



# Checklist for collaboration between services for child protection and other agencies within Barnahus

Authors: Linda S. Jonsson and Anette Birgersson

Editor: Shawna von Blixen- Finecke

Marie Cederschiöld University, Stockholm, Sweden 2025



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## Introduction

This checklist aims to support states to effectively structure cooperation between child protection<sup>1</sup> services and other agencies that collaborate within Barnahus. It is developed based on the insights gathered during the EU co-funded project SOTERIA.

Child protection services provide children and caregivers the necessary services and support when suspicions of child abuse arise. Child protection services are particularly important in cases where the child needs protection due to potential abuse. Therefore, the establishment of collaboration guidelines for Barnahus in how to collaborate with child protection services is of high importance.

Throughout Europe, the variety in organisational structures, stakeholder interests, and applicable legislation makes it challenging to create a general recommendation for how to include Child Protective Services in Barnahus.

To accommodate these complexities, this checklist is designed to support agencies collaborating within Barnahus to ensure effective cooperation and communication with child protection services. The checklist is not exhaustive. Rather, it is a foundational tool that requires further development and adaptation to meet the specific needs of each individual Barnahus setting.

The areas addressed are:

### **Cross-cutting: Child and caregiver participation: embed trauma-sensitive and inclusive practice**

- 1. Decision-making structures: clarify who decides what and how**
- 2. Confidentiality and information sharing: agree on clear procedures**
- 3. Protocols and agreements: formalize interagency roles and responsibilities**
- 4. Monitoring and evaluation: implement systems to track and improve practice**
- 5. Communication and coordination: create structured routines and contact points**
- 6. Training and collaboration: build shared understanding and culture**
- 7. Professional support: provide supervision and reflective practice**
- 8. Workload and resources: plan realistically across agencies**
- 9. Safeguarding and risk: define joint responsibilities and response protocols**
- 10. Early joint case management: start collaboration from the first contact**

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<sup>1</sup> Child protection is here defined as “measures and structures to prevent and respond to abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence affecting children” (UNCRC article 19)

## **Cross-cutting: Child and caregiver participation: embed trauma-sensitive and inclusive practice**

Child and caregiver participation is a key priority that permeates the activities of the entire multidisciplinary team. To facilitate this engagement effectively, it is key to adopt a trauma-sensitive approach within practice. This entails developing a child-centred mutual language that fosters understanding and communicates safety throughout the process from disclosure to potential treatment. Key strategies include providing information that is accessible and easily comprehensible, ensuring that processes and procedures are transparent, and maintaining a consistent focus on the individual needs and vulnerabilities of each child. By implementing these approaches, the multidisciplinary team can create an environment conducive to active participation from both children and caregivers.

### **Checklist:**

- ☒ Actively include children and non-offending caregivers in decision-making
- ☒ Ensure their perspectives are considered in all stages of case planning
- ☒ Provide clear information on support options and their roles in the process, including follow-up
- ☒ Ensure all processes prioritise the child's experience and wellbeing (e.g. minimising repetition of interviews)
- ☒ Use child-friendly communication tools across all agencies
- ☒ Make sure the Barnahus setting and all interactions are emotionally safe and predictable for children

### **Practical Examples:**

- Design informative fact sheets and brochures that explain the rights and roles of children and caregivers within the Barnahus process.
- Facilitate joint meetings where children and caregivers can express their needs and preferences, ensuring their voices are central to the collaborative process.
- Make sure all involved agencies adhere to a trauma sensitive approach through mutual education and the reoccurring meetings.

## **1. Decision-making structures: clarify who decides what and how**

Establishing clear professional roles and aligned expectations among professionals and agencies is helps fostering effective cooperation and communication at both the practitioner and leadership levels. It is important to create opportunities and routines that allows staff members working within Barnahus and child protection services to raise questions regarding decision-making processes and responsibility. Additionally, it should be straightforward to communicate to children and caregivers the identities of the relevant authorities and what they can expect from them. Providing informative flyers that outline the roles of each authority would benefit not only caregivers and children but also serve as a valuable resource for new staff members.

### **Checklist:**

- ☒ Define roles and responsibilities of the agencies who work in and with Barnahus
- ☒ Define the decision-making structure in joint meetings, and how disagreements are resolved
- ☒ Establish transparent procedures covering the full lifespan of how cases are handled, including structured follow-up, and smooth transitions when referring the case to other services
- ☒ Establish transparent procedures for complex cases
- ☒ Ensure decisions are documented and accessible to all relevant parties

### **Practical Examples:**

- Create an organisational chart that delineates roles and responsibilities
- Make sure personal connections are established between agency professionals and keep them updated in case of staff turnover.
- Establish routines for recurring meeting opportunities for professionals
- Develop a standard operating procedure document that includes scenarios for conflict resolution with designated professionals within the agencies.

## **2. Confidentiality and information sharing: agree on clear procedures**

Confidentiality rules and norms present a significant challenge for Barnahus teams. These may stem from legal statutes, policy frameworks, and established professional practices. It is essential for both practitioners and leadership teams to have a clear understanding of the confidentiality requirements that apply to the various agencies collaborating within Barnahus, particularly when determining the appropriateness and timing of information sharing.

