



Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board

Learning Brief

CHILD G SERIOUS CASE REVIEW October 2015

Welcome to this Child G Serious Case learning briefing published by Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board.

Lancashire LSCB is currently undertaking a serious case review that cannot be published due to ongoing criminal matters. It involves the death of an infant, Child G, aged 13 months. Whilst we cannot share details of the case yet, learning from the review is already emerging.

Key areas for professionals to consider and challenge themselves

Question Yourself - Think the Unthinkable

Consider parental history and use it to assess future risk

People may want to change but can they (and in the timescale of the child)?

Look for evidence – what you see may not be accurate or the full picture

Show professional scepticism. Beware the "rule of optimism" ¹

Sometimes, people lie – sometimes this can be supported by other people

Remember the impact adult behaviour has on the children they care for – what does the child see, experience, feel, think, fear, do?

None of these messages are new. Serious Case Reviews have previously reported that professionals may have been 'overly optimistic', or accepted at face value what they were told because they wanted to believe people would change their lifestyles and care properly for their children.

If on a Thursday morning, you visit a family home, and see a sober, friendly, engaging parent who tells you that they know in the past their alcohol use has prevented them from doing their best for their children, but they have stopped drinking now, and this time, they're determined to do the right thing, what do you think?

What if that parent had been abusing alcohol for years?

What if the parents had a very long history of domestic abuse which the children frequently witnessed?

What it is like to be that child, repeatedly witnessing your parents physically fighting and too drunk to properly care for themselves?

How and why would the parents suddenly stop drinking alcohol and being violent?

How do you know that what you are being told and what you are seeing on a Thursday morning, will still be applicable on a Saturday night?

Telling lies

During the completion of a recent serious case review in Lancashire, the mother of a deceased child was visited in prison. She was in prison for offences relating to the death of her child, and felt she had 'nothing to lose now'. She told the reviewers that she had lied repeatedly to professionals that worked with her, about pretty much everything.

She lied about not taking drugs any more, about the father of the child not visiting the house anymore, about coping with being a parent. She knew what professionals wanted to hear, and so that is what she said. Much of it was not true. But she felt it 'got people off her back'. This mother knew what to say, and what to do to cover up what she was doing.

Written agreements can be signed, but ignored. If you have no evidence that a parent will comply with what they have signed, then written agreements in themselves will not keep a child safe. They can on occasions not be worth the paper they are literally written on. Don't take false comfort by the fact there is a signed agreement – paper does not protect children – a parent's best intents may not be maintained.

Domestic Abuse and Alcohol abuse

In the current serious case review, both parents had a history of abusing alcohol. On several occasions they were too drunk to care for their children and failed to make appropriate arrangements for their care. They had a long history of domestic abuse, with repeated assertions that they had separated (which in itself often raises the risk of abusive incidents – three quarters of domestic homicides occur after a separation. Separation does not necessarily make things less risky).

This domestic abuse was seen as an issue about conflict management – people not controlling their temper, when in fact it was much more about power and control. Research suggests that perpetrators of domestic abuse

have inferior parenting skills; they are often more irritable, less affectionate and more likely to use physical punishments with their children. ²

Women's Aid provide lots of information about domestic abuse, the causes and how to work with people experiencing it: [Women's Aid - the national charity working to end domestic violence against women and children](#)

Other things to make you think...

A professional having 'seen' a child does not make that child safe. They may be safe at the moment you see them, but history may tell you that it is likely there will be a time soon when they will be at risk.

Do you have any evidence to support the things you are being told? Or evidence to contradict it? Do you know what you don't know? Parental participation does not mean cooperation, and a parent 'getting you off their back' may even believe their own intentions at that moment in time.

There are lots of training and learning opportunities available for the children's workforce about a variety of safeguarding and child protection topics. Access to those learning opportunities can be found on the LSCB website [Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board](#) and also through the Children's Trust website [Lancashire Children's Trust - - Workforce Development](#)

1. *A frequent lesson from the reviews was that practitioners had been affected by what is known as the 'rule of optimism'. This is a tendency by social workers and healthcare workers towards rationalisation and under-responsiveness in certain situations. In these conditions, workers focus on adults' strengths, rationalise evidence to the contrary and interpret data in the light of this optimistic view. They confuse participation by parents with cooperation (para. 96 Daniel Pelka report)*
2. *[S. Walby and A. Myhil, 'Assessing and managing risk', in J. Taylor-Browne, What Works in Reducing Domestic Violence? A Comprehensive Guide for Professionals \(London: Whiting Birch, 2001\).](#)*

Finding Out More about Serious Case Reviews:

Lancashire Safeguarding Children Board continues to run Briefing Sessions about the findings from Serious Case Reviews and they are updated on a regular basis. There will be more about the learning from Serious Case Reviews completed in Lancashire and helpful practical advice to take back into your practice. Check the [LSCB website](#) for upcoming dates.

Contact the LSCB:

LSCB, Room 503/504, East Cliff Offices, JDO, Preston, PR1 3JT
01772 530283