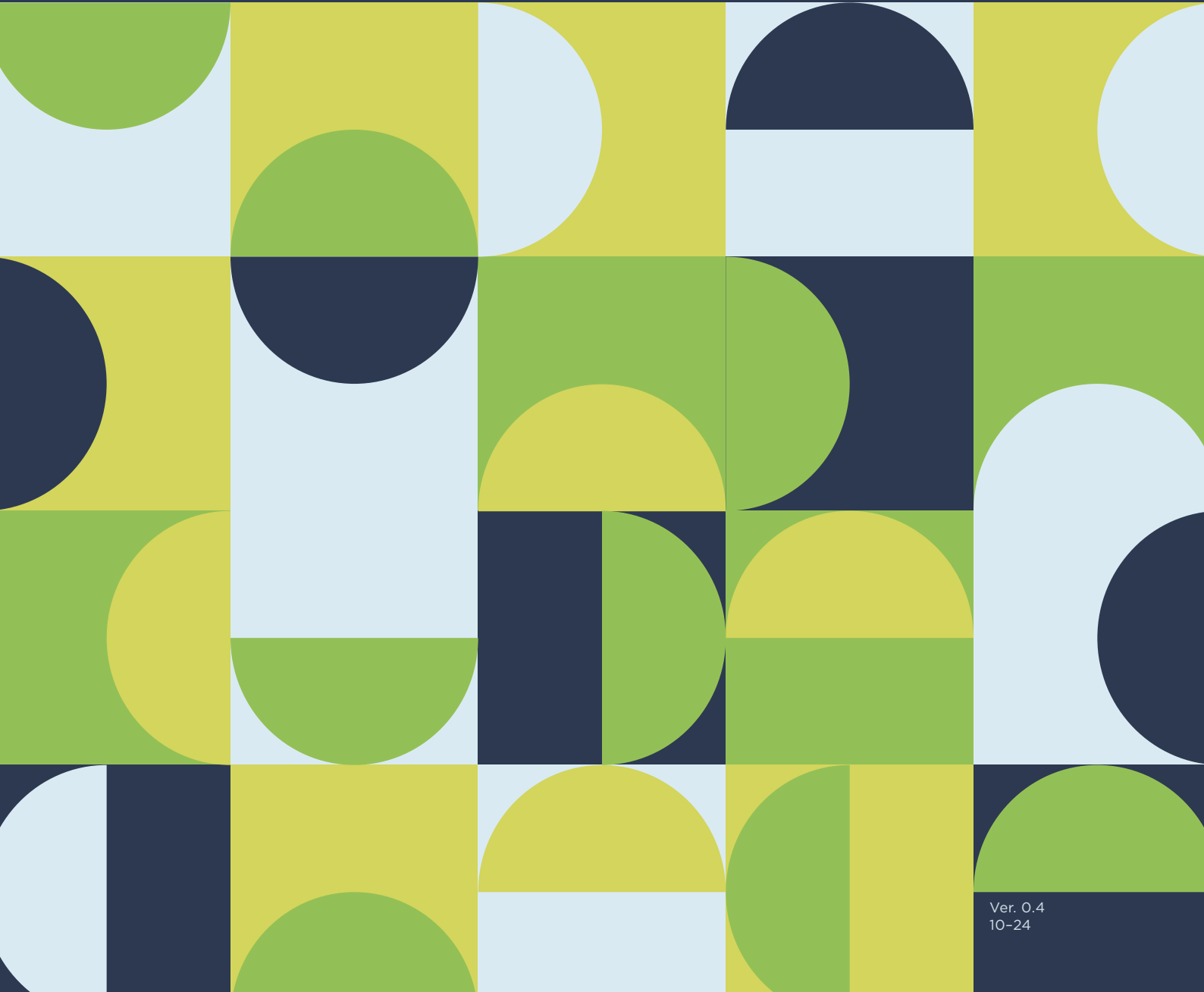# Leading chronology improvement
REFLECTION AND SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

Ver. 0.4
10-24

About this tool

This tool is designed to help leaders to improve chronology practice. 'Leader' in this context means someone, regardless of positional authority, who wants to improve chronology practice. Leaders include practitioners, those in learning and development and training roles, team leaders and managers at all levels. This is in recognition that making change that sticks takes people from different parts of the system sharing clear goals and working together.

