



**GRADUATE CERTIFICATE in Consolidation
of Social Work Practice
LEVEL 6 - 60 Credits
BMPF6044**

**LEARNER PORTFOLIO
(PORTH AGORED and UNIVERSITY OF WALES
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Task 3

Safeguarding and working in complex situations – Case Study

Guidance;

Please ensure that you meet the National Occupational Standards and assigned Learning Outcomes for this task (see appendix 5 and 6 of the handbook).

Question:

Complete a critically reflective case study based on an assessment that you have undertaken with others, in your own area of work, concerning the safeguarding of either an adult or a child. You must demonstrate how the case relates to or could relate to safeguarding legislation, policies, strategies and procedures (including demonstrating an understanding of the interface between social services provision in Wales with the United Kingdom, the European Union (EU) and outside the EU). You must demonstrate your understanding of the integration of analysis in assessment, collaborative working and professional judgements in increasingly complex situations and the use of social work theories. You must refer to the specific dimensions of working in Wales.

4000 words (+/- 10%: include your actual word count at the end of each section).

‘Critical Reflection’ is a crucial element in social work practice, as it promotes a deeper level of reflection, whereby personal bias can be challenged (Gambrill, 2012), and where reflection results in the analysis of the information and ‘thinking with purpose’ (Tilbury, Osmond & Scott, 2010). The critical reflection on practice should lead to the professionals adapting and evolving their own practice, whereby thinking can inform action, and action can then further inform thinking (Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 2009). This element of reflection should not be viewed as an event, but rather as a process for learning (Conway, 1994), where there is the need to be open, honest and thoughtful (Crawford, 2012). For the purpose of this reflective account concerning the safeguarding of a child, I will be utilising the reflective cycle developed by Driscoll (2007) which includes the questions ‘What’, ‘So what’, and ‘Now What’, as a basis to structure my reflection on.

I have been a social worker within Childrens services since qualifying in 2021, and in order to safeguard the many children open to the service, it is imperative that there is a clear understanding of the legislative grounds in which we work, with the Code of Professional Practice (CoPP) (Social Care Wales (SCW), 2017) dictating that social workers must take accountability for their work, and ensure that there is a development of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, there is a requirement within the National Occupational Standards (NOS) (SCW, 2011), for social workers to maintain up to date knowledge and a clear evidence

base for practice.

Within Wales the legislative basis underpinning safeguarding and social services intervention, comes from within the Children Act (1989) and the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act (SSWBA) (2016), with section 7 of the SSWBA (2016) being specifically directed to Safeguarding, and furthermore, outlining the need to have safeguarding boards. The objectives of a 'Safeguarding Children Board' are covered in Section 37 of the SSWBA (2014), and outlines that children residing in the area covered by the board are protected and prevented from the risk of abuse, neglect or harm, with six safeguarding boards currently functioning within Wales. The purpose and function of the boards is to carry out practice reviews when a child dies, sustains life threatening injuries or permanent impairment to health or development, and furthermore, to identify learning for future practice. Additional guidance in relation to safeguarding children in Wales is provided within the 'Working Together to Safeguard People' guidance (Welsh Government (WG), 2018). Additional practice guidance can be accessed within the 'Wales Safeguarding Procedures' (WSP) (2019), which was implemented to ensure all practice within Wales is in accordance with the principles underpinning the legislation (WSP, 2019). Social work practice in Wales must also have due regard for the legislation held within the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure (WG, 2011), which embedded the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)(1989) into domestic law.

In relation to the Welsh context, and practicing social work in Wales, there is further legislation relating to the duty to integrate the 'Active Offer' of the Welsh language to all families being assessed, and to give them the opportunity to be supported through the language of their choice. The Welsh Language Measures (Wales) (2011), ensure that services adopt an approach that is person centred, where language choice supports families and individuals to feel more comfortable, and have a sense of control within any process of assessment and support they require (WG, 2015).

