



Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board

Joint Visits Guidance

December 2011

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Many professionals in Kirklees visit family homes to conduct assessments, signpost families to local services and support families who may find it difficult to attend appointments and/or take up opportunities offered within settings.
- 1.2. These professionals have identified and shared the benefits of conducting a joint home visit with professionals from other disciplines to broaden assessments of family need and to co-ordinate the delivery of services for families.
- 1.3. Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board has developed this guidance to encourage and support staff to undertake joint visits as part of their work to support children and families.

Benefits of Conducting Joint Visits

- 1.4. Joint visits enable professionals to consider different perspectives of family needs and how these needs might be met. Professionals interpret presenting issues in line with their professional experience and expertise, so professionals from different disciplines that work together can develop a more holistic picture of family needs. Furthermore, having two professionals in a home provides an extra pair of eyes and enables more opportunities for observation, as one professional can observe while the other is talking and vice versa.
- 1.5. This is particularly important for families that are considered to be vulnerable or have complex needs. The home environment is the optimal place for assessing family needs and providing targeted support to address those needs. Evidence suggests that home visiting interventions to address the multiple needs of families are more effective than those that focus on a narrow range of outcomes¹.
- 1.6. Joint visits can also increase the chances of engagement with a range of services – families can have misconceptions about the work of particular agencies which lead to anxiety and a reluctance to engage. If these workers conduct joint visits with those professionals that already have an established relationship with the family, having a ‘friend’ in a worker can help to break down anxiety for families.
- 1.7. Families that see professionals from different disciplines working together know that those agencies are sharing information and working together to support the family. This can reduce the frustration of having to repeat information to different professionals, and minimises opportunities for families to manipulate professionals.
- 1.8. Joint visits are also good for safer working practices. This is particularly important with those families that are intimidating or make professionals feel threatened. An agency may not have the resources to send two professionals on a joint visit, so conducting a joint visit with a professional from another agency is a good use of resources and provides additional support to professionals dealing with hostility.

¹ J Bull et al, *Ante and Post Natal Home-Visiting Programmes: a Review of Reviews*, Health Development Agency, 2004

2. When should staff consider undertaking a Joint Visit?

- 2.1. Professionals should consider undertaking joint visits with professionals from other disciplines as a regular part of their day to day work to support children and their families. They may be particularly useful in the following circumstances.

Families with Complex Needs

- 2.2. Joint visits are of particular importance in those cases where the family has a range of complex needs and/or professionals feel that they do not have the necessary expertise to consider the impact of issues or behaviour. For example, a children's social worker and mental health professional may conduct a joint visit to determine the nature of a parent's mental health condition and if this poses any risk to children living in the house.
- 2.3. Some families with complex needs need interventions from a number of services and, as a consequence, have a lot of appointments and professional visits to their home. For these families, it is important to co-ordinate home visits to ensure that families feel supported by agencies and less overwhelmed by the range of professional intervention in their family lives.

Introducing New Services or Professionals

- 2.4. Joint visits are a useful and less threatening way to introduce new professionals to a family. For example, a health visitor that has an established relationship with a family could conduct a joint visit with an outreach worker from a local children's centre to introduce the family and foster trust with the new worker.

Hostile or Manipulative Families

- 2.5. Some families are hostile or threatening towards professionals visiting the family home. In such circumstances, it is good, safe work practice to conduct a joint visit. Professionals from other disciplines will offer different approaches for mitigating hostility and engaging reluctant families.
- 2.6. Joint visits with professionals from other disciplines will also minimise opportunities for families to provide conflicting accounts and/or manipulate professionals.

Emergency or Crisis Situations

- 2.7. Professionals must follow their own agency procedures for responding to emergencies and seek appropriate supervision and/or management oversight of decision making if unsure of the appropriate course of action.
- 2.8. Such situations may call for the assistance of police or other professionals at a family home to provide emergency protective action to safeguard children. Professionals should consider this in line with their own agency procedures.

3. Planning a Joint Visit

3.1. As a minimum, professionals should make sure that they are familiar with the family and the history of their agencies' involvement before they go out on the visit.

3.2. Professionals should also consider:

- Can you plan the visit over the phone, or would it be beneficial to meet beforehand to ensure you are clear about what the visit is trying to achieve?
- What is the purpose of the visit? Are you trying to complete an assessment, signpost families to local services or offer support/services to families who find it difficult to attend appointments?
- Who will lead the visit in terms of engaging with the parents? Who will lead on engaging with the children? Who will advise the family of the visit and that professionals from different agencies will be attending?
- If more than one assessment is being completed, how will you structure the visit to ensure that you both receive the information that you need? What information is absolutely key? How will you support each other to ensure you get all the information you need?
- Are there any potential issues/questions that are likely to be difficult? What is your strategy for managing this?
- How much time do you have to complete this visit? How will you make sure that your visit does not overrun?
- Is there any evidence to suggest that parents, carers and/or children may need additional support to understand and participate in this visit i.e. language support, independent advocacy?
- What are you going to do if the family are not at home, refuse to answer the door, or refuse to let you in? What are the consequences of not successfully completing this visit?
- Safety planning. Is this family likely to be hostile, threatening or aggressive? What will you do if someone in the family home behaves in this way?

4. Conducting a Joint Visit

4.1. Planning your visit well will reduce anxiety during the visit and ensure you are prepared to confront issues as they arise. Professionals should ensure that they are clear about the plan for the visit and follow agreed strategies and contingencies (as far as is possible).

4.2. Clearly, the conduct of the visit will depend on what professionals are attempting to achieve. Agencies will need to follow their own procedures for conducting assessments and providing services.

- 4.3. During the visit, professionals need to clearly explain the purpose of the visit, the role of each professional, and how agencies will be continuing to work together to support the family.
- 4.4. Professionals will need to show courtesy and respect for the opinion and conduct of the other professional; and ensure that any professional disagreements are discussed outside the family home. Professionals will need to resist 'siding' with the family or disagreeing with the other professional within the family home.
- 4.5. Think of your safety and that of your colleague. Make sure you know where the exits are and can easily leave the house. Do not sacrifice your personal safety in pursuit of information or to complete an assessment. If you feel threatened or unsafe, you need to consider the needs of children in these situations. If you are unsure about leaving the children in volatile environments, contact your manager and/or designated professional for advice from outside of the family home.

5. After a Joint Visit

- 5.1. Following the joint visit, professionals should consider and discuss:
 - Was the visit successful? Did the visit achieve what it set out to achieve?
 - If not, why not? For example, if you were not able to obtain all the information you needed to inform an assessment, can you find out the information another way? Or will you need to conduct another visit? What will you do differently to ensure that you get all the information that you need?
 - What are the consequences i.e. do you need to set up another joint visit? Should you advise anyone if you have been unable to gain access to the family home? If you were visiting to conduct an assessment, what are the risks of leaving the situation unassessed?
- 5.2. Professionals may also wish to provide constructive feedback to one another.