The tool was developed based on research into chronology practice in Adult Support and Protection (Iriss, 2023), with key insights from this work incorporated throughout. Feedback from members of the National Implementation Subgroup for Chronologies as well as key stakeholders across the Scottish Government has been instrumental in creating this tool. The scope of the tool acknowledges that chronologies are essential across the lifespan, and enhancing chronology practice requires a holistic approach. Consequently, this tool is designed for leaders working with children, young people, and adults across Social Work, Social Care, Education, Police, Justice, and Health sectors. This tool is not chronology guidance because this already exists both **nationally** and **locally** in some areas. This tool can be freely adapted to align with existing local guidance.

USING THE TOOL

The tool aims to help leaders to assess their current understanding of and practices related to chronologies; to identify incremental, manageable changes and take meaningful actions for improvement. The tool poses questions across

a number of themes to support reflection and help leaders think through the supports and barriers in their context, related to their leadership role. It also offers prompts from research and ideas for activities. Learning from reflections can be consolidated into the 'Better Chronologies Blueprint' (Section 7), capturing why this improvement matters and some first steps.

Challenges with chronologies are complex and connected, so this tool supports leaders to recognise readiness for change and find a place to start. It can be used flexibly, to support individual reflection, team discussions, supervision, or as part of training. There's an opportunity to share feedback on the tool at the end and ways Iriss can help.

The tool is in seven sections:

1. About your role
2. Your chronology experience
3. Picture this
4. Current support
5. Challenges and the leadership role
6. Involving people in their chronology
7. A blueprint for better

There's no set time recommended to spend on this tool. It depends on how it will be used. It may be something to start and return to later or focus on one or two sections at a time. It may be that only one section is relevant to bring into team sessions or supervision. Alternatively, this tool could be used to underpin a series of sessions.

LEARNING PARTNERS

Iriss is offering support to test, evaluate and embed this tool in practice. If you are interested in being a learning partner and piloting the tool, please complete the expression of interest form at **https://bit.ly/48oxn7p**. You can also contact **ellen.daly@iriss.org.uk** for an initial discussion.

1. About your role

1. **Your sector**

2. **Your role**

3. **How would you describe your leadership role?**

4. **What's your motivation for using this tool?**

2. Your chronology experience

1. How would you describe your experience of chronologies?

2. Where has most of your experience come from? (e.g. practice, inspection reports, audit, supervising others)

3. What messages have influenced your approach to chronologies? (e.g. inspection reports, learning reviews, national and or local guidance)

4. How would you describe the culture around chronologies in your context? (e.g. expectations, assumptions, frequency of discussion, reflection and support)

5. What matters to you about chronologies and why?

3. Picture this

Imagine that you wake up tomorrow and chronology practice in your local context has dramatically improved:

1. **What does success look like?**

2. **What are the key features of improved practice?**

3. **What is different?**

4. **Who is noticing the difference?**

5. **Who is impacted?**

6. **How have you contributed to this improvement?**

7. **What one thing made the biggest difference to making this change possible?**

8. **What will sustain this improvement?**

4. Current support

SUPPORTING TEAMS

In *Moving from Current to Best* (Iriss, 2023), managers described how they supported staff with chronology practice which included:

- Raising and maintaining awareness and 'keeping it on the team agenda'
- 'Reminding' about the importance of chronologies
- Training and briefings
- Setting clear expectations
- Encouragement (eg. giving permission, one-to-one support)
- Discussion (including in supervision and with teams)
- Goal setting
- Feedback on chronologies
- Promoting understanding of process and rationale
- Protected time
- Making chronologies required

Reflecting on this list:

1. **How do you support your team / service in their chronology practice?**

2. **How do you motivate and encourage your team around chronology improvement?**

3. How can you help your team prioritise chronologies? What is standing in the way of this?

4. How can you create capacity to prioritise better chronology practice?

5. How do you currently identify and respond to instances of poor chronology practice? How do you manage performance around this?