Within the case study being reflected on, and the 'What' element of the reflective cycle developed by Driscoll (2007), I will refer to the young people it relates to as Child 1, Child 2, and Child 3, so as to ensure confidentiality. It is important to understand the background context to this case study, and the patterns of behaviour being displayed, rather than focussing on the individual issues. This systemic way of thinking has been utilised within the team in which I work, where there is a focus on the relationships within the individual's life, and an understanding that actions and behaviours are embedded within their social context. Systemic approaches within social services were established by Gregory Bateson in the 1970's, who looked at patterns of behaviours, power dynamics and beliefs, as a foundation for maintaining family functioning.

In relation to the background of this case study, the three children live with their mother who

is to be referred to as Adult 1, and her partner who is to be referred to as Adult 2, and who is the father to Child 3. Child 1 and Child 2 have no contact with their birth father, due to previous court proceedings, where findings were made against their birth father in relation to a non-accidental injury on Child 1 when she was a baby, where she was found to have a spinal injury and skull fracture. There has also been concerns around drug use, with Adult 2 being previously convicted and given a substantial custodial sentence as a result of intent to supply class A drugs. Furthermore, Adult 1 has historically been seen to fail to protect her children from the risk of harm. Child 1 is of secondary school age and is female, Child 2 is male of secondary school age, and Child 3 is female and of primary school age.

As part of my reflection, I will now implement Driscoll's reflective cycle (2007) and the 'What' question in relation to what happened; The family were historically known to social services, having been open to preventative services for a period of time, however the case escalated when Child 1 had taken an overdose, resulting in her being admitted to hospital. During the time she was in hospital, she disclosed to the hospital staff that she had been hit by Adult 2. This information was shared with social services who conducted an Assessment of Care and Support under the legal basis set within Section 3, Part 21 of the SSWBA (2016), where it outlines the duty to assess the needs of a child. Further information was then shared with social services when Child 1 disclosed that Adult 2 had been touching her and placing his hands up her top, along with kissing her and licking her on the lips. Due to the significant concerns around this disclosure, a Strategy meeting was held in accordance with safeguarding procedures within Section 47 of the Children Act (1989). This then led to a joint Section 47 assessment with the police, where all three children were interviewed. This was difficult for all three children, and in particular Child 1, who felt uncomfortable talking about her experiences, and even though under Article 16 within the UNCRC (1989) every child has the right to privacy, there was a need to act in Child 1's best interest and welfare, with the safeguarding of a child being the first and paramount consideration as outlined in the Children Act (1989).

Adult 2 was arrested with bail conditions being imposed, preventing him from having any contact with any person under the age of 18 years old, and furthermore, he was to have no contact with Child 1, 2 or 3, or enter and visit the family home. This action contravenes Adult 2's right to a family life within Article 8 of the Human Rights Act (1998), however this action was as a result of the need to protect the rights of the children, where under Article 34 of the UNCRC (1989), it outlines that children need to be protected from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

Due to the concerns and presenting risk, the case proceeded immediately to an Initial Child protection Case Conference in accordance with safeguarding procedures. The children's names were placed on the Child Protection (CP) Register under the category of Emotional Harm and Sexual Harm. However, there were concerns that due to the lack of evidence,

and the feeling that Child 1 would not be able to give evidence due to her own mental health issues, that the police investigation would conclude 'No further action', and that when bail conditions were lifted, that Adult 1 would allow Adult 2 back in the family home.

After speaking to Adult 1, and assessing her response to the concerns, and her plans if Adult 2's bail conditions were lifted, I felt there was a real risk that Adult 1 would allow Adult 2 back in the family home, therefor placing the children at risk of significant harm. Furthermore, when researching the case history and analysing patterns of behaviour, it was clear within the family's chronology, that historically Adult 1 had not shown her ability to prioritise and understand the need to protect her children. My analysis of the information, and assessment of Adult 1's ability to protect, led me to seek further advice from my senior and team manager, as I felt there was a need to collaboratively decide on the best safeguarding plan, which would promote positive outcomes for Child 1, 2 and 3. Within social services and reviews of CP practice, it has been acknowledged that seeking supervision is an important aspect of practice in achieving positive outcomes for children (Laming, 2009; Munro, 2011). Additionally, seeking advice and supervision supports the direction within the NOS (SCW, 2011), whereby social workers are expected to maintain professional accountability through supervision. During the case discussion on the risk I had identified, I was given directions to discuss the plan with the family within the formal setting of a 'Core Group', as part of the CP process.

