

Learning from the serious case review for Child A and Child B

A summary:

Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (the Board) conducted a Serious Case Review (SCR) after it emerged that two young children had been seriously abused by a man. He and his female partner were looking after them under a Special Guardianship Order. The children had previously been in the care of Oxfordshire County Council (the Council) and the Council's Children's Social Care (CSC) services had been instrumental in arranging for the children to live with the Special Guardians.

Findings:

A number of learning points and concerns about practice within and between agencies are identified in the SCR. However it is right to say at the outset that there was absolutely no indication that the children might be abused so seriously and extensively, within the Special Guardianship placement.

Key findings:

- ❖ **Many individual staff across the agencies displayed great commitment and compassion in their work with the children.**
- ❖ **Finding a permanent home outside the children's birth family, and placing them separately, should have been given greater thought with regards to the children's previous living arrangements.**
- ❖ **The children's distress was too easily ascribed to negative experiences in their earlier lives. Professionals might have been more alert to the possibility of other causes.**
- ❖ **The vulnerabilities of the children, and particularly their disabilities, did not always prompt the level of professional watchfulness that they might have done.**
- ❖ **Formal child protection procedures were not followed with sufficient rigour. Further investigative steps should have been taken and greater consideration given to who should have attended the Child Protection Conference.**
- ❖ **The Family Group Conference could have been facilitated in a way that enabled a more robust challenge to a proposal that adults with no experience of parenting and some problems of their own could offer a permanent home to two children with very special needs.**
- ❖ **The legal proceedings were particularly complex but their overall conduct was satisfactory. Agencies worked together to resolve differences of opinion.**

Themes in common with other Oxfordshire case reviews:

Normalising and misinterpreting behaviour - linked to Special Educational Needs

Identifying the increased safeguarding risks for children with learning disabilities and Special Educational Needs

Identification of physical abuse and following process

Learning points for managers

Talk to your staff, make sure that:

- They consult you when child protection concerns are raised and ensure it is fully investigated.
- Their commitment to making a placement work is objective and well founded.
- Ensure that “together or apart” decisions are formally considered.
- Don’t be constrained by Family Group Conference decisions.
- Satisfy yourself that Special Guardianship is being used appropriately, in the right circumstances.
- Remember how frequently children with disabilities are abused and how disability masks abuse.

Action points for practitioners

Talk to your manager:

- Don’t decide that a reported injury need not be investigated without checking with someone else.
- Don’t be afraid to persist in raising concerns to the relevant agencies if you feel you have not been heard.
- Make sure your manager is challenging you on what you believe to be the right way forward.
- Approach “together or apart” decisions with rigour.
- Remember how frequently children with disabilities are abused and how disability masks abuse.

Key messages for inter-agency learning

Ensure family members have realistic expectations of the Family Group Conference process.

Take the time to reflect...

Have you been rigorous with your assessment of permanency options?



Did you know?

The following document is available to support the process of together or apart decisions:

[Siblings-Together-or-Apart-Practice-Paper.compressed.pdf](#)

Special guardianship: statutory guidance update.

The Department for Education (DfE) has updated the statutory guidance on the special guardianship services local authorities need to provide in accordance with the Children Act 1989. The updated document includes more information on support for special guardians.

[Special guardianship guidance \(PDF\)](#)

Multi-agency safeguarding procedures – The OSCB multi-agency procedures cover a wide variety of situations you may encounter. You can access them at <http://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/>

For an overview of the Family Group Conference – guide for families:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/family-group-conference-service>