

Part 31

Staffordshire Safeguarding Children Board

Service User Contact Recording Policy

Introduction

1. Best Practice in recording is based on key principles of partnership, openness and accuracy; effective recording is part of the total service to the service user.
2. The case record is a vital tool for the practitioner, manager and administrative staff, in ensuring that all information is easily accessible.
3. Contact recording is the narrative provided by the practitioner that documents the involvement and intervention of each contact with or regarding, the service user.

Legal Framework and Associated Guidance

4. This policy should be read in conjunction with:
 - Children Act (1989)
 - Children Act (2004)
 - Working Together To Safeguard Children. (A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) (2006)
 - Inter-Agency Procedures for Safeguarding Children and Promoting their Welfare
 - Data Protection Act (1998)
 - The Human Rights Act (1998)
 - Information Sharing
 - Bichard Requirements (2004)
 - Policies and Procedures Pertinent to Individual Agencies.

The Purpose of the Policy

5. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that all agencies have their own efficient and updated policies in place, in relation to record keeping.
6. All partner agencies have a responsibility to ensure that recording and providing accurate information is fundamental to good, safe practice and better outcomes for children.
7. Records that are well kept are an essential foundation for good professional practice. Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children requires information to be brought together from a number of sources.
8. Contact records should therefore be clear, accessible and comprehensive. Professional judgements are often made on the basis of this information.
9. This policy is a working document; some areas may require further development as a result of local discussions and practice.

10. The policy will be reviewed and updated as necessary annually.

Principles Underpinning Recording

11. Good record/contact recording is an important part of the accountability of professionals to those who use their services.
12. Good recording helps to focus work and is essential to working effectively across agency and professional boundaries.
13. All Service Users should be aware that the agencies keep records, the purpose of maintenance of the records, and the process of access to those records.
14. Partner agencies information cannot be treated as anonymous. No information will be treated as 'off-the-record' regardless of the source. All sources of information should be clearly stated.
15. Recording should be concise, factual and relevant. It should also be written in non-discriminatory and non-oppressive language.
16. Use of technical or professional terms and abbreviations must be kept to a minimum; and if there is likely to be any doubt of their meaning, they must be defined or explained.
17. Any necessary opinion should be recorded as such, and should be based on professional rather than personal judgement. Both fact and opinion should be evidence-based.
18. It is essential that practitioners identify their role when contact notes are completed,
19. All recording should be dated and signed in order that the source of recording can be easily identified.
20. Cases where s47 enquiries/referral concerns have not been substantiated should be retained in accordance with agency retention policies. Agencies should ensure that records are stored safely and can be retrieved promptly and efficiently.

Good recording helps to:

21. Ensure that there is a documented account of an agency's or professional's involvement with a child and/or a family.
22. Assist continuity when workers are unavailable or change.
23. Provide evidence for investigations and enquiries and may also be required to be disclosed in court proceedings.

24. Provide an essential tool for managers to monitor work or for peer review.
25. Ensure accountability and adherence to procedures and statutory responsibilities.
26. Ensure decisions taken jointly across agencies or endorsed by manager are documented clearly.
27. Clarity of information for everyone involved in the planning and delivery of services, and in the event of investigations, inquiries, or audits.

Information Sharing

28. Service users should be advised that a system for record keeping exists and the purpose for keeping records.
29. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 confirms the duty to share information for the prevention or detection of crime.
30. The Children Act 2004 further validated the duty to share information to improve the well-being and to safeguard children and young people.
31. Sharing information is vital for early intervention to ensure that children and young people with additional needs get the services they require. It is also essential to safeguard children and young people from suffering harm from abuse and neglect and to prevent them from offending.
32. *'core group meetings, reviews and casework decisions include all the professionals involved with the child, particularly police, health, youth services and education colleagues. Records must be kept which include the written views of those who cannot make such meetings'*

(The Protection of Children in England: Progress Report 2009).
33. Consent to share information on a need-to-know basis should be recorded using the respective agency's documentation.
34. In all cases, the decision not to secure consent, and the reasons for taking this decision should be clearly recorded in the service user's case notes.

Integrated Children System (ICS)

35. The Integrated Children's System has been designed by the DCSF to help social care practitioners working with colleagues from other agencies to improve outcomes for children in need and their families.

36. The Integrated Children's System is one of the key tools that supports 'Every Child Matter's aims to integrate services for children 0-19; with agencies working across professional boundaries to co-ordinate support around the needs of children, using common processes and language.