

Safeguarding Children Practice Review – Child I1

Background

Child I1 was born in 2018, at the time his mother was 18 years old. Child I1's Mother has struggled to parent Child I1 resulting in a child protection plan being arranged for him.

Mother, is understood to be a victim of Child Sexual Abuse herself, she became a Cared for Child (looked after) and there were indications of sexual exploitation of her by friend (who is suspected of exploiting other children)

In March 2020, Mothers friend was arrested for sexual assault on 4 boys and bailed with conditions including:-
Not to have any unsupervised contact with any child under the age of 18 without their parents being present and only after being risk assessed and approved by children's services.

The friend was re-arrested August 2020 for Sexual activity /Sexual assault of a child under the age of 16 and /Child abduction due to new evidence. they were bailed following this arrest and the bail conditions remained in force until December 2020. Conditions were then removed following review by the Police. However, the friend remained "under investigation".

Themes

Unexplained Injuries

Child I1 had a number of unexplained injuries throughout there life. It was thought Child I1 had Von Willebrand Disease (a blood clotting disease) which would explain the bruising they incurred. It was later discovered through medical testing that child I1 did not have the disease.

Hidden Males

There is information that indicates the friend remained in close contact with mother and Child I1 following the arrest in march 2020. It is known that in late May 2022, they all took a holiday abroad together which included Child I1. At this point, the friend was under investigation for child related offences, although not on bail conditions.

Mothers friend was part of the Child Protection process regarding Child I1, they were described as an 'influential part' of the process. Professionals agree that there should have been a stringent safety planning meeting, including an clear written agreement that no contact should take place between child i1, mother and mothers friend.

The Child's Lived Experience

Professionals believed it was difficult to gain a picture of Child I1's daily lived experience or his relationship with his Mother. He was described as a placid child; presenting as happy and content. He was described as giggly and loved to engage with professionals who visited him. He was also noted to have a good attachment to his Mother. However alongside this there are many descriptions which suspected he was being left alone in his bedroom and his hygiene being neglected.

Disguised Compliance

Mother was regularly referred to as 'vulnerable' and at risk of exploitation from her family and associates. Mother was also described as defensive and resistant, and later her behaviours and responses were described as 'disguised compliance'. It is unclear how these concerns were responded to in terms of the potential risks from mothers friend and Mother's ability to protect Child I1 from these risks.

What did we Learn?

- There is a need for professionals' to have a high level of awareness of the behaviours of predatory individuals, relating to child sexual abuse, grooming and exploitation.
- All professionals must have an increased understanding of and responses to 'Disguised Compliance' ensuring professionals have heightened awareness of the behaviours, to be provided with support and supervision to address and manage this, in order to ensure the focus remains specifically on the needs of the child.
- There is a need for raising awareness of the 'bruising on immobile babies' policy and guidance, and ensure those non-verbal children who are mobile receive the same level of attention – particularly those already subject to CP plans.

What needs to Happen?

- Make sure that all records fully reflect the child's circumstances, concerns and actions taken and all relevant information is shared appropriately.
- Explore the effectiveness of Child Protection/ Child in Need assessments and forums in managing risk and assessing, recognising and responding to Child Sexual Abuse/Inter Familial Abuse.
- Explore the effectiveness of the professional response to Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- Explore the effectiveness of the Voice of the Child in everyday practice.

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