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Carys – Social Worker

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for attending this Initial Child Protection Conference. I'm Carys, the social worker assigned to Johnathan and his family. Let me start by providing an overview of the situation involving Johnathan and share my personal observations and experiences with the family.

Johnathan is a 3-year-old boy attending an early years setting, where Laura is his teacher in his Nursery class. Over the past month, there has been a marked change in his behaviour. Previously an engaged and happy child, he has become increasingly withdrawn. His hygiene has deteriorated, and he arrives at the setting in dirty clothes daily. Just last week, he was brought in by an unknown male who smelled strongly of alcohol, which raised immediate safety concerns.

I've been working closely with Johnathan and his family. His mother, Rose, has become noticeably stressed since separating from Johnathan's father. My discussions with her and communications with Loreida, suggest she might be suffering from postnatal depression after the birth of Johnathan's younger sister, Amilia, who is under a year old. During my home visits, I have observed a decline in the home's condition, with clutter and unwashed dishes, reflecting a potential inability to provide adequate care. Rose has admitted feeling overwhelmed, and there are signs she has turned to alcohol, which exacerbates the neglect risks.

Our priority today is to evaluate the risks to Johnathan and Amilia and decide on the necessary steps to ensure their safety and well-being. Our approach must be informed by the legal framework designed to protect children.

Under the guidance of Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, which mandates us to investigate any situation where we suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, we've identified several areas of concern that require immediate action. Similarly, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 underscores our responsibility for early intervention and comprehensive needs assessment. Today, we aim to outline a clear plan that not only addresses immediate risks but also sets a path for the ongoing support and monitoring of Johnathan and Amilia's welfare, ensuring all measures are aligned with their rights under the UNCRC, especially focusing on their right to safety and stability.

Our coordinated response follows the All Wales Child Protection Procedures 2023, which emphasizes a multi-agency approach. The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011, incorporating the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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(Articles 3 and 12), requires us to prioritize Johnathan's best interests and consider his views, even though he is very young. Observing his emotional state provides insight into his needs and experiences.

Regarding the potential issues of domestic abuse and substance misuse, the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 directs us to protect children in such environments and ensure interventions address these risks.

To safeguard Johnathan and Amilia, I propose the following actions:

Police Investigation from Lindsey: I think that there should be immediate investigation into the unknown male who brought Johnathan in today, assessing any potential risks related to substance misuse or criminal activity. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Section 130 supports our duty to collaborate with the police in such investigations.

Health and Developmental Assessments from Loreida: Comprehensive assessments for both Johnathan and Amilia to identify any immediate health or developmental concerns. This aligns with the Children Act 1989, Section 20, which allows us to seek medical assessments as part of our protective duties.

Urgent Home Visit conducted by myself: A detailed home visit to evaluate the current living conditions and gather further information on Rose's ability to care for her children. The Safeguarding Board (Functions and Procedures) (Wales) Regulations 2015 support the need for thorough home assessments as part of our multi-agency approach.

Support Services for Rose: Referrals for parenting support, financial assistance, and substance misuse counselling. Addressing Rose's potential postnatal depression and alcohol use is crucial for improving the family's situation. This aligns with Section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which obliges us to provide services that promote family welfare.

Interim Safety Plan: Development of a safety plan, potentially involving temporary care arrangements for the children while we conduct further investigations. This plan is in accordance with Section 31 of the Children Act 1989, which allows for care orders and supervision orders when a child is at risk.

Our approach is further guided by Section 11 of the Children Act 2004, which mandates us to ensure that our services protect and promote the welfare of children, and the Education Act 2002, Section 175, which requires educational institutions to safeguard children in their care.

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In conclusion, our immediate priority is the safety and well-being of Johnathan and Amilia, guided by robust legal standards and our collective professional dedication. We are committed to providing Rose with the necessary support to foster a stable and nurturing environment for her children.

Carys: Laura, would you like to share your insights as class teacher on Johnathan and his family?

Laura – Teacher

Yes, thank you, my name is Laura Milton, I am Jonathan's nursery teacher. I am here today to discuss and feedback the schools' observations on Jonathan's daily health, well-being and development. And to outline our concerns and the steps we have taken in accordance with the schools safeguarding policy and procedures to ensure Jonathan's rights and well-being are protected (Department of Education, 2024).

My role has been to provide an emotionally safe and nurturing environment to support Jonathan in expressing and regulating his feelings (Educating Wales, 2021). We aim to meet his basic needs for safety, nutrition, and hygiene in a consistent stable and caring classroom, as outlined by Maslow (1943). Since September I have built a positive, trusting relationship with Jonathan, which has allowed me to understand him as a unique individual and notice changes in his behaviour which signified that something has been troubling him (HM Gov, 2018; Education Wales, 2022).