6. What support do you think makes the most difference and why?

7. **What activities could you strengthen?**

8. **What role do you think supervision plays in supporting chronology practice? How can this support be strengthened?**

Review and reflection in supervision

	yes	no
1. Has a chronology been completed since last supervision?	☐	☐
2. Is the chronology up-to-date?	☐	☐
3. Does the chronology inform the analysis of risk?	☐	☐
4. Is the chronology concise?	☐	☐
5. Is the chronology accurate?	☐	☐
6. Does the chronology contain sufficient detail?	☐	☐
7. Has the supported person (adult and or child / family) been involved throughout the development of the chronology?	☐	☐
8. Has time been planned to read through the chronology with them?	☐	☐

TRAINING

Recent research (Iriss, 2023) highlighted features that would strengthen and enhance training in chronologies. Feedback highlighted that there was a need for training that will:

- Increase practitioner confidence
- Reduce fear
- Make chronologies more meaningful, integral to good practice, not an 'add on'
- Increase peer support and networks
- Increase multi-agency understanding

The research also suggested including content within training that focused on:

- The value and importance of chronologies
- Relevance — what information to include
- Clarity on what is a significant event
- Analysis and recording practice
- When to begin a chronology
- What length it should be
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
- Multi-agency information sharing
- Links to practice development and defensible decision-making of both practitioners and managers
- The needs of different practitioner stages (e.g. student, newly qualified, experienced)
- Evidence from file audits / practitioners as file readers
- Case studies and examples

Reflecting on the lists above:

1. **What's the current learning and development / training provision in your context to support chronology practice? Are there any areas which are particular priorities and if so, why?**

2. **To what extent does the training provision prompt reflection for practitioners?**

3. **What strengths and gaps are there in chronology training? How could strengths be built on and gaps addressed?**

Idea: Shifting mental models
Red / Amber / Green

A perspective we've used in our related work in **recording practice** is using mental models as a lens through which to see how practitioners relate to their writing. Across our work, including **recent research** on chronologies, we identified that some practitioners feel fearful of getting it wrong and being in 'panic mode' (Iriss, 2023). **Paperwork** can be a source of fear and stress.

Numb, collapsed, shut down

- I can't see a way forward
- I am buried under a huge load and cannot see a way out
- I'm exhausted and burnt out
- I will do the bare minimum
- I don't know how to write anything
- I can't trust myself to write

Mobilised, agitated, frantic, panic

- Flight / fight / fawn / fib
- I'm getting overwhelmed and I'm struggling to keep up
- I need to defend myself in my writing by keeping myself hidden
- I will omit information to keep myself safe
- I need others to reassure me that my writing is 'correct'
- I need the safety of others examples

Safe, social, engaged, connected

- I trust that I have the writing skills I need to get started
- I feel able to ask for help and support with my writing
- I am comfortable with writing as a process, and drafting
- I can learn and connect
- I feel able to manage my time

- How could you use the Red / Amber / Green frame to discuss with your team their chronology practice?
- To what extent do these Red / Amber / Green statements resonate with your team?
- What conditions might support a 'greener' state when writing?

Supportive writing cultures

In a workshop on shifting mental models in writing we asked participants to discuss in groups the question: *How could we create supportive writing cultures?* Some participants described 'fear of red pens' and recording under stress. What they thought was needed from a supportive writing culture included:

