

Serious Case Review Quality Markers

Supporting dialogue about the principles of good practice

Quality Marker 4: Informing the family

Quality statement: family members are told what the Serious Case Review (SCR) is for, how it will work, and the parameters, and are treated with respect

Rationale

A core principle of safeguarding is to work with families in an open and honest way and this needs to be replicated in the SCR. Being clear about the purpose and function of the SCR helps to manage the expectations of family members about what the SCR can achieve and what it will not cover. Within this context family are usually close relatives, including those with parental responsibility.

How might you know if you are meeting this quality marker?

1. Is there a reliable mechanism to enable the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to inform family members of the SCR at the earliest stage possible?
2. Is the standard correspondence that is used for family members about the purpose, process and parameters of the SCR adequately clear, accessible and kind?
3. Are the opportunities being offered to family members to discuss any queries or clarifications flexible, and do they give them a realistic chance of doing so?
4. Is there overt support for legitimate questions posed by family members being addressed honestly?

Knowledge base

Recent research into family involvement in SCRs identified four reasons for such involvement:

- human rights
- a child-centred perspective
- a primary source of knowledge and information
- altruistic and cathartic motives (Morris et al., 2013).

Equality and diversity

- The needs of families where English is not a first language can require specific interventions such as interpreting and translation.
- Letter writing may not be an adequate form of communication with families where there is fear and/or conflict with authorities. Consideration of alternative means of making contact is required in such cases.
- Disabled parents can require additional support.
- Consideration of the particular needs of children (siblings) can be required.
- Involving adolescents can require consideration of the use of a range of methods for communication including email/text/Skype/Facebook.

Link to statutory guidance and inspection criteria

- ‘Working together’ states: ‘families, including surviving children, should be invited to contribute to reviews. They should understand how they are going to be involved and their expectations should be managed appropriately and sensitively’ (HM Government, 2015: 74). It does not specify the need to inform families but inviting them to contribute assumes they have been informed.

Tackling some common obstacles

- Establishing a routine process of informing families at the same time that the LSCB is informed increases the chance that this does not get delayed or overlooked.

This is one of a set of 18 Quality Markers which aim to support commissioners and reviewers to commission and conduct high quality reviews. Covering the whole process, the quality markers provide a consistent and robust approach to SCRs. They are based predominantly on established principles of effective reviews / investigation as well as SCR practice experience and expertise, and ethical considerations.

The SCR Quality Markers were produced as part of the Learning into Practice Project, a one-year DfE-funded project conducted by NSPCC and SCIE between April 2015 and March 2016. For more information see nspcc.org.uk/lipp or scie.org.uk/lipp