

Spotlight on Chronologies

What is a chronology?

A chronology is a written record of significant events both positive and negative in the order they occur, in the life of the person. It is not an assessment and is not an end in itself. It is not a list of all events or a duplication of case notes. It is a working tool to promote engagement with the person.

The chronology needs to be regularly analysed for patterns of behaviour and for the impact which these behaviours have had on the individual’s life. This helps us to better understand the person’s experiences, risks and strengths, including their need for protection from harm.

Why is a chronology important?

The National Practice Model which is central to GIRFEC says that each agency involved with a child and a family should collate key information into a single agency chronology of contact. Reviews and inquiries of cases where a child or adult has died, suffered harm or been at risk of harm have highlighted how key information was missed when decisions were made, as there were gaps in chronologies – patterns and themes may have been picked up earlier which could have led to earlier intervention and support to prevent harm. The [Care Inspectorate](#) have highlighted that chronologies are a critical element of Adult Support and Protection work but require significant improvement.

What does a chronology look like?

Agency recording systems may have specific chronology templates, but the Pan-Lothian Chronology Partnership has developed a template to support consistent recording. It includes the following elements:

Date or date range (dd/mm/yyyy)	Significant event(s)	Outcome (What happened to the person as a result of the event?)	Source of information (name and agency). May be anonymised in the interests of safety

Spotlight on Chronologies

What should be in the chronology?

- Key dates such as dates of birth, life events, moves.
- Facts, such as a child's name placed on the child protection register, multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) meeting, adult who is subject to adult protection procedures.
- Transitions, life changes.
- Key professional interventions such as reviews, hearings, tribunals, court disposals.
- A very brief note of an event – for example, a fall downstairs, coming to school with a bruise, a registered sex offender whose car keeps 'breaking down' outside a primary school.
- At the same time, the writer needs to provide enough information for the entry to make sense. Statements like: "...[the individual] behaved inappropriately..." do not necessarily have sufficient detail.
- The actions that were taken. Many chronologies list events and dates but do not have a column which enables the action taken to be recorded or, if no action was taken, to explain why.
- Not opinions – these may be for the case record, but the strength of chronologies lies in their reporting of facts, times, dates and so on.

What do we do with the chronology?

- Review it and analyse it – look for the patterns and themes
- Share it with other professionals involved with the person – and in some circumstances a multi-agency chronology is invaluable
- It can be helpful to review it with the individual and family (where appropriate) – to help them identify risks and understand the impact of significant events on them and their family. It can highlight when things have improved, help the person to understand what led to that and create a sense of achievement
- A chronology is a key tool to support reflective practice and critical thinking in supervision
- Keep it updated and ensure significant events are recorded accurately – it is only useful if this is done well and used well to inform analysis and assessment.

Spotlight on Chronologies

Where can I get more information and guidance?

The [Care Inspectorate Practice Guide to Chronologies](#) talks about the ‘nine things to consider’.

Sign up to the Pan-Lothian Knowledge Hub on Chronologies – you need to register first from your work e-mail account here [Sign up - Knowledge Hub \(khub.net\)](#) then search for Pan-Lothian Partnership – Joint Chronologies.

The purpose of the Pan Lothian Partnership Joint Chronologies is “to formally establish governance where the user base, and subject matter experts, can meet on a regular basis to review the progress on developing the approach for improving the aggregation, integration and improve systems dependencies around Children and Young People and Adult Services Joint Chronologies”.

[Why writing a chronology should be the first thing you do in an assessment \(communitycare.co.uk\)](#)

[Completing social work chronologies: Practice Tool \(2022\) | Research in Practice](#)

Refer to the [EMPPC Adult Support and Protection Procedures](#) (section 19, page 21)

Refer to the [Edinburgh and the Lothians Multi-agency Child Protection Procedures](#) (page 25)

Lord Laming stated in his report into the death of Victoria Climbié “I regard the inclusion in any case file of a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date chronology as absolutely essential”. Still so relevant almost 20 years on.