

Guidance Note on Report Writing

Safeguarding First in partnership with Gavin Taylor Together for Children, Sunderland have produced this guidance note to support you in producing any formal report involving children and young people.

When writing any report involving children and young people, for example a Child Protection Report please consider the hand model and the five areas.

Voice of the Child

When sharing information in a multi-agency and often formal environment it is essential that the voice of the child is heard and reflected fully in your report. Although it is important to ‘think family’, the ‘voice of the child’ must come first. In Education you are often the person/people who may see the child the most regularly, therefore your views about the needs of the child may conflict with the progress or concerns in relation to parents. For example, if a parent is accessing a drug/alcohol service and is achieving improvements and attending sessions but there is little or no improvement for the child it is essential that we comment on this. Equally how the child sees or views their situation may be different to the views of both parents or professionals and so it is important that this information is shared and clarified.

When reporting on the voice of the child, the following points are useful to ensure that the child’s views are fully considered:

* What is a day in the life of that child like?
* How does it feel to be that child?
* What is it like to be parented by those parents?
* What is the impact of the parent’s behaviour/parenting on the outcomes for the child?

At times you may be one of the main advocates on behalf of the child and in representing their views you must ensure that your report ensures that all of the professionals in the room understand exactly how the child feels about their situation. This in turn requires good analysis, for example if the child is stating that they are happy and well but this contrasts the information, observations and the child’s needs from you then this also needs to be clearly stated.

Strengths

When representing information one of the biggest support mechanisms is in the strength of your chronology. A good chronology will support you in identifying themes and patterns for example in behaviour, attendance or parental contact. It will also highlight all the opportunities where the voice of the child was captured, e.g. circle time, written work, drawings and role plays. If records are strong with a clear purpose and evidence impact and outcomes for children they will form the basis of your report.

In addition to that, strengths within the family or for the child can be highlighted through your report. Whether the concerns or risks have reduced or are continuing it is still helpful to highlight the strengths of the child and the family. For example if a child is doing well, behaviour has improved or attendance has increased then all of this can be reported on. If parents are co-operating, communicating and taking on board the concerns of the professionals this can all be stated to demonstrate the impact of the process on both the child and the family.

However you must reflect on why that has happened. For example if attendance has improved because you provide transport, assistance or even an alarm clock to the family, you must be clear about why the change has occurred. Another example may be that a child’s behaviour has improved because you have provided one to one support or peer mentoring then the intervention or improvement has occurred because of what you have offered and not because a parent’s ability or motivation has changed. Essentially, although you are commenting on what is working well to give motivation to the family what you are measuring is parents ability to make and maintain change e.g. if services were not providing the support currently being implemented have parents got the ability to make the change and sustain it on their own?

Education Specialism

One improvement that could definitely support effective report writing is remembering that you are the experts in education. A number of professionals around the table may not have the knowledge or insight into the effects of poor attendance or unsupported home learning on academic progress for a child. It is good practice to ensure that any information about targets, attainment or progress is linked to ‘age appropriate expectations’ and the ability of the individual child. For example if a child’s poor attendance is resulting in poor progress, state where they would be add if attendance improved by 20% for example.

Equally regarding ability if a child has not made his/her expected levels of progress, what in your opinion has effected this? If a child is not at ‘age appropriate’ levels is this academic ability, a result of poor attendance or for example development delay. You need to ensure the information you give is based on fact or in your professional opinion. Assumptions or second guesses would not support any action taken in court.

When sharing information in relation to Education ensure that the links are made between home life and the impact on behaviour and learning and progress. Equally if concerns are raised about a child’s behaviour at home and not school, comment on why you think that may be. For example if a child is on task, responsive to instructions and well behaved in school but parents state this is not the same at home, is this because the child responds to consistency and boundaries and in your professional opinion this is not happening at home or have you actually witnessed parents trying to manage the behaviour positively or negatively?

Remember this is the area where you have the strongest expertise and can evidence where a child’s home circumstances or social situation can impact on their learning and progress.

Identifying Risk and Analysis

In addition to the knowledge and expertise in Education it is important to identify the risks to a young person in their current situation. Aside from assessing the links between their situation and the educational progress, what you are additionally looking at is the impact of their situation on their well-being. One way to support this consideration is to think what would happen to this young person if there was no intervention? As time moves on you are further assessing what will happen if the intervention for this child and family ceases. At each point in the process you are measuring whether the improvements or changes outweigh the risks or if the risks have reduced significantly enough to reduce or cease intervention.

There are two ways to measure this, one through the child, their emotional well-being and progress in the physical measures of their presentation and general happiness alongside attendance and attainment. However, the other measure is through parent’s ability to recognise the concerns, make the necessary changes and more importantly be able to sustain them when intervention ceases. By thinking through these elements and linking them to your knowledge on the child and the family you will be able to make a clear analysis.

Outcomes

Through the intervention and change work with families, the ultimate measure of the progress is through improved outcomes for children. The evidence that you are seeking is that through this process not only has life improved for the children involved but that actual improved outcomes are achieved and that child has the ability to move on and exceed expectations throughout their life. This is where the focus of the work through the plan of intervention needs to be considered.

If multi agency professionals are working together, the driver of the intervention comes from a strong plan of intervention. Whether its child protection or any plan, it needs to be focussed on the goals and outcomes rather than the tasks and the distribution of them. Therefore when it comes to writing a report on the progress, remember to keep the focus on whether the outcomes of the child or the family have been achieved. At the same time it is also about measuring how effective the plan has been in achieving the outcomes. This means throughout the process there is a constant need to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in achieving the outcomes. The plan needs to suit the needs of the child and the family and if the plan is not clear, with timescales and the appropriate intervention or services provided then you are evaluating whether the plan is delaying the outcomes for the child and family.