When creating a written agreement regarding information sharing in the Barnahus context, it is crucial to involve both practitioners and leadership. They should have the opportunity to explore a variety of scenarios during the development process. Reports from Barnahus indicate that when such agreements are unclear or lacking in detail, effective cooperation becomes exceedingly difficult.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Develop a shared policy on confidentiality and consent
- ☒ Define what information can be shared, with whom, and under what circumstances
- ☒ Use secure, agreed-upon communication tools/platforms for sensitive data

**Practical Examples:**

- Draft a confidentiality agreement that articulates the types of information that can be shared among agencies and the procedures for consent.
- Utilise encrypted email services or secure data-sharing platforms specifically sanctioned for sharing sensitive unidentifiable information.
- Make sure the agencies emails and phone numbers are updated and easily accessible.

**3. Protocols and agreements: formalize interagency roles and responsibilities**

Experience shows that Barnahus with written agreements negotiated at the leadership level are more likely to cultivate strong cooperation with child protection services, independent of specific staff members. Additionally, some Barnahus designate a primary point of contact for child protection services, which facilitates both formal and informal communication.

Furthermore, the specialised knowledge and skills possessed by Barnahus staff can significantly enhance cooperation, even when child protection services hold primary responsibility for a case. By providing expertise and education related to the cases they handle, Barnahus can foster more effective collaboration. Often, Barnahus assumes a role in coordinating and leading discussions about the handling of cases, and cooperation is generally strengthened when this responsibility is explicitly assigned to staff members.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Develop formal, signed interagency agreements defining roles and responsibilities, ensuring that they are recognised by all cooperating agencies
- ☒ Agree on step-by-step protocols for joint meetings, referrals, and follow-up
- ☒ Ensure protocols are known, accessible, and used by all professionals involved
- ☒ Appoint key persons or key professional roles that participate in the interagency meetings
- ☒ Appoint key persons or key professional roles as responsible for contact between Barnahus and Social Protective Services

**Practical Examples:**

- Create a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) that specifies each agency's responsibilities in various scenarios.
- Implement a shared online document that outlines meeting protocols, agenda items, and follow-up procedures, which is accessible to all stakeholders.

#### **4. Monitoring and evaluation: implement systems to track and improve practice**

Including a plan for monitoring performance and evaluating practice in the interagency cooperation agreements enhances a positive development. Incorporating both the support and interventions given to children and caregivers, and the interagency cooperation.

##### **Checklist:**

- ☒ Set clear goals and indicators for successful cooperation
- ☒ Use shared documentation systems for transparency and tracking
- ☒ Regularly review outcomes, and adjust practices as needed

##### **Practical Examples:**

- Establish a performance management system that tracks key indicators (e.g., response times, case resolution outcomes) that teams can regularly update and review.
- Evaluate the collaborative process regularly, providing opportunities for key staff to discuss successes and areas for improvement.

#### **5. Communication and coordination: create structured routines and contact points**

Effective coordination and communication require both regular multidisciplinary team meetings and a combination of formal and informal communication channels. It is important to hold meetings on a consistent schedule, not just in response to specific cases. This helps foster a constructive and stable working environment across agencies. Communication structures should not rely on a single individual, as this creates vulnerability in the system. Instead, there must be a clear and resilient framework in place, including contingency plans for staff absences. This ensures that children and caregivers do not face delays or gaps in support due to breakdowns in communication.

##### **Checklist:**

- ☒ Schedule regular case meetings with all relevant parties present
- ☒ Use shared communication channels (e.g. secure email, joint case notes)
- ☒ Assign contact persons for smoother information flow and follow-up

##### **Practical Examples:**

- Plan monthly multidisciplinary team meetings with an established agenda and time dedicated for each agency to provide updates.
- Implement a shared calendar for all agencies to track interdisciplinary meetings and timelines.

#### **6. Training and collaboration: build shared understanding and culture**

Sharing knowledge through interagency trainings and workshops can significantly strengthen relationships, communication, and collaboration across different professions and agencies. Building a shared foundation of knowledge—and, where possible, a common approach—helps make cooperation more robust and sustainable. When professionals know each other personally and have opportunities to connect on both professional and informal levels, communication becomes easier and more natural. These connections help bridge institutional or cultural barriers and enable professionals to reach out beyond scheduled meetings when needed.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Organise cross-disciplinary workshops to build mutual understanding and trust
- ☒ Provide joint training on multidisciplinary teamwork, trauma-informed practice, and child abuse interventions
- ☒ Include specific modules on online sexual abuse and cross-agency collaboration
- ☒ Offer ongoing learning opportunities and shared workshops
- ☒ Encourage leadership in both services to model and support collaboration
- ☒ Create space for reflection and dialogue on joint practice
- ☒ Include staff who don't work in Barnahus daily, including external child protection case workers

**Practical Examples:**

- Schedule mutual training sessions regularly where different agencies present on their practices and areas of expertise, facilitating knowledge sharing.
- Promote, sharing developed resources highlighting best practices for trauma-informed care across agencies.

