



**Safeguarding
Children Board**

Child Protection Conferences

A guide for parents and carers

A Child Protection Conference is a meeting between families and professionals which is held when there is concern about the safety or care of a child or children within a family.

Cornwall is using a family friendly approach to Child Protection Conferences to ensure the best possible outcomes for your child and family. The Child Protection Conference aims to help your family and caregivers to work with Social Care and other services to ensure your child is safe and appropriately cared for.

The Child Protection Conference meeting will assess any risks by looking at strengths in your family, looking at concerns about your family and making decisions about what needs to happen to ensure that your child is safe and appropriately cared for.

The purpose of a Conference

The purpose of a Conference is to:

- Share information about the health, safety and wellbeing of your child
- Assess whether your child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm
- Identify changes needed (if any) in order to ensure the safety and appropriate care of your child
- Identify the strengths within your family and what as a family you are able to do to achieve any necessary changes
- Identify any professional assistance needed by your family and which agencies can provide this
- Decide if your child needs to be subject to a Child Protection Plan.

A Child Protection Conference does not make decisions about legal or court action, or about where children should live.

As a parent or carer, you are invited to attend the conference and we would encourage you to take an active part. Prior to the conference we will discuss with you whether there are any family or friends who could attend the conference to support you and consider what role they may play in any plans that are made.

How can you prepare?

During the Conference you will be given the chance to comment about what others are saying and provide information and your views. You will also be asked what you think should happen in the future, including any help you feel is necessary.

Many of the professionals who come to the conference will have prepared reports – setting out facts as they are known, their views and ideas. Do take up opportunities to go through this information with the professionals involved with your family before the conference. This will enable you to be clear about what you do and do not agree with and help avoid surprises.

If you would like to prepare a report you may do so and should you require help with this please consult a member of your social work unit. If you do not want to write things down, you could still think about what you would like to say at the meeting and perhaps bring some brief notes. You might find it useful to think about the following:

Strengths

- What do you think are the strengths in your family?
- What are the things you think you do well?
- What positive things would you like professionals to know about you and your family?

Risks / Concerns

- What (if anything) do you think needs to change in order for your child to be safe and appropriately cared for?

Services / Assistance needed

- Does your family need any additional services or assistance?
- How would this assistance help?

Next Steps

- What do you think needs to happen after this Conference?
- What do you think you, or others, could do to improve the current situation?

Who else will be at the conference?

Anyone who has a role in caring for your child and your family can attend. This will include professionals who work with your child and your family. Everyone who attends the conference will have a chance to:

- Speak about what is working well
- Speak about what is worrying them
- Be involved in decisions about who might support you and your child

The conference will be chaired by an Independent Chairperson. There will also be someone to make a written record of the meeting, which will be shared with you.

A number of professionals that have been involved with your family might be invited to the meeting, such as:

- Social Workers
- Health Visitors
- School Nurses
- Doctors
- Teachers
- Education Welfare Officers
- Probation Officers.

A representative from the police attends all Initial Child Protection Conferences.

Can my child attend?

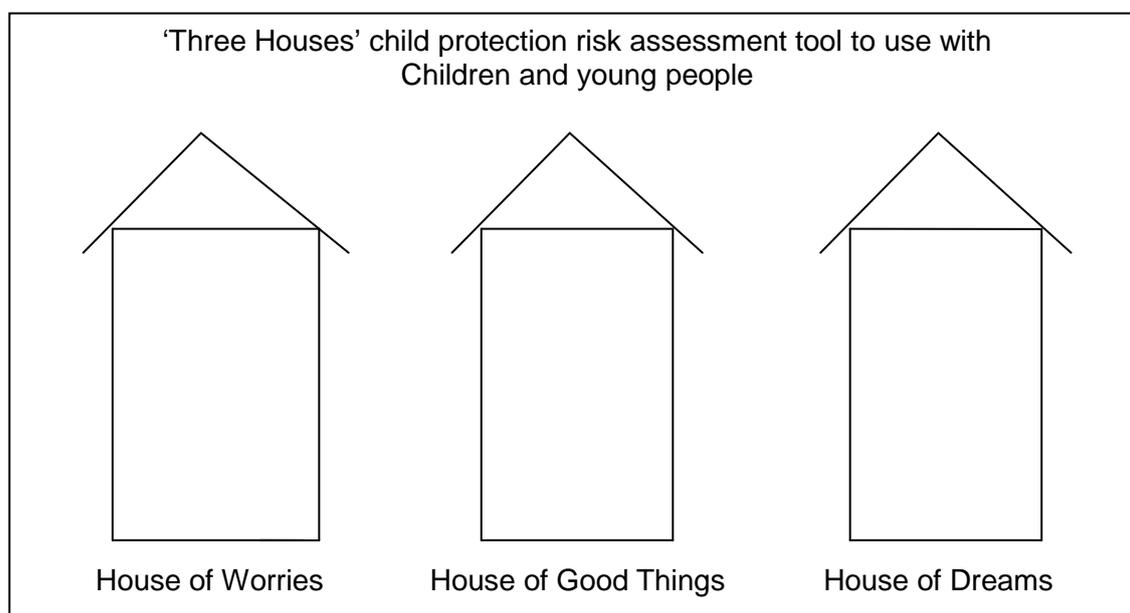
If your child is aged 12 years or over and it is appropriate. They are welcome to attend at least part of the conference if this is what they want. Your social worker will discuss this with you.

The views of children aged less than 12 years will be sought, usually by the social worker, and given to the meeting.

Talking to children

It is important that your child, if appropriate, has an opportunity to talk about what they are worried about, what makes them happy and anything they would like to be different.

Social workers are expected to bring information about a child's views to the conference. They may use a tool like the Three Houses, below, to speak with your child to obtain their views.



What happens at an Initial Child Protection Conference?

The Independent Chairperson will meet with you immediately beforehand to welcome you, to explain how the conference will run and to talk about the best way for you to contribute to the discussion and how sensitive issues can be best handled.

During the meeting four key questions are asked and everyone is asked to contribute:

- What is working well in your family?
- What are we worried about in relation to your child and your family?
- What is the lived experience of the child?
- What needs to happen to make sure your child is safe and appropriately cared for in the future?

At the start of the conference all of the participants will introduce themselves and the Chair will ask you as parents and professionals for their views about the risks, what is working well and the next steps.

Once its accuracy has been agreed, key information will be recorded on a grid displayed on the wall. The grid will have headings based on the questions above and information will be recorded under these. In this way there is openness about what information is seen to be important and in what way.

An outline plan will start to be developed with you and the professionals during conference, after which a decision will be made about whether the risks to your child are significant enough that the plan should have the status of a Child Protection Plan. To inform the decision, you and professionals will be asked to score on a scale of 0-10 how safe you view the child to be, with 0 being not safe at all and 10 being totally safe.

If it is decided that the plan will be a Child Protection Plan, a core group of people will be identified, which will include you and any supportive family and friends, as well as professionals involved in your family's care. The role of this core group is to work out in detail how the plan will work and measure progress.

It may be agreed that your child does not need a Child Protection Plan but the discussion has identified that certain things should happen or some assistance which may benefit your family. If this is the case then a Child in Need support plan may be developed.

What happens after the Conference?

After the Conference you will receive a copy of the written record of the meeting in the post.

If a Child Protection Plan is made, you will be asked to attend regular meetings with other members of the Core Group. At these meetings you will look at the plan and discuss what progress has been made in relation to the plan. The Core Group will meet within 10 working days of the Initial Conference and then at regular intervals, usually about 6 weeks, until the next conference.

A Review Conference will be held within 3 months and then at a maximum of 6 monthly intervals for as long as your child is subject of a Child Protection Plan. At each Conference a decision will be made about whether a Child Protection Plan remains necessary.

What happens at a Review Child Protection Conference?

The focus of the review conference will be on the discussion of the implementation of the Child Protection Plan. Everybody's views will be obtained regarding the current risks, what is currently working well and the next steps that should be taken to make the child safe.

The same process will be followed as with an initial conference, in that the Chair will facilitate the discussion, formulate a danger statement and ask you and the professionals to score your child's safety. A decision will then be made about the type of plan your child will need.

What can you expect from us?

We want to work in partnership with you and your family. As a parent/carer, you should expect to:

- be listened to
- be treated with respect
- be involved in decisions
- get any assistance and help that has been offered to you within the agreed time scales
- get a copy of the Conference record within 15 working days of the Conference

Why might parents/carers be excluded from a conference?

Parents and carers will only be excluded in exceptional circumstances, for example, if the person is likely to disrupt the conference or if their presence might have a negative effect on your child.

Sometimes, in very difficult situations, you might be excluded for part of a conference while information about another person is discussed, or if there are any conflicts between family members which make it difficult to share information with everyone present, for example, when your child would prefer you not to hear what they want to say or in situations of domestic violence.

The conference Chair will make the final decision about exclusion and the reasons will be explained to you before the conference takes place.

Equal Opportunities

Cornwall is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with dignity and respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you require this information in a different format or in another language, please discuss this with your social worker prior to conference.

Your rights

You are entitled to receive advice from a solicitor if you wish. A list of solicitors experienced in family matters in your area can be obtained from your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Complaints

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of a Child Protection Conference please contact:

Complaints Manager,

FREEPOST
RRZJ-EUSJ-EGKL
Education, Health and Social Care Complaints
Cornwall Council
County Hall
Truro
TR1 3AY

Telephone: 01872 323164

Email: ehsc.feedback@cornwall.gov.uk