

**Developing  
Collaborative Relationships  
in  
Interagency  
Child Protection Work**

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# Preface

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This work was inspired by government advice and guidance about interagency child protection work, which always seemed to presume too much. This book does not presume too much – it explores, it explains and it attempts to be helpful and relevant to practice. The first edition was published in 1995 and was informed by all the changes that the Children Act 1989 inspired. The second edition has been made necessary by the plethora of changes introduced into childcare practice after 1997. Thus it encompasses the changes brought about by *Working Together to Safeguard Children* and the *Framework for Assessment of Children in Need*. More important it comes in the wake of the profoundly distressing Inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003) where, once again, the difficult nature of interagency work has been highlighted. Finally it explores the Government's response to the Laming Inquiry and its response to the interagency 'problem' including *Keeping Children Safe* and the green paper *Every Child Matters*.

To illustrate particular points within the text, use is made of a number of practice scenarios. These scenarios are relevant examples of practice that have been disguised to protect the identity of the participants concerned.

Finally, because the majority of practitioners in the child protection system are women, practitioners are referred to as 'she' rather than 'he' within the text.

# Glossary of terms

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ACPC	The Area Child Protection Committee. The interagency coordinating committee for child protection work (soon to become Safeguarding Children Boards).
BEd	Bachelor of Education. A four-year teaching qualification.
best evidence interview	A joint interview of a child (or other vulnerable adult) by a police officer and a social worker often concerning sexual abuse.
breached	The re-calling to court of an offender who has breached a community court order (probation service).
case	A family, a child, a unit of work (social services).
caseload	A health visitor or field social worker's workload.
Child Assessment Order	A court order (section 43 Children Act 1989) that allows access to children to assess them.
child protection conference	An interagency meeting, held under child protection procedures, to share information and decide on future action.
child protection plan	A plan begun at a cp conference and developed in core groups to coordinate interagency action with regard to a child on the cp register.
child protection register	The register of children, in an ACPC area, who are most vulnerable to abuse.
client	A consumer of the social work/probation/legal service.
core group	The group of interagency practitioners and parents charged with the job of carrying out the child protection plan.
CPS	The Crown Prosecution Service. The agency responsible for guiding prosecutions for child abuse through the criminal legal process.
CQSW	Certificate of Qualification in Social Work. The former qualification in social work.
CSS	Certificate in Social Service. The former residential social work qualification



de-registered	The removal, by a review conference, of a child's name from the Child Protection Register.
DfES	Department for Education and Skills.
designated doctor	The designated doctor with special responsibility for child protection within an ACPC area.
designated nurse	The designated nurse with special responsibility for child protection matters.
designated teacher	The member of staff within the school who has responsibility for child protection matters.
DipSW	Diploma in Social Work. The combined qualification for field and residential social work included in a degree course from 2003.
DMS	Diploma in Management Studies.
DoH	Department of Health.
duty officer	The social worker responsible for incoming child protection referrals (often part of an intake or short-term team).
Emergency Protection Order	A legal order (section 44, Children Act: 1989) that permits the removal of a child to a safe environment for up to eight days.
failure to thrive	An exaggerated form of physical or emotional neglect, in which very young children fail to grow
fieldwork (social services)	Social work in the community (not in a residential or daycare setting).
fieldwork (youth work)	Direct work with young people in the youth service.
first parenting	A special form of preventative health visitor support for first-time parents.
FRCP	Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians.
guardian ad litem	A specialist independent social worker representing the interests of the child in the care process (usually working within CAFCASS).
intake team	A specialist social work team which takes all referrals of new work. Often responsible for child protection investigations.
Koerner	The elaborate system of quantifying and recording the use of school nurse and health visitor time.
LEA	Local education authority.

level 2 or 3	Newly-qualified social workers are appointed on level 2 pay scale and grade, but are allowed to progress to a level 3 grade after a certain amount of experience has been gained. In theory this means that the most difficult cases will be reserved for the level 3 social worker.
LMS	Local Management of Schools (the devolution of power to school governing bodies).
MBA	Master of Business Administration. A higher degree in management, increasingly popular in helping agencies.
MRCGP	Member of the Royal College of General Practitioners.
NAI	This stands for non-accidental injury or a case of child physical abuse (now an old term but still in regular use).
non-abusing parent	The parent (frequently in child sexual abuse) who is unaware that the abuse has occurred.
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications. A series of work-based qualifications of increasing importance in the helping agencies.
office tie	The shared item of apparel that male social workers use when going to court!
opting out	The ability of schools to 'opt out' of the local authority system or sphere of influence.
organised abuse	The systematic (sexual) abuse of children by a group of often unrelated adults.
PAIN	Parents Against Injustice.
parental participation	The attendance and inclusion of the parents of the abused child in the interagency child protection meetings.
PCT	Primary Care Trust
perpetrator	A perpetrator of child (sexual) abuse.
PGCE	Post-Graduate Certificate of Education. A one-year teaching qualification for graduates.
planning/strategy meeting	An informal interagency meeting called to discuss concerns about a particular child before a referral is made.
PQ Award	A system of post-qualification education for social workers.
Professional abuse	The abuse of a child by the practitioner responsible for their care.

referral	A new piece of (child protection) work received by the field social work team.
registered	This means that a child's name has been placed, by a case conference, on the Child Protection Register.
ritualistic abuse	Organised abuse with satanic overtones.
SCB	Safeguarding Children Boards (to replace ACPCs).
Schedule 1 offence	A serious offence perpetrated against a child.
SSI	The Social Services Inspectorate (a regulatory social work body).
statutory case	A case in which a legal order has been made for the care and protection of a child.
TSP	Training Support Programme. An annual grant to Social Services Departments to fund specific areas of training including child protection work.
unallocated	This indicates that, although the Social Services Department are aware of the situation, a social worker has not been allocated to the case. In terms of a registered child, this would mean that the child had no keyworker (usually due to a shortage of resources).

