

EAEE5006 Safeguarding in the early years

EAEE5006C Diogelu plant yn y blynyddoedd cynnar

Part 2

Introduction

During the first discussion the group held regarding setting up a child protection conference it was decided who would take the different professional roles. Within the group it was clear to see that there was some strong characters and I felt this would be a challenge. I took the role as keyworker. Others in the group seemed more confident and requested more challenging roles. I felt as a keyworker I may have an advantage as I would have the required resources in work to assist my research. I soon discovered how complex the child protection system is and should not have been so complacent as with any of the roles, inexperience in the field of safeguarding and child protection conferences was felt by all.

A process of further discussions regarding the scenario were conducted. I thought it would be an asset to learn more about the other roles to be able to understand them to contribute more. There were advantages to working as a group, one of which was the sharing of information, this I felt enabled growth in experience as through the discussion of different perspectives led to deeper learning and understanding, which also contributed to the effectiveness of the conference. However, there are disadvantages to working as a group such as group members live in different areas and have technologies that are not always compatible.

A conference is a meeting of agencies to discuss the children's safety and put in place a plan to promote and secure the health and development of the child. The law and UNCRC articles state that the voice of the child and family should be listened to and their feelings should be adhered to in the process (Muench et al., 2016). It is also a requirement under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 (replaced by section 53 Children Act 2004) (Hedy et al., 2009 p187). Prior to the conference, the most important part of the process is recognising abuse or neglect is taking place (National Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children, 2017a). All Wales Child Protection (2008a) categorises 4 types of abuse. Physical, Emotional, Sexual and Neglect. Under the Children's Act (1989) everyone has a duty to safeguard and protect any child suffering from abuse or neglect. During the group discussions it was decided that the scenario should present that the child was suffering from emotional abuse and neglect. The child was witnessing arguments in the home (emotional abuse) and the child was presenting with unwashed clothes and the

health visitor observed that there was no food in the house (neglect). The outcome would result in a child in need case (Child Law Advice, 2017a). Even though through previous training I was aware of the different types of abuse, it was beneficial to my learning that these types of abuse were placed into a scenario. I felt it demonstrated better understanding. However, the disadvantage was, only two types of abuse were used at the conference portrayed.

The Local Safeguarding Children's Board ensure and co-ordinate work to promote children's welfare. The board includes the Local Education Authority, Police, The Local Health Board and National Health Services (AWCPP, 2008b). The boards follow the child protection policy, procedure and guidance according to The Children's Act 1989, these are the only professionals and the NSPCC that can take legal court proceedings on behalf of the child in respect of abuse and neglect (NSPCC, 2017b). For the conference, all these roles were selected which meant that it would be possible to ensure that multi-agency legislation could be followed. The advantage being that it would allow for a complete understanding of the child conference from the perspective of all professions. This has also enhanced my learning and will enable me to be a better practitioner in the future.

Working within a group I have learnt that communication underpins everything that professionals do and can determine the quality of service that children should be entitled to. Poor communication between multi-agencies affects children's lives leading to tragic cases such as Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly (WAG, 2003). On reflection of these cases, and through the scenario, it is easy to see how agencies can see things from different perspectives when not faced with the full facts. This however is why it is extremely important to report, document and liaise with everyone in any cases (Muench et al., 2016). Communication during the conference process was slow due to technology difficulties and commitments. Each member of the group collated research on their given roles and reported back to a meeting. The advantage of this was that it was also good to hear the interesting and creative stories that each of us had thought up. However, without this initial communication it became apparent that communication was key to creating the right setting for our conference. I feel that some of the members were insistent on using certain criteria because it had taken up valuable research time. The disadvantage for working as a group at this stage was that some members were very adventurous. I did fear at one point that the scenario was being stretched a little too far, for an outcome that was a child in need case. I also felt I did not want to appear that I wanted a simple case, and kept these concerns to myself, which on reflection when the entire scenario was put

together it worked well. According to Willumsen and Skivenes (2005) working together can be for several reasons learning and assisting with the appropriate decisions. On reflection of the process, a framework for our learning and decision making should have been discussed from the beginning. The disadvantage was that the members in the group were all very polite, which did not help with decision making. Another, disadvantage of working as a group is commitments to circumstances outside of control (families and work) and even though some members of the group put their hands up to do things in fact they should have allowed others to help. If a framework had been set, I feel certain challenges could have been avoided, allowing for more efficient use of time.

