

Every Sleep Counts (ESC) Case Study

Baby Zia

Child's Voice

My name is Zia and I died when I was two months old.

I was the first baby my Mum and Dad had together. I have a big sister, Cara, who has the same Mum as me. Cara doesn't live with us because it was decided when she was about my age that our mum wasn't able to keep her safe. Before I was born, there was a plan in place to help to keep me safe.

My Mum and Dad argue quite a lot, and sometimes my Mum would call the police because she was worried that she might get hurt by my Dad. My parents would drink alcohol and take drugs sometimes; the plan to keep me safe said that they both had to stop doing this. My Mum and Dad were given help to make it easier for them to stop drinking and taking drugs. My Mum also felt very sad sometimes, so she had some medicine from the doctor to help her feel better.

When I was born, there was a meeting in the hospital before my Mum and Dad could take me home. Some of the professionals who had looked after me in the hospital were worried that my Dad was drinking alcohol, even though he said he had stopped and was no longer living in the family home. When my Mum and Dad first took me home, a professional would visit almost every day to make sure that I was safe. After six weeks, my Mum took me to see the GP for my 6-week check. The GP asked my Mum about how she was feeling. They had helped my Mum to take the right medication when she was pregnant with me to help her with her sad feelings. My Mum told the doctor that everything was fine. I don't think the GP knew that my Mum and Dad were together or about their arguing.

Not long after, the professionals had a meeting to talk about the next stage for the plan about what needed to happen to keep me safe. I don't think the professionals knew that my Dad was still drinking, because he told them that he wasn't and when he did tests for them it didn't show up. My Mum knew that my Dad was drinking sometimes, but I don't think she wanted to tell anyone that. I wonder if the professionals knew that I was almost the same age that Cara was, when she was hurt and had to stop living with Mum? Not all of the professionals who were helping to look after me were at the meeting, so that made it trickier to know if I was still safe living with my Mum and Dad. This meant professionals did not have all of the information about whether my Mum and Dad were doing what professionals were asking of them to keep me safe.

On the night I died I was asleep with my Mum and Dad in their bed, instead of my cot. When Mum and Dad woke up in the morning, I had stopped breathing. The ambulance crew and hospital staff tried really hard, but they couldn't help me to start breathing again. The staff at the hospital were worried that my parents smelt of alcohol when they were at the hospital with me.

Points for consideration and discussion

- **Professional curiosity** – Where might your agency have had the opportunity to ask Zia's mother about any potential abuse within the relationship and possible continued alcohol use from Zia's father?
- **Safe sleep** – What might the potential barriers have been for Zia's parents to following the safe sleep advice that they were given? Consider the role that parental mental health, potential domestic abuse and alcohol use can play in increasing the vulnerability of a newborn baby, particularly in relation to safe sleep.
- **Assessment of risk** – What factors/barriers may have made it challenging for professionals to have a full picture of the risks presented to Zia within the home? What is in place within your agency to mitigate these factors?

If you do one thing

Share information with the practitioners working with the child/ren and family in a timely way and make sure you contribute to Child Protection Conferences and Plans as needed.

Important information regarding drug and alcohol testing

This case highlights the importance of understanding what a negative result on a breathalyser test means, to mitigate the risk of professional over-optimism. Whilst repeat negative results can indicate that it is less likely that an individual is alcohol-dependent, it is only indicative of a negative result for alcohol at that moment in time. One unit of alcohol will typically remain within an individual's bloodstream for approximately one hour, dependent on factors such as the individual's liver function.

Useful resources

Guidance

[HIPS Unborn Baby Safeguarding Protocol](#)

Toolkits

[HSCP Safeguarding Infants Toolkit](#) - Includes resources on the ICON and Every Sleep Counts programmes of work.

Training

The [HSCP Virtual Offer](#) provides training in:

- Disguised compliance
- Safe sleep
- Supporting children of substance misusing parents
- Safeguarding infants
- Domestic abuse
- Perinatal mental health and the impact on the child
- The importance of engaging with fathers and the impact of paternal mental health on children and families