- Non-judgemental environment to enable writers to 'step back and analyse'
- Support from managers through reflective supervision and adaptive leadership
- Joint working for shared accountability
- Support from peers, good support mentoring
- Guidance and building confidence around expectations and who owns the data
- Consistency in approach to writing
- Keeping in mind the purpose of the writing and the reader
- Involving the supported person (adult and child / family) in writing about them
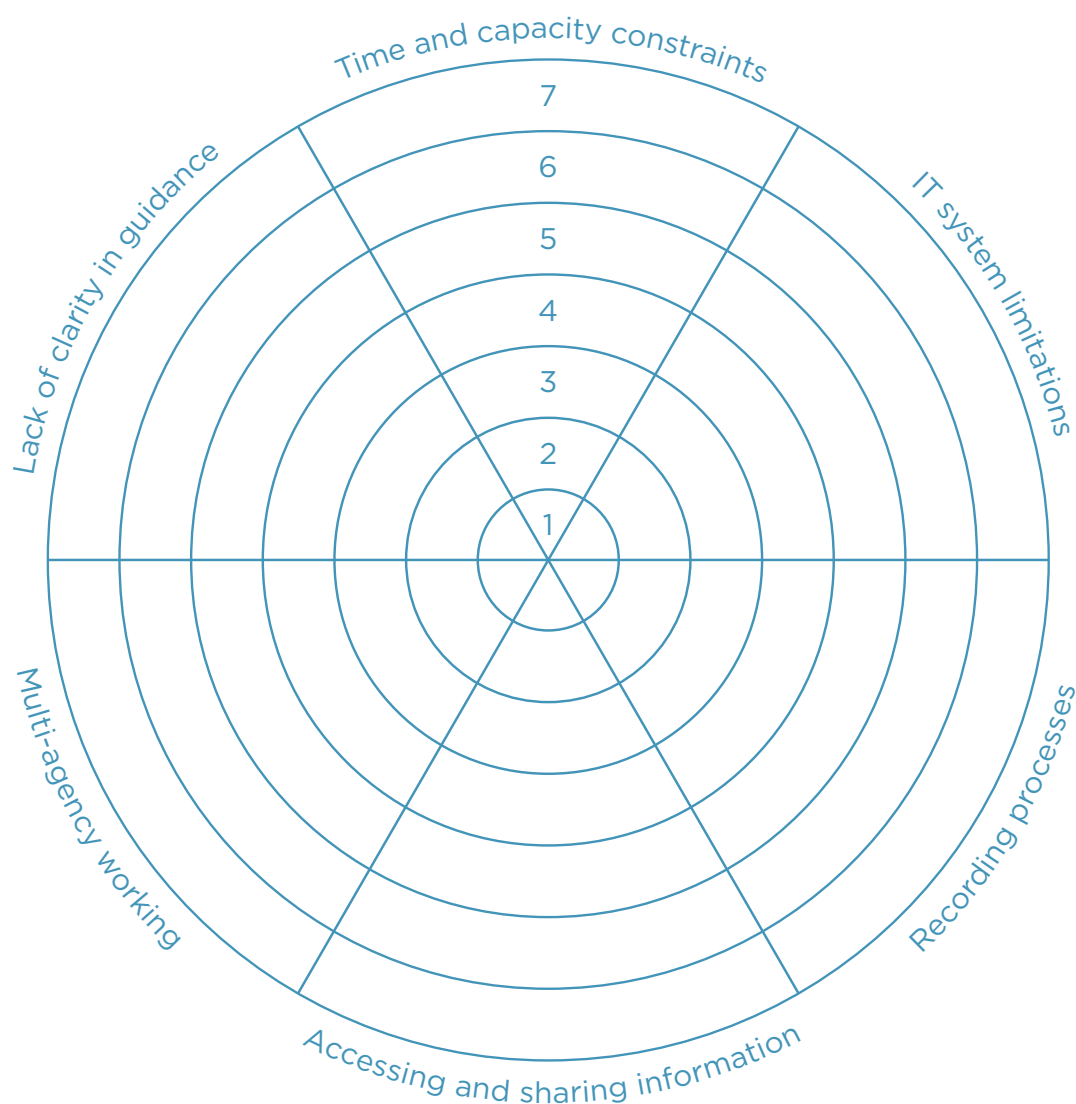- Time and space

Activity

Try discussing these points with your team. What do they need to help create supportive writing cultures?

5. Challenges and the leadership role

The challenges of chronologies are well documented and include:

- Time and capacity constraints
- IT system limitations
- Recording processes
- Accessing and sharing information
- Multi-agency working
- Lack of clarity in guidance

Using the wheel below, score each of these barriers according to their impact in your context.

