

Information Sharing

Fact sheet

Embedding good practice



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Embedding good practice in information sharing

Information sharing is key to the Government's goal of delivering better public services that are coordinated around the needs of the individual. It is essential to enable early intervention and preventative work, for safeguarding and promoting welfare and for wider public protection.

Cross government guidance is available to help practitioners understand how to share information legally and professionally. The guidance and associated materials are most relevant to those practitioners at the front-line who have to make case-by-case decisions about whether and what to share, and for the managers and advisors who support these practitioners.

The guidance has been widely endorsed and well received across all sectors however guidance and training on their own are not enough. It is important that local areas address all relevant aspects of governance, strategy, process and front-line delivery. People at all levels in organisations must understand and play their part in ensuring that good practice in information sharing is deeply embedded in the organisation's working practices. Commitment must be across the board.

How to embed good practice

Many factors influence information sharing practice. Local areas have to ensure that guidance and training are supported by appropriate policies and processes. Activities to help embed good practice could include:

- ensuring that organisation policies promote and support good practice in information sharing at the front-line and that staff feel confident of on-going support from their organisation;
- building an organisational culture that supports information sharing;
- ensuring a systematic approach to explain information sharing to service users;
- ensuring appropriate references to information sharing in performance management frameworks and processes, proactively monitoring performance in information sharing;
- providing access to infrastructure and systems to support secure information sharing;
- providing appropriate training on information sharing for practitioners, managers and advisors;
- ensuring effective supervision and support in developing practitioners' and managers' professional judgement in making information sharing decisions;
- working across services to develop a common understanding of terms and standards in use;
- communicating messages related to information sharing and integrated working to all staff via briefings, information packs, articles in newsletters, discussions in team meetings, etc.

Organisational policies – information sharing governance frameworks

An information sharing governance framework is good practice. It must always recognise the importance of professional judgement in information sharing at the front-line and should focus on how to improve practice in information sharing within and between agencies. The framework should aim to dispel any misunderstandings, for example the role of the Data Protection Act and the applicability of Information Sharing Protocols. The information sharing guidance makes it clear that the Data Protection Act is not a barrier to information sharing.

The guidance also makes it clear that Information Sharing Protocols (formal agreements between agencies) are not required before front-line practitioners can share information about a person. By itself, the lack of an Information Sharing Protocol must never be a reason for not sharing information that could help a practitioner deliver services to a person. This view is supported by the Information Commissioner's Office.

“An Information Sharing Protocol is not a useful tool for managing the ad hoc information sharing which all practitioners find necessary. Most importantly it is not intended to be a substitute for the professional judgement which an experienced practitioner will use in those cases and should not be used to replace that judgement.”

Information Commissioner's Office

Role of Children's Trusts

For children's services, the Children's Trust should take a lead to provide and support activities designed to build the confidence of, and empower, practitioners to use their professional judgement in decisions related to children's well-being; and to foster trust and professional understanding between the services. For example, Children's Trusts could take the lead in developing information sharing governance frameworks that would establish common policies and standards across all organisations within the Trust.

Role of other organisations in supporting good practice

National organisations, professional and representative bodies all have a part to play in supporting good practice in information sharing as well as those organisations that employ front-line practitioners. The exact role will depend on the nature of the organisation but could include:

- references in national occupational, induction and training standards;
- developing sector specific case examples or guidance;
- appropriate references in professional codes of practice;
- providing sources of impartial advice and support for information sharing issues.

Further information

To find out more or to obtain copies of the information sharing guidance and supporting tools go to www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/informationsharing