

A Practitioners Quick Guide to Cumulative Harm



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Cumulative harm is the build-up of harm caused by episodes of abuse, neglect and other harmful or adverse circumstances or occurrences experienced by a child or young person over a short, medium or long time. This can include emotional, physical and psychological harm that is caused by the lack of care and or by the behaviour of parents, carers, other adults, children and young people. It can also be caused by accident and the loss of relationships and changes to primary carers.

Identifying Cumulative Harm	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the child's file. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the harm is caused by the person who is the child/young person's primary care giver or is trusted and loved, the level of trauma increases and is more complex.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to understand the child's history and develop a chronology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated harm compounds and reinforces the impact of the different types of harm for the child/young person.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be focused on the child's whole childhood not just the presenting issues – understand their past and present lived experiences from their perspective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower levels of harm can become significant if frequent.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work directly with the child/young person to understand their experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people often communicate the harm they have suffered through their behaviour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify patterns of abuse, impact and harm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased self-blame, self-hatred and negative thoughts "it's my fault, this is all I deserve, it keeps happening so it must be me".
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the harm that occurs when children yo-yo in and out of services, what harm are they likely to have suffered from when they were without support? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeated harm leads to loss of trust and becoming harder to reach.

Identifying Cumulative Harm	Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start with first, worst, most recent, frequency and duration of the abuse and identify the likely impact of each, when the abuse is repeated remember this means the impact of harm multiplies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a child/young person has managed to tell someone about the harm they have/are suffering and are disbelieved or no safety action is taken, this adds to the harm suffered.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out and understand the likely impact of different types of abuse and neglect, including all types of exploitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased vulnerability and risk of other types of harm including exploitation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify experiences of loss and separation, being removed from parents/cares or losing loving relationships causes trauma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long standing consequence.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the child been subject to prejudice abuse based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion etc? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internalise and externalise harm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include less obvious harm such as bullying, broken lost friendships, isolation and poverty. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted behaviour can be mistaken for resilience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take into account resilience factors, but make sure this is not just the child adapting or internalising. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problems later in childhood can be seen out of context of the harm the child/young person has suffered and they are viewed as the problem or perpetrator only and not as a victim.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accidental harm can also add to harm. 	

What can we do?

- Consider harm from the view of the child – by ‘standing in their shoes’ as well as from what research and practice wisdom tells us.

- Use the Harm Matrix.

- Be trauma informed in your work with children and families.

- Use plain language that is kind, respectful and not blaming.

- Have a clear focus on repair and healing. Consider how everyone around the child, care givers, parents, teachers, family members and friends can learn and help to enrich the child’s sense of worth and healing, as well as specific therapies.

Signs of Safety Harm Analysis Matrix Prompts (in question form)

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> Actions & Experience Time </div>	Timespan	First Incident	Worst Incident	Last Incident
<p>Behaviour</p> <p>The dangerous or harm causing adult behaviour. Can also be a young person's dangerous behaviour.</p>	<p>What is the worrying adult behaviour and how long has it been happening?</p> <p>How many times has that adult behaviour happened over the total time span?</p>	<p>When and what was the first time the agency heard about the worrying adult behaviour?</p>	<p>When and what was the worst event of worrying adult behaviour the agency knows about?</p>	<p>When and what is the most recent event of worrying adult behaviour the agency knows about?</p>
<p>Severity</p> <p>Describes how bad the harmful adult behaviour is.</p>	<p>Over the whole timespan the adult behaviour has been happening, how bad has the adult behaviour been?</p>	<p>How bad was the first event of adult worrying behaviour?</p>	<p>How bad was the worst event of worrying adult behaviour?</p>	<p>How bad was the most recent event of worrying adult behaviour?</p>
<p>Impact</p> <p>Describes the physical and emotional impact of the adult behaviours on the child.</p>	<p>Over the whole timespan the adult behaviour has been happening, what has been the overall impact on the children?</p>	<p>What was the impact of the first incident on the child(ren)?</p>	<p>What was the impact of the worst incident on the child(ren)?</p>	<p>What was the impact of the most recent incident on the child(ren)?</p>