'Core Group' meetings are held 10 days after the initial conference and then every 4-6 weeks, which is in line with statutory timescales set within the Children Act (1989). Within these meetings it was important to promote collaborative working between the professionals and the family, in order to review the CP plan, and gather all relevant information, so as to assess any presenting risk. Prior to the 'Core Group' meeting, I ensured to speak with the three children on their own and gather their views and thoughts. This information was then used to give the children a voice within the meeting, as their lived experiences were key within the formation and implementation of the CP plan. I managed the family and professionals by allowing everyone time to express their views, making it clear that nobody was to speak over another person. I also ensured that the focus of discussion remained child centred, with clear guidance around what was required from the family in relation to the CP Plan, which was that Adult 2 was not permitted in the family home until further assessments were completed. Furthermore, I focussed on giving the family the opportunity to identify changes they could make to support the CP plan. This is a manner in which all social workers are required to work under the SSWBA (2016), where co-production is identified as a key principle. Moreover, collaborative working with families promotes their voice and control which is congruent to the CoPP (SCW, 2017).

Within the 'Core Group' meetings, I implemented a Signs of Safety approach (Turnell and Edwards, 1999), which is designed to promote a cooperative relationship between workers

and families, where risk is assessed through looking at what is working well; what we are worried about; and what needs to change. I ensured that I remained child focussed with a strong emphasis on identifying positive outcomes for Child1, 2 and 3, with safety being the top priority. I found the meetings difficult as it became clear that Adult 1 and Adult 2 were unwilling to follow the agreed CP plan, specifically around Adult 2 not being permitted in the family home. Due to my analysis of the situation and having considerable concern around Child 1's ongoing safety, I used my professional supervision to discuss the option of having a 'Legal Gateway' meeting, in order to ascertain whether threshold had been met under Section 31 of the Children Act (1989).

During the discussions held within the 'Legal Gateway' meeting, I worked collaboratively with other professionals and presented accurate and pertinent information around the presenting risk, along with sharing Adult 1's history in relation to her inability to protect. It was felt that there was significant risk to all three children if Adult 2 were to return to the family home, and it was decided that the case met threshold to enter the Public Law Outline (PLO) process, with a Pre-Proceedings Meeting to be held. The PLO process lasts 26 weeks and gives social services the opportunity to identify what further assessments and support are needed, along with consideration given to any progress made in determining whether care proceedings are necessary to safeguard the child. Adult 1 and Adult 2 were made aware of this action through a letter containing the relevant concerns, and they were given the opportunity to seek legal representation. Making this decision within the 'Legal Gateway' meeting allowed a plan of action to be developed in order to promote change within the family, which is congruent to standards set within the NOS (SCW, 2011).

In relation to reflecting on my actions, understanding and interactions, I will now use the 'So What' element of Driscoll's reflective Cycle (2007), where I will be focussing on 'So What' did I feel; how I responded and why; along with reflecting on any conflict that arose. I feel that having worked within a team dealing with long term CP as a student, and then as a qualified practitioner, gave me an understanding of the appropriate safeguarding procedures and legislation, which assisted me in following a clear plan of action within the confines of the law. However, although I have previously managed multiple CP cases, I have not managed a case involving the potential risk of sexual harm or abuse. I feel that this was a challenge in relation to remaining professional and not allowing my personal feelings of anger and disgust to be visible to Adult 1 or 2.

