

What is record keeping in Public Protection?

Broadly, case recording is any written material in the case files of people who are supported by services such as Social Work, NHS, Social Care or the Third Sector. It covers a range of content, such as assessments, reports, minutes of meetings, chronologies, case notes, records of visits.

Record keeping in Public Protection involves:

- Recording what the concerns are.
- Noting how these concerns are being dealt with.
- Reflecting the views of the child or adult who is potentially at risk of harm.
- Analysis and assessment of the risk of harm.
- Noting the work that is being done to help keep the child or adult safe.
- Recording the life history of the child or adult at risk of harm and how this may be impacting on their life now.

Why is record keeping important?

Recording in Public Protection is important, both to provide an overview of decision-making, and why a particular course of action was taken (or not). It should provide the rationale behind professional judgement. By keeping accurate and detailed documentation, professionals ensure that their work remains accountable, effective and evidence-based.

Record keeping is important to show evidence that policy, process and practice have been followed appropriately, demonstrating professionalism and competency.

Record keeping is important as a means of communicating a person's story and supporting their understanding of their current or past situation.

Without comprehensive documentation, professionals risk missing critical details or failing to track progress and patterns over time, which can impact on their ability to make informed decisions.

Spotlight on Good Practice in Record Keeping in Public Protection



A Significant Case Review carried out by Angus Adult Support and Protection Committee in 2021 in relation to a 50-year-old man found that “Record keeping within the District Nursing service was of poor quality with no reference of self-neglect or poor living accommodation mentioned in any case records. When (*the adult*) changed address there was a failure to record this information accurately in ehealth systems which resulted in some professionals visiting an address that (*he*) no longer lived at and (*him*) missing appointments and being identified as ‘disengaging’.”

How might records be used?

You might be asked to provide case notes to help inform Child Protection investigations or Adult Support and Protection inquiries, and decisions about risk and protection plans. These records might be used to feed into chronologies, or to help multi-agency professionals have a discussion at a Planning Meeting or Case Conference.

Other professionals may ask you to share information held in your records with them. Professionals should ask for what is proportionate and relevant for them to know.

Records may be used as evidence in court, in criminal or civil proceedings, including for example, in Children’s Hearings proceedings to establish grounds for referral or in permanence proceedings.

Records may be used to inform Learning Reviews or other types of Reviews or Inquiries.

Case records of core agencies (including Police, Social Work, Health, Education) are reviewed during external inspections to assess the quality of practice, process and partnership working.

An individual may seek to access their records later in life, to help them understand what happened to them and why. Many care experienced adults turn to case records created about them by professionals to reconstruct and understand their personal history. Bear this in mind when creating any record and think about tone, language and detail.

Key tips for good practice in record keeping

- Avoid jargon and if using acronyms, provide explanations of what they mean so that others reading your records after you understanding what you are referring to.
- Distinguish between facts and opinions. Good records contain both facts and opinion, but it must be clear which is which.
- Be sure to include to wishes, feelings and views of the person who you are writing about.
- Ensure you have got basic details right, for example, the correct spelling of a person's name, the right address, next of kin.
- Be sure to include any reasons for taking a particular course of action, and just as importantly, any reasons for not taking any further action.
- Record any referrals made or received and the reasons for them, including any follow-up action.
- When a case is closed to your service record how you came to work with the person, what action has been taken and when and why you are closing the case.
- Recording should be accountable, but not defensive as this can make the writing less centred on the person and more oriented to the organisation.
- Recording should be timely – essential for accuracy and supporting information sharing, assessment and decision-making.
- Write for the person who you are writing about and for the next person who may read your record. Would your narrative make sense to them?
- Ensure you are familiar with your organisation's policy and procedure on record keeping. Ensure you are up to date with your learning on GDPR, which provides the basis for you to share information when required to identify children or adults at risk of harm.
- As a manager, ensure that you regularly review a worker's case records to assess compliance with your organisational policy and procedure on record keeping. Make time in supervision to feedback, highlight strengths and areas for improvement in recording.
- As a worker, seek feedback from your manager about the quality of your case records.

