Risk Assessment Framework for Sudden Infant Death

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is described as the sudden death of an infant that is unexpected by medical history, and remains unexplained after a detailed investigation. An infant is at a higher risk for SIDS during sleep, which is why it is sometimes (confusingly) referred to as cot death. The cause of SIDS is unknown, but some characteristics associated with the syndrome have been identified.

A review of Child Deaths in Rotherham (from 2008-2012) has revealed that a disproportionately high number of deaths are among infants aged under 1 year and 70% are SIDS. We have reviewed these deaths and have indentified the key characteristics/risk factors that are present. Many of these risk factors/characteristics are supported by national and international evidence (see supporting information) relating to SIDS.

This tool allows professionals and workers to further identify and support families who may be vulnerable to SIDS. This tool should be used by all workers/professionals who come into contact with families with infants under 1 year to assess an infant’s sleeping environment and reinforce safe sleeping messages.

Characteristics and risk factors present in Rotherham SIDS since 2008

- Smoking
- Domestic Violence
- Mental Ill Health (either parent)
- Male Infant
- Criminal convictions (either parent)
- Alcohol use
- Sleeping environment (this includes co-sleeping (in bed) and overlay, babies being placed on their front (supine) to sleep, and head covering from bedding/duvet)
- Low birth weight
- Poor living conditions (this includes condemned boiler, disrepair of windows, no central heating and condemned housing)
- Poverty (this includes unemployment or very low income)
- History of neglect this includes siblings
- Young Mum (age range 16-21 years)
- Substance misuse
- Poor Engagement with services
- Not breastfed

Co-characteristics and risk Factors

4% of the recent deaths in Rotherham had 10 or more of the risk factors present (two having 13 risk factors) 34% had 6 or more risk factors present, 11% had at least 4 risk factors present only one child had no risk factors other than being male.