Developing effective Safeguarding Adult Review learning events

Dartington
Trust

Contents

Glossary of acronyms

LE – Learning Event

SAB – Safeguarding Adult Board

SAR – Safeguarding Adult Review

SILP – Significant Incident Learning Process

1. Introduction

This practice tool will be useful for lead reviewers, Safeguarding Adult Board business managers, safeguarding review subgroups and all involved in learning from Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs). It can be used as either a checklist and reflection for experienced staff, or as a support to those new to learning events (LEs). It focuses on SARs, but this toolkit may also be helpful when considering LEs for other reviews.

The evidence used in this practice tool came from a Research in Practice survey sent out to Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs) and local authorities in 2019 to gather evidence about their experience of barriers and enablers to effective LEs. Individuals from 47 areas responded to the survey, all of whom had organised or participated in a range of LEs. Some of the online responses were followed up with further conversations.

These responses have been used to develop a set of tools which can be used to help plan and deliver an effective LE, whether as part of a SAR methodology, to disseminate the learning from a SAR or as part of understanding the outcomes of putting the SAR learning into practice.

Safeguarding Adult Reviews are about learning

SABs have a duty to hold a review of any situation in their area where an adult with care and support needs has died or has experienced *'serious abuse or neglect'* and *'there is reasonable cause for concern about how the SAB, members of it or other persons with relevant functions worked together to safeguard the adult'* (*Care Act 2014*, s44).

A SAB may arrange for there to be a review of *'any other case involving an adult in its area with needs for care and support'* (*Care Act 2014*, s44.4). This can include using a SAR to identify learning from practice that has made a positive difference and can be applied in similar situations.

Each member of the SAB must cooperate in and contribute to the carrying out of a review under this section with a view to *'identifying the lessons to be learnt from the adult's case, and applying those lessons to future cases'* (*Care Act 2014*, s44.5)

The purpose of a SAR is to identify useful learning to help prevent similar situations arising in the future. The SAR needs to look beyond records or written reports and explore the financial, legal, political and social context in which the work was undertaken (Preston-Shoot, 2017). How these contexts impact upon the situation under review can best be understood by working with the people involved at the time, by understanding the perspectives of practitioners and managers, and the impact of contextual factors on their thinking and decision-making. Practitioners are often best placed to identify what could change in safeguarding systems, and how barriers to best practice might be overcome.

What is a 'learning event?'

A 'learning event' (LE) can be defined as a facilitated meeting with an invited group of participants held for the purpose of learning. LEs are valuable opportunities for organisations who are part of a local safeguarding system to develop and implement learning from SARs and to reflect on the impact of completed action plans arising from SAR recommendations.

Why are LEs useful?

LEs can be used at three stages in the process of learning from a SAR. There is no limit on how often LEs can be held during the SAR and post SAR process. A LE could be considered during and after the SAR process to support the ownership of the learning, recommendations and actions across the safeguarding partnership.

The three stages of SAR LEs

Stage 1

As part of the SAR methodology.

The majority of recognised SAR methodologies have LEs at their core – for example, *Learning Together* (Fish, 2008), *Significant Incident Learning Process* (Clawson, 2013), *The Welsh Model* (Kingston, 2018) and the SCIE Review in *Rapid Time Methodology* (Fish, 2020), which is being trialled at the time of publication (February 2021). Many SAR lead reviewers use 'hybrid' methodologies which use LEs as well as analysis of chronology or Internal Management Reviews (Preston-Shoot et al., 2020).

Gathering together the practitioners involved in the circumstances being considered by a SAR provides a rich source of reflection. By revisiting the context of the practitioner's decision-making and actions they can avoid the risk of 'hindsight bias', offering an insight into 'why' decisions or actions happened. Participants can reflect on how organisations worked together, how each understood the situation and communicated this understanding, and the power dynamic between those organisations.

The broader context in which practice took place can also be considered. This generates powerful learning for LE participants, as well as for the wider audience the SAR will reach. Participants develop a view of what needs to change to support practice in the future, which will directly inform the findings and recommendations of the SAR. This can increase ownership of the recommendations and subsequent actions that need to be taken.

