

Information Sharing Factsheet

Understanding which rules to apply

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Understanding different situations and applying appropriate rules and processes

Lack of distinction between different information sharing situations can mean that rules and processes that are appropriate for one are applied inappropriately to another and, as a result, efforts to improve practice fail or are short-lived.

There is a need for a clear distinction between, and understanding of what is appropriate for:

- sharing of anonymised or aggregated information;
- pre-planned or bulk sharing of personal information; and
- sharing of personal information at the front-line where practitioners and managers have to make case-by-case decisions.

“Following recent high profile data losses, Government has acted to ensure there is an appropriate focus on data governance and assurance. However, this must not discourage practitioners from sharing information to keep children and young people safe or to improve their well-being.”

Taken from Government letter to stakeholders on publication of The Government’s Response to Lord Laming: One Year On, sent on 17 March 2010

Sharing of anonymised or aggregated information

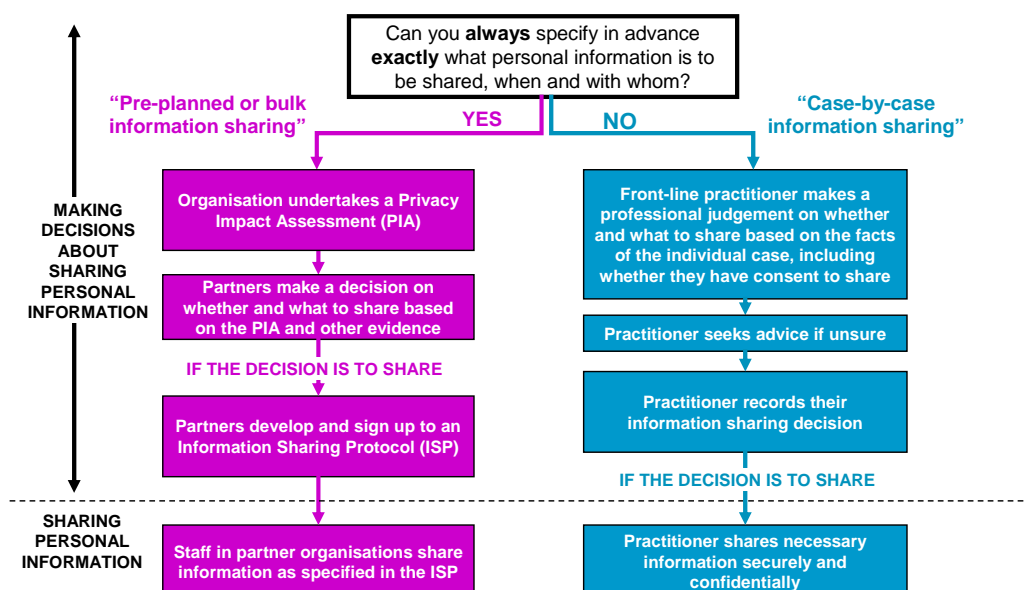
If the information is anonymised or aggregated in a manner that does not allow an individual to be identified then it is not subject to the Data Protection Act and it can be shared, with appropriate security.

Sharing of personal information: pre-planned vs case by case

If the proposed sharing relates to personal information, i.e. information that identifies an individual, it is important to distinguish between pre-planned and case-by-case sharing, using the following test:

- Can you always specify in advance exactly what personal information to share, when and with whom?
- At any stage in the process will a front-line practitioner or manager have to make a decision about whether or what it is necessary to share about an individual or family and with whom?

Overview of information sharing processes



Key differences between pre-planned and case-by-case personal information sharing

Key differences	Pre-planned or bulk sharing	Case-by-case sharing
Deciding whether or not to share personal information	Decision is made by a group of managers and/or information governance officials	Decision is made by an individual front-line practitioner and/or their manager / professional advisor
	supported by Privacy Impact Assessment framework, training and templates provided by the ICO and / or their organisation	supported by principles set out in information sharing guidance, training, and organisational codes of practice and policies
	based on the professional judgement of the group based on the evidence of the risks and benefits	based on the practitioner's professional judgement on the facts of the individual case and their knowledge of the individual
	normally made well in advance of when the information is to be shared	normally made just before the information is to be shared
... and what information to share	as specified in the Information Sharing Protocol	based on the practitioner's judgement of what is necessary to share in this case and situation
... and how to share the information	as specified in the Information Sharing Protocol	as required for the situation, following principles set out in the organisation's information security policies
In summary:		
Practitioners are guided by	specific rules and processes	common principles and standards
Effectiveness depends on	the robustness of the Information Sharing Protocol	the skills and confidence of the practitioner

Implications for front-line information sharing

The implication of this is that to embed good practice in information sharing at the front-line the focus must be on maximising the skills and confidence of the front-line practitioners who have to make these case-by-case decisions. This can be best achieved by providing practitioners with appropriate support, guidance and training and by ensuring that all organisational policies and processes empower and support them in making these information sharing decisions and in sharing information securely.

Formal rules or protocols for information sharing may be appropriate for bulk or pre-planned information sharing. However they cannot cover every eventuality that a practitioner could encounter and do not contribute to building the necessary practitioner skills and confidence.

This approach is supported by the Information Commissioner's Office:

“An Information Sharing Protocol is not a useful tool for managing the ad hoc information sharing which all practitioners find necessary. Most importantly it is not intended to be a substitute for the professional judgement which an experienced practitioner will use in those cases and should not be used to replace that judgement.”

Information Commissioner's Office