

Child protection conferences

Information for parents



You will know from your social worker that your child's welfare is to be discussed at a child protection conference. These notes will help you to understand the purpose of the meeting, who is likely to attend, what can be decided and what happens if your child is made subject of a child protection plan.

What is a child protection conference?

A child protection conference is a meeting arranged by Social Care to discuss concerns which have been raised about the safety and well-being of your child. The social worker will explain the particular reasons for the meeting in your case.

You will probably know some of the people who will be attending this meeting. They may include health visitors, social workers, police, doctors, education welfare officers, probation officers and other people concerned with the welfare of your child. Some of them may already know you and your family, while others may have information useful to the meeting. An administrator from Social Care will take notes of the meeting, and your social worker will give you a copy.

The purpose of the conference is to share all the information there is about your child and family, identify strengths but also areas of concern, and if necessary recommend a child protection plan for your child. It is important to remember that arranging a child protection conference does NOT mean that the authorities have already decided your child has been abused or neglected.

The conference has an independent chairperson who is employed by Social Care, but who will not be the manager of any of the other professionals at the meeting.

Can I attend the conference?

Yes. Parents have an important part to play in helping the meeting reach a decision. You should be able to hear the professional workers' concerns and views, ask questions and give your own account of the matter which led to the conference.

You may worry that you will be criticised and want to hold back information, but experience has shown that parents who have been able to talk fully at conferences are usually very relieved that they have done so.

We feel your co-operation is vital if we are to make the best decisions for your child, and we can assure you that what you tell us will only be shared by those who need to know.

If you wish you can bring a relative, friend or advocate to the conference. They can speak on your behalf, or just be there to support you. Your child will also be able to attend part or all of the

conference, depending on his/her age and understanding.

It is rare for you or your 'supporter' to be excluded from the conference. The main reason for doing so is when you or your supporter's presence could prevent the conference from carrying out its tasks. If this happens, you will be informed in writing regarding the reasons for this exclusion, and it may be possible for you to meet with the Chair separately.

What decisions can a child protection conference make?

There are 4 main parts to a conference:

Introduction. The chairperson outlines the reason for the conference and asks those present to introduce themselves.

Sharing information. This is given by those present, including yourself, either verbally or in written reports. The chairperson will summarise the key issues.

Discussion. This will focus on the risks to your child of abuse or neglect in the future.

Decisions. These are taken on whether it is appropriate to make a child protection plan in respect of your child and if so what should happen to ensure your child's safety and well-being.

A conference may conclude that your child is well cared for, or that the worries that led to the conference have been resolved, or are not as serious as first thought. In this situation, no further action will be taken, or you will be offered help with the remaining problems.

If, on the other hand, the conference agrees that there are still serious concerns, your child may be made subject of a child protection plan.

What happens next?

If it is agreed that your child is at continued risk of significant harm a child protection plan will be required so that help and protection may be given by different agencies.

Harm can include physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or neglect.

If it is decided to make your child subject to a child protection plan, a plan will be made to protect him/her in the future. The Child Protection Plan will include a number of recommendations about how professionals can help you and your family. To help with this planning, the professionals will undertake a core assessment, which includes consideration of risk factors, and this means talking to you about your present and past situation, and your child's needs such as health, education and social

relationships. They will also discuss what needs to be changed to improve the situation, and how to provide you and your child with the best possible help.

Your social worker will work with you on the plan, together with a key group of professionals involved with your family. This group is known as a core group, and they will meet with you regularly.

How long will my child be subject of a child protection plan?

If your child is subject of a child protection plan, reviews will take place every six months, although the first review will take place after three months. Core groups will normally meet at least once a month.

At each review, consideration will be given as to whether your child should cease having a child protection plan. This will happen when the conference members are confident that your child is no longer at risk, and that a formal child protection plan is no longer necessary. There is no set time for a child to be subject of a child protection plan.

You will be invited to attend each review conference, and your child will be able to attend part or all of the review, depending on his/her age and understanding.

Can I appeal?

You can appeal against the decision to make a plan, continue a plan, or discontinue a child protection plan if you think this outcome was affected by the fact that the procedures in the conference were not followed correctly. For example, you may feel that the conference did not have all the relevant information to make a decision about your child being made subject of a child protection plan.

If you wish to appeal you should write to the chairperson of the conference. In your letter you should give us as much information as possible about your appeal, which will then be heard by a special committee.

For further details of the child protection procedures and for the appeal process, you will need to see a copy of The South West Child Protection Procedures. Please ask your social worker, and he or she will take you through it. Alternatively log onto www.swcpp.org.uk

If you wish to complain about the conduct of a person attending the conference from an individual agency, and /or the service provided (or not provided) by the individual and the agency, then you should write to his/her employers who will respond according to their complaints procedure.

Is there a possibility that my child might be taken away?

All the professionals involved in the meeting prefer to keep families together, if possible. Most of the children who have a child protection plan remain at home with the help of various people.

However, sometimes it is felt that a child is at such serious risk that he/she cannot stay at home.

A conference cannot decide to remove your child, but it can recommend that the case goes to court. This would only happen in exceptional cases, and such decisions are not made lightly.

In conclusion

We realise that a child protection conference can be a worrying experience, but we need your help and co-operation to make the right decisions about the future of your child. We will offer help whenever we can.

If you would like to comment on your experience of being involved with a child protection conference, then please let us know.

Sources of independent advice

The Family Rights Group

Print House
18 Ashwin Street
London E8 3DZ

Telephone: **0800 7311696**

Citizens Advice Bureau

Details of the nearest office can be found in the telephone directory.

A solicitor

You might be able to get legal aid. Ring them first to see if they are able to help you.

Any comments?

We would welcome any comments about this booklet, and also about any other part of our Child Protection Procedures.

Please write to:

The Safeguarding Manager
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Children
Safeguarding Unit
Pendragon House, Gloweth
Truro
Cornwall TR1 3LS

Getting in touch with Children, Schools and Families

If you want to find out more information about services please telephone
0300 1234 101.

You can also access the website
www.cornwall.gov.uk

and the email address is
enquiries.childservices@cornwall.gov.uk

If you would like this information in another format please contact:

Cornwall Council

County Hall

Treyew Road

Truro TR1 3AY

Telephone: **0300 1234 100**

Email: **enquiries@cornwall.gov.uk**

www.cornwall.gov.uk



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