Stage 2

After a SAR to share findings.

After a SAR is completed a LE can be used to share the learning from the Review and to explore how changes in systems can be achieved. These LEs can be used to build on action plans, or to plan how the SAR learning might be further disseminated and embedded into policy and practice. Post SAR LEs will promote ownership of actions by individuals and organisations and will build on discussions and insights achieved during the SAR.

In the rare circumstances that a SAR is not published it is essential to get organisations together to discuss the findings and recommendations, and to agree how learning will be disseminated and acted on.

Stage 3

One year on – or at an agreed interval.

A LE can be held to reflect on the impact and outcomes of the SAR action plan. Measuring changes and impact is recommended (Preston-Shoot, 2018) and an audit can be a basis for identifying what has and has not changed.

> **What has affected the change process?**

> **Is this a local or national systems issue?**

> **How can partners work together to move forward?**

> **Has the impact of change been as expected?**

> **What more do organisations need to do to embed the learning?**

2.   Key factors to support effective learning events

> *A sense of common endeavour - positive upbeat approach, collaborative, interactive and improvement-focused, reflective and responsive leadership, and the opportunity to network, debate and discuss.*
> (Survey respondent)

Survey respondents identified four key factors that will support effective LEs:

> > Creating a positive learning environment.
> > Planning and preparation for collaborative learning.
> > Facilitation to create the learning environment.
> > Processes which support effective LEs.

Creating a positive learning environment

Survey respondents were clear that a **positive learning environment** is key to how effective the event is likely to be in terms of participation and overall outcomes. It supports a sense of common endeavour and collaborative solutions, generating personal and organisational learning and commitment. The other three key factors support the creation of a positive learning environment.

A culture of blame is a key barrier to an effective event. The challenge of creating an environment where people are open to sharing their experiences and learning from each other without feeling or being blamed should not be underestimated. It is possible to minimise the risk of a blame culture with careful planning, skilled facilitation and inclusive processes within the LE. There are also two significant external factors which will support a positive learning environment within the LE, the existing learning culture within the SAB, and the approach taken in the SAR methodology.

A learning culture in the SAB partnership:
Organisations bring their own learning cultures into events, as well as their experiences of working together. The culture within the Safeguarding Adults Board can potentially support or undermine positive learning experiences. The SAB can hold partner organisations to clear leadership messages about learning, not blame. Some of the survey respondents use a 'just culture' approach within the SAB and to support SARs.

The approach taken in the SAR methodology:
SARs informed by 'systems' approaches (Fish, 2008; Clawson (SILP), 2013), are more likely to support positive 'blame free' LEs. Systems approaches (Munro, 2011) avoid the idea that there is a single 'root cause' of an incident, or that events could have been foreseen (hindsight bias) or that individuals are to blame.
People are 'part of the system because their behaviour is shaped by systemic influences. It looks, therefore, at the interactions between people and factors in the workplace. In the systems approach, people and processes jointly create the system' (Fish, 2012, p.3).
Real learning emerges from using an approach that explores the organisations in which people work, how those organisations work together and the enablers and barriers to good practice. 'Blaming' an individual, or one organisation, is understood as limiting and meaningful change is best achieved through attention to the safeguarding system. Bringing this approach to all aspects of the LE will support the participants to engage in collaboration during the event, 'owning' the actions which result.

Just culture

The concepts behind 'just culture' relates to systems thinking – specifically, that mistakes are generally a product of faulty organisational cultures, rather than solely brought about by the person or people directly involved. In a 'just culture' the question asked after an incident is "*What* went wrong?" rather than "*Who* caused the problem?". A just culture is the opposite of a blame culture (Catino, 2008). A 'just culture' is founded on two principles, which apply simultaneously to *everyone* in the organisation:

1. **Human error is inevitable and the organisations' policies, processes and interfaces must be continually monitored and improved to accommodate those errors.**
2. **Individuals should be accountable for their actions if they knowingly violate safety procedures or policies.**

NHS Improvement has produced a *Just Culture* guide (2018), aimed at protecting patients by removing the tendency to treat wider patient safety issues as individual issues.