Over the past three to four weeks, we have noticed Jonathan arriving to school in an unkept manner. His hair unwashed and uncombed, dirty fingernails, unbrushed teeth, same socks on consecutive days and a general unclean smell around him and his belongings. There has also been a change in his behaviour, he has been isolating himself from the other children, appearing withdrawn and failing to engage with daily tasks. Most recently, there has been an incident where an unknown male, with a strong smell of alcohol has dropped him off to school.

In accordance with the Children Act 1989 section 17 (legislation.gov.uk) and the NSPCC, ND we have attempted to liaise with Jonathan's parents via telephone and school app to work in partnership and support the family. We offered breakfast club, family connect and coffee mornings with support services for information sharing and guidance on nutrition and personal hygiene (Estyn, 2020). Unfortunately, there has been very little engagement from mum and our concerns are ongoing, particularly with Jonathan's emotional wellbeing.

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As a class teacher, I am obligated to comply with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, ND) article 19 which states governments should care and protect children from harm. These welfare concerns have been identified in the early stages and shared in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), ensuring information is accurate, necessary and made in the best interests of the child, without disclosing excessive personal data (Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, Section 6).

Following the guidelines in 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2018) we have documented our observations on the 'My Concerns' computer system which is a record for the local authority and discussed them with the headteacher Mr Hodder, who is the designated safeguarding person. Following the Children Act 1989 Section 47 guidelines (legislation.gov.uk) and the 'Every Child Matters Green Paper' (2003) Mr Hodder reported the concerns to social services in writing within 24 hours (Welsh Government, ND, Keeping learners safe; Welsh Assembly Government, 2002).

As a school we take safeguarding very seriously and welcome Estyn to review our safeguarding policy and practice to ensure compliance with national safeguarding legislation (Welsh Government, ND, Keeping learners safe). We also take a child centred approach, viewing children as experts on their own lives and involving them with decisions and actions that directly affect them. Therefore, we have ensured Jonathan is heard, understood, respected and that his opinions, health and welfare are always considered (HM Gov, 2018).

As we all know "Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility" (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2019). And working as a multi-disciplinary team, as we are here today, is paramount to safeguarding and protecting the children in our care (Children Act, 1989 Section 17).

I am here today to support the process of effective information sharing, joint assessments, coordinated support plans, and shared responsibility (Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014). Our goal is to ensure tailored support for Jonathan and his family, including his younger sister, in accordance with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of a Child (UNICEF, ND) article 6, which states a right to life, survival, and development. And I agree relevant support services should be put in place to support mum to cope like the substance abuse program and parental support.

Carys: Great, thank you for your input, Laura.

Loreida, would you like to add your experience with the family?

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Loreida – Health Visitor

Introduction: Good afternoon, my name is Loreida Salway, and I am the Health Visitor working with the family of Johnathan and his younger sister Amelia. My role involves establishing relationships with families with children from birth to age 5, assessing health and developmental needs, providing support and advice to parents, and collaborating with other professionals to protect and safeguard children (NHS Wales, 2024).

Background Information: I have known Johnathan and his family for 3 years. Johnathan is an energetic and delightful boy. His parents have been supportive and attentive to his needs, in line with Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They consistently attended most clinic appointments, demonstrating a commitment to his wellbeing and openness to advice and support. Although his Personal Child Health Record (PCHR) was occasionally overlooked, his height and weight fall within healthy ranges, aligning with average percentiles (NHS Wales, 2020). His vaccinations are up to date according to the Routine Childhood Immunisation Schedule (2023).

Observations of Johnathan: Johnathan is always neatly presented, wearing weather-appropriate clothing (UK Health Security Agency, 2024). His home environment is conducive to play and exploration, with an abundance of toys, aligning with Article 31 of the UNCRC. There were no previous signs of concern.

Current Concerns: I am also the Health Visitor for Amelia, Johnathan's 11-month-old sister. Recent visits have revealed significant changes, potentially due to their parents' separation. Rose (mother) has expressed challenges in caring for two young children. I am concerned about potential post-natal depression, as Rose has shown persistent low moods, tearfulness, and weight loss during my recent visits (NHS Wales, 2024). Rose reports a loss of appetite and disrupted sleep, often sleeping only 3-4 hours a night. She also mentioned drinking "a few glasses of wine a night" to manage stress but insists she is not reliant on alcohol. This is a concern under the Care Act 2014 regarding the parent's wellbeing.