# Introduction

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## This book

Welcome to this book about interagency child protection work! It attempts to be theoretically challenging and practically useful. It is one book among several that are published every year on the subject of child protection, but it does hold one fundamental difference. It is not about child protection *per se* but about the exploration of child protection work as an *interagency task* or effort. This book does not claim, as some have done in the past, to bequeath an ultimate expertise, to be the last book on child protection that you will ever have to read! This book is about facilitating our practice by the better understanding of our system. This does not just include the narrow understanding of our own role, but the wider understanding of the roles of other practitioner groups.

## The need for interagency understanding and cooperation

Child protection work in Britain sometimes seems to be in danger of becoming seen as the domain of the expert. In child protection terms no one expert, or single area of expertise, will ever be enough. To claim that this might be so would be to exaggerate the importance of any one practitioner at the expense of the wider interagency group. We all have our own area of expertise within our own practice domain. These different areas of expertise should complement each other, forming the basis of effective cooperative action:

*it is impossible for any single member of one profession to manage the multitude of tasks necessary in child protection work. As a consequence it is important that the information available from the unique professional viewpoints is combined so that an individual family's problems are understood from a comprehensive perspective.*

(Charles with Stevenson, 1991: 76).

However, we are often ignorant of the expertise of our colleagues and are not good at explaining our own area of expertise to others (Shardlow et al., 2003).

If we compare the child protection process to a game, the decades since the 1960s have seen an increase in knowledge or expertise about the rules of the game, and an increase in the technical understanding of what needs to be done within it. But this rise in expertise has ignored one crucial element in child protection work — it is essentially a team task. Although individual ability, training and expertise are important, the child protection task is not one that is amenable to processing through the sole expertise of one individual practitioner or practitioner group.

Therefore, what good is the most suitable therapeutic facility if the right families are not referred to it? What use is the most advanced form of direct work with the individual

abused child if they are accommodated in an unsuitable, unsympathetic residential or foster home? How effective is the most sensitive handling of a disclosure of child sexual abuse, if the child goes on to be bullied within the court system? Child protection work is a complementary, collective process that needs the positive collaboration of all concerned.

Child protection work is difficult. It can be personally and professionally stressful (Murphy, 1997). It can create considerable anxiety in the practitioner and the agency, who feel obliged to 'get it right' all the time (Morrison, 1997). This work will not patronise the reader by suggesting that there are easy or 'right' answers to the problems that child abuse raises. However, the work will not attempt to 'awfulise' child protection work either. It can be an area of work full of job satisfaction, stimulation and even enjoyment. It will also continue to be a crucial element in how any society cares for one of its most vulnerable groups of citizens.

This work seeks to explore the interagency context of child protection work. It examines difficult areas of practice and suggests possible helpful developments. Without denying the inherent difficulty of the child protection task, it seeks to test the hypothesis that the development of good interagency teamwork is the most crucial element in improving child protection practice.

This book is published at the time that the government is consulting about wholesale changes in the structure of the childcare system (*Every Child Matters*, 2003). However, whatever the shape of new childcare structures, the issues of interagency cooperation and collaboration will still remain.

The book is set out in the following way:

**Part One** sets the context for the rest of the work.

Chapter 1 looks at the definitional problems around interagency child protection work, examines the historical development of such work in the USA and Britain, and suggests some parameters for understanding the tensions in the child protection task.

Chapter 2 examines what the interagency child protection task is, how it is undertaken and how it is coordinated.

Chapter 3 explores the difficulty of interagency child protection work. Its primary hypothesis is that this difficulty is not the fault of the individual practitioner, but is due to the structural difficulties involved in interagency collaboration. The chapter goes on to examine, with appropriate examples, what these structural issues are and how they can be overcome.

**Part Two** takes, in turn, a major agency or group of agencies, examining in detail their role, perspective and pressures in working in the child protection arena. This section includes examples of difficult areas of practice and provides useful general information about these agencies and practitioners.

Chapter 4 is concerned with the differing roles, perspectives and problems of the members of the social services department.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the roles, perspectives and problems of the different members of the health service.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the different roles and perspectives of the education service.

Chapter 7 deals with the differing roles of those agencies and practitioners who are involved in the legal system.

Chapter 8 is concerned with the voluntary organisations and new childcare partnerships that have played such an important role in the development of the child protection service.

**Part Three** explores the individual and organisational paths to positive interagency practice.

Chapter 9 looks away from the agency context of interagency work towards the impact of the individual on that interagency work and the impact of the work on the individual.

Chapter 10 begins to draw some conclusions about the achievement of positive interagency work, examining the differing responsibilities for making interagency collaboration work. It also draws conclusions about how to improve collaboration at different points within the child protection process.

## **Who this book is for**

The whole work aims to be informative for the volunteer, the student, the trainee, the practitioner and the manager. It is based both in theory and practice, but attempts, most of all, to be useful to those currently involved in child protection work. Throughout the text use is made of practice scenarios — these are suitably disguised examples of current practice, used to illustrate particular points in the book. Please use the book in the way that best suits your interest or learning need — either by reading it as a whole or by ‘dipping’ into chapters that have particular relevance for you.

This work begins with a challenge to the reader:

*We all harbour a deep ignorance of the role and perspective of the other practitioner groups within the child protection system.*

If you agree with this statement, you may choose to read on to do something about it. If you disagree with this statement, you may choose to read on to test it out!