

National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Webinar: Persistent Themes in Safeguarding Practice (14.10.26)

The [National Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) delivered a webinar exploring three of the [ten persistent themes](#) most frequently identified in Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs). The session aimed to **move beyond simply identifying recurring findings and focus on practical approaches to addressing them in day-to-day and strategic safeguarding practice**. The webinar highlighted the Panel's newly published [suite of resources](#) designed to support practitioners, managers, leaders and safeguarding partnerships in reflecting on and responding to these persistent themes.

Key Messages from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel

Persistent Themes Reflect System-Wide Learning The Panel emphasised that the ten persistent themes have emerged from reviews undertaken nationally and represent recurring challenges identified by safeguarding partnerships themselves. The themes are not new, but their continued appearance indicates a need for more consistent application of learning across the safeguarding system.

Current System Context The Panel acknowledged the significant pressures affecting safeguarding practice, including:

- Workforce challenges and recruitment pressures.
- Growing demand for services.
- Difficulties accessing specialist support.
- Placement sufficiency issues.
- Ongoing reforms across health, social care, policing and criminal justice systems.
- Increasing complexity and fragmentation across services.

Despite these challenges, the Panel stressed the importance of maintaining a strong focus on learning and practice improvement.

Theme 1: Understanding the Child's Lived Experience

Core Messages The webinar reinforced that:

- Seeing a child is not the same as understanding their lived experience.
- Practitioners must continually ask whether they understand what life feels like for the child when professionals are not present.
- Adult engagement with services should not be confused with improved outcomes for children.
- Assessments should focus on whether children feel safe and whether circumstances are improving from the child's perspective.

Practice Implications Partners were encouraged to:

- Prioritise direct work with children.
- Remain professionally curious.
- Consider children's emotions, experiences and daily realities.

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- Use observations as well as verbal communication, particularly with babies and pre-verbal children.
- Focus on patterns and history rather than isolated incidents.

Theme 2: Naming and Understanding Harm

Core Messages The Panel highlighted that:

- Identifying concerns is not the same as understanding harm.
- Harm can become obscured when concerns are considered separately rather than collectively.
- Cumulative harm often has a significant impact, even where no single incident appears severe.
- Clear and precise language is essential in safeguarding records and assessments.

Importance of Language The webinar stressed that language can unintentionally minimise children's experiences. Practitioners should:

- Avoid vague or adult-centred descriptions.
- Be explicit about the harm being experienced by the child.
- Clearly identify responsibility for harm.
- Ensure records accurately reflect children's experiences.

Practice Implications Partners should consider:

- How well assessments describe children's experiences.
- Whether cumulative harm is being recognised and analysed.
- The impact of unconscious bias and assumptions on risk assessment.
- The role of supervision in helping practitioners challenge assumptions and strengthen analysis.

Theme 3: Understanding the Whole Family ("Think Family")

Core Messages Reviews repeatedly demonstrate that children's experiences cannot be understood in isolation from their family context. The Panel emphasised:

- Children often live within families experiencing multiple and overlapping challenges.
- Practitioners can know a great deal about individual family members without fully understanding what life is like for the child.
- Family relationships and dynamics are critical to understanding risk and protection.

Practice Implications Partners were encouraged to:

- Gather and analyse information from multiple agencies.
- Develop fuller pictures of family functioning.
- Consider the roles of fathers, partners, ex-partners and significant adults.

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- Recognise both sources of risk and sources of protection within family networks.
- Avoid relying on a single account of family circumstances.
- Maintain respectful curiosity and professional scepticism.

Additional Learning Themes Emerging from Discussion

Cumulative Harm A key discussion point was the need to:

- Look beyond the latest incident.
- Understand the impact of repeated low-level concerns over time.
- Use chronologies effectively.
- Consider whether professionals are responding to a single event or a child's cumulative experience.

Professional Challenge Speakers stressed that:

- Professional challenge must be welcomed rather than defended against.
- Healthy challenge supports better decision-making.
- Organisations should create cultures where challenge is encouraged and valued.

Cases Becoming 'Stuck' The Panel highlighted the importance of:

- Recognising when interventions are not leading to improved outcomes.
- Creating opportunities for reflection and review.
- Supporting practitioners to think differently when progress stalls.

Key Themes from Participant Discussion

System Pressures and NHS Reform Participants raised concerns regarding:

- NHS workforce pressures.
- Fragmented systems and policies.
- Potential impacts of health reforms on safeguarding practice.

The Panel acknowledged these concerns whilst emphasising that alongside systemic issues, safeguarding outcomes can also improve through better information sharing, chronology building and multi-agency analysis.

Applying Learning Consistently Discussion focused on why recurring themes continue to appear within reviews. The Panel's view was that the issue is often not a lack of learning but challenges in implementing and sustaining learning consistently across organisations and partnerships.

Consent and Information Sharing The role of information sharing was highlighted, including:

- Delays caused by uncertainty around consent.

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- The potential benefits of the new information-sharing duty in supporting more timely safeguarding decision-making.

Poverty and Wider Determinants Participants highlighted:

- Poverty.
- Housing difficulties.
- Financial hardship.
- Food insecurity.
- Social isolation.

The Panel acknowledged that wider socio-economic factors influence many safeguarding concerns and noted growing consideration of these issues within national learning and review processes.

Neglect and Safeguarding Language Discussion highlighted the importance of:

- Developing consistent language around neglect.
- Better recognition of educational, medical and supervisory neglect.
- Focusing on the child's experience rather than service-specific terminology.

Reflection

1. How effectively is the child's lived experience evidenced in assessments, plans and reviews?
2. Are cumulative patterns of harm being recognised and responded to? *'Am I only responding to today's incident, or am I considering the cumulative history?'*
3. Does local practice clearly identify and describe harm?
4. How effectively are agencies [sharing](#), analysing and triangulating information?
5. Do practitioners feel supported to [challenge and escalate](#) concerns?
6. How are wider contextual issues such as poverty, housing and inequality considered within safeguarding practice?
7. Are recurring review findings resulting in measurable practice change?

For Strategic Leaders/ Partnership; [Persistent themes in CSPRs](#)

Resources The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel has published a [suite of resources](#) on all ten persistent themes. Safeguarding partnerships are encouraged to use these resources within strategic discussions, workforce development activity, supervision, audits, learning reviews and multi-agency training.

The central message from the webinar was that ***safeguarding partners must move beyond recognising recurring themes and focus on ensuring that learning is consistently translated into practice that improves children's experiences and outcomes.*** The child's lived experience should remain the "golden thread" running through all safeguarding activity.

Please take a minute to complete this [survey](#); tell us if this briefing was useful!