

Report offers new guidance on family involvement of child abuse case reviews

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Child protection professionals are to be offered new guidance on how best to involve families in the case reviews that follow the death or serious injury of a child as a result of abuse or neglect.

A report being launched today will reveal the results of a study led by experts at The University of Nottingham and commissioned by the British Association for the Study and Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (BASPCAN).

The research explored the personal experiences of both professionals and families to make recommendations on best practice in this challenging area.

Kate Morris, Associate Professor in [Social Work](#) at the University's Centre for Social Work, said: "This research provides a unique insight into the challenges and opportunities presented by the involvement of families in case reviews.

"The report provides specific practice suggestions, including an advice sheet for families. The high level of interest expressed already by practitioners, policy makers and user-led organisations indicates the value of this research and the resulting report."

Catherine Powell, Chair of BASPCAN, added: "BASPCAN has been pleased and privileged to support this important work. Many of our members have been (or will be) involved in case reviews and this report

rightly reflects the crucial importance of taking into account the lived experiences of the child and their [family](#).

"The participative nature of this research, and the engagement of families, practitioners, academics and policy makers from across the UK has challenged the status quo and the final recommendations are a powerful force for change and improvement."

Currently in the UK there are expectations in policy and practice guidance that families should be involved in serious case reviews following the death or injury of a child in that family where abuse or neglect is suspected.

However, there is little guidance about how this should occur and to date no research has been conducted on family experiences of involvement.

The study, which also involved collaboration from Marion Brandon at the University of East Anglia and Paul Tudor, an independent safeguarding advisor, identifies the principles that should support family involvement, irrespective of the review model used, and the practices necessary to ensure this involvement works for everyone.

Families and professionals both acknowledged the need for sensitive communication and practice that demonstrated care for the family's grief and empathy with their lives. Families also wanted to know that the review was going to make a difference and wanted to be kept informed about the reviews progress and to have access to the learning and proposed plans for change beyond just the executive summary.

Evidence from both parties made clear that successful family involvement is not a single event but a phased process that needs careful planning and skilful handling.

The principles to underpin family participation in reviews include:

- clarity about the purpose of family involvement in the review, set out in a way that is clear and easy to understand
- transparency about the limits and opportunities of participation which should be established very early on in the process
- careful negotiation about the terms of engagement for family involvement in each review
- sensitivity and professional judgement about the best approaches to facilitate family participation
- feedback from family members so there can be evaluation and development of the process

The report offers guidance to professionals, which could be used to underpin the policy adopted by Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB) and the working practices of child protection professionals, and a brief information sheet for families who may be asked to participate in case reviews.

As one LSCB commented: "One of the greatest challenges for LSCBs is how we engage families both effectively and sensitively in the Serious Case Review process. This thought provoking research provides for the first time an insight to what the process is like from the perspective of the family and from this develops practice guidance that will be a become an invaluable resource."

The report suggests that unless local policies make clear the purpose for participation, [family involvement](#) will continue to be an area of practice that can be difficult and, at times, unsatisfactory.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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