

Learning Briefing Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review VN21 “Alison”.

Circumstances

This review concerns a four-year-old girl and her unexplained serious injuries while in foster care with her two older siblings. The children had complex needs as they had experienced many traumatic events in the care of their birth parents. The foster carers were new and inexperienced, they had no children of their own and this was their first placement.

There was no single ‘trigger’ incident for the serious incident notification and rapid review. It followed an analysis of a number of incidents involving injuries to the girl whilst in the care of her foster carers from April 2020 to February 2021. Two of the episodes of injuries required significant medical treatment – serious damage to her pancreas which led to surgery to remove 70% of her pancreas and a fracture to her arm. Multiple injuries were accepted as being due to “clumsiness” or caused by siblings, despite evidence to the contrary, without adequate exploration or challenge.

The level of experience of the involved carers and social workers impacted in this case. Strategy discussions were not undertaken at key points. Professional curiosity and challenge around assumptions should have been more thorough.

Links to Local/National/Themed Guidance

- [Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews \(nottinghamshire.gov.uk\) – VN21](https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk)
- [Welcome to the Interagency Safeguarding Children Procedures \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com)
- [Child Protection Enquiries \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com)
- [Good Practice Supporting the Voice of the Child \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com)
- [Resolving Professional Disagreements \(Escalation Procedure\) \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://www.proceduresonline.com)

Key Partnership Learning Points from the review

- Professionals should be clear about how to recognise and respond when there is reason to suspect that a child may be at risk of, or have suffered significant harm and they are already open to children’s social care. **Concerns about a child open to social care including a Looked After Child should be referred to the involved social work team as a safeguarding concern.** The threshold/timeline for holding a strategy discussion is no different for a Looked After Child. Concerns should be raised with the Emergency Duty Team if out of hours.
- Professionals should understand the **impact of adverse childhood experiences** on children and young people and be able to provide, or refer to, support to reduce this impact.
- The importance of ensuring that **formal meetings (such as Personal education plans, LAC reviews etc) are effective** in their primary purpose and do not become exercises to be completed.
- Managers and supervisors have a responsibility to monitor and support **professionals or foster carers who are less experienced to ensure that** service standards/quality, and ultimately care of the child are appropriate.
- The needs and lived experience of the Child and the child’s voice should be central to all assessments and meetings. **Professional curiosity** should be used to explore and challenge explanations and assumptions.

Learning Briefing

Agency Specific Learning

Social Care

- **When new information comes to light regarding a child that is already open to children social care it is the responsibility of the allocated social worker to arrange a strategy discussion/meeting promptly.** GP's and all relevant professionals need to be made aware.
- The importance of considering sibling groups and their dynamics when making best interest decisions about whether to place siblings together.
- The importance of support for foster placements including the carers.

Nursery and School

- Querying and professionally challenging the conclusions of the involved professionals if there is a differing opinion, escalate as required.
[Resolving Professional Disagreements \(Escalation Procedure\) \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)
- The benefit of consistent support around a child's emotional and mental wellbeing in these settings.

Fostering Agencies

- Seeking full information prior to matching children to foster placements.
- Record keeping and information sharing training for foster carers.
- Responsibilities of staff to be within their level of experience and role.

Health

- **The need for a child protection medical is a decision made as part of a strategy discussion and should only take place under S47 proceedings.**
- When patients are transferred between acute trusts and there are SG concerns, information should be handed over verbally and in writing and a copy sent to the receiving trusts safeguarding team. Look out for upcoming new guidance.
- Robust safeguarding discussions must be undertaken under the appropriate frameworks to collate evidence from different medical professionals.
- **Voice of the Child Pathway to be used in line with current agency processes.**