People are *'part of the system because their behaviour is shaped by systemic influences. It looks, therefore, at the interactions between people and factors in the workplace. In the systems approach, people and processes jointly create the system'* (Fish, 2012, p.3).

Questions for reflection

1. How are you promoting a positive learning culture within the safeguarding partnership?

2. How is this approach mirrored in how meetings are conducted?

3. What activities support this?

4. How does the SAB know there is a positive learning culture?

5. What indicators does it use to gauge this?

Planning and preparation for collaborative learning

Planning and preparation for LEs addresses two areas, the **practical preparation** for the event and **preparing participants to engage.**

Survey respondents emphasised the importance of getting the 'right people' to attend:

"Grass roots practitioners being supported in honestly and transparently explaining why they think events occurred as they did, in a respectfully challenging environment. Strategic presence is important but those strategic leads need to listen and hear the real challenges faced by their teams in order to truly learn from these events."

Respondents also stressed that preparing participants to engage should begin weeks before the actual event, which also helps to encourages a greater 'buy-in' from them:

"It is important to provide as much information before the event as possible to ensure attendees know what the agenda is and what is to be discussed and reflected upon... setting out the chronology or key elements of the case by way of background – multi-agency focused."

As part of their commitment to learning for the SAR, organisations can support people to attend by:

> Making sure they have time allocated.
> Providing an opportunity to discuss any hopes and fears about the session.
> Allocating a 'supporter' who they can debrief with after the event if needed.

Clear guidance on expectations of organisations from the SAB Chair are also invaluable.

Question	Consider
What is the purpose of the event?	Clarity on *'Why are we meeting?'* and *'How will we know we have achieved what we set out to?'* is essential when conveying the importance of attendance to participants. The purpose and outcomes need to be conveyed to participants in all communications prior to the event.
What are the outcomes of the event?	
Who needs to be there? Who is important? **This may change depending on whether the event is part of the SAR methodology or about disseminating learning after the SAR.**	**During the SAR:** Practitioners and their managers who are expert in the review or operate in similar roles. **Post SAR:** A combination of expert practitioners and managers, and senior/strategic managers who will be able to take findings and recommendations forward.
What can be done to ensure the right people are able to attend the event?	What are the concerns and priorities of the organisations participating? Will they need to cover shifts, or fit their attendance around non-surgery time? How can attendance be made easier? Must everyone attend the whole session? Can the programme be changed to accommodate people? Are there access or inclusion issues? For example, is a hearing loop needed, or an interpreter?
How will the learning event be structured so that the voices of practitioners are maximised?	What impact will the presence of senior /strategic managers have? How can they assist with ensuring the expertise of practitioners is clearly heard, and that they don't feel inhibited?
Where and when should the event take place?	What is the right balance between a venue and time that supports the learning effectively, and one that supports attendance by crucial participants?

Question	Consider
Who will take notes/administrate?	How will the deliberations and outcomes of the event be captured and recorded? How will notetaker(s) be prepared for this? Would a template help, either for an individual note-taker or tabletop note-takers recording feedback from discussions?
What can be done to engage and prepare organisations before the event?	How can clarity about the purpose of the day be communicated to the organisations involved? What preparation and support is expected that organisations can provide to people attending? How can organisations be supported to do this? Will a conversation with organisation leads to agree how people will be enabled to attend, and be supported before and after the event, be beneficial?
What can be done to engage and prepare participants before the event?	How can an expectation of collaboration be set, in order to reduce any anxiety about the event? Are there any specific sensitivities; for example, is there a particular focus on one organisation or practitioner? Consider contacting that person and their manager in advance to calm any anxieties. What should be sent? Consider lack of time to read long chronologies or reports versus transparency in information-sharing to promote trust and reduce anxiety. Are there any barriers to engagement? Do the messages contained within preparation materials convey respect for all participants, and an appreciation of the value of their contribution?
What will be communicated to participants and their organisations after the event?	Tell participants before the event – will they get notes or a report, will they be expected to comment on these?

1. How creative are you when convening LEs?

2. Do you expect organisations and individuals to fit in with your plans, or do you take a creative approach to their busy schedules and priorities?

