



Children's Safeguarding Board Practitioner Briefing

Briefing Number 2: Themes and Lessons

The safeguarding children's board has undertaken a number of multi-agency audits. From those audits were found re-occurring practitioner themes when working with children and families. Those themes have also been identified within local and national serious case reviews as lessons for agencies to put into practice;

- **Voice of the Child:** Ensuring that the child's voice is not just listened too but is actively heard. Professor Eileen Munro (2011) referred to this throughout her reports and research around child protection and social work practice. It is a phrase used to describe the real involvement of children and young people – not just what they tell us but 'What is life like for them?' – What do they understand / What could be different?
- **Professional Curiosity:** is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. In other words **ask questions** about 'What is life like for the child living at home?' 'What is it like for the family?' etc. Make observations about the home/family environment- how does the child react to their parents and vice versa?
- **Respectful Uncertainty:** A term initially used by Lord Lamming (Baby P – Serious Case Review) meaning that Professionals must remain **sceptical** of the explanations, justifications or excuses they may hear. In other words professionals should not take what families tell us at face value – they should 'check out' with other agencies / sources of information what is being said.
- **Cultural Competence:** Cultural competence is being respectful of and responsive to the beliefs, practices and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse communities both from the individual (practitioner) and the organisation (agency). When referring to 'communities' this extends to areas such as; socio-economic back ground, race, gender, mental health, sexual identity/ orientation, religion, disability etc. In other words professionals should not make assumptions about a family and as part of 'informed practice' should be confident to ask about what their life experiences are in order to meet their needs and to provide the best service.
- **Dads can safeguard too:** Cases and assessments often refer to missing/absent fathers or sometimes do not mention any father figures at all. Professionals should check out with families/young people if there are any significant males in the child's life and where they are. Practitioners should take into consideration where and when would be best to complete assessments and interviews so that dads can be present. Where father figures may be the perpetrator, within a relationship, professionals should also ask what dad is going to do to minimise his risk and to protect his child(ren) and not put all of the safeguarding expectations on the mother/child; and vice versa if mum / mother figure is the perpetrator.

- **Think Sibling:** Local and National Serious case reviews tell us that in relation to a child at significant risk of harm there were often other children within the family. These siblings were omitted from assessments and sometimes from safeguarding procedures even when the sibling lived in the same home as the child at risk. Professionals need to think 'are there any other siblings either living in the family home or living elsewhere as part of an extended family' and to ensure that they are actively part of any assessment and if necessary any child protection process.
- **Think the Unthinkable:** Is a phrase taken from Daniel Pelka's Serious Case review where professionals did not consider that 'abuse' was a possibility. In other words practitioners should always work with 'healthy scepticism' when dealing with families where children might be at risk and to actively think 'is this child abuse'?
- **Disguised Compliance:** Can involve parents or carers or siblings giving 'the appearance of co-operating with child welfare agencies to avoid raising suspicions, to allay professional concerns and ultimately diffuse professional intervention'.(NSPCC/Hamzah Khan (SCR)). They may; tell professionals what they 'want to hear', not admit that they do not want to change or say that they have completed requests when they have not done so. Practitioners need to be aware of possible disguised compliance from families and to always check out what is being said.
- **Rule of Optimism:** is a term often used in social work and quoted within serious case reviews. (Daniel Pelka and Baby P). The Rule of Optimism is where practitioners are 'blind' as to what is actually going on in the child's life as they like to see the 'best in' families and wrongly assume positive outcomes for children. Professionals just focus on the positives/strengths within the family and either don't see or avoid seeing the risks; potentially to the detriment of the child. Even where the facts show that risk is ongoing or increasing, professionals tell themselves that the opposite is true. This can be for a number of reasons; pressure of caseloads, disguised compliance from parents, not thinking the unthinkable and being overly positive about a family. In order to assess risk and to safeguard the child(ren) professionals need to have a balanced view about the family.

Further Information

(Daniel Pelka: 2013) (Hamzah Khan 2013)(Baby P: 2009)

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/case-reviews>

Safeguarding Board Websites:

<http://www.safeguardingpeterborough.org.uk/children-board/>

<https://www.cambslscb.co.uk/>

Safeguarding Training:

<http://www.safeguardingpeterborough.org.uk/availabletraining/>

<https://www.cambslscb.co.uk/multi-agency-training/>