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The home environment has deteriorated, with dirty dishes and leftover food around. The curtains remain closed, blocking natural light, and windows are often shut, affecting air quality. An unpleasant odour is noticeable, and there are safety concerns like the lack of a safety gate on the stairs and hot beverages within children's reach. These issues indicate that the children's basic needs are not being met (Maslow, 1943).

Observations of Johnathan and Amelia: Johnathan's personality and appearance have changed; he seems subdued, his cheeks are often red from crying, his hair is matted, and his clothes are unkempt. He no longer fully participates in the Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGS) assessment and shows signs of emotional and developmental regression. Under the Children's Act 1989 Part 3, I must share my concerns with local authorities to safeguard the children from possible neglect.

Amelia also shows signs of neglect. Both children appear dirty, with clothes that seem days old (socks black with grime, stained t-shirts). Amelia's development is concerning; she is not sitting up or reaching typical milestones for an 11-month-old (NHS, 2024).

Recommendations: Aligning with the Working Together to Safeguard Children policy (2023) Section 136, I propose a needs assessment for the family to improve family functioning, in partnership with social services and the school. Regular reviews and progress updates are recommended. Under Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989, I seek assistance in delivering support and ensuring effective communication between agencies to safeguard the children (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2024).

I maintain a good relationship with Rose, although it is currently strained. Our open and honest communication has enabled her to share her struggles. I have referred her to her local GP and the Pre and Postnatal Depression Advice (Pandas) programme under the Children's Act 2004, Section 11. However, she has not yet received an appointment date (Wales Safeguarding Procedures, 2024).

Conclusion: I recommend a needs assessment referral to provide tailored support for Rose and to establish care and support plans. Collaboration with the local authority, school, and family is essential, as stipulated in the Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) policy and the Children's Act 1989. My focus remains on supporting this family and improving their welfare during these challenging times.

Thank you.

Carys: Great, thank you for that Loreida.

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Lindsey, would you like to add your concerns into the discussion?

Lindsey – Police Officer

Thank you Carys. I have had no direct dealings myself with the family, however I am here as a representative from Dyfed Powys Police in relation to the referral submitted.

I have prepared this report following discussions with police officers, and conducting extensive searches of the police database for all records we hold relating to both Johnathan and Amilia, Rose, and their close and extended family members. I do however have a duty in line with The General Data Protection Regulation 2018, so I will not be in a position to disclose all of the information we hold, however all necessary details will be shared. In addition to this search, following our recent multi-agency strategy discussion as set out in the Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019 Section 3, part 1, a detailed database search was also undertaken for Mr Robert Evans. This returned a string of historic offences, however over the past two months there have been several offences committed by Robert under the Public Order Act 1986 including breaches in Section 4 for fear or provocation of violence. In addition to these offences, within the past 48 hours an incident of a domestic disturbance has been recorded at Rose's property address. This, I note is the first instance of a police record at this address. This current matter is still open and ongoing however I can share with you these details for the purpose of this conference:-

Following a telephone call from a neighbour reporting a disturbance at the property, our police officers attended the address in accordance with Section 2 of the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014. Officers were unable to get an answer, after knocking loudly on the door and windows for several minutes. Raised voices and the smashing of a glass or bottle were then heard, this exercised our officers' rights to gain entry to the property under Section 17 of The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Upon entry, officers were able to defuse the situation to a certain extent. It was then confirmed by Rose that her two children were at the property.

Officers located Jonathan and Amilia in a bedroom, they were both evidently scared and crying, this goes against Article 19 of the UNCRC which states that children have a right to be kept safe from violence, abuse or neglect and is in line with Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 where any child who sees, hears or experiences the effects of domestic abuse is regarded as a victim.

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WPC Smith reported that Amilia appeared cold, and was only wearing a nappy and Jonathan had dirty clothes on and was hungry, this indicated a breach of the UNCRC Article 27, stipulating that children have the right to housing, food and clothing. These signs of neglect are in line with the NSPCC 2020, who state that a possible indicator of child neglect is if a child is wearing inadequate or dirty clothing. When questioned why they were upset, Johnathan replied that he was 'scared of Robert hurting mammy'.

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children and young people have the right to be listened to and taken seriously. WPC Smith reassured Johnathan that help was at hand.

Our officers also questioned Rose who denied any form of abuse, however finger pad bruising was evident on both arms, and red marks were found on her neck which is an indicator of potential physical abuse according to Women's Aid 2019.

It was apparent that Rose and Robert had been heavily drinking, there was a broken bottle in the living room, and the home was unkempt with dirty nappies and rubbish everywhere.

