Practice Matters

Child Protection Conferences

What is a Child Protection Conference?

The Local Authority Children Social Care Team Manager in consultation with a Child Protection Manager is responsible for making the decision to convene a child protection conference. The conference is chaired by a child protection manager on behalf of Derby and Derbyshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

A Child Protection Conference brings together family members (and the child/ren where appropriate), supporters/ Advocates and those practitioners involved with the child and family to make decisions about the child’s future safety, health and development. If concerns relate to an unborn, conference should be held prior to birth and before 28 weeks.

Why have a Child Protection Conference?

The tasks for all conferences are to:

* Consider the information presented to the conference and, considering the child’s present situation and information about their family history and present and past family functioning, to decide whether the child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm.
* Bring together and analyse, in an inter-agency setting the information obtained about:
  + The child’s developmental needs
  + The child’s wishes and feelings
  + The parent’s capacity to respond to the child’s needs to ensure their safety and promote the child’s health and development within the wider context of their family and environment.
  + Recommend what future actions, including timescales, are required in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, including the child becoming the subject of a child protection plan, what the planned outcomes are for the child and how best to intervene to achieve these;
  + Confirm a lead Social Worker from Local Authority Children's Social Care for the child, or any child in the same family who requires a Child Protection Plan. The Social Worker is responsible for ensuring that the Child Protection Plan is developed, coordinated, and fully implemented to timescale.
  + Identify a core group of practitioners and family members to develop, implement and review the progress of the Child Protection Plan;

Put in place a contingency plan if the agreed actions are not completed and/or circumstances change impacting on the child’s safety and welfare

How to ensure an effective Child Protection Conference is achieved?

* Be prepared, ensure your report for conference is clear about the risks and their impact on the child; and that you can articulate that clearly at the meeting. If the conference is a review conference ensure you are clear about progress against the plan, any drift and any actions taken to mitigate drift.
* Help the family to prepare for conference so they can share their views and feel able to contribute. This will include making sure your report has been shared with them (including the child if appropriate) so they understand what will be discussed at the meeting, the risks, their impact and your recommendations.
* If the family has any needs that should be considered (e.g. dyslexia, sight or hearing issues etc.) make sure you have discussed these with the chair so they can be considered.
* Consider how will the family access the meeting if conducted virtually?
* Ensure the child’s voice and their lived experience is brought to life and kept at the centre of all discussions and your report – bring to conference any direct work undertaken and share it.
* Where appropriate (if secondary school age) encourage the child to attend the conference, or part of it, so they feel included in the decisions made around them and their family.
* Reports from other agencies should be available in advance, read these so you have a full picture of all the information being shared.
* Ensure you remain attentive and professionally curious throughout the meeting. If new risks come to light ensure they are fully understood by everyone, including their impact. If you feel an area has not been discussed or discussed in full highlight this to the chair.
* At the end of the meeting ensure you are clear about whether you feel the child(ren) is at risk of significant harm, giving clear rationale about why and the categories of risk involved. Ensure this is articulated in a clear, jargon-free way so the family understands.
* At every point where there are multiple children in a family each should be assessed and considered individually.
* Where review conferences are scheduled, it is good practice to invite the core group members to consider threshold and future recommendations in advance of the meeting and to agree on arrangements to ensure that conference reports are shared in advance with all parties.