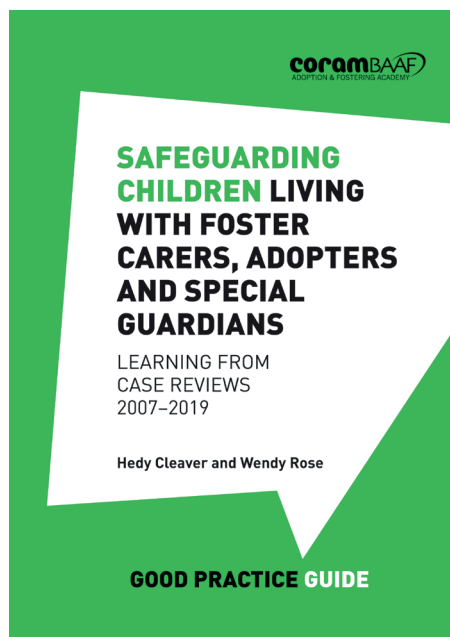


Safeguarding Children living with Foster Carers, Adopters and Special Guardians

Learning from case reviews 2007-2019

Hedy Cleaver and Wendy Rose

Case reviews have played a critical role in helping organisations to improve the safeguarding of children. Since 1988 in England and Wales, where a child has died or come to serious harm, and abuse or neglect is known or suspected, local case reviews have provided useful explanations that can contribute to learning and change.



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This good practice guide is based on a UK-wide study of 52 case reviews concerning 98 children who had experienced serious harm while living with foster carers, adopters or special guardians. The study spans 12 years and is the first to focus exclusively on reviews of cases of children in alternative family care. Consequently, it shines a spotlight on those issues particular to these children – selection and assessment of carers; support for children and carers; and the supervision and management of arrangements.

This study identifies recurring issues of concern in case reviews, including:

- the assessment and selection of carers: exploring motivations, gaps in information, sensitive issues, carer

attitudes, and managing doubt and uncertainty;

- keeping the child at the heart of practice: improving placement planning, reviewing children's well-being, listening to children, and closely monitoring vulnerable children;
- supporting carers: the level of supervision and oversight, the impact of organisational pressures, maintaining objectivity;
- being aware of the assumption of safety in foster care and adoption: reluctance to explore unease, asking questions about an absent child, avoiding manipulation, and maintaining authority;
- effective communication and collaboration: between agencies, including health, social care and education, and clarity about responsibilities to share information between services and across local authority boundaries.

Rich with case examples and quotations from the reviews studied, the findings form an authoritative guide as to what can be done in day-to-day social work to reduce the risk of significant harm and child death. This is a vital resource for social work practitioners and all those involved in the care of looked after and adopted children.

The authors

Dr Hedy Cleaver is an Emeritus Professor at Royal Holloway College, University of London, with experience as a social worker and child psychologist. She was part of the research team responsible for the last triennial review of serious case reviews (Brandon *et al*, 2020). The findings from her research have influenced UK policy and practice in respect to children and families throughout the last 30 years.

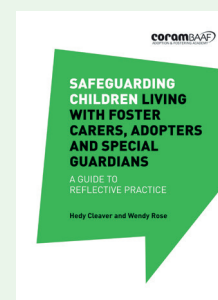
Wendy Rose OBE was an Assistant Chief Inspector at the Department of Health, following considerable social

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work experience. At the Open University as a Senior Research Fellow, she worked on research and development projects, and acted as a professional adviser to the Scottish Government on Getting it Right for Every Child. She worked with the Welsh Government on its safeguarding reforms and as an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University. She has published widely including, with Julie Barnes, the second biennial analysis of serious case reviews (2008).

COMPANION GUIDE



In order to make the knowledge from this study more readily accessible to those in practice, the findings have informed the development of a concise companion guide. The guide

summarises the research and examines the main themes emerging from this study. Within each theme, a series of questions for practitioners encourage reflection and prompt, practical actions, with the aim of reducing the risk to children of experiencing serious harm. This companion guide is not a comprehensive set of practice guidelines or a replacement for professional judgements, but has been developed with the knowledge from the study to assist social workers with the far-reaching judgements they are required to make.

Note: This guide to reflective practice is intended to be read in conjunction with the associated Good Practice Guide. Practice points and questions for practitioners are based on the findings identified in the case reviews studied.

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