

Communication – Context - Curiosity

The national review into the death of baby Victoria Martin examines systemic issues affecting unborn babies and infants at risk of serious harm and identifies learning for all practitioners.

The review repeatedly stresses the need for proactive, relational, and authoritative multi agency safeguarding practice, especially earlier in pregnancy. Parents must have access to structured emotional and practical support, especially following child removals, to disrupt cycles of repeated pregnancies and risks.

Key Themes Identified in the Review

A. Earlier and Stronger Pre Birth Safeguarding: The review calls for stronger early identification of risk during pregnancy, including clearer processes for unborn child safeguarding. Practitioners must anticipate risk where there is a pattern of recurrent pregnancies and prior removals. Victoria's conception, while not her death, was considered predictable given the family history. Practitioners should:

- Start pre birth assessments earlier.
- Ensure timely multi agency meetings for unborn babies.
- Be alert to patterns of rapid repeat pregnancies, parental avoidance, and unresolved trauma.

B. Trauma Informed Engagement with Parents: A consistent theme is the need for trauma informed practice to reach parents who struggle to engage with professionals. Parents whose children have been removed often lack support to process grief, loss and shame—barriers that contribute to non engagement. Practitioners should:

- Recognise the emotional and psychological context behind non engagement.
- Use relational, persistent and compassionate approaches.
- Do not allow non engagement to halt safeguarding planning.

C. Working with Serious Offenders: The review highlights gaps in managing risks when serious offenders (including sexual offenders) are parents or carers. There is a need for stronger links between children's social care and offender management services (MAPPA). Practitioners should:

- Ensure robust information sharing with probation/offender managers.
- Assess not just the offence but the offender's coercive control and behaviour toward partners and children.
- Escalate concerns promptly when risk pathways are unclear.

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D. Concealed or Denied Pregnancy: Concealed pregnancy was a major theme, with learning about anticipating concealment—especially in families with long-standing patterns of avoidance. Practitioners should:

- Be alert to indicators of concealment (sudden changes in presentation, inconsistent accounts, disengagement).
- Have clear processes for rapid safeguarding response when pregnancy is disclosed late.

E. Domestic Abuse: Domestic abuse, including coercion and control, is a recurring risk factor. Practitioners must recognise its impact on both mother and unborn child. Practitioners should:

- Conduct routine enquiry.
- Build multi agency responses that prioritise survivor safety and infant safeguarding.
- Recognise that domestic abuse frequently underpins concealment, moving and non engagement.

F. Families Who Move Frequently: Frequent moves across local authority boundaries create gaps in oversight and delays in support. Practitioners should:

- Ensure safeguarding alerts are promptly transferred.
- Clarify lead agency responsibility when families move.
- Use national systems (where available) to track high-risk mobile families.

Quick Practice Reminders

Early Help and Support

- Start unborn baby safeguarding processes early.
- Consider historical patterns, including repeat removals and avoidance.

Engage with Empathy and Persistence

- Use trauma-informed strategies.
- Non-engagement must trigger *heightened* safeguarding response, not withdrawal.

Think Multi-Agency

- Share concerns early and robustly across services.
- Ensure MAPPA engagement where relevant.

Assess the Whole System Around the Baby

- Consider domestic abuse, coercive control and offender risks.
- Prioritise the baby's safety above all else.

Track Movement

- Be vigilant when families move—ensure continuity of oversight.