The legislation that would be required to be followed for the scenario is "The Child in Need". When a referral is made to the social service department (form C1) it is then the responsibility of that department to decide if there is a case to be made. I was aware of this procedure as it is in the schools safeguarding policy. In the conference scenario there was sufficient evidence to initiate section 47 of the Children Act 1989 (HM Government, 2006 cited in Hedy et al, 2009 p202). For the conference scenario it was decided that the case was not serious enough to remove the child under section 46 as there was not enough evidence to suggest that the children were at risk from significant harm. This is when the decision to make the case a "Child in Need" as there is always emphasis on keeping the family together if services can help to promote the child's welfare under section 17(3) (Adams et al., 2009). Therefore, within fifteen days of the referral a multi-agency group would be called under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 and a conference is to be held within 45 days. It is the duty of each agency to produce a report. Reports should be given to the parents at least 48 hours before conference (Child Law Advice, 2017b). I was not aware of this process before and feel that this is beneficial for my understanding of how the process occurs and will be more mindful of what some of the children in my setting might have been through when I look after them in school. The disadvantage was that I was not aware sooner and may have been more understanding of the child's needs.

Through analysis is clear that children should be protected from harm and that professionals should work together, following relevant legislation, policies and procedures (Ward et al., 2012). However, past governments have worked in isolation for many years believing they were working to protect children's health and well-being through the Children Act 1989, although legislation was created every time a new case occurred, this was just an overlapping of policies to prevent further cases slipping through the net (Musgrave, 2017). During the group work this process I fear is reflective of the practice

conducted in the past. Independent working and then collaboration to make the work more efficient and make sense at the end.

However, further legislation has now been introduced, unfortunately because of yet another case, the Victoria Climbié inquiry by Lord Laming a green paper was produced entitled "Every Child Matters and Wales 'Rights to Action' The Children Act 2004 was then passed. It focuses on the importance of multi-agencies working together and creating partnerships between local authorities (Clark and Waller, 2007 p68). Lord Laming's report (2003) also requested that the government should strengthen policies and procedures this led to the introduction of The All Wales Child Protection Procedures, 2008 (Children in Wales/ Plant ung Nghymru (2014). Child Protection has and is constantly being reviewed and revised over the years, with several cases of child abuse that have been discovered this has shaped the legal system we have today. The collaboration of multi-agency working together and The Children Act (2004), led to the first Child Commissioner of Wales being introduced. Then measures regarding sharing data because of 'Sarah's Law' regarding sex offenders in England and Wales led department called Multi-agency public protection arrangements which produced the enhanced criminal records bureau check now known as the disclosure and barring service (Gov, 2012 p2). However, still more cases keep occurring. I was aware of why there is a DBS, but never really appreciated the significance of it before.

Cases keep occurring perhaps because of ethical dilemmas that agencies are faced with Balancing needs and interests regarding conflicts with legislation and protection issues UNCRC regarding safety. The professionals apply ethical codes required for their practice and around issues of confidentiality and the pressure of sharing information with the appropriate agencies (Walsh, 2005). Ultimately, putting all the conflicts of interest aside, it is important to remember that the welfare of the child is over and above any rights or confidentiality (AWCPP, 2008b) the reason for this is to protect children from harm or possible fatality. The advantage of knowing this information is that in practice, in my role confidentiality is important but this does not always protect the child, it is good to know that the law protects me if I had to divulge confidential information.

It is encouraging to discover through research that the laws in Wales are changing and the Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales, (CSSIW, 2017a) is an institution that is working to improve childcare and social services for people in Wales. The CCSIW are now implementing new legislation called Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (CSSIW, 2017b). This Act is required to ensure that high quality support is

provided for all the people in Wales. This Act also supports Social Services and well-being (Wales) Act 2014 (CSSIW)c, which is also used to support the rights of the people of Wales. Through these Acts all practices and institutions will have to register their businesses and the CSSIW inspectors will have increased powers to ensure that under new registration guidelines are met and services are improved (CSSIW, 2017c). I feel that discovering this information is vital for my development of learning as I can use it to promote multi-agency collaboration with renewed strength that more is being done in Wales and perhaps I can make a difference.

Conclusions

My knowledge of safeguarding and child protection was limited to the generic information that is taught during the child protection inset that is held at my school every year. I have always acted professionally and appropriately regarding safeguarding and child protection and worked in accordance to Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies held in our school.

During the recent conference I learnt the value of working within a group as well as enhancing my knowledge of the child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures. I feel that my confidence and understanding in legislation has grown and on reflection I should have been more confident to take on any of the roles.

In future, when I deal with any matters arising on placement, I will be able to approach the child protection officer with confidence, as I now understand the process. In the past I have not followed up on certain situations, leaving the professional to deal with. In the future I will follow up cases to their conclusions. With the information that I have gained, I would further benefit from experience and will be asking to shadow the child protection officer with some initial review meetings.

I feel that on self-reflection my decisions are sometimes influenced by my values, beliefs and assumptions. However, a strength of mine is to watch, observe and draw an opinion and conclusion from others. However, I believe that developing the skill of observing from a new perspective is required to address the complex situations of real-life safeguarding and child protection issues.

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