

Rough Guide to Recording and Report Writing

Recording and report writing support good practice across children's services. This guide gives practical "how-to" advice – it does not replace policy or legislation. Although focused on child protection, the principles apply across wider practice.

What Is Recording?

A case record is an account of an agency's involvement with a child and family. It usually includes:

- Child/family details; Contacts and visits (dates, people present)
- Assessment of needs; Plans and actions
- Outcomes for the child
- Records may be written, typed or electronic.

Why is it Important?

- Clarifies and organises complex information
- Supports decision-making and assessment
- Shows the rationale for professional actions
- Provides a retrievable history
- Supports partnership working with families
- Provides evidence for inspections, audits and resource decisions
- Ensures continuity when workers change
- Forms the basis for reports
- Is a core element of professional accountability

What Is Effective Recording?

Use plain, clear language:

- Avoid jargon, slang, acronyms.
- Be specific, not vague.
- Use wording that families can understand

Make Sense:

- Be coherent and unambiguous.
- Always record who is involved and their relationship to the child

Keep it up to date:

- Record as soon as possible after each contact/event.
- Follow agency timescales.

Differentiate fact, assumption, opinion and professional judgement

- Fact: Verifiable event
- Assumption: No supporting evidence
- Opinion: Personal view
- Professional judgement
- Opinion based on professional knowledge
- Clearly separate what happened from what you think it means

Be Relevant:

- Include significant information, not everything
- Avoid both over-recording and under-recording
- Link recording to the child's plan and outcomes

Include Analysis:

- Include significant information, not everything
- Avoid both over-recording and under-recording
- Link recording to the child's plan and outcomes

Show Direction:

- Records should make it clear what has happened and what the plan is.
- Maintain a focus on outcomes for the child.

Chronologies

A chronology summarises significant events in a child's life to show patterns of risk, resilience, and need.

- ✓ Only include significant positive or negative events.
- ✓ It must be succinct, factual, and child-focused.
- ✓ Record the impact of each event on the child, not just dates.
- ✓ Avoid gaps; ensure events link logically.
- ✓ Chronologies must be reviewed and analysed to be useful.

Report Writing

Key Principles:

- ✓ Know the purpose of your report.
- ✓ Plan your structure and key points before writing
- ✓ Check all details for accuracy (names, dates, spelling).
- ✓ Use case records – do not rely on memory.
- ✓ Avoid duplication
- ✓ Distinguish your views from third-party information.
- ✓ Share reports with families in good time before conferences.

Common Issues With Reports:

- ✗ Too focused on structure rather than content
- ✗ Repetitive, descriptive rather than analytical

What Makes A Good Report?

Written in clear, simple language:

- ✓ Avoid long sentences.
- ✓ No slang, jargon or unexplained abbreviations.
- ✓ Grammatically correct
- ✓ Proofread for spelling, punctuation and word choice.
- ✓ Consistency of names, dates, details.
- ✓ Specific, not vague.
- ✓ Complete the picture without unnecessary detail.
- ✓ Avoid wordiness or irrelevant information.
- ✓ Clear flow, well-organised structure.
- ✓ Conclusions should follow naturally from earlier sections.
- ✓ Labelling or vague terms (e.g. "low ability", "unresponsive") are unhelpful.
- ✓ Explain what you observed and why it matters.
- ✓ Include analysis – not a list of problems
- ✓ Show significance, meaning and implications for the child.