Robert continued to be aggressive, and our officers witnessed emotional abuse towards Rose throughout the visit. The NHS 2022 states that everyone has the right to a safe home free from neglect and abuse, as a result of this continual aggression and coercive behaviour, Robert Evans was subsequently removed from the property under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015. When providing a statement following Robert's removal, Rose stated that following the sudden split from Johnathan and Amilias father, her mental health had declined and living without him made her feel lonely, and caring for the children was a challenge. Mind 2020 state that if you are struggling with your mental health, daily parenting tasks can feel a lot more difficult to accomplish. Rose admitted that she had become vulnerable and had met Robert during a night out around three months previously. Their relationship was mainly centred around heavy drinking, which resulted in arguments in front of the children most days. Our officer highlighted the increased risks as set out by Public Health Network Cymru 2024, which state that exposure to adverse childhood experiences such as alcohol abuse and domestic violence may have an effect on her children. Rose explained that drinking alcohol seemed to help block out feelings of loneliness and felt that there was nobody who could help her. As outlined in the statutory guidance Working together to safeguard children 2023, having a strong multi-agency network is vital to serve the needs of children and their families, and Rose was reassured that support would be available for herself and both children from multiple agencies which would focus on their wellbeing

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mental health and safety as set out in the Children Act 1989, Section 17. Rose welcomed this help and appropriate steps are now being taken to initiate this support.

Carys:

Thank you, Laura, Loreida, and Lindsey, for your crucial insights.

So just to summarise our action plan:

- 1 - Lindsey will continue to conduct a police investigation regarding the unknown male, now known to us as Robert, connected with Johnathan and Amilia.
- 2 - Loreida will handle comprehensive health assessments for Johnathan and Amilia.
- 3 - Laura will continue educational support and monitor Johnathan's school environment.
- 4 - I will conduct a home visit to assess the living conditions and gather more information about the children's home environment.
- 5 - Support services for Rose will be coordinated to address her needs and enhance her parenting capabilities.

Our collective efforts are aimed at ensuring the safety and well-being of Johnathan and Amilia. We'll reconvene in six weeks to review progress and make necessary adjustments.

Thank you all for your commitment to this case.

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Reflections

Carys

Before beginning this module, my understanding of child protection was primarily theoretical. I knew the basics of the legal frameworks such as the Children Act 1989 and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, and I was aware of the critical importance of safeguarding children. However, my practical experience in applying these laws and collaborating in a multi-agency context was limited.

Throughout this module, I have gained a profound appreciation for the complexity and depth of child protection work. I've learned how to interpret signs of distress and neglect in children, not just through direct observation, but also by understanding the subtler indicators of a child's deteriorating environment. The hands-on scenario and case studies presented in the course have been invaluable. They've taught me to analyse various risk factors comprehensively and to craft coordinated intervention plans that involve various stakeholders such as police officers, health visitors, and educators.

One of the most impactful lessons for me was understanding the importance of a multi-agency approach. I learned that protecting children is not just the responsibility of social workers but a collective effort that includes education professionals, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and community resources. This holistic approach ensures that all aspects of the child's welfare are considered, and interventions are more tailored and effective.

Reflecting on this learning experience, I realize how it has equipped me with practical skills and deeper insights that will be crucial in my future career. The ability to work collaboratively with other professionals, to communicate effectively, and to maintain a child-centred approach in all interventions will significantly enhance my ability to advocate for and protect children.

Going forward, I feel more confident in my ability to engage in child protection conferences, to assess complex family situations critically, and to contribute meaningfully to creating intervention plans that genuinely improve children's lives. I am

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also more aware of the emotional resilience this job requires and feel better prepared to manage the challenges it presents.

In conclusion, this module has not only broadened my knowledge but has fundamentally shaped how I will approach my role in child protection. It has ingrained in me a strong sense of duty, compassion, and an unwavering commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of children in my professional care.

Laura Milton - Reflection

Before this module my experience of safeguarding and child protection was primarily based on the training provided by my school. This included knowledge of the school's policies and procedures, my role in being vigilant, recognizing signs of abuse, and taking necessary actions to prevent harm.

This module has deepened my understanding of the safeguarding process, particularly the steps that follow initial observations or disclosures such as, specific timescales and the range of professionals involved. It has also underscored the importance of multi-agency collaboration and the extensive support that these agencies can provide to both the child and their family. Such as therapeutic services and legal aid. Highlighting how an inclusive approach considers everyone's perspectives—including the parents—to ensure a fair, effective and holistic approach to protecting and supporting the child.

