

Serious Case Review Baby O

Learning Handout

Background

In 2016 a Lithuanian mother concealed her pregnancy from both professionals and her partner. She gave birth at home and later admitted killing her baby, now known as Baby O. Baby O had a four year old sibling, who was at home at the time of the baby's death. This child is also considered within this serious case review as apart from immunisations, this child had not been seen by professionals since attending their 3 month development check. The death of Baby O led to police investigations and the mother was later convicted. Key themes that have emerged from the serious case review include:

Key Theme 1

Engaging with families/communities that are hard to reach or seen as different from the local, generalised population.

- **The review found:**

Some professionals who work with families from different cultural backgrounds, and also those with English as a second language, do not understand the range of challenges these families can encounter, or are not aware of services available to professionals to support them in their work.

- **We've learnt that:**

Parents from other cultural backgrounds often have different expectations around when to access services. For example, learning indicates that Eastern European families may be presenting for maternity support later than the average across the whole population. Families' assumptions about services need to be explored in order to ensure they are supported to engage with the right services at the right time.

How to think about this in your practice:

- Consider the most appropriate ways to communicate with families: Ensure you have access to interpreter services and you know how to use them.
- Try to avoid using family members to translate conversations as this can prevent important information from being shared with you for example disclosures of domestic abuse.
- Explore cultural differences with families, and be aware and your own responses to them. Don't let cultural differences affect your professional curiosity or your focus on the child's wellbeing at the centre.

Key Theme 2

Considering the vulnerabilities of women who are pregnant, including immediately after birth.

- **The review found:**

Lack of engagement with appropriate health services during pregnancy can be an indicator of vulnerability.

- **We've learnt that:**

Learning from previous reviews has highlighted the importance of taking the family history and functioning into account when considering the vulnerabilities of new and expectant mothers.

How to think about this in your practice:

- If your service identify a parent they are currently working with is expecting another child, use your professional curiosity to ask about the pregnancy. Be aware of potential complicating factors such as potential mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, or a history of children being taken into care
- When working with a child, make sure you take into account the whole picture, including the needs of siblings you might not be working with, or the impact of a new baby on the functioning of the family.
- Make sure you are aware of the relevant procedures in relation to concealed pregnancy and late presentation to health services.

Key Theme 3

The importance of knowing your organisations' processes in relation to working with other agencies.

- **The review found:**

There were inconsistencies between WSSCB and single agency procedures, for example the expected response in relation to late presentation differed across different procedures.

- **We've learnt that:**

Information within policies and procedures needs to be consistent in order to support a worker's professional judgement. It is important to ask questions about how partner agencies work with families so that workers are aware of the wider support a child or young person and their family is receiving.

How to think about this in your practice:

- Make sure you are familiar with the policies and procedures of your organisation and how these apply to your role.
- Familiarise yourself with the pan-Sussex procedures
- Be professionally curious and ask questions about how other organisations work. If you are working in partnership make sure you are clear about who the lead agency is and how information is shared.
- If you come across conflicting information or guidance, highlight this to your line-manager so that the conflict can be addressed.