I feel that within the 'Core Group' meeting held in respect of the three children, I remained professional and respectful towards Adult 2, even though the knowledge of his behaviour and attitude towards Child 1 was in direct conflict with my personal values. I believe that I was able to recognise and reflect on my personal values and bias, as this is essential when dealing with difficult situations and family dynamics, as failing to do so can result in biased assumptions and decisions being made (Sheppard et al, 2000). I also feel that I remained

child focused and managed the ethical dilemma in relation to maintaining Adult 2 remained outside of the family home until assessments were completed, as this request was in direct conflict with his basic human right to a family life as outlined in the Human Rights Act (1998). Safeguarding often involves dealing with highly complex situations with a strong ethical dimension, and being able to work through these dilemmas upholds the NOS (SCW, 2011) around managing ethical issues, dilemmas and conflict. I feel I understand and implement intervention that balances and manages the child's fundamental right to be safe, against the parent's right to raise their child, as this is fundamental in social work practice and CP (Chisnell & Kelly 2019).

When reflecting on my communication within the safeguarding process, I believe I was able to discuss the concerns with the family and communicate in an appropriate manner, whilst sharing accurate information, which links directly to section 2 of the CoPP (SCW, 2017). Furthermore, I was able to support other professionals to share information which contributed to my assessment of risk. It was imperative that all the professionals understood their role within the meeting, and I feel I understand and appreciate that no one practitioner can have the full picture in terms of a child's life, and therefore working together was the only way in which I could identify the prevailing concerns. This manner of working supports the key principle within the SSWBA (2016) around promoting co-production.

Effective communication must be seen as a vital element within any social work intervention (Lishman 2020), however remaining child focussed is also essential (Munro 2011). I feel that I was able to understand the children's lived experiences, through gathering their wishes and feelings in the direct work I completed with them. Within the process of CP and safeguarding, it is imperative that the child's voice is heard, as failing to do this has resulted in child deaths (Ferguson, 2017). However, even with this knowledge, children are still being left out of the process, with Munro (2011) attributing this to systemic pressures, whereby practitioners have little time to develop the necessary relationship with the child in order to safeguard them. On reflection, I feel that I could have focussed more time on gathering the children's thoughts, and moreover, offer time to developing a trusting relationship with them, so that they could open up and discuss their feelings more freely. I recognise that at times, my interactions with them may have been rushed, due to the constraints in relation to finding time within my diary to allocate to the direct work. It is clear within guidance and literature that the communication with the child, and the building of trusting relationships is key to effective safeguarding (WG, 2018). This has also been outlined within serious case reviews, where a key lesson for practitioners is to remain child focussed and have an understanding of the child's views, wishes and feelings (Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan Regional Safeguarding Children board, 2016).

The 'Core Group' meeting was a platform whereby multi-agency working was used to safeguard and promote Child 1, 2 and 3's well-being, which is a manner of working directed

within the Working Together to Safeguard People guidance (vol 5) (WG, 2014). Within the meeting I feel I used a 'Questioning' model of assessment which was identified by Smale et al (1993), as a model of assessment which largely reflects the workers agenda. However, due to the tension in relation to upholding the right of Adult 1 and Adult 2 to participate in the decision-making processes, against my role as the children's social worker to ensure their safety, I feel that the questioning model of assessment was the correct method of interaction for the purpose of the meeting. I do however recognise and respect that the 'Exchange' model of assessment is one that is preferred, and one which promotes a more person-centred approach in social work intervention, as the individual is seen as the expert within their own life, identifying their own strengths and resources to produce change (Smale et al, 1993).

In relation to understanding the family and their background, relationships and patterns of behaviour, I feel that having an understanding of 'Systemic Practice' supported my rational for researching the family's historical patterns of behaviours, which supported my professional assessment of risk. I also feel an understanding of social work theory supported my understanding, in particular 'Systems Theory' (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which is a holistic perspective whereby there is a need to recognise individuals as interconnected parts of larger systems, including families, communities, and societies (Maclean & Harrison, 2015). I believe that my understanding of the family within their own context, supported in identifying areas where stresses or negative interactions were taking place (Teater, 2014), therefore allowing me to plan the appropriate intervention and support, in order to safeguard the children.

