

7 Minute Learning: Victoria Marten

Victoria's Story

Victoria was the fifth child of Constance Marten and Mark Gordon. Her siblings were placed in care due to child protection concerns. The pregnancy with Victoria was concealed from agencies and once born, her safety and care needs were not met. Victoria was living in a tent with her parents and following a two-month national search her body was found in a shopping bag inside a disused shed. In 2025, her parents were each sentenced to fourteen years in prison for several offences against her including gross negligence manslaughter.

National Review

The [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) published a [national review](#) in February 2026 prompted by the circumstances of Victoria's death. The review aimed to identify how systems need to change to strengthen safeguarding practice for all vulnerable babies. The review found that sibling history, the cumulative affect of trauma and repeated removals of children from their parents requires a proactive, relational and trauma informed multi-agency approach that enables risk to be anticipated and preparations to be made for future pregnancies.

Key Learning Areas: Practice Principles

Engaging Parents:

- Engagement should be a shared responsibility between parents and services.
- Practitioners should establish whether non engagement is a result of choice or other reasons.
- Trauma can cause parents to seem resistant but this may be a coping mechanism and not avoidance.
- Building trust through a [trauma-informed approach](#) is essential to improve parental engagement and reduce the necessity for care proceedings.
- Trauma may affect parental engagement but it does not remove caregiving responsibilities.
- Parents need support after care proceedings to limit the chance of risk and vulnerability repeating.
- Practitioners should collaborate to find solutions to non engagement that prioritises children's best interests, like establishing tailored adult-focused interventions which are separate to the support provided by statutory safeguarding services.

Managing Child Protection Risks Associated With Serious Offenders:

- Child protection and offender management practitioners should collaborate to understand the parenting roles of serious offenders to help identify risks to children early and accurately.
- Risk assessment should not rely on offenders voluntarily disclosing information.
- When parent(s) are managed at [MAPPA Level 1](#), practitioners should decide whether additional or more formal multi-agency oversight is needed to keep children's safeguarding central to MAPPA.
- Specialist expertise should be sought to understand the behaviours and risks of serious offenders.
- Practitioners should understand that long custodial sentences, especially those served in adult prisons during adolescence, can undermine trust in services and affect parenting capacity.
- Persistent non-engagement by serious offenders should be treated as a risk factor as it limits opportunities to assess and manage harm to children. Multi-agency support should aim to understand and respond effectively to continual non-engagement.

Transient Families:

- Clear multi-agency mechanisms are needed to establish legal responsibility when a family's residency is unclear, especially when it's necessary to locate a vulnerable pregnant woman.
- Established alert systems should be used to ensure safeguarding processes are properly invoked.
- Professional insight is essential when families move between local authorities. Critical safeguarding information should be communicated clearly and continuity of care should be a priority.
- Complete case histories, not summaries must be shared promptly to ensure children's needs, risks and complexities and that the required interventions and support are accurately conveyed.
- [Statutory responsibility](#) sits with the authority where the child usually resides; responsibility transfers to the receiving area when families move permanently.
- Transfers to other local authorities should be multi-agency, formal and well documented.
- Joint oversight is required when parents under a [supervision order](#) move between local authorities.
- Frequent moves can indicate increasing risk or attempts to evade agency oversight.
- Unborn infants are especially vulnerable in transient families.
- Proactive plans for future moves should include a chronology, assessment summary and contingency.

Domestic Abuse:

- Practitioners should use the [Domestic Abuse Handbook](#) to recognise and respond to the impact of harm on children and families.
- Children who see, hear or experience domestic abuse are victims in their own right.
- Agencies must treat domestic abuse as a primary children's safeguarding concern.
- Specialist expertise should be sought to interpret complex relationship dynamics, especially where there is mutual harm, denial and minimisation.
- Domestic abuse concerns must be clearly recorded and shared across agencies.
- Coercive control can mask vulnerability and limit parents' ability to recognise harm or accept help.
- Tailored strategies towards supporting vulnerable parents can prevent over-reliance on safety planning and reduce the need for child removal.
- Safeguarding systems can expect victims of domestic abuse to navigate complex processes which can cause harm and affect their engagement, especially when they are already experiencing racism, discrimination and exclusion.

Protecting Unborn Babies and Infants:

- Pregnancy may be concealed due to trauma, domestic abuse or mistrust of services and may not always signal deliberate avoidance of professionals.
- Practitioners should treat concealment as a potential indicator of significant safeguarding concerns.
- Safeguarding unborn babies relies on proactive, relationship-based work, where parents are engaged early to enable the completion of [pre-birth assessments](#) which identify risk and need.
- Multi-agency plans should balance parental support with child protection and they should anticipate future pregnancies, especially where older siblings have been removed.
- Parents should receive specialist tailored interventions that address vulnerabilities, build trust in services and reduce the likelihood of future concealment or care proceedings.



Reflect on the practice principles in team meetings, supervision sessions and with your colleagues. Think about the families you work with and consider the following key questions:

- Have you effectively assessed parents' vulnerabilities, trauma and offending history?
- Which trauma-informed approaches will help you to engage with parents effectively?
- Which early interventions can strengthen parenting capacity?
- What support is needed to help newborn babies remain safely with their parents?
- What are the reasons that parents aren't engaging?
- What is the extent and impact of domestic abuse on parents and children?
- Are child protection and offender management processes integrated sufficiently to reduce risks posed by serious offenders?
- Is the safeguarding response urgent enough for transient families?

Useful Resources

- The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel: vulnerable babies - information, examples and practical resources to help professionals understand the risks and take appropriate action
- DDSCP: concealed and denied pregnancy guidance
- DDSCP: domestic abuse handbook
- DDSCP: managing individuals who pose a risk of harm to children
- DDSCP: multi-agency protocol for pre-birth assessments and interventions
- Department for Education: working together to safeguard children
- Derby City and Derbyshire Threshold Document
- East Midlands Local Authorities Children's Social Care Regional Protocols
- Every Baby Matters: identifying vulnerability - observations and conversations (supportive guidance)
- Giving HOPE Project: multi-agency pathway – journey and touch points for mothers and their babies
- NSPCC: summary of The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's national review into the death of baby Victoria Marten
- The multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse