

Key recommendations

The LSCBs should require partner agencies to:

- Explain how professional curiosity is promoted within their organisation.
- Explore the barriers to this occurring and how they can be overcome.

Provide a synopsis of the case and encourage reflection on the need to test allegations and assumptions, particularly where factors such as class and gender may be influencing responses.

Request a review of the advice, support, supervision and reporting arrangements for staff working in early years settings, in order to ensure they provide sufficient opportunity for reflection on issues of concern.

In relation to response to domestic abuse,

- Develop a strategy for supporting front line professionals to work effectively across agency boundaries in situations of domestic abuse, including how to maintain professional curiosity and identify significant information whilst working with a high volume of information.
- Commence a multi-agency debate regarding the best way to develop an effective multi-agency response.

Ensure that Social Care staff are aware of the meaning of a Police welfare check and understand that it is not a substitute for an initial assessment.

Request that any future national research into lessons from serious case reviews should explore the relationship between parental separation, risks to children and appropriate professional responses

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LEARNING FROM A SERIOUS CASE REVIEW

Child J and Child K

www.surreycc.gov.uk/safeguarding

The SSCB conducted a SCR as a result of events in 2010, which resulted in the deaths of Child J aged 3, and Child K aged 2. Their Mother was subsequently convicted of their murder.

The SCR covered the work of Surrey agencies and Sussex agencies where the children had lived for the majority of their lives.

Synopsis

The children were the second and third children of Mother and Father, their first child having died as a result of a Sudden Unexplained Infant Death.

At the time of their deaths, the children had been living with their mother in Surrey for 4 months but had previously lived with their mother, father and two half-siblings in Sussex. There were disputes between Mother and her first partner re contact and residence of the older half siblings.

The family had minimal involvement with agencies and were described as “middle class”, living in owner occupied property within affluent areas.

Four months before the deaths of J and K Mother left Father and moved to Surrey with the children. Father contacted Sussex Police to express concern for the welfare of the children.

Both Sussex and Surrey Police had contact with the family regarding alleged domestic abuse incidents, as well as concerns for half-siblings. Sussex Police requested that Surrey Police undertook welfare checks: Mother made various allegations to police in both Counties as well as Surrey County Council Contact Centre about domestic abuse perpetrated by Father. All professionals took these allegations at face value and both Surrey and Sussex Police completed risk assessments at various points.

In the weeks immediately prior to the deaths Mother appeared to be making plans to return to Sussex. Mother re enrolled both children at their original nursery and gave the address of the family home in Sussex as their place of residence. Mother also requested a meeting with Sussex health visiting service.

The day prior to the deaths of Child J and Child K, Mother caused damage to the family home. Mother was not arrested. This was the last face-to-face contact with any family member prior to the deaths of the children.

The main lessons that have emerged

Ensuring that where parents are separating and there are concerns about the children, information is collated about all children within the family by all relevant agencies.

The need to remember that child abuse crosses all class boundaries and professionals need to consider the potential impact of bias on their evaluation of information. This relates to gender as well as class.

The importance of robust child protection knowledge and safeguarding practice in early years settings, including effective systems for advice and consultation.

The importance of record keeping within schools when any concerns are raised about a child and ensuring that records about a child are kept at a central point.

The need for all teaching staff to use advice and consultation mechanisms. This is particularly important when they are feeling overwhelmed by the issues being presented to them.

The need to ensure that where allegations of domestic violence are made to professionals, such as health visitors, the information is verified in order to inform next steps.

The need for clarity of roles across professional boundaries, most particularly in relation to police welfare checks.

The importance of establishing processes, management and supervision within Surrey County Council Contact Centre, which ensure that sufficient information is gathered and analysed in order to make an informed judgement about next steps.

The challenges of identifying where parental separation is adversely affecting children and in particular the significance of rapidly deteriorating behaviours or relationships in either the adults or children involved.