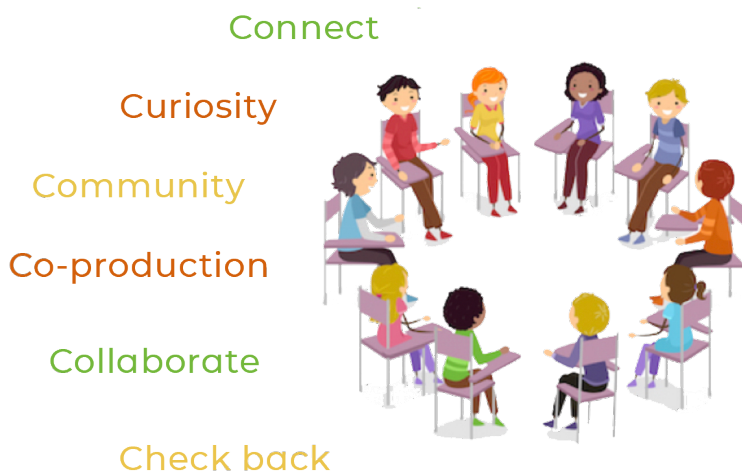


# Restorative Child Protection Conferences in Tower Hamlets



## What is a Restorative Practice?

Restorative practice is about connecting with people to build and maintain positive, healthy relationships, resolve difficulties and repair harm where there has been conflict. It is a way of working or doing things WITH people, not TO them, or FOR them, by offering them high support and challenging them to acknowledge and take steps to make changes where there has been harm.

## What is a Restorative Child Protection Conference?

A Child Protection conference is held when there is a worry that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm. A restorative conference aims to bring together the people within a family network who are affected by the harm along with professionals who could assist them to make things better. Together they will seek to understand how the child/ children have been impacted by the harm and identify what needs to happen to 'repair the harm' and keep the child safe and well. It is important that the family are at the centre of the meeting, taking a leading role in the discussion and the planning.

Conferences done 'WITH' parents means:

- Families feel welcomed and respected as equal participants.
- Avoiding blame and judgement and ensuring focus on the impact on the child.
- Understanding the strengths within family network and exploring the challenges to repair harm.
- Identifying outcomes and actions with the family and supporting them to identify what support they feel will best enable them to make changes.

## How to prepare the family for a restorative Child Protection conference

Before a conference takes place, the family needs to understand what it is, why it is needed and what will happen. Restorative Child Protection conferencing additionally promotes giving parents choice in determining how the conference will take place.

Parents and carers will be given at least 12 days notice that a conference has been scheduled.

We are working towards some families deciding if they wish for a Safeguarding Family Group Conference (FGC) to be held in place of an initial Child Protection conference (ICPC). This allows them to bring together those in their network and who are important to the child to find solutions and make a plan that may otherwise be held by professionals.

This service is still being developed before it can be offered to families.

An FGC should always be offered to a family by the time a decision has been made that an ICPC is needed.

The conference chair will contact the family at least 2 days ahead of the conference to give them an opportunity to share their views and to plan how the conference will run. This includes finalising the list of people who will attend the conference to ensure that only the most important people to the child are present. Representatives will need to attend from key agencies supporting the family, however where possible efforts will be made to identify a professional who the family feel comfortable with.

All professionals invited and the parents/carers if they wish, will be asked to submit a written report ahead of the conference. This report should use clear, jargon free language to outline the strengths and worries for family and outline the impact for the child. The professional who writes the report is expected to share the report with the family at least 2 days before the conference and it is helpful if they can talk through the report with the family so they understand the content.

The social worker should arrange for an interpreter of the correct dialect to attend the conference where necessary, and if the family have a preferred interpreter they have previously worked with attempts should be made to see if that person is available.



## What will happen during the conference?

Respect is fundamental to restorative Child Protection conferences and families should be made to feel equal participants within the conference. Acknowledging that parents and carers are experts about their own family enables an ability to challenge and support them to identify what changes need to happen to keep their child safe and well.

The pre-conference reports will outline what has happened that has led to the Child Protection conference being held, meaning the discussions during the conference can focus on:

