

“Are you listening to me?”

This was an incredibly rare and distressing review where an innocent young man lost his life in October 2020. He was fatally stabbed by his partner’s 14-year-old daughter, Child A.

Child A, who is of dual heritage, had a traumatic childhood. She was a victim of serious assaults, exploitation, neglect and inadequate parenting. The impact of this trauma made it increasingly challenging for schools to manage her behaviour and by the time she was eight, Child A had been permanently excluded from primary school. Although Child A was living in West Sussex at the time of the fatal incident, she had spent most of her life in Birmingham. Child A was the subject of a number of different types of multi-agency support plans, Education Health and Care Plans, Child in Need Plans and Child Protection Plans. Whilst there was undoubtedly significant effort and commitment by many professionals, there is no evidence that the forms of support offered by professionals significantly improved the Child A’s life or reduced the level of risk she posed.

Key Learning

- Risks posed by Child A to all family members in her life were not fully considered.
- Professionals were not looking behind the child’s presenting behaviours and her vulnerability was not fully recognised, nor her risk to others, particularly at crisis points i.e. being permanently excluded from school, being a victim of serious assaults, being exploited, carrying a knife, self-harming, making threats to kill etc.
- ‘The family’ in its broadest context was not understood, nor were the family dynamics, and the family history was not taken into consideration to inform partnership intervention.
- The emphasis was always on the mother’s ‘failure to protect’ her child, rather than offering her support that actually made a difference.
- Key information was not passed on quickly enough when the child moved areas. This led to a breakdown in the continuity of care and support.

Improving Practice

- Look behind a child’s presenting behaviours. Recognise, and act on, signs of trauma and abuse and never underestimate the impact of trauma and abuse.
- Significant adults in a child’s life do not have to be living in the home; consider their strengths and risks too. Family history is ALWAYS relevant. Listen to family members. The best chance of effecting positive change for a child is to understand where the child and their family are coming from.

- In everything you do, single and multi-agency, always ask the ‘so what’ question. What difference is this plan/action/visit making to this child’s life? Are the interventions making this child’s life better and if not, what needs to be done differently?
- When a child moves areas always make sure information is passed on as quickly as possible, to ensure continuity of care and support for the child and family.
- Beware of your own, or others’, adultification bias where some children are seen as more streetwise, savvy and grown up by professionals, losing sight of them still being children. Also be mindful of intersectionality where the interconnected nature of race, class and gender, and other factors, could impact simultaneously on discrimination and disadvantage.

Next Steps

- ✓ Circulate the Learning Lessons Briefing Note to all members of your team. Use the [PowerPoint presentation](#) to ensure everyone understands and is able to apply the learning
- ✓ Watch this short video to improve your understanding of [adultification](#).
- ✓ Watch this short video to improve your understanding of [intersectionality](#).
- ✓ Look out for the BSCP and WSSCP Practitioners webinar (date to be confirmed) where the Lead Reviewer will provide an overview of the learning and steps to improve practice.