3. Could non-engagement be about anxiety? Are there engagement strategies you can use to ensure attendance?

Facilitation that creates a safe learning environment

LEs need facilitation by at least one person. If two or more are facilitating, preparation work to promote a shared approach is required.

Events that are part of the SAR methodology need skilful and independent facilitation. This aspect should be considered when identifying a SAR lead reviewer(s), to ensure that both expertise in the matter under consideration, and the ability to facilitate an effective LE, are covered. LE facilitators should be able to demonstrate:

> Clear communication, and calm objectivity.
> Confidence in holding the group to an agreement about working together.
> Knowledge and experience of leading groups of people in collaborative problem-solving.
> Understanding of how to encourage participation from those who may not have had an equal voice at the time of events, or in the safeguarding partnership.

SABs may wish to consider identifying someone independent of the organisations involved to work alongside the lead reviewer to facilitate the LE. This ensures the opportunities to build relationships between agencies or the individuals participating are maximised.

Post-SAR, LEs should ideally also be facilitated by individual(s) who are independent from the organisations involved. This ensures objectivity, and prevents any potential for trust in the neutrality of the facilitator to be affected.

"Facilitators should be inclusive, all attendees are valued and contribute."

"Open and honest, but sensitive- we need a skilled facilitator to manage difficult conversations."

"The facilitator knew the case really well."

"What really helped was being able to identify positives and negatives in a non-threatening, open and positive environment with a facilitator who brings an objective approach to the event."

(Survey respondents)

The language used by facilitators is crucial in creating a positive learning culture. Language and an approach of 'respectful inquiry' will promote trust and collaborative endeavour.

What is respectful inquiry?

Respectful inquiry means asking open questions and actively listening to answers. If a facilitator does this, listens and does not 'tell' or impose their version of events, participants will have an increased sense of 'autonomy' or freedom to make sense of a situation rather than be 'given' the sense or meaning.

There is a positive correlation between respectful inquiry and feeling competent. Respectful inquiry communicates 'we are in this together' and 'I care about you and need your contribution'. Participants may be particularly aware of the potential power a facilitator has in the room, how the facilitators act and what they say becomes crucial in empowering the participant to contribute confidently (Van Quaquebeke, 2018).

Questions for reflection

1. Does the language you use reflect your approach to the SAR or to learning?

2. Are you using emotive language which may evoke feelings of guilt/sadness/anger in participants and impede learning or participation?

3. Are you using terms that might encourage a linear and biased view of events?

4. Have you developed questions that support respectful inquiry?

5. Does your approach promote every participant to engage in collaborative discussions?

Processes which support effective LEs

1: Creating a safe space

Common feedback from survey respondents is that *'A learning culture is important so that practitioners feel able to share their experiences and explain the kind of pressures they face. Participants need to feel able to identify mistakes made as well as strengths in the practice'.*

Survey respondents emphasise the need for clear 'ground rules' at the beginning of the event. These ground rules, together with a clear description of the purpose and expected outcomes of the event, can be sent to participants beforehand, setting the scene for the day.

What helps?

> Remember that the range of information you can see was not known to all agencies at the time. Avoid hindsight!

> Look for the good practice in the situation, as well as the areas that need to improve.

> Question each other in order to extend the learning, not to criticise or blame.

> We all come to work to do a good job, but many things can get in the way of that. The LE is about identifying what gets in the way, what needs to change and what you can do to create that change.

Ground rules for a LE as part of SAR methodology

Participants will arrive with their own history and pre-existing relationships. Setting and reinforcing ground rules will help to increase collaborative relationships during the event and potentially afterwards. Facilitators should make themselves aware of relationships beforehand; this can be helpful when inviting participants to reflect on what is happening between them in the room.

It may also be helpful to ask participants what their objectives are and what they hope to gain from participation. What are their hopes and concerns about the event? These reflections can be used to shape the event in the room, ensuring participants are engaged in learning at an early stage.

The facilitator may need to be active in promoting the voices of the 'practitioner experts' in the room, for example by highlighting the understanding a domiciliary care worker participant had of the day-to-day life of the person at the centre of the SAR, and how this valuable knowledge could have been utilised to inform decision-making at the time. An LE discussion is sometimes the first time that other organisations' roles and expertise is understood, with colleagues from provided services, housing and the third sector often overlooked.