1. What is the impact on the child?
2. What needs to happen next?

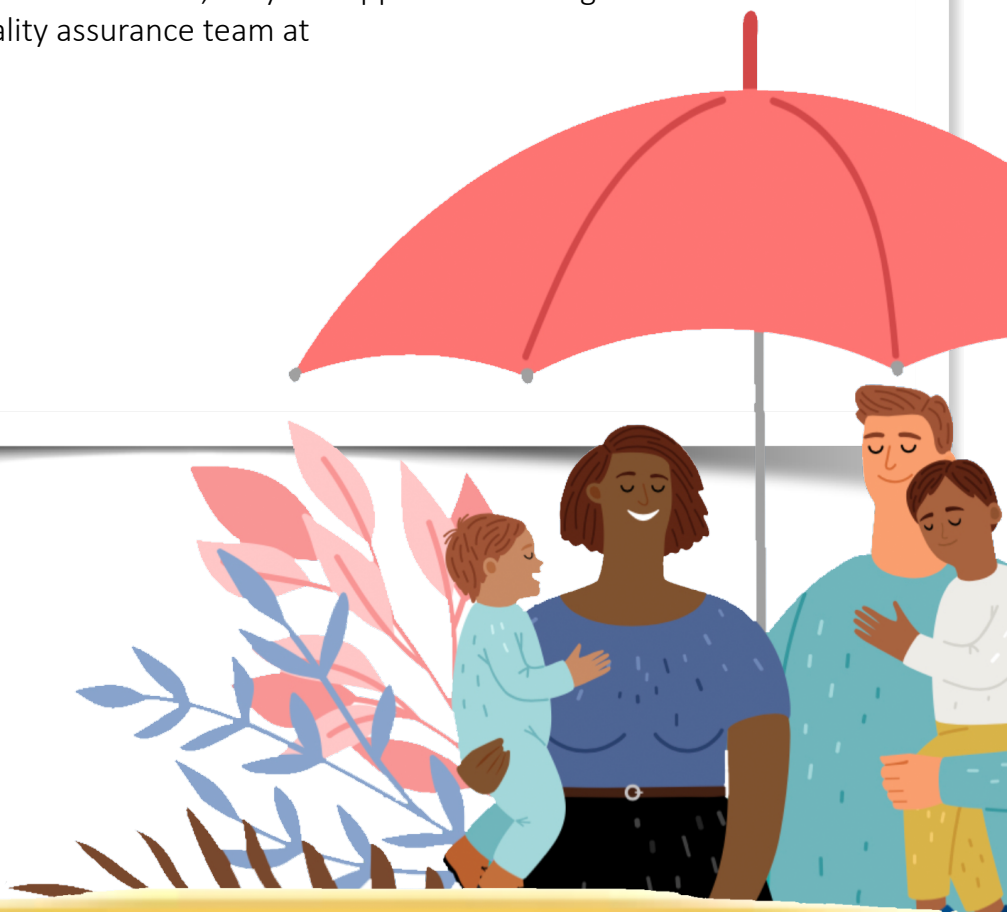
**One of the main goals of a conference is for the family and professionals supporting them to develop a plan that will address the worries for the child. Actions on the plan should specifically address the impact of harm on the child and not their general wellbeing.**

Parents and carers are able to choose which services they feel would be most beneficial to support them. It is important that plans are made collaboratively, and that as far as possible parents/carers are on board with the plan, whilst ensuring that it addresses the needs of the child identified during the conference.

If an FGC has taken place, the plan created by the family network should be incorporated into the Child Protection plan.

If the conference is feeling overwhelming for a parent/carer, the conference chair may offer a 15 minute break to allow them some space.

Sometimes the conference chair may make a decision without consulting everyone in the room if this is in the best interests of the family, but will allow opportunities for those in attendance to offer their views. If anyone disagrees with the decision, they can appeal this through emailing the Safeguarding and Quality assurance team at [SQA@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:SQA@towerhamlets.gov.uk)



## Keeping the child at the centre of the conference

The child is the most important person at the conference, even if they are not present, and the focus of the conference must remain on their needs. It is really important that a child's wishes and feelings are shared during the conference and are considered when decisions are being made.

All children over the age of 5 should be offered a referral for advocacy, they will need parental consent unless they are over the age of 16. An advocate can support a child to share their views directly in the conference, or they can represent the child in the conference.

When deciding who will attend the conference, the people around the table should be those who know the child well and have an important role in their life.

## Young people and Child Protection Conferences

From around the age of 14 young people are able to make bigger decisions about their life and what they want to happen. As such it is important that we listen to them and respect the choices they make.

Conference chairs will want to hear from young people about whether they feel they need a Child Protection plan to help keep them safe and will carefully consider their views when making a decision.

As children reach adolescence, the worries for them may lie outside the family and in their external networks. As such it is important that they are offered a conference that can effectively address the impact this has on them. In these circumstances a conference tailored to extra familial risk will be offered to make sure the right people are invited to effectively support and protect the young person.

## Support for families

The allocated social worker will offer parents/carers a referral for advocacy support during the conference. The conference chair will review this with parents prior to the conference if it was not taken up when offered by the social worker. Parents may also wish to bring a friend or relative along to the conference for support and this can be discussed and agreed with the conference chair.

The meeting between the conference chair and the family ahead of the conference will also identify any additional support families require to enable their full participation.

Parents/carers can also provide a written report for the conference in which they can share their views. An advocate is able to offer support to the parent in preparing this report.

## What happens after the conference?

After the conference has finished, parents, children and professionals will all be asked to complete a short feedback form to share their experience of the conference. Parents should also be offered a debrief conversation with the conference chair or social worker to talk about their experience of the conference and the outcome. The conference chair will review the feedback and tailor the review conference to ensure the needs identified are met. This allows families to attend conference that are bespoke to their needs.

The Child Protection plan will continue to be monitored by the conference chair. A midway review will take place 6 weeks post conference, and a further review may also take place ahead of the review conference.

All initial Child Protection conferences will be held at council offices, however if the family would feel more comfortable with the review conference taking place at an alternative location this can be considered and efforts will be made to accommodate the family's choice of venue where possible.