

Guidance for staff or reviewers meeting with family members for the purposes of reviewing a case

Introduction

The views of families who use our services should be encouraged in relation to individual service delivery, but also to give a view how our services generally should be delivered.

The news that the LSCB are going to conduct a serious case review into the circumstances around the death or injury of a child will inevitably create anxiety for any family involved, despite the purpose of learning about the multi-agency working around the child. This news will probably come to them at a time when they are highly stressed because they are grieving for a child who has died, or have had a child removed as a result of serious harm, or are trying to manage a child who has been subject to serious harm. The information that a serious case review is to be held is likely to be a further hurdle for them. It is therefore good practice to give family members an early opportunity to have a meeting to assist their understanding. This may be more appropriately done by a worker known to them. Families do not have to contribute but clearly it brings a richness to the review if they do.

There may also be occasions when staff will want to meet family members when they are reviewing a case. This might, for example, be as part of an audit, part of a multi-agency review or as part of a more formal serious case review.

Families must be given the opportunity to contribute to the review unless there are criminal proceedings outstanding. In this case the Senior Investigating Officer must be consulted. Usually the Police will advise that a family is not seen while criminal investigations are in place.

Coroner's inquests do not inhibit the involvement of the family at an early stage but liaison with the coroner is advised so that this is achieved in an open and transparent manner.

There are some issues which need to be considered before any meeting with family members

Reviews carried out by Independent Reviewers

1. The review panel should decide who should be interviewed as part of a review and how this should be managed. At the outset of the review the family should be informed that a review is taking place and that they will be invited to contribute as the process unfolds. It is good practice for the conversation with the family to be undertaken with either another Panel member **or** a professional of their choosing if they would like that.

2. Families should also be given the option of where they would like to have their conversations. Some will opt to visit a neutral office, but some will be more relaxed if they are seen at home.
3. Any visit to a home requires some forethought about personal safety for all participants and to consider the issue that might arise. It may be appropriate in some cases to invite the family to come to the office for these interviews in which case efforts should be made to ensure a comfortable space with refreshments.
4. The language used in interviews should be clear and appropriate for the level of understanding the family has of the process. Jargon must be avoided at all times.
5. Ensure that the Reviewer has up to date information about the family gained through the Panel lead for the Review. The reviewer should have a good picture of the child's life and the family's lived experience before the visit, informed by the multi-agency chronologies completed for the review and discussions in the review panel. This will help inform the reviewer about the information that is being gathered. Particular attention is required where the person being interviewed has experienced abuse and/or trauma, or has a history of addiction, mental health or learning difficulty/ disability so that the information being heard can be analysed in that context.
6. If the purpose of the meeting is to share the overview report, the professional from the panel who has been allocated this task should see the family with a member of staff who has an ongoing responsibility for the family. If the family do not have on going contact with professionals, consideration must be given to their own going support needs in relation to the review. This should be agreed with the SCR Review manager.
7. Care must be taken to move at pace of the family. Whilst a review report cannot be left with the family at this stage, it is important that the family know what the review says about them in particular; and understands what actions are to be taken as a result of the review. Arrangements should be made to let the family know when and how the review will be made public and arrange for them to have a paper copy of the review if they want one.
8. Families should be given written information with contact details so that they can reflect on the information they have heard, follow up any query they may have, or make a general enquiry after their meeting.

The reviewer and accompanying person should have a discussion with the SCR review manager before the meeting and on return from the meeting to debrief and also pass on any necessary information or safeguarding concerns that may have been uncovered through the discussion. These might include:

1. Specific complaints about a service which necessitate the single agency taking some action
2. New information - these might include for example;

- the presentation of the home which may be of concern e.g. alcohol or drug paraphernalia, temperature or cleanliness
- new disclosures about health or well-being
- new pregnancies
- death of relative
- new people living in the household

Review interviews carried out by staff members who are not case holders

It is good practice to inform families that a review is being undertaken about professional working with their family, even if this is a lower level of review (Multi Agency Learning Reviews). Consent may need to be sought in any event if there are medical records to be checked, and the reasons for this reinforced – i.e. the review is looking for examples of multi-agency work.

Any person undertaking a review should be familiar with the up to date circumstances of the family as above. This might necessitate a conversation with members of staff from the same agency or from partner agencies who are working with the family or a case record check.

After the visit

Any member of staff undertaking any review mentioned in this policy should meet with their line manager for **reflective supervision** both before and after the meeting. The purpose of this is to give the worker the opportunity to explore in a safe space the issues to be addressed, and to check out potential safeguarding concerns. Post-visit, a debrief meeting should be held to consider the information that has been gathered and to begin to form an analysis of it. Any actions that need to take place can be agreed. These discussions needs to be formally noted in the agency's required supervision format.

The meeting needs to be recorded on the case record of the agency.

The Greater Manchester Serious Case procedure can be found here:

<http://greatermanchesterscb.proceduresonline.com/chapters/contents.html#review>