

Child Protection Conference

A parents/carers guide



You will know from your child's Social Worker that there is going to be a Child Protection Conference to discuss concerns or worries about your child or children.

This booklet explains the purpose of the Conference, who attends and how you will know what has been decided.

What is a Child Protection Conference

The Government has set national guidelines which explain how professionals who work with children should work together to ensure children are kept safe from harm. Dorset Safeguarding Children Board has devised a set of local Child Protection Procedures based on these guidelines and these are called Inter-Agency Safeguarding Procedures. These procedures are followed whenever there is serious concern about a child, or it is felt that a child is at risk. The Child Protection Conference is part of these procedures. The Social Worker will explain the reasons for the Conference in your particular case.

The Child Protection Conference will address the concern, share all relevant information and look at the level of risk. The first meeting is called an "Initial" Child Protection Conference. If your child is considered to be at risk of significant harm, a Child Protection Plan will be drawn up with you which will explain what the concerns are, what needs to change to reduce or remove that risk and who will support you to enable this change.

Can Parents attend?

We welcome parents' attendance at Conferences as we want to work with you to make sure that your child is safe from any harm. A letter will be sent to you from Children's Services inviting you to the Conference.

Sometimes we do not invite the parent, if this is not in the best interests of the child. If Children's Services have decided that you cannot be invited to attend either all or part of the Conference, the reasons will be explained to you by your Social Worker

Can your child attend part of the Conference if he or she wants to:

The Conference would like your child to attend the Conference, if your child is mature enough to express a view directly at the Conference. If your child feels unable to attend, your child could be supported by an Advocate or be helped by your child's Social Worker to provide written views to the Chair of the Conference.

It may be unhelpful for your child to be present for all of the meeting and your child's Social Worker will talk to you about this.

Membership of the Conference

No single person holds all the information about your family. You may know some of the people at the Conference, but not all of them. Introductions will be made on the day, with people explaining their roles and general responsibilities towards your child. The people invited will be listed on your letter of invitation.

Depending on the age of your child, the people who usually attend Conferences are Social Workers, Teachers, Health Visitors, School Nurses and Police Officers.

Other people that sometimes attend may include your Doctor, a Hospital Doctor, Probation Officer and Education Social Worker, or other professionals involved in child care.

The Conference may need legal advice and a Local Authority Solicitor is invited to provide that advice.

A minute taker is also always present to make notes of the discussion at the Conference.

The person in charge of the Conference is called the Conference Chair. He or she will be a person with experience of child protection matters but without direct responsibility for the management of the case. The Chair retains an impartial view and will help the Conference members come to an informed decision about the risk to your child.

The Social Worker will prepare a written report which will be shared with you prior to the Conference.

Sharing Information

It is important that you are aware that information may be shared at the Conference which will relate to you and/or any other significant adults involved in your family.

This information may be of a sensitive nature, such as any criminal offences, or other police information or allegations in connection with child abuse. It would also include any medical information or information held by Children's Services.

You will want to know how confidential information is being used and who has access to it. Wherever possible, all information will be treated as confidential and with sensitivity. It will only be available to you, relevant agencies and those invited to the Conference. You can discuss this with the Chair or the Social Worker who will be happy to answer your questions.

How will the decisions and recommendations affect you?

The only decision a Conference can make is whether or not your child is considered to be at risk of significant harm and needs a Child Protection Plan to be kept safe.

If your child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, one of the following categories will be used to indicate the type of concern:

- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Physical injury
- Sexual abuse

The Social Worker will discuss these terms with you and explain how they may apply to your circumstances.

When a conference decides that a Child Protection Plan is required Children's Services will allocate a social worker to work with you, your child and your family. This person is known as the "Key Worker". The Social Worker who initially contacted you and discussed the areas of concern about your child, will sometimes not be able to be the Key Worker following the Conference. You may therefore, need to be introduced to a new Social Worker.

Child Protection Plan

The decision and recommendations about your child will be made jointly by the professionals at the meeting. The Conference will then draw up a plan which will describe what the concerns are, what needs to change to reduce the concerns or risks and who will be involved to help make those changes. This is the "Child Protection Plan".

The Keyworker and people who are most involved in helping you, will also be contributing to the Child Protection Plan. It is important that you are fully involved in helping to put together this plan and that you let us know what will help you.