YOUR CONTEXT: CHALLENGES

1. **If you had to pick one challenge as the most pressing in your context, what would it be and why?**

2. **How would you describe the way challenges to chronology improvement are currently addressed in your context? What's missing?**

3. **How could you in your leadership role begin to address the challenge you've identified as a priority? What strengths, assets or expertise might you draw on? Who could help you?**

4. **Which challenge might represent an area for early success to gain momentum?**

IMPLEMENTATION GAP

Evidence gathered from inspection activity and research suggests that there is an implementation gap where guidance, tools and training don't appear to drive up the quality of chronologies. Thinking about your context:

- Do you recognise an implementation gap for your team / service? If so, how would you describe this gap? What do you think is driving this gap?
- How do you see your role as a leader in addressing this gap? What strengths, assets or expertise might you draw on? Who could help you in this work?

Need inspiration? Read **these examples** of how practitioners are making change.

Process Mapping could help visualise how your team is approaching chronologies, identify levers and pain points through the process. This is about understanding what you and your team actually do, rather than what you think you do.

1. **Define the process**. Is this for single or multi-agency chronology? Is this about starting, updating or collating a chronology? Who's involved and when? Where does the process start and stop?
2. **Get everyone involved** in executing the process in one room. If the group is large, it is good to have a facilitator. This is an opportunity for all team members to come together and share their perspectives on the work and supporting process.
3. **List all the steps** in the process, and then put them in sequence. Listing all the steps on post-it notes is useful.
4. **Draw the flow** between steps using arrows and other symbols.
5. **What do you notice** about the process? Where are the sticking points or gaps? What skills are the team using and do these need further support?

ANALYSIS

Little or no analysis is highlighted in Joint Adult Support and Protection inspections as markers of poor chronology quality. A more consistent approach to analysis was highlighted in our **recent research**. Often, chronologies contain description (the 'what'), but crucially, miss out the analysis (the 'so what') which means patterns and themes may go undetected. The Adult Support and Protection Quality Improvement Framework (Care Inspectorate, 2024) highlights that very good chronologies include analysis of patterns of adverse harmful occurrences, of risk and protective factors.

Think about the following questions:

- What's the role of analysis in chronology writing from your experience?
- What are the benefits of analysis in chronology development?
- How do your team approach analysis? Is there a shared understanding and consistent approach? How might this be strengthened?
- What frameworks, skills and or training are your team drawing on?
- How confident are your team with analysis? When and how do they analyse in chronology development? Where is the analysis recorded?
- How confident are you to support your team with analysis?
- What, if anything, is needed to strengthen skills in this area?

Analysis: A process and a product

Analysis is central to everyday social work practice and involves paying careful attention to what is going on in any situation in order to understand that situation and make recommendations for support. Analysis can, therefore, be thought of as an ongoing process that social workers are engaged in all of the time.

Analysis is also a product, a written record which captures key aspects of all the different parts of the analytic process – the thinking, listening and observing that social workers do. The written record of analysis involves selecting the most important details from all these aspects and writing in a way that makes these understandable to many different kinds of readers. Moving from analysis as a process – a part of almost every moment of everyday practice and involving a wide range of professional skills, intuition and expertise – to analysis as a written product is central to the securing of

services and providing good care for vulnerable children, young people and adults. Producing written analysis can also be challenging for many reasons.

Four key messages about analysis in chronologies

1. A well-written chronology can reveal patterns of behaviour over a period of time which may not have been otherwise apparent. It should be examined to identify the patterns and themes which are the **most persistent**, rather than the themes that have been the **most predominant** in previous reports. This analysis can help to make sense of the present, including current behaviours and reactions of individuals.

2. When the need for a chronology is first identified, previous notes should be reviewed. Analysis of information from the assessment should be **concisely captured within the chronology**. Analysis should include changes that have taken place that may have led to an increased risk for the individual e.g. increased dependency on others or loss of a protective adult. Analysis of information may also highlight circumstances that have led to improved circumstances for an individual.

3. The skills of absorbing and analysing what other people have observed and heard are just as vital to any robust assessment of an individual as the skills of observing and interviewing. This can be challenging, particularly when there is a lot of historical information. **Using the chronology in supervision** (for social work and health staff) helps the supervisee to make better sense of the situation. A supervisee may be prompted and challenged by their supervisor to identify relevant issues such as patterns, resultant harm, strengths and protective factors.

