

Keeping and maintaining clear case records is an essential task for all child and family practitioners. This can become challenging when working with larger sibling groups of three or more children when it comes to recording chronologies and case notes. It can seem more time efficient to write a single case note or chronology entry and copy and paste this entry over to each sibling's record.

However this can have the effect of losing the 'story' of each individual sibling, particularly if one or two siblings are experiencing more trauma and/or presenting with more challenges than the other siblings. The case recording and chronology for the sibling group can then become dominated with one child's story.

Example: Smith Family

Mike (age 15), Elle (age 12), Dustin (age 10) and Susie (age 8) are siblings who are receiving professional support due to parental neglect and domestic abuse. Mike engages with criminal activity in the community and Susie has special needs. Elle and Dustin spend a lot of time at their grandmothers. Due to Mike's activities in the community there are more contacts and interventions for him, and when copied over to Elle's records her chronology could read like this:

Elle Smith - Chronology (1)

DATE	SIGNIFICANT EVENT/PATTERN/SEQUENCE	ACTION TAKEN
10.04.2017	Mike arrested for stealing bikes with a group of youths in Commercial Rd, Portsmouth	Mr Smith collected from Police Station. Police Warning issued
18.05.2017	Mike excluded from school for causing damage to the dinner hall when they were told there were no chicken nuggets left.	3 Day exclusion.
14.06.2017	Susie EHCP review held. Mother attended	
15.06.2017	Mike and Dustin caught shoplifting in Asda. Mrs Smith collected them from the shop.	Police warning issued to both boys.
10.08.2017	Family had to leave Butlins holiday camp due to Mike setting fire in the room.	Family returned home and are now barred from Butlins. Mr and Mrs Smith removed Mike's Playstation and bike as consequence.
11.08.2017	Police report received. Mr Smith punched Mike in the face in front of his siblings following an argument about the Play Station. Mrs Smith called the Police who arrested Mr Smith.	Mr Smith arrested and not allowed back to the family home. Mrs Smith being supported by domestic abuse services to seek an injunction. Mike does not need medical attention. Remaining children staying with grandparents for a few days.

This chronology above does not give a picture of Elle, Susie or Dustin. It's important to record the relevance and impact of an incident on each person.

Elle's chronology can have links to Mike, but needs to be adapted to her experience. For example;

Elle Smith - Chronology (2)

DATE	SIGNIFICANT EVENT/PATTERN/SEQUENCE	ACTION TAKEN
15.06.2017	Mike and Dustin caught shoplifting in Asda. Elle looked after Susie whilst Mrs Smith collected the boys from the shop.	Police warning issued to both boys.
10.08.2017	Family had to leave Butlin's due to Mike setting fire in the room. Elle was very upset and disappointed to have missed out on her holiday as a result of this.	Family returned home, and are barred from Butlin's holidays. Elle went to stay with her grandparents for the week.
11.08.2017	Police report received. Mr Smith punched Mike in the face in front of his siblings, then left. Mrs Smith called the police. Elle was found in the bedroom comforting Susie who was very distressed on their arrival.	Mr Smith arrested and not allowed to the home address. Mrs Smith being assisted by Domestic abuse services to seek an injunction. Elle, Dustin and Susie have gone to stay with grandparents. Mike remaining at home.

The first chronology builds a picture of Mike's world, the second chronology contains information about Mike, whilst building a picture of Elle's world. The chronology entry needs to be relevant to the individual child.

Case note recording for sibling groups

Case recording should also be **individual to the child whose record** the information is relevant to. For example Susie's record contains the following case note following a home visit. The case note has been copied and pasted from Mike's record.

Home Visit 16.06.2017: Home visit to follow up on recent incident where Mike and Dustin were caught shoplifting at Asda and the Police were called. Mrs Smith left Elle and Susie at home to collect Mike and Dustin from the shop and the Police issued a caution. Mrs Smith said she was embarrassed by this as she now feels she can no longer shop at Asda and has to now take the bus to Tesco, which is difficult with Susie. Mike and Dustin have been grounded and had their Playstation taken from them; they both said they think this is not fair. Susie spoke to me outside where she was playing and said she had been unhappy about her brothers shoplifting because now everyone thinks she is a thief too and Elle was fed up when she had to look after her.

What's the problem with the case note above?

In this example, although Susie's views are recorded, it is Mike and Dustin rather than Susie who are the focus of the case note. It is important the incident with her brothers is recorded, but the case note for Susie needs to start with Susie, and record how the incident is relevant to her;

Home Visit 16.06.2017: Home visit to follow up on recent shoplifting incident involving Mike and Dustin. Susie spoke to me outside where she was playing and said she had been unhappy about her brothers shoplifting (on 15.06.2017), because now everyone thinks she is a thief too. Susie said Elle had been fed up that she had to look after her when her mother went to get her brothers. Mrs Smith is also embarrassed to return to Asda and has to take the bus to Tesco, which Susie does not enjoy.

This second case note tells us more about how her brothers shoplifting has **impacted Susie**.

Remember - case recording and chronologies tell the child's story and by recording the perspective and impact of an event on each sibling individually, practitioners will safeguard against losing sight of the child and be better placed to plan interventions appropriate to their individual needs.

Finally under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, individuals have the right to access any records held by a public authority through making a Subject Access Request. When reading their case recordings, **it should be clear for each child in a large sibling group that they were visible**.



One Minute Guide Case Recording and Chronologies for Sibling Groups (for Children & Families Service)



For Further Information:

See Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 2018, General Data Protection Regulations.

Useful article: 'What good social care case recording looks like'

<https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/08/05/good-social-work-case-recording-looks-like-existing-practice-can-improve/>