

Learning from the Partnership Learning Review: A Child's Identity Needs

Summary of the case reviewed:

This summary highlights the key learning points from a Partnership Review concerning a teenage Child who attempted to take their life. The review considers the Child's complex social and psychological needs alongside their gender identity.

The Child and their family received early help support from Education, Health, Police and Children's Social Care during the period under Review. The Review considers the family and professionals' responses (and struggles at times) on how best to support the Child during times of crisis and during longer term work.

A single agency Serious Incident Investigation (SII) was undertaken by Health following the significant injuries sustained.

Findings:

The review found no evidence to suggest that any organisations could have predicted the outcome for the Child, although increasing family stress factors and risks to well-being were known by individual agencies.

The review shows that if levels of need had been identified earlier, and progressed as requiring statutory assessment and intervention, risk could have been managed differently by professionals and the family situation may have been supported, e.g. if the partnership had working more effectively and the Child had been more involved in decisions impacting on their day to day life.

- Multiple factors including gender identity, mental health needs, previous family traumas, and physical ill-health impacted on family dynamics, parenting capacity and the Child's well-being and safety. These were not considered holistically within multi-agency systems as the situation was not deemed to have reached a statutory level for continuing multi-agency assessment.
- Practitioners working with the family failed to determine the level of risk and need for the Child. There were two differing sets of views within the multi-agency group of professionals about the worries and strengths in the family and this split impacted on the ability to work well together. It is likely that the focus was lost on hearing the Child's voice and ensuring their involvement in assessment and identification of needs and levels of risk.
- During the Review period the Child increasingly stated that they were not happy at home. At times focus on their wishes and feelings was lost, so that they were not effectively supported to understand other options available to them, and to participate in decisions made about them. Similarly, family members also expressed views that they were unable to keep the Child safe towards the end of the Review period. It is likely that professionals struggled to meet the needs of the Child and their family given the family complexities, as local gender identity support was limited and there were long waiting lists for national specialist input from the Tavistock Clinic.
- Attending school each day was a safety factor for the Child, support was good during term time and holidays were correctly highlighted as a period of reduced support and increased risk. A coordinated multi-agency discussion and response was formulated by Early Help professionals during this time, but the Child missed the daily school contact. This raises important considerations about ensuring young people are involved and clear with the plans for any periods of time when there are gaps in their regular support systems.

Key messages:

The following key themes were identified in individual agencies and when working together during this period of time.

- Keeping a relentless focus on what young people are saying and effectively involving them in decisions which impact on their lives
- Giving consideration to a young person's identity needs and understanding the implications of family dynamics and parenting on well-being and safety
- Effective partnership working to determine the thresholds of need and risk
- School attendance as a safety factor for young people and any gaps (such as school holidays) need to be assessed and planned for with them

Themes in common with other Oxfordshire case reviews:

- Understanding the child's world
- Effective multi-agency working
- Assessing identity needs

Strengths in practice:

- Effective relationship building with the Child by key professionals, e.g. the child's wishes and feelings were listened to and heard by the school health nurse Designated Safeguarding Lead and Early Help Practitioner
- The Child felt they had trusted adults outside the family in whom they could confide and who would act as advocates
- At times of crisis, the Child and family were responded to quickly and efficiently and immediate safety plans put in place
- School records clearly cited risk
- The Child felt able to explore their gender identity with key professionals and was given support and advice

Learning points for practitioners:

- All **assessments** should capture the child's world, including how they see themselves & their gender identity - have you considered their feelings and wishes / their beliefs/ what they like / what they don't / what they think about their day to day life? Use their own words and consider writing to them
- All types of **plans** should ideally be worked out with the Child and their family following your assessment - this results in more effective outcomes for the child and ensure working WITH families

Learning point for managers:

- **Effective communication and challenge** are essential to effective partnership working and safeguarding systems. Promote this approach in your Teams and use the [Resolving Multi-Agency Professional Disagreements and Escalation Policy](#) to support conversations if required
- **Support to Staff:** know your policy and procedures when a significant incident occurs for a child or a member of staff. Ensure the Agency response and support is in place for all

Take the time to reflect.....

Assess & analyse needs/risks so that the right level of support and intervention is given at the right time. Needs and risks change, and these should be responded to in a timely way.

Refer to the Levels of Intervention Windscreen for further guidance - [Threshold of Needs Windscreen](#)

Learning points for the safeguarding system:

- Ensure there is a clear and effective local pathway for young people with gender identity issues and when needed, referrals to specialist services are made in a timely manner. Safeguarding in Education subgroup to lead on communicating the pathway across education settings
- The OSCB reviews the procedures agreeing and undertaking multi-agency reviews to ensure work commences with partner agency practitioners and managers in a timely manner

If you do one thing.....

Invest in building effective relationships with children, their families and one another across the partnership. See *Thematic Review on understanding a child's world*

Keep the focus upon working WITH and not doing to or for others, where difference of opinion is heard, and plans worked out together.

Did you know? The following links offer useful further information and resources when working with gender identity:

- [oxme](#): info for young people on sexuality and gender identity
- [TOPAZ](#): safe space for Oxfordshire young people to explore their feelings, sexuality and identity
- [My Normal](#): inclusive group for Oxfordshire LGBTQIA+, disabled young people and allies aged 13-25
- [InSite Schools Transgender and gender questioning](#): national links and resources
- [Ditch the Label](#): resources to use when tackling gender stereotypes
- [Schools Out](#): Offers practical advice, resources (including lesson plans) and training to schools on LGBT equality in education
- [Stonewall](#): Resources to help schools, colleges and other settings ensure they are LGBT inclusive
- [Mermaids](#): Provide family and individual support for teenagers and children with gender identity issues