

Serious Case Review S25

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE CASE

The DSCB completed Serious Case Review in 2017 in relation to the death of a 2 ½ year old child in 2016 following a vicious assault. Prior to death the child's parents had separated and the child had lived with his mother and her new partner. The couple had been living together for approximately 16 weeks before the child died. The post mortem report on the child showed that in addition to the injury which resulted in the death, there were a number of other injuries considered to have been inflicted over a number of weeks. There was one significant injury suffered by the child 9 weeks prior to death, which had required surgery and an overnight stay in hospital. After a trial the mother's partner was found guilty of murder and is currently serving a lengthy prison sentence.

Although this case was considered to be below the threshold for social care intervention, prior to the death of the child there were a number of common factors present that should always be considered in the context of the impact on the child.

LEARNING

Recognising Risk and Vulnerability

- For all agencies it is important to notice patterns of behaviour, particularly when there are changes and to consider the possible significance of this. This is especially important when considering the parenting capacity of a young parent with a complex history.
- It is important to recognise that self-reporting by a parent with a previous history of domestic abuse and is now in a new relationship may run the risk that an incomplete picture will emerge. It is key to establishing family details with birth dates for all adults in domestic relationships.
- Where domestic abuse has been identified all professionals working around the family should consider their knowledge of domestic abuse **and** the impact it has on children. Equally being mindful domestic abuse allegations can be a deflection to the true home environment and that both parents can be victims and perpetrators.
- Victims of domestic abuse can minimise the significance or impact and consideration must be given to their parenting capacity. Whenever the possible child or children should be spoken to alone.
- Appropriate sharing of information can enable a picture to be built up over time leading to a more accurate assessment of risk this includes reviewing relevant records.
- For an assessment to be effective, details about past history and current circumstances must be considered together in order to achieve a complete picture.
- Rigorous supervision, safeguarding advice and management support is essential to ensure practitioners have adequate knowledge of risk factors, to help them reflect, think systematically about risk and avoid over optimism.

The Significance of injuries to children and the Voice of the Child

- When checking records for previous injuries or involvement of agencies it is important to remember that the information available may be limited and care needs to be taken not to be falsely reassured, Verbal as well as body language and presentation should always be considered.
- When assessing an injury all professionals need to be thoughtful about the possibility of being misled by parents and to confirm who was present when the injury occurred.
- Important to ask a child directly to describe how an injury occurred as through simple natural conversations there is a potential to elicit valuable information.
- Practitioners should keep an open mind and if concerned, ask questions, particularly when a young child presents with an unusual injury.
- Asking the question “what is it like for a child in this family” will help practitioners retain a child focus, especially when there are changes in the child’s family around them.
- A vulnerable client may bring an additional adult for support however this can offer false assurance and can falsely reassure influence on the assessment influencing an outcome. It is important to clarify and record who they are and what capacity they are present in, and whether they witnessed the incident.

Safeguarding, the Legal Framework and Good Practice

- Background checks on adults involved in domestic incidents are an important part of safeguarding practice. Consideration needs to be given to carrying out these checks and then appropriate sharing of information with other professionals.
- If more than one worker in the same agency is involved in a case there needs to be clarity about who is responsible for what and clear lines of communication.
- Multi-agency working and co-operation is central to safeguarding practice, each agency brings different knowledge and experience to a case. Care should be taken to avoid assuming that Children’s Social Care to follow up all incidents.
- All agencies should be alert to the risk of making assumptions about the judgements and decision making of others.
- Men play an important part in children’s lives and therefore should not be overlooked by professionals who can focus almost exclusively on the quality of care given by female carers.