When reflecting on my response and interactions with the family, I feel I was innately aware of the importance in building relationships with the family. I believe that a further theory which supported my involvement was 'Relationship based Theory', which draws upon the approach and understanding within 'Psychodynamic Theory' (Ruch, 2023). I feel I approach every family with the belief and understanding that there should be a focus on the uniqueness of each individual's circumstances. The relationship developed between the individual and the social worker is essential, as this is the foundation to understand the complex and challenging situations individuals face, and moreover, the social worker and service user relationship is recognised as the factor which determines the level of information shared, so as to develop positive intervention (Wilson et al, 2011). I feel that I built a relationship with both the parents and the children, whereby I was able to connect and understand their lives, both within the situational context and historical context, which has been seen to be an important element of thinking (Ferguson et al, 2022). This is also a manner of working congruent to the NOS (SCW, 2011) where it states the need to promote engagement and participation with individuals.

I believe that responding to my assessment of risk, and seeking guidance and supervision from a senior member of the team, allowed me to make professional judgments with regards to the plan of action and safeguarding the children, so that positive outcomes could be achieved in safeguarding them from the risk of harm. The quality of intervention and the responsiveness in terms of action has long been directly linked to achieving positive outcomes (Gardner, 2008). I feel that my response to my assessment of the risk, and the steps taken to mitigate this risk adhered to the CoPP (SCW, 2017) where it outlines the need to “take the necessary steps to minimise the risks of individuals’ behaviour causing actual or potential harm to themselves or other people”.

Whilst preparing the report for the ‘Legal Gateway’ meeting, I felt I was able to remain child focused throughout, and balance my own personal bias and feelings around Adult 2’s actions and behaviours towards Child 1. I was fully aware of the importance of maintaining accurate accounts of the presenting issues, with a clear outline of the impact Adult 2’s behaviour was having on Child 1, as this would be the basis of the decisions being made, and furthermore, the formation of an appropriate safeguarding plan. I felt an immense pressure to get things right, as I knew the consequences of not delivering the pertinent information, could potentially lead to an inadequate plan being agreed. However I feel I managed this, and worked in line with the directives set for social work intervention within the NOS (SCW, 2011), where it states that in order to practice professional social work, there is a need to prepare professional reports and records relating to people.

As the final part of the reflective cycle developed by Driscoll (2007), I will be focussing reflection on the ‘Now What’ question, this can be achieved by reflecting on what I have learnt from the experience; what I could have done differently; and what I can do to improve future practice. I have identified that I may have not placed enough emphasis on the time spent gathering the views of the children, and not prioritising this element of practice within the safeguarding of the child. In order to develop this practice further, I will make efforts to increase my understanding through further research into the importance of the child’s voice, and thus preventing what has been termed as the ‘Invisible Child’ (Ferguson, 2017), taking place within my own practice.

I have learnt that I am able to manage CP processes well, and that I have a good understanding of the legislative grounds in which I work, however I still rely heavily on the advice from senior members of the team when deciding what needs to be done, and although this is good practice in terms of seeking professional supervision and guidance, I do feel I need to build my confidence in my own decision making skills. I believe that this skill will develop in time as I gain experience within my role, but that I can enhance this through actively taking the lead in decision making rather than relying on others to suggest appropriate action.

When looking at my experience within the interactions, decisions and communication that took place with the family, I believe that there is always room for improvement, and that social work is a continuous cycle of learning, reflection and further learning. Being a reflective practitioner is an essential element of social work (Schon, 1983), as there is a need to manage the complexities of working with individuals facing overwhelming difficulties in their life, and to make decisions based on evidence rather than bias, and furthermore, to seek to ensure the safety of those you work with, whilst also maintaining their rights.

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This includes outlining an excellent understanding of the interface between social service provision in Wales within the United Kingdom, the European Union and outside the EU and specific elements of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act, 2014, Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, 2015, Human Rights Act, 1998, the UNCRC, 1989, Equalities legislation and Health and Safety including the Welsh Language Measures (Wales) 2011