Additionally, I have gained an understanding of the legislation and statutory guidelines which I wasn't aware of before. Specifically, how Acts have evolved, often as a result of tragic case studies.

Moving forward I will carry a greater insight into the causes and reasons behind why abuse may occur, such as, poverty, inadequate parenting and low incomes. As well as an understanding of how 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' can be a regular cycle through the generations.

This knowledge has fostered, within me, an increased empathy for all parties involved and an appreciation for the importance of early interventions and the need to support both children and adults to break the cycle of abuse.

To conclude, I am now ever more committed to being vigilant in spotting signs of abuse and will strive to apply my enhanced understanding of the safeguarding process and legislation to ensure I provide the best support and protection for the children in my care.

Loreida

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Reflection on Safeguarding Learning

Before starting this module, I had a foundational understanding of safeguarding procedures and was aware of the designated safeguarding officers in my school. I knew the protocols for reporting concerns and the immediate steps to take to protect children. I regularly used the system "My Concern" to record any safeguarding issues and understood the importance of following up on concerns to ensure they were being addressed. However, my most significant learning from this module has been the deeper understanding of the reasoning behind new legislation.

Learning about how new safeguarding laws often stem from tragedies or failures in the system has profoundly impacted my perspective. A poignant example is the tragic case of Victoria Climbié, an eight-year-old girl who suffered horrific abuse and ultimately died in 2000 due to the failures of various agencies to protect her. This tragedy led to the introduction of the Children Act 2004, which established a more rigorous framework for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

Understanding that many of these legislative changes are reactions to past incidents where children were failed by the system has highlighted the critical importance of vigilance and accountability in safeguarding. The Children Act 2004, for instance, mandates improved coordination among agencies and introduced the role of the Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), ensuring that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Knowing that these laws are designed to prevent recurrence of such tragedies underscores the necessity for every professional to adhere strictly to these guidelines. This understanding reinforces that safeguarding is not just about following procedures but comprehending the gravity and consequences of lapses in the system.

Furthermore, my knowledge of the legislation and its implications for accountability will significantly improve my practice. I am now more aware that safeguarding is a collective responsibility. Every individual in a child's life must be proactive and vigilant. This module has equipped me with the insights needed to ensure that I am not just compliant with the procedures but also deeply committed to the principles behind them.

Moving forward, I will apply this enhanced understanding to ensure that I remain proactive in safeguarding duties, contribute to a culture of accountability, and constantly advocate for the well-being and safety of every child in my care. I will continue to use "My Concern" diligently to record and follow up on any safeguarding issues, ensuring that concerns are not only documented but also addressed promptly and effectively.

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Lindsey Edwards

Personal Reflection.

As I have never worked in an early years setting, my previous knowledge on children's safeguarding was rather limited prior to studying this module. I was aware of the basics surrounding the importance of protecting children, however I was unaware of the protocols which should be followed, and how in depth and complex safeguarding can be. I was completely oblivious as to how important it was for an individual like myself to look out for potential warning signs, and how to act promptly, and efficiently, to take the relevant steps to escalate a concern.

Over recent weeks I have been engaged and committed during safeguarding lectures, and spent many hours of individual study time learning about statutory requirements and legislation which encompasses the safeguarding of children. I have learnt how implementing these in practice can achieve an efficient safeguarding system. I have developed an in-depth knowledge and understanding of Wales Safeguarding Procedures 2019, which provides me with appropriate resources and step by step guidance on supporting children's welfare and safety.

Furthermore, with the extensive knowledge gained, I now understand my ongoing duty to protect and keep **all** vulnerable children safe from harm, by initiating the appropriate safeguarding measures if necessary, and how I could potentially make a difference to their lives.

What I have learned to date has certainly made a difference to how strongly I feel about ensuring children are protected. It has even initiated me to contact my local college to enrol onto their safeguarding courses for the purpose of augmenting my current understanding and broadening my overall knowledge even further.

Currently I am not an early years practitioner, however, in the future, and following completion of this degree, I plan to work with young children in an early year setting. Having already gained a current understanding of safeguarding, and with the further and extended knowledge that I will develop from the proposed safeguarding courses, it will provide me with the confidence to apply these newly learnt skills and expertise in future employment. Furthermore, I feel that I am also well placed to educate other people and to share my knowledge and understanding with them on how important it is to be aware of a child that may be exposed to potential harm. I feel confident that I will be able to identify any potential safeguarding concerns in and around my community,

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and I will have firsthand knowledge on how to raise any matters through the correct channels, to ultimately, protect any children who may be at risk or harm.