

BOLTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP PRACTICE SPOTLIGHT; EFFECTIVE MULTI-AGENCY MEETINGS

Learning from local reviews and multi-agency quality audits have continually highlighted that effective multi-agency planning meetings for children is an ongoing challenge. For meetings to be effective we need to continually involve all partners, children and their families in a genuine and meaningful way. All practitioners have a responsibility to actively seek and listen to the views, feelings and wishes of children and their families, as well as other practitioners. This practice spotlight provides some practical pointers to strengthen practice in this area.

Effective multi-agency working is rooted in a shared culture and approach to core values and behaviours. Embedding these in daily practice supports our multi-agency system to successfully work together: -

OUR VISION			
‘In Bolton we want to give all our children the best possible start in life, so that they have every chance to succeed, be safe and be happy’			
VALUES AND BEHAVIOURS			
Accountable	Determined	Make a Difference	Honesty and Respect
We will take responsibility for our roles to help and protect children and families. We will challenge and support one another. We will create transparent and trusting relationships with children and families. We will take responsibility for our collective and individual participation, actions and decisions.	We don't give up; we seek solutions and are open to new ideas. We will have the curiosity to understand the problem and the courage and integrity to do all we can, to achieve the best solution.	We will work to a high standard individually and collectively to provide a quality, joined up service. We will value, respect and empathise with every practitioner, child and family.	We will be truthful, open, fair and treat those we work with in the same way we wish to be treated ourselves.
WORKING TOGETHER			
Flexible	Safe	Inclusive	Collaborative
We are committed to working in a way that is informative, reflective, and adaptive to the needs of children and families. We will make best use of the multi-agency network to improve outcomes for children and their families.	We will hold each other to account. We will seek to understand together the needs and risks from all perspectives and take collective responsibility to help and protect all involved. Where we believe that practice is not safe, we are committed to act.	We respect and treat everyone justly according to their individuality, unique circumstances and barriers. We will make the necessary adaptations to help children and families to be safe and well.	We will motivate each other to be innovative, creative and to nurture individuality. We will work to develop strengths and enable children and their families to create their own sustainable solutions.

It is essential that when agencies meet together to help and support a child and their family that all play an active role. Prior to holding any multi-agency planning meeting, a holistic assessment of the child's needs should be completed. The assessment should draw information from a range of sources including, but not limited to: -

- Family history and experience, including child and parental experiences of trauma
- Case records, single or multi-agency assessment and analysis held by their own service or other agencies
- Observations of daily family life
- The child's experiences and aspirations; what does the child hear, see and think on a daily basis, what are their hopes for the future
- 1-2-1 conversations with parents or those with a parenting role; their perspective on what works well and where help is needed

The Lead Profession has a pivotal role to play in ensuring all meeting participants have a consistent and clear understanding of the needs and risks for the child and are given opportunities to clarify or query the analysis, prior to or during a multi-agency meeting. Any multi-agency planning meeting should be informed by the analysis within the assessment as well as the values and behaviours promoted across the multi-agency system. Reflecting on the questions below before and after a multi-agency meeting will support all agencies to be active participants and increase the likelihood of securing better outcomes for the child: -

- Are we all clear on the purpose and function of coming together in a meeting? What do we want to achieve for the child and their family?
- Have we discussed the need for a meeting with the child and family, explaining the assessment and analysis to them? Are they clear why a meeting is needed, what will happen in the meeting and what it hopes to achieve? Do they understand what information will be shared and why; where necessary have they consented? Do they know who will be present and what their role is? Would it be helpful for the child or family to meet participants they do not know, before the meeting?
- Considering everyone's needs and the purpose of the meeting, where is the best place to hold it to promote engagement and secure better outcomes?
- Have we supported and enabled all participants, including the child and family, to express their views and offer challenge where needed? Have all the right people attended? Is everyone clear what the outcomes from the meeting are and what will happen next?
- If the child or parents choose not to attend, who will represent their voice and opinions? Do we understand why a child or parent does not want to attend, is there anything we can do to alleviate this (including attendance by a friend, family member or advocate) Have we planned time and agreed how we will check out with the child and parent to ensure they feel they were listened to and understand what has been agreed?
- Do we stop and reflect on the impact and effectiveness of the meeting, the plan made and whether the interventions being delivered are making a positive difference? Are we confident to escalate should progress not be made?