

Serious Case Review Quality Markers

Supporting dialogue about the principles of good practice

Quality Marker 12: Family involvement

Quality statement: the Serious Case Review (SCR) is informed by ‘family’ members’ knowledge and experiences relevant to the period under review

Rationale

Family members are an important source of information about how services were experienced in an individual case and may provide information about service delivery in general. In this context, the definition of family can be broadened to include wider family and networks where this is judged to be necessary and proportionate to the likely learning. Publication of SCRs places a greater onus on the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to ensure that personal data placed in the public domain is accurate and involving family members may facilitate this. However, it can be entirely appropriate for family members to decide not to take part.

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

1. Is there clarity about why family members are being involved?
2. Has there been discussion about which family members are involved and why?
3. Is it agreed how family members are being supported to be involved?
4. Do the family have the opportunity to influence the focus of the review?
5. Is there clarity about what the family is going to be asked?
6. Has there been discussion about how the analysis will be informed by family members’ knowledge and experiences relevant to the period under review?
7. Has there been discussion about how families are to be represented in the final report?
8. If family members are not involved, are the reasons for non-involvement reasonable and are they documented?
9. Are there mechanisms to allow the family to feedback on the report before it is completed?

Knowledge base

- Recent research into family involvement in SCRs identified four reasons for family involvement: human rights; a child-centred perspective; a primary source of knowledge and information; altruistic and cathartic motives (Morris et al., 2013).
- The questions above draw on research conducted by Professor Siobhain Laird, University of Nottingham.

Equality and diversity

- The needs of families where English is not a first language may require specific interventions and may require interpreting and translation.
- Disabled parents may also require additional support.
- Consideration of the particular needs of children (siblings) may be required.
- In order to involve adolescents, a range of methods for communication can be considered including email/text/Skype/Facebook.

Link to statutory guidance and inspection criteria

- 'Working Together' states that 'families, including surviving children, should be invited to contribute to reviews. This is important for ensuring that the child is at the centre of the process' (HM Government, 2015: p74)

Tackling some common obstacles

- Identifying the support required for children to enable their involvement, and the expertise professionals may need to communicate with them in this context, helps to address fears that agencies can have about participation impacting negatively on the child.
- Clarity about confidentiality and how their input will be represented can support participation in the SCR where family members are fearful of repercussions from wider family or community.
- Additional support can also enable family members to be involved where there are issues such as domestic abuse.
- Specialist organisations, such as the Victoria Climbié Foundation of Advocacy After Fatal Domestic Abuse (AFFDA), provide something akin to mediation services that help to facilitate a constructive dialogue between families and agencies.
- The ability of lead reviewers to analytically address contradictory views expressed by different family members and/or between family members and professionals helps enable meaningful involvement of family members. Expectations that the final report will produce a definitive account can make it more challenging to accommodate differing perspectives.

- Where it is decided not to involve family members in the SCR until after civil and/or criminal proceedings are concluded, anticipating the extra analytic work involved in amending the analysis so that it is informed by their input can avoid their involvement being only tokenistic.
- Where there are criminal investigations and family members are witnesses or suspects, involving the senior investigating officer at an early point, and enabling them to understand the focus and scope of the review, is essential. It allows informed discussions about when and how family members can be involved and supports access to any relevant information.

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