



Background

A chronology gives a summarised and sequential overview of significant events in an adult or child's life. It is a tool, which practitioners from a range of disciplines can use to help them understand what is happening in someone's life.

There are different types of chronology, depending on their purpose, scope and the format adopted. However, all chronologies draw together important information to assist understanding. Chronologies can be compiled by a single agency or several, and can be separate or integrated, pulling together the knowledge and information held by agencies involved with the adult at risk

A good chronology contributes to an accurate assessment of an adult's circumstances. It can help professionals understand the immediate and cumulative impact of life events, as well as helping to identify links between past and present events that are not immediately obvious, so they can better understand their significance.



Why it matters

Chronologies are particularly useful when considering risk and can be used when starting work with an adult, in response to a specific concern, or after a significant event has taken place.

Several government inquiries have highlighted the value of a well-constructed chronology in practice. Professor Jay in his 2014 report on child sexual exploitation in Rotherham concluded that, 'it is likely that the absence of structured chronologies contributed to key information being missed when decisions were made'. Lord Laming, in his 2004 report into the death of Victoria Climbié was unequivocal in stating, 'I regard the inclusion in any case file of a clear, comprehensive and up-to-date chronology as absolutely essential'

Chronologies can be used to facilitate reflective discussion during supervision and case management reviews, as well as being a quick way for professionals to 'get up to speed' with new cases. They can also be shared with the adult they have been written about as a way to help them understand their own history and current circumstances, as well as to evidence any progress they have made 273.

When to start and finish a chronology?

Chronologies can be started when beginning work with an adult at risk to help identify emerging concerns, or after a significant event has already occurred to help professionals understand why it happened.

They should be used for as long as is considered necessary by the agency and professionals involved, or for the specific time period requested if part of a review.



What is recorded in a chronology and what format to use?

Information recorded in a chronology should be relevant and succinct so that other professionals reading it do not get lost in insignificant detail. Staff need to resist the temptation to record everything if they are worried about what might happen or are compiling a chronology after something has already occurred. Professional judgement must be used when deciding what to include and what to omit.

Chronologies should provide summarised factual accounts of significant events in sequential date order, based upon an agency's contact with the adult at risk. For example, entries could state, 'fell down the stairs of family home' or 'presented at appointment with bruise on cheek'. Vague statements such as 'behaved inappropriately' are of little value. Good chronologies have formats that allow recording of dates, information source, events, actions taken and even space for commentary on those events and actions. However, the real value of chronologies lie in their reporting of facts, with any opinions clearly separated and evidenced by reasoned thinking 203.

What is a 'significant event'?

Typically, significant events include; moving house; changes in family composition, including births, deaths and divorces; suspicious injuries; suspected or known abuse; hospital attendance; substance misuse; development of life limiting or impairing health conditions; mental ill health and self-harm; criminal proceedings and outcomes; changes in legal and employment status and so on 84.

Am I informed?

[NSAB Procedures](#)

[NSAB Resources](#)

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

What are multi-agency chronologies and when to use them?

Single-agency chronologies can be integrated to establish a more complete picture of what is happening in an adult at risk's life. This is more common in children's than adult services

Integrated chronologies are generally only produced as part of a specific multi-agency intervention where there is a concern about a person's wellbeing and should only include information extracted from single agency chronologies that is relevant to support that intervention

Complications between professionals can arise when it is not clear who has responsibility for gathering together single-agency chronologies, combining them into one chronology and updating it regularly. Multi-agency chronologies must be regularly updated and analysed by the lead professionals involved, as well as data protection issues considered.