



Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board

Learning & Improvement Briefing Sheet 10

Learning From Annabel

This Learning and Improvement Briefing details a case review undertaken by Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board (WSCB) and provides details of **new guidance** to support practitioners.

Annabel felt there was no point in talking about what it was like living at home because no one really listened and nothing changed. It is recorded that she stated on a number of occasions 'what's the point?'

Annabel's learning disability, and health needs made her vulnerable to neglect. The neglect she experienced included the failure of her parents to allow her appropriate access to health care both in regards to her weight and accessing timely medical intervention. Annabel told the author that her parents 'hated' her even more because of the professional involvement that followed her allegations.

Synopsis of case

Annabel, not her real name, is a 15 year old female. Following a significant health emergency (not a child protection issue) she was admitted to hospital. Whilst in hospital Annabel made a number of disclosures of emotional harm and neglect – much of what she disclosed was previously known to certain professionals. Following the hospital admission Annabel was taken into care and her emotional and physical health improved.

The good practice evident in this case included (but was not limited to):

- The practice undertaken during the transition period over the summer term before Annabel moved to High School.
- The nursing staff involved after her hospital admittance cared for her well and identified safeguarding concerns.
- The decision to undertake care proceedings on Annabel, despite her age.
- Annabel has had a significant relationship with her social worker since February 2016. She reports that she now feels listened to and safe.

Working with other agencies

Professionals who do not agree with the decision of another professional, in any agency, need the confidence and support to be able to say 'I do not agree'. They should use the [WSCB policy for escalating concerns](http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/) available at <http://westmidlands.procedures.org.uk/>

Interventions and support for families is of limited effectiveness if it is delivered without a written plan to clarify the focus of work and enable outcomes to be monitored.



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Multi-agency impact chronologies are an effective tool when assessing children who may be suffering abuse or neglect.

Professional Curiosity

Although the opportunities were few, there were attempts to engage with the family in regards to issues identified. The lack of engagement by the parents in a number of these interventions, including the CAMHS appointments, other medical appointments including with paediatricians, and with the support offered to Annabel when she was at middle school, show the parents were resistant to professionals. The extent of their resistance was not identified until Annabel was in hospital at the end of the period being considered by this review however.

When spoken to, the parents were clear that the issue was Annabel's poor behaviour and that she had eating issues. They stated she stole from home and school. They pointed out their successful parenting of her older siblings, and blamed Annabel for any issues.

The identification of a punitive style of parenting should lead to further questions being asked about the relationship between the child and the parents.

Professional curiosity should be exercised when any child presents with delayed puberty, a possible eating disorder, or low weight/faltering growth, and professionals should always consider if neglect or emotional abuse is an issue.

Voice of the child

It is not possible to deliver effective services to children and young people without listening to what they have to say about their experiences. Listening to the voice of the child means understanding the child or young person's lived experience using whatever means are available to practitioners and checking this out over time. It means knowing what it feels like to be that particular child or young person living in that specific family situation.

As stated by Annabel, professionals '*should look for children who have marks on them, who are not eating, who don't concentrate at school, and who want to miss out on the harder lessons. They should ask them why.*'

Resources

WSCB Learning & Improvement Briefing Sheets on Voice of The Child (8) and Professional Curiosity (9) can be found on the Learning & Improvement Resources page of the [WSCB web-site](http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/wscb). www.worcestershire.gov.uk/wscb and follow the links to Information for Professionals, then Learning and Improvement.

