

Chapter 7: Investigation and case planning

Consider the following evolving scenario and then answer the questions arising.

Mary, the six-year-old child of Tom and Ann, was found at school with a series of dark bruises on her back. She was examined by a paediatrician who said that they were the result of being hit and that there were some additional fingertip bruises on her arm. Mary said her dad had hit her. When questioned, Tom denies hitting Mary. Ann, whilst not saying what happened, talks about Tom's drinking and problems in the marriage. There are financial difficulties and the family want to be rehoused. There is a new baby, Peter, who is three months old. Ann appears to be finding coping a strain. Your initial conclusion (which may only be an instinctive feeling) is that the current pressures faced by the family are responsible for the situation in which Tom takes out his frustrations by hitting Mary.

1 What further inquiries would you make?

It would be important to seek information from other agencies who may have had contact with this family. Peter should have had a health visitor and there maybe midwifery notes for his birth. Mary's school may have other information about her including attendance records. The police and probation services should also be asked to check their records, as should the Housing Department. These checks are best done with the parent's permission but given that the medical opinion is that the injuries to Mary were non accidental, it is most likely the local authority will consider their involvement with this families as enquiries under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. Consent is not necessary but would be desirable.

2 What, if any, statutory duties arise?

The statutory duty to investigate under section 47 Children Act 1989, namely:
Where a local authority—

(b) have reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm,

the authority shall make, or cause to be made, such enquiries as they consider necessary to enable them to decide whether they should take any action to safeguard or promote the child's welfare

3 You discuss the case with colleagues; there is a child protection case conference. Who would you expect to be present at the case conference?

All professionals who have had involvement with the children, including the social worker who undertook the s47 investigation, Peter's health visitor, a school representative, a housing officer and the local police. Others maybe involved if for example the local authority has child/parent advocates.

4 What questions need to be decided at the initial case conference?

The case conference decides to make Mary the subject of a CP plan. You are the lead professional.

5 How would you explain that decision to Tom and Ann?

It would be important to explain that a child protection plan is designed to provide the family with help so that the children remain free from significant harm and the root cause of the family's problems can be addressed by a multi-professional team (core group).

6 Who would you expect to be in your core group?

The parents, a school representative and the health visitor.

7 What action needs to be taken to record your decisions?

The children in this family will have their own individual electronic records and the minutes of the case conference and core groups will need to be uploaded onto these records. In addition, there will need to be a formal entry on the records for children who are subject to a child protection plan, so that other agencies who may come into contact with the children can be made aware of the existence of the plan.