Question for reflection

> How can we empower every individual and every organisation to participate and collaborate?

Some of the questions used in Appreciative Inquiry can be used to explore best practice and create an energised and positive environment that is about collaborative change.

Appreciative Inquiry – some useful questions to build into the event:

> **If you were operating at your best, what would that look like?**

> **What would you be achieving?**

> **What is your dream/vision for your organisation?**

> **Why is that important to you?**

> **If you want your vision/your recommendations to become a reality what do you need to do? What actions need to take place?**

> **Who needs to do what and by when? (Try to remain realistic.)**

> **How will you know your proposal will work?**

> **What do you need to make it happen?**

(Elliot, 2015)

2: Activities

Activities within LEs need to encourage **'professional curiosity,'** to explore and understand what is happening rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. This has been described as the need for practitioners to practice **'respectful uncertainty'** – applying critical evaluation to any information they receive and maintaining an open mind (**Manchester Safeguarding Partnership**).

Survey respondents were unanimous in emphasising the need for dialogue, not didactic teaching. Opportunities to explore learning in small multi-agency groups to encourage curiosity and collaboration were favoured and overuse of PowerPoints and being 'spoken at' were considered unhelpful. Respondents recommended a variety of activities to engage people with different learning preferences.

Survey respondents' recommendations for learning event activities

Common to all LEs	
Create opportunities to explore ideas.	> Use a range of approaches to engage and appeal to the participants – presentations, group discussion, case studies, exercises (group and individual). > Clear, short presentation about the purpose of the event. > Share discussion and thoughts in small groups, preferably multi-agency.
Balance – learning from strengths, as well as what went wrong.	Think about: > Positive practice. > Developments since the time of the SAR. > What needs to change and how can this be achieved?
Engage professional curiosity.	> Encourage reflective questions. > Encourage participants to relate the SAR events and findings to current experiences or dilemmas. To what extent are they representative of current practice? > **Ask:** What? So what? Now what?
Bring the person into the room.	> Use empathy – via pen pictures, sharing memories, or family or friends statements. > What was the person's life like? Their identity, networks, culture – what did they value? > **Ask:** What might the person have thought about this? How might they have reacted? What would they have wanted to happen?
Be clear about the next steps.	> Include clear summaries at the end of the event – what next? > How can participants continue to be involved? > What has been learned? What are the (further) recommendations? > How will participants know a difference has been made?

LEs as part of SAR methodology to identify findings and recommendations

Work together to explore what happened.	> Use shared chronologies or reports to explore events together.
	> What resources were available to support practice and decision-making within, and shared between, organisations? For example:
	  - Time and capacity of practitioners and teams.
	  - Expertise - legal, mental capacity, physical and psychological health.
	  - Supervision – was this challenging and knowledgeable?

Ensure systems thinking is reflected.	What was happening at the time: > At a practice/practitioner level? > In the organisation and between organisations? > In the local safeguarding system? > At a national level?

Ensure power and difference is reflected throughout the event.	> How were themes of power and difference addressed in practice?
	> How was the person's identity understood?
	> Were there barriers to:
	  - Respectful curiosity about diversity?
	  - Challenge to, or within, organisations around discrimination against the person?

Maintain a focus on what needs to change, and is changing.	> How can you work together differently? > What is needed to support this? > What could the safeguarding system and practice look like if those changes were achieved?

Question for reflection

1. What was informing your practice at that point in time?

2. How were you feeling?

3. What were you trying to achieve?

4. What was getting in the way?

5. What have you learned/would you do differently?

After a SAR to share findings	
Provide a clear summary of the SAR – either at the LE or distributed beforehand.	Think about how this summary can include the findings and recommendations in a way that 'brings it alive', and is relevant to different practitioners taking part in the LE. For example: > Presentations from the agencies involved about learning. > Hearing from expert speakers. > Emphasising interaction and the right time to ask questions. > Discussing the implications of what has been learned and the changes that can be made together in response.
Provide space to talk about what has changed since the events described in the SAR.	> What learning has already been put into practice? > What best practice can be shared?
Consider how the findings of the SAR apply to current situations/dilemmas.	> Use case studies and small, multi-agency groups to support these discussions. > Develop ideas on how the lessons can be embedded into practice. > Think about what the barriers and challenges might be. > Connect the learning to local and national themes.