The Conference will focus on support for you and your child, as well as suggestions and guidance on how best to protect your child in the future. The key people involved in helping to support you and your child are known as the "Core Group".

The “Core Group” will meet after the Conference, to focus on support for you and your child. It is important that you are involved in this process so that you and your child can achieve progress in the Child Protection Plan.

How you will know about the decision

If you are present at the Child Protection Conference you will hear the decisions made and you will contribute towards the Child Protection Plan.

If you are not present at the Conference, your Social Worker will explain to you any decisions and plans that have been made. After the Conference, a record of the decision and plan will be sent to you.

Speaking up and putting your views

We recognise that attending a Child Protection Conference can be a daunting experience. The Conference will want to hear your views and the Chair will encourage you to join in any discussion. If you are able to correct any factual errors in the reports, please do not be afraid to speak out.

If you are unable to attend the Conference, you can put your views in writing or tell your child’s Social Worker. If you find it difficult to put your views in writing you may like to ask a friend to help you or ask the Social Worker to write down your views.

There are various reasons why people sometimes decide not to participate. If this is the case we would like to assure you that this will not be held against you or affect any decisions or recommendations made at the Conference.

Support for you at the Conference

You can bring someone to support you in a Conference, like a friend or relative. Your supporter may be able to help you clarify the information in the Conference but it is important that they understand that they will not be part of the decision making process. If you have nobody to support you, you may want to consider the help of an Advocacy Worker.

It would be helpful if you could let the Social Worker know in advance if you would like to have support at the Conference.

Do you need a Solicitor?

The Child Protection Conference can make recommendations that, if necessary, Children's Services should consider legal action to protect your child. However, this does not always happen with every child. If you feel that you need some legal advice you may choose to bring your Solicitor to the Conference. This can be very helpful. The Solicitor's role will be that of advising you and helping you to understand what is going on. The solicitor will not be able to take part in the discussions and cannot normally attend the Conference without you or in place of you.

If you have a disability or need assistance with English.

A Child Protection Conference should take account of race, gender and disability. An interpreter, for example, or access to the Conference for anyone with a disability will be made available.

Reviews

If your child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, your child's circumstances must be reviewed formally within three months.

These meetings are called Review Child Protection Conferences. You will be notified about this and invited to attend. The Review should consider both the positive changes and the problems which are still a cause for concern. It will also look at whether your child continues to be at risk of significant harm and needs to remain subject to a Child Protection Plan.

Practical arrangements

Any needs you have should be discussed in advance with your Social Worker who will ensure that everything possible is done to help you be part of the Conference.

It is also important that nobody should be prevented from attending a Child Protection Conference due to problems of availability, child care difficulties or cost of transport. If this is difficult for you, please ask the Social Worker for help.

Please note that it is not suitable for a baby or young children to be present at a Child Protection Conference as matters will be of a sensitive nature and for adult discussion. If there are difficulties, please discuss this with the Social Worker before the Conference, so that alternative arrangements can be looked at.

How you can help your Child

You may feel you want to hold back private information particularly in an open discussion if you feel that you may be criticised by someone. We recognise that these are difficult issues, but without your co-operation and willingness to share information we are less likely to reach decisions that will be helpful to you. It is important that you participate in the discussion and contribute your views in any planning for your child.

Representations

You are invited to arrive at the Conference 30 minutes before it is due to start so that you can be introduced to the Chair who will explain to you how the meeting is to proceed. This is also an opportunity for you to raise any anxieties you may have about what is happening.

We do realise that attendance at a Child Protection Conference will make you anxious. We do however hope that you will feel you have been listened to and we hope in turn that you will listen carefully to what is said. It is possible that there may be some things that you do not agree with. Hopefully we can work through this together.

The Child Protection Conference has an Anti-Discriminatory Statement. An effort will be made by the Chairs to ensure that parents and all members at the Conference will be treated with due regard and respect even if they express different views.

However, if you feel that you have been treated unfairly and cannot resolve this by discussion with your child's Social Worker, the Team Manager or Conference Chair, the Dorset Safeguarding Children Board does have a Complaints Procedure. If you wish to make a Complaint, your Social Worker or the Area Local Office will supply a Leaflet about making a Complaint.

All leaflets can be made available in audio tape, large print and Braille, or alternative languages on request.

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