' form (Form C Part 2). If the Designated Person is using a secure database for child protection records they should ensure the record is complete including information as above.

2.8 Reports for case conferences, core groups etc. should follow the same principles and guidance as stated above.

3.0 Where should child protection information be kept?

3.1 The child protection file should contain all reports, notes and correspondence referring to a child. This should be kept in one secure place e.g. a locked filing cabinet in the Head's/ Designated Person's office. Files on extended family members should be kept together and cross-referenced.

3.2 All child protection records should be held in a ring binder or similar expandable file with secure fittings to enable papers to be filed behind the front sheet and chronology without removing existing papers, *never loose leaf in a wallet style folder*.

3.3 A note or symbol (e.g. a blue star) should be placed on the cover of the school file for the child, indicating that there is a child protection file relating to the child. All staff who may need to consult a child's school file should be made aware of what the symbol means, and who to consult if they see it.

4.0 Who should have access to child protection information?

4.1 Access to the information on file should be on a need-to-know basis among the staff. This can only be decided on a case-by-case basis. The confidentiality of the child and family should be respected as far as possible, but the welfare of the child is paramount. It would be unlikely that every member of staff needs to know the details of a case. Generally speaking, the closer the day-to-day contact with the child, the more likely the need to know an outline of the case. It is good practice to share the school report to the child protection conference with the parent(s) before the conference takes place. All information must be shared with Children Services and/or Police, as appropriate, where there is concern that a child is at risk of significant harm.

- 4.2 Child protection information should not ordinarily be shared with agencies other than these statutory agencies e.g. information should not be released to solicitors etc. Where such a request is made, it is best to seek the advice of the legal department (schools hotline) or the schools own legal adviser, or the Education Safeguarding Children Manager.

5.0 Monitoring the child

- 5.1 If a child is placed on a Child Protection Plan it is important that the designated person (who may not have been at the case conference), is immediately told of the decision.
- 5.2 What monitoring is required by the school should be clearly understood and actioned e.g. attendance, lateness, hygiene, dress, curriculum engagement, behaviour etc.
- 5.3 Monitoring report should be presented to every core group and review conference.
- 5.4 Monitoring records could be kept on file paper inserted securely into the child's child protection record. It is very important the recording follows good practice (writing in black ink, dated, timed, signed, name printed and in sequence following the previous monitoring record with no spaces left between).

6.0 How long should information be kept?

- 6.1 The Children Services Department will keep information about the child for many years, so anything reported to Children Services will still be available. There is no need to keep a copy of material sent to a new school unless, at the discretion of the designated person, there are exceptional reasons for doing so. For example, at time of school transfer it is good practice to retain copies of key documents for 2 further terms approximately. The Records Management Society provides guidance to be followed if you are the last education establishment the child attends. The schools' tool kit is found at <http://irms.org.uk/page/SchoolsToolkit>. The NSPCC also publishes guidance on child protection records retention and storage via their website.

7.0 What should happen to the information when a child leaves the school?

- 7.1 If the child is moving to another school, the complete child protection file should be sent, under separate cover from regular school file. It should be marked 'Confidential, Addressee Only', and should go to the Head Teacher of the receiving school. Where a pupil of 16+ years is taking up a college place, the file should be sent to the receiving college for the attention of the college principal. Where a pupil leaves with no FE place identified, the file should be retained at the school until the child's 25th birthday.

- 7.2 If there are concerns about a child who is not subject to a child protection plan, child protection information should be shared, for example 'nagging doubt' logs. Serious concerns should already have been shared with Children's Services, who will make arrangements to hand over to another Children's Services team where necessary.
- 7.3 If there are concerns about a child who has never been registered, or had a child protection plan, child protection information can be shared at the discretion of the designated person. All relevant information, including nagging doubts, should be shared.
- 7.4 If a child leaves the school and you have not been informed where the child's new school will be, monitor this carefully. If the child has a Child Protection Plan, inform the key worker, Independent Reviewing Officer (Chair of conference), Education Safeguarding Children Manager and Head of ESWS. If the child does not have a child protection plan but there are current child protection concerns, contact the duty social worker. Even where there are no child protection concerns, if there is no request for the school file within 21 days, inform the Head of the Education Social Work Service.

8.0 Auditing Child Protection Files Kept by the School

- 8.1 The designated person should, as good practice, carry out an occasional audit of the school's child protection files to ensure that adequate records are being kept in an appropriate manner. The Education Safeguarding Service may be able to assist with this task if requested.

The check should cover the following:

Facing sheet with name, address, dob, family members and name, address and contact number of Social Services (if the child is on the child protection register this should be the key worker).

Note or symbol on child's regular school file

File cross-referenced with other family members, if appropriate

Cross reference to additional files, if appropriate

Records and notes typed or written in legible handwriting

Incident date (including year!), time, place

Name, address and dob of child concerned recorded on each sheet

Factual outline of incident/ concern/ allegation/ disclosure

Opinion substantiated, if given

Clear names, job titles of staff involved

Signature, printed name, job title of person making record

Note of action taken, and with whom information was shared

Note of copy of referral form sent to Children's Services and Education
Safeguarding Manager, as appropriate