

## What is a chronology?

A chronology is a list of significant events recorded in date order that have happened in a child or young person's life. They provide a concise written timeline containing factual information.

A chronology:

- Is a clear and dated narrative which details all of the significant events in the child's life.
- Should be shared with the child or young person and their family and should be immediately recognisable to them as what has happened for them.
- Summarises what we know happened to or in the life of the child based upon the information we have available from all agencies who have worked or are working with the child or young person and their family.
- Reflects our best understanding of the facts that have shaped the child or young person's life to date.



## One Minute Guide Chronologies

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## Why is a good chronology important?

A good chronology serves as a sound basis for working in a relational way.

Preparing a chronology at the start of any intervention is vital as research shows that starting with a chronology that is checked with the experiences of the family contributes to more accurate assessment, leading to more affective intervention.

A chronology provides an overview of what has happened in the child and family's life, which can help us to better understand what their life experience has been. It can help identify patterns of events, concerns, positives, strengths and unmet needs.

We can then identify what happens at times when things are going well as well as when they are not going as well and utilise this to recognise what perpetuates things in order to affect more sustainable change.

A good chronology should be updated regularly so that they accurately reflect the life path of the child.

A good chronology is a vital tool for analytical practice, as the factual basis of a good chronology can help balance the emotive nature of the work and the subjectivity that can creep in around this.

## Writing a social work chronology

**What is the purpose?** It helps from the offset to be clear about why you are writing the chronology. Is it for court proceedings, for the child's electronic file, for an assessment or to support the child to understand their life journey? This will guide the content and structure.

**Where shall I get the information from?** Gather factual and accurate data from places like case notes, interviews with the child or young person and their family, multi-agency records like those from the GP, police, school etc., previous assessments

**Be accurate and factual.** Cross-reference information from different sources to clarify dates, ensure an accurate record of what happened and the observed impact.

**Use clear and descriptive language.** Acronyms and abbreviations should be avoided (e.g.: use Children and Family Assessment rather than C&F). Be descriptive about what the service offers (e.g.: Haven domestic abuse support services) alongside the name of the service.

**Highlight significant life events.** Births, deaths, marriages, separations, changes in residence, medical procedures, legal proceedings or police encounters and educational milestones are all important to include, as well as social work interventions such as referrals made, assessments undertaken, support group or course attendance and the outcomes of these.

**How often should I update it?** A chronology is a dynamic piece of work that is constantly being added to when significant life events happen. It is good practice to review the child's chronology on their electronic file at least once a month to ensure that it accurately reflects the current situation as well as events in the past.

**Use the chronology as a reflection tool.** Analyse patterns, triggers, and life events that have shaped the child or young person and their family's experiences. This will not only inform your practice but will deepen your understanding of them.

## Types of chronology

### System chronology

Is kept on the child's electronic file and is updated on a regular basis to ensure it remains current and accurate. An LCS chronology is ordered oldest date first.

### Court Chronology

Is an essential tool to support the courts in making the right decision for the child. They need to be able to extract the facts quickly, so a fine balance of detail and brevity is required. A court chronology is ordered recent events first.

### Impact Chronology

Supports a better understanding of immediate and cumulative impact of events on the child or young persons and their family's lives. Is often a standalone document on the child's electronic file.

## Key Contacts and Further Information

[Coventry Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

[Practice Hub – Good Chronology Example LCS](#)

[Research in Practice Tool – Completing Social Work Chronologies](#)

[Richard Devine's blog post – A summary on the WHY of writing a chronology](#)