Documentation at a glance factsheet

A quick reference guide for all staff on the key principles, requirements and common pitfalls of safeguarding documentation in education and care.

ACCURACY	OBJECTIVITY	TIMELINESS
Record what happened correctly and completely. Include: dates, times, locations, people involved, what was seen/heard/said.	Record facts and observations - not opinions or judgements. Separate what you saw from what you think about it.	Record as soon as possible after the event. Delays reduce accuracy and can delay escalation.

Situation	Document?
A child makes a disclosure	Yes – immediately
You observe a concerning behaviour or injury	Yes – immediately
A concern feels minor or uncertain	Yes – document and monitor
You report a concern internally	Yes – record who you told and when
A colleague behaves in a concerning way	Yes – report and document
You escalate a concern to a leader or external agency	Yes – record all steps taken
A concern is followed up or reviewed	Yes – update the record
You discuss a concern with a colleague informally	If it relates to a safeguarding matter – yes

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Common documentation mistakes to avoid

Mistake	Why it matters
Recording opinions as facts ("She seemed like she was lying")	Undermines credibility and objectivity of the record
Using vague language ("sometime last week", "the usual behaviour")	Prevents others from acting on the information
Waiting to document until the end of the day or week	Key details are forgotten; escalation is delayed
Not recording because you're unsure if its serious enough	Patterns can't be identified without consistent records
Paraphrasing a child's words in a way that changes meaning	Misrepresents the child's account
Not documenting that you reported or escalated	Can appear as if nothing was done
Leaving records incomplete or unsigned	Creates accountability gaps

Remember: If it is not written down, it did not happen. Documentation is not about perfect reports, it is about capturing the right information in the right way at the right time.