4. Any chronology and its analysis are not just for professionals but **for use with the individual and families as appropriate**. It helps them make sense of their own history and reflect on their own or other people's decisions and behaviours. It may also help them understand the impact on the individual of what has happened. Where appropriate, the analysis itself may even be carried out with family members or checked out with them before being used in any formal report.

Writing Analysis in Social Care offers a framework for approaching analysis in social work writing.

There is further information and prompts for supporting analysis in chronologies for children in this **Practice Tool** (Research in Practice, 2022).

The ASPire Hub **chronology collection** includes examples of local guidance, some of which include prompts for analysis.

LEARNING AND EXPECTATIONS

- How is feedback about chronologies shared in your context? (e.g. from audit, inspection, supervision) How is feedback discussed and learned from? How might this be improved / supported?
- One of the findings of the research (Iriss, 2023) was that expectations around chronologies vary. The research findings suggested that expectations are not well understood locally or nationally. What are the expectations around chronologies in your context? How are these communicated and understood? As a leader, how can you articulate and share expectations about chronologies?

6. Involving people in their chronology

A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

Research and inspection indicate that involving the person whose life events are captured in the chronology is an area for improvement:

> *"One interviewee noted the role chronologies could play as a tool to support a meaningful conversation with supported people about their lives and the events which impacted them... A chronology was recognised as a learning and reflection tool for both the supported person and practitioner... respondents commented it could be used as a therapeutic tool, a point also made in the interview with learning and development colleagues and aligned with a trauma-informed approach." (Iriss, 2023)*

Involving the adult or child in the development of their chronology, helps reinforce that chronologies aren't a paper exercise but a tool for meaningful conversation that supports relationship-based practice. Like **life-story** work, building a chronology involves reflecting on the impact of life events, both positive and negative, and needs to happen in a **trauma-informed way**. These conversations would be approached differently for adults and children. Where it is not appropriate to directly ask a child or young person about their life events, information for a chronology could be gathered from a range of sources (for example, parent / interview already provided, any therapeutic work being carried out) rather to avoid re-traumatisation.

The Adult Support and Protection Quality Improvement Framework (Care Inspectorate, 2024) also emphasises the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach to chronology development.

Conversations about life events for chronology development may also need to be supported by communication tools for those with diverse needs.

- How does your team currently involve the person in the development of their chronology?
- What, if any, barriers exist to doing this?
- How could developing a chronology with the person support relationship-based and child-centred practice in your context?
- How can involving the person help practitioners connect their practice values to their writing?
- How could involving the person in their chronology support analysis?
- What communication tools (e.g. **Talking Mats**) are used in your local context and how might these be applied to chronology conversations?

Idea: Using a different voice in recording

In our work with children's services practitioners, they recognised the shift that happens when case notes and information about significant events in chronologies was written to the child rather than about them. Using the first rather than third person voice helped to support a shift in mental models about writing.

- How might this work for chronologies? How could you test this?
- What impact might this have?

