

Oversight and review of cases in light of changing circumstances and new information

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Oversight and review of cases

- how do people respond to new (and challenging) information?

- What is the issue and why is it important?
- What helps to guard against the problem ?
 - Playing one's own devil's advocate
 - Bringing in a fresh pair of eyes
- Implications for Senior Managers
- Key messages



What is the issue and why is it important?

One of the most common, problematic tendencies in human cognition is....

Our failure to review judgements and plans, once we have formed a view on what is going on, we often fail to notice or to dismiss evidence that challenges that picture

(Fish, Munro and Bairstow 2009, p.9)



What is the issue and why is it important?

- Nature and context of professional judgements and decision-making in child protection work
- Common biases and the inherent hazards of these in child protection
- Importance of and deficiencies in assessment and analysis
- Significance and impact of the ethos, systems and culture of the working environment



What helps to guard against the problem ?

Playing one's own devil's advocate

Constant balancing of opposing arguments, alternative hypotheses, or conflicting versions of events; critically challenging self on assumptions, judgements and responses

Bringing in a fresh pair of eyes

Practitioners who are well supported, receive supervision and have access to training are more likely to think clearly and exercise professional discretion

(Brandon, Dodsworth and Rumball 2005, p.174)

Bringing in a fresh pair of eyes (cont)

Supervision and reflective practice

Supervision helps practitioners to think, to explain and to understand. It also helps them to cope with the complex emotional demands of work with children and their families (Brandon, 2008)

The supervisor's role is to ensure that the worker considers the implications of new information and changing circumstances for their original analysis, and to explore the degree of fit between the worker's previous and current understanding of the situation (CWDC, 2009)

Bringing in a fresh pair of eyes (cont)

Supervision-rhetoric vs reality

In its current configuration, supervision – certainly within most statutory social work settings, does not offer the appropriate conditions in which thoughtful practice that embraces ‘respectful uncertainty and healthy scepticism’ can be nurtured

(Ruch 2007)

Other ways of providing a fresh pair of eyes

‘Communicative and collaborative practices’ such as co-working, consultation forums, group supervision and case discussions



Implications for Senior Managers

Lord Laming places strong emphasis on the role of senior managers, exhorting them to *value first-line managers ensuring that management oversight of decision-making is rigorous and that the lines of communication between senior managers and frontline child protection staff are as short and effective as possible*

(Laming 2009)



Implications for Senior Managers

Some questions managers should ask of themselves and their organisations:

- How does our agency culture promote critical reflection and revision of views in light of new evidence or alternative hypotheses? Are we open to challenging input from our staff, peers or from outside agencies?
- Do our models for auditing practice help us to understand why practitioners act as they do and what factors influence them ?
- How do we learn from, and help others to learn from, successes and mistakes ?

Key Messages

- Assessments are fallible, and thus professionals need to keep their judgements under **constant critical review**
- The single most important factor minimising errors is to admit that you **might be wrong**
- There is a tendency to persist in initial judgements, to re-frame, minimise or dismiss discordant new evidence
- Practitioners must be willing, **encouraged and supported** to challenge, and where necessary revise, their views throughout the period of any intervention
- Supervision should provide a **safe but challenging** space to oversee and review cases with the help of a fresh, experienced, pair of eyes



Key Messages

Managers at all levels must ensure a 'learning culture' (Laming 2003) with an ethos in which reflective practice and self-questioning are accepted and actively promoted – a non-judgemental acceptance that errors are inevitable makes it easier to recognise, acknowledge and learn from them.

