Keeping the Neglected Child in Focus in Child Protection Conferences

Helen Richardson Foster


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The challenge of Child Protection Conferences

Multi-agency work  Group dynamics

Right forum for analysis?  Consensus

Limited research  Planning

Family participation
The Challenge of neglect conferences

- Multi-factorial
- Practitioner domain
- Start again syndrome
- Rule of optimism
- Incident driven
- Neglect most difficult for practitioners
- Parents more likely to be difficult to engage
## Discussion of daily life

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Large sibling groups

- More time
- Less time for planning
- Focus on older children with difficulties
- More practitioners
- Many reports
Representation of children’s views

- Children’s participation in conferences
- Work with children prior to conference
- Representation of views in reports
Parents

Non attendance  Avoidance  Dominating needs
Naming neglect

- “I think, well, it’s better if it’s spelt out, because it’s just a word that people put their own interpretation on and I think you know it is quite hurtful to hear, you’re neglecting your kids.” (Chair 6)
Planning

- Limited time for discussion in conference
- Styles of planning styles:
  - parent-focused (7/14)
  - no concerns (3/14)
  - child focused (4/14)
- Roles of the Chair and the core group


Ofsted (2014) In the Child’s Time: Professional Responses to Neglect. London


Keeping the Neglected Child in Focus in Child Protection Conferences

Helen Richardson Foster

Session Overview

- Child Protection Conferences in Cases of Neglect
- Making Sense of The Child’s Lived Experience, a PhD study
- How do the findings relate to your practice?
The challenge of Child Protection Conferences

- Multi-agency work
- Group dynamics
- Right forum for analysis?
- Consensus
- Limited research
- Planning
- Family participation
Child protection plans

• Vague actions: what is an outline plan?
• Lack of clarity regarding timescales
• Negotiable and non-negotiable
• Focus of plan:

The Challenge of neglect conferences

- Multi-factorial
- Practitioner domain
- Start again syndrome
- Rule of optimism
- Incident driven
- Neglect most difficult for practitioners
- Parents more likely to be difficult to engage
Making Sense of the Child’s Lived Experience in Cases of Neglect
Background

‘the child is a person and not an object of concern’
(Dame Bulter-Sloss, CM 412, 1988 p245)

failure of workers to “assemble and analyse information .....through the eyes of the child” (Lord Laming CM 5730, 2003 4.189, p69)

...too often the focus on the child was lost; adequate steps were not taken to establish the wishes and feelings of children and young people; and their voice was not heard sufficiently. (Ofsted, 2011)
Research Questions

- Who shares what information about a child and their family at a child protection conference?
- To what extent is information about parenting capacity, context and issues explored in relation to the developmental needs of the child?
- What difference is there to the quality of information about individual children and their lived experience if more than one child in the family is discussed at the conference?
- How has information been obtained and presented about the child’s experience, wishes and feelings?
Research Questions /2

- If the child is present at the conference, to what extent are they given a voice?

- To what extent do conference members provide information about the day in the life of the child?

- What information is used to inform the content of the child protection plan?

- What promoters and inhibitors do the workforce identify in relation to maintaining a child focus?
Methodology

1. Conference data
   - Audio recording and documentary analysis.
   - Conferences with neglect as main concern/category
   - 14: 3 ICPCs, 11 reviews
   - In 1 LSCB area

2. Interviews with conference staff
   - Conference chairs, managers, minute takers and their supervisors
   - 26: 9 chairs, 13 minute takers, 2 managers, 2 supervisors
   - In 2 LSCB areas

3. Focus groups
   - Staff from all agencies who attend conferences
   - 6 groups: 35 participants
   - In 2 LSCB areas
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Conference Type</th>
<th>11 reviews, 3 initial conferences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Review:</td>
<td>3- 24 months, average of 9.5 mo</td>
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<th>Family type:</th>
<th>6 ‘baby only’ conferences</th>
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<td>5 large families of 4+ children</td>
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| Family attendance:   | 12 mothers, 5 fathers, 3 teenage children |

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<th>Practitioners:</th>
<th>2 - 13, average of 10</th>
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<td>Length:</td>
<td>35min -2 h 8 min, average 1 h 17 min</td>
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All previously known to Children’s Social Care

Predominantly White British

Parents: domestic violence, drug and alcohol use, mental health difficulties, learning difficulties, physical health

Children: Autism, offending
What information is shared in conferences?
Information shared

Self-care skills

Health

Education

Emotional/behavioural

Family functioning

Wider family

FAMILY & ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

CHILD
Safeguard & promote welfare

CHILD'S DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

PARENTING CAPACITY

Guidance & boundaries

Social presentation

Identity

Income

Employment

Community resources
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Large sibling groups

- More time
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- Focus on older children with difficulties
- More practitioners
- Many reports
Exercise 1: 5 minutes

• What strategies do you have to ensure good information sharing about individual children at conferences?
• How could you incorporate more information about the child’s daily life?
Family participation in Conferences and the focus on the child
Representation of children’s views

- Children’s participation in conferences
- Work with children prior to conference
- Representation of views in reports
Parents

Practitioners’ views:

Sometimes the parents get so locked in to, particularly on initial conferences, into the battle with professionals to prove their innocence etc. that actually they don’t want to talk about the child at all so I think it’s more often the parents that divert away from the child.

(Chair 3)
Parents

Non attendance

Avoidance

Dominating needs
Naming neglect

- “I think, well, it’s better if it’s spelt out, because it’s just a word that people put their own interpretation on and I think you know it is quite hurtful to hear, you’re neglecting your kids.” (Chair 6)
Exercise 2: 5 minutes

• Do the findings resonate with your experience?

• How do you manage the needs of parents whilst keeping the child at the centre of discussion in conferences?
The Child Protection Plan & Planning in Conferences
Planning

• Limited time for discussion in conference

• Styles of planning styles:
  - parent-focused (7/14)
  - no concerns (3/14)
  - child focused (4/14)

• Roles of the Chair and the core group
Exercise 3: 5 minutes

- Have you encountered different approaches or styles of planning in conference?
- How can you create more child-focused plans?
In Summary
Summary Exercise: 5 minutes

• What are the three main points you have gained from this morning?