7. A blueprint for better

CONNECTING TO WHAT MATTERS

The aim of this section is to consolidate the learning from the reflection and self-assessment questions into a blueprint that captures why this improvement activity matters and some initial steps. The blueprint aims to complement rather than replace any existing project planning templates you might use in your context. This can be done individually or collaboratively with colleagues and partners.
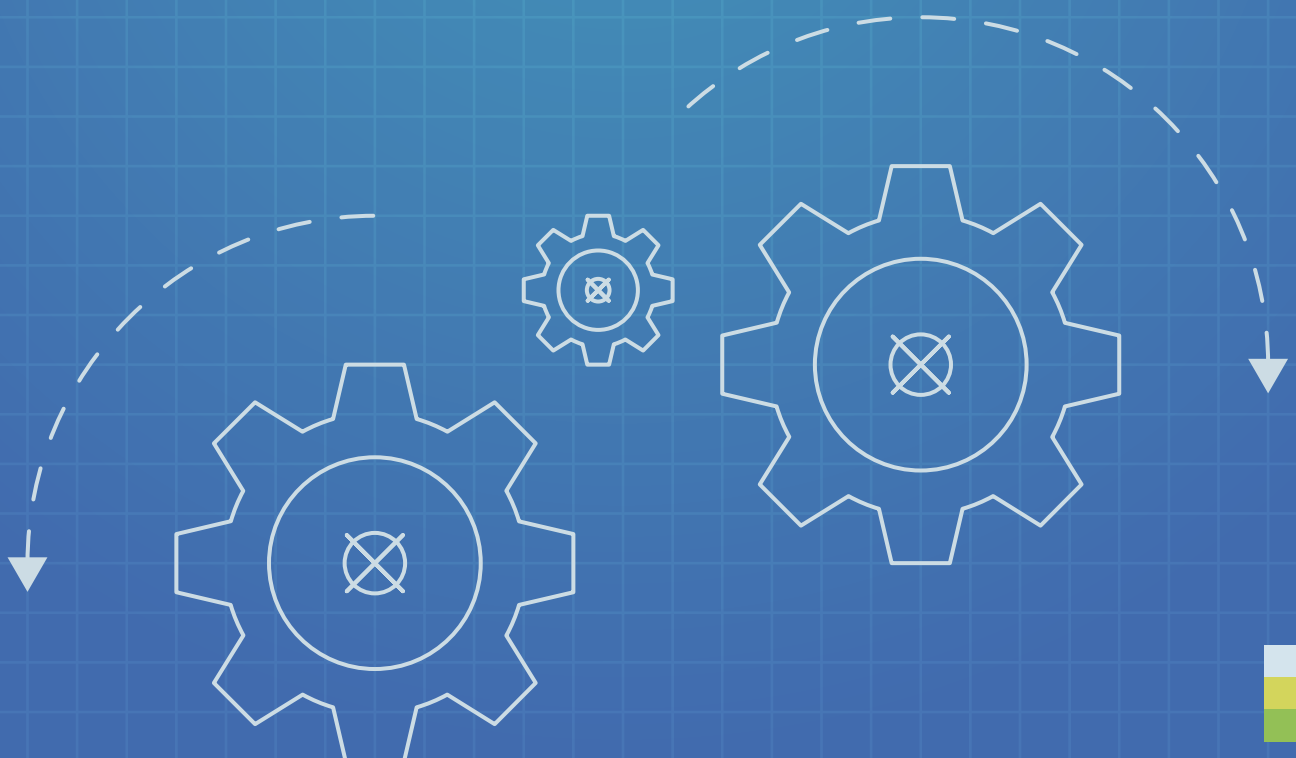
OUR BLUEPRINT FOR BETTER CHRONOLOGIES

Our vision for chronology improvement is:

- What's our guiding principle or 'North Star'?

Better chronology practice will benefit supported people (adults and children) by:

- What does better practice mean to those we support?

We will share this vision by:

- How will we communicate in a way that ensures buy-in from across the system (supported people, carers, managers, practitioners)?

Our rationale and evidence for why we need to change is:

- What sources are informing us? (e.g. inspection, audit, feedback from supported people and practitioners).

Our improvement priorities are:

- List three starter areas for improvement (eg training, communication, guidance, tools).

The culture we need to realise this vision looks like:

- What approaches and behaviours define this change?

The practical and cultural conditions we need for this shift include:

- What do we need for this to work?

The people we need for this change include:

- Who do we need and why? How will we involve them and when?

The leadership we need for this shift includes:

- What attitudes, approaches, activities (e.g. supervision, oversight etc) are needed from leaders?

The mental approaches we need to thrive through this shift are:

- How do we need to think about this differently? What do we need to keep in mind or reframe?

We will know we're on track towards better chronology practice when:

- What indicators and sources of feedback will we use?

Green shoots of good practice and new learning will be nurtured and shared by:

- How will we build on our learning?

Our first steps are:

- List three to five steps to get started.

Share and support

Do you have feedback to share about the tool?
Contact **ellen.daly@iriss.org.uk**

We also offer hosted sessions expanding on our range of tools and their use. Contact **services@iriss.org.uk** for more information and **explore the range of services we offer**.