**7. Professional support: provide supervision and reflective practice**

Regular formal and informal meetings, as well as joint supervision sessions, are effective ways to ensure staff feel supported and valued. These practices can also help reduce workplace stress and promote a healthier work environment. Encouraging professionals to share their own experiences when working with challenging cases fosters a culture of openness and emotional safety. This approach reflects the same principles of support and self-awareness that professionals aim to instil in the children and caregivers they serve.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Offer joint debriefing opportunities or reflective practice groups for staff handling difficult cases
- ☒ Include trauma-informed care not only for children but for the wellbeing of professionals
- ☒ Identify support structures (e.g. supervision, case consultation teams) to manage emotionally taxing work

**Practical Examples:**

- Implement support group meetings regularly for professionals dealing with challenging cases to share experiences and coping strategies.
- Consider external supervision/consultation calls for the group and or individuals regularly for both case consultation and professional support.

**8. Workload and resources: plan realistically across agencies**

The additional time required for multidisciplinary and interagency collaboration should be recognised and built into professionals' regular workloads. Working across agencies to make a case run smoothly inevitably takes more time for professionals, and this should be planned for—not treated as an extra task. Furthermore, when professionals are involved in trauma treatment or

particularly complex cases, leadership must provide additional time and emotional resources, supporting that professionals can deliver quality care without being overburdened.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Acknowledge time and workload limitations across agencies
- ☒ Plan for realistic timelines and shared responsibilities
- ☒ Advocate jointly for sufficient staffing and resources

**Practical Examples:**

- Develop resources to assess the workload of staff across agencies and identify if there are areas where agencies can support each other.
- Personal connections and communication between agencies can help understanding if there are delays in response.

**9. Safeguarding and risk: define joint responsibilities and response protocols**

Interagency agreements must clearly define collaboration structures and routines, along with mechanisms to ensure they are followed. Although child protection services typically hold primary responsibility for child protection, Barnahus staff may support specific assessment tasks. To prevent miscommunication, confusion, or gaps in care, these roles must be explicitly outlined. Clear procedures also help children and caregivers understand what to expect, ensuring no one falls through the cracks.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Use a shared framework for assessing risk and safety (e.g. signs of ongoing harm, family risks)
- ☒ Establish joint safety protocols, especially when dealing with intra-familial abuse or sibling sexual abuse
- ☒ Agree on emergency response procedures and how each agency responds

**Practical Examples:**

- Develop a standardised risk assessment checklist that all agencies use during cases, ensuring consistent evaluation.
- Evaluate the checklists regularly and help the involved agencies problem solve in times of failed adherence.

**10. Early joint case management: start collaboration from the first contact**

Early involvement of all relevant agencies is key to ensuring coordinated support for the child and non-offending caregivers. In Barnahus where interagency collaboration begins promptly—supported by structured meetings and clearly defined roles—teams are more likely to manage cases jointly from the outset. This helps reduce fragmentation, ensures continuity, and increases the likelihood that children receive the right support all the way through to any necessary specialist treatment.

**Checklist:**

- ☒ Ensure child protection services are involved from the initial stages (e.g. after first suspicion or disclosure)

- ☒ Set joint timeframes for assessments, interviews, and support to reduce delays
- ☒ Coordinate initial safety planning collaboratively
- ☒ Hold joint case planning meetings with shared decision-making
- ☒ Clarify how each role contributes to the overall care planning

**Practical Examples:**

- Create a flowchart outlining the steps for an initial response to a report of abuse that includes timelines and appointed contact professionals for involved agencies.
- Establish a protocol for immediate triage of cases requiring urgent attention to minimise delays in support.

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## Implementing the Barnahus Quality Standards throughout Europe

Projects under the umbrella of PROMISE have been supporting Europe to adopt the Barnahus model as a standard practice for providing child victims and witnesses of violence rapid access to justice and care. We undertake this work to fulfil the PROMISE vision: a Europe where all children enjoy their right to be protected from violence.

A Barnahus provides multidisciplinary and interagency collaboration to ensure that child victims and witnesses of violence benefit from a child-friendly, professional and effective response in a safe environment which prevents (re)traumatisation. With the formal support from national authorities, PROMISE projects provide opportunities to translate national commitment into action and engage internationally in the process. In addition, regular networking and strategic communications continually activate our growing network of professionals and stakeholders who are committed to introducing and expanding Barnahus services nationally.

In the early years, we established European standards, formalised the Barnahus Network, and expanded into University training and case management tools. We further laid the groundwork to establish a European Competence Centre for Barnahus and an accreditation system for Barnahus. Our current focus is on addressing gaps and specific needs identified by Barnahus in Europe. This includes strengthening inclusive and resilient child protection systems particularly in times of crisis, improving national systems' ability to effectively handle transnational cases, and enhancing the role of Barnahus within broader child protection systems.

Access the PROMISE tools and learn more at [www.barnahus.eu](http://www.barnahus.eu)



**Children  
at Risk**



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