One year on...has the implementation of SAR recommendations made a difference?

Review how practice has changed as a result of the SAR.	> Incorporate a reminder of the actions and recommendations of the SAR. > Present the findings of any completed audits or action plans. > Provide the opportunity for critical reflection on these.
Identify change which led to positive practice impacts.	Celebrate achievement, then ask: > Can we go further? > What do we need to do to extend this further?
Identify change which led to no positive impact.	Think about: > What else must change? > What do we need to do now? > Who can help?
Identify where there was no change.	Think about: > What were the barriers to change? For example, resource levels, and legal, financial and political barriers. > What can be done to address the barriers? What may make a difference? > Is there a new context which means change is no longer possible and a different path must be taken?
Identify where there was negative impact from change.	Think about: > Whether there is a systemic issue at play. > What could have been missed in implementing this change? > How can any negative impact be addressed? > How will subsequent actions be measured for success?

3. Virtual learning events

At the time of writing face-to-face LEs are not being held as part of the UK social distancing measures to reduce the risk of COVID -19 infection.

Virtual learning events pose some challenges to dialogue. Initial feedback from LE facilitator suggests free-flowing discussion on some of the deeper contextual issues within the SAR can be hard to achieve. The facilitator may not be able to 'read the room' or accurately pick up emotion from an individual's body language. Post SAR events are slightly easier, as the painful aspects of the review may already have been discussed and contextualised by the SAR, but these events risk being overly presentation-focused and lacking in healthy challenge.

Experience and knowledge necessary to maximise the productivity of virtual LEs is still being gathered. **The following are tips from the learning so far:**

Before the LE
Personal communication from the facilitator to participants, alongside pre-reading and information about what will happen in the event, plus the group rules, help to start a connection with the facilitator and the event.

Create an overall structure for the event which can be shared with participants beforehand. Some of the materials used in the SCIE Reviews (Fish, 2020) are designed for virtual LEs and provide good examples of preparation and structure for LEs which may be adaptable for the virtual event.

The platform used
Try to use a platform that will allow the use of 'breakout rooms' where participants can meet and talk through aspects of the review and then report back to the main group. Some platforms have 'whiteboards' or facilities to record and share thoughts; other allow participants to share documents which may be notes written up during discussion. Think about the 'gallery' the platform offers; some allow for more people to be seen at any one time than others, useful if you want to see how people are generally responding to the LE.

Timing
Virtual environments are tiring for participants. Try to work for a maximum of three hours, with a long break in the middle or plenty of opportunities for offline tasks.

During the event
The facilitator should look into the screen and try to hold eye contact with the camera (and, therefore, participants) as much as possible - at least 60 per cent of the time. Avoid fiddling with anything or frequently looking away from the screen, any activity whilst speaking on camera is visually amplified. It is helpful if the top third of the facilitator's body can be seen, hands and arms add to overall communication.

Ideally, people should keep their cameras on but voices muted to avoid external noise distracting others. Using the 'hand-up' function helps keep the discussion smooth.

Smile, look confident, and be warm and humorous where possible. Recognise that people are doing a very tough job at the moment, be appreciative of what they are doing and their participation in the LE.

Activities

Use as many different activities as possible to help participants remain actively engaged:

> Use the chat bar for comments or questions.
> Use break-out rooms if available.
> Invite individuals to comment.
> Send some participants 'out of the room' to do an offline task whilst there is focus on one activity with a smaller group.
> Show slides or documents at intervals.

The above list is not exhaustive and will continue to grow as creativity online is developed. It is very useful to have more than one facilitator so that one can monitor the chat or watch for 'hand-up' indicators that people want to say something.

After the event

Do ask for feedback about how the LE could be improved. A follow-up email outlining the points made and inviting any other thoughts or comments may be useful, as some people don't find it easy to express detailed thinking via virtual communication.

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