**Child Protection Meetings Torbay - Guidance during Covid-19**

**The social worker is responsible for the following prior to conference:**

* Completing the Section 47 Enquiry and preparing and presenting a written report to the parent and child before the meeting ensuring that it contains all pertinent information from all agencies, the conference is not an information gathering exercise and information from partners should be gathered and considered as part of the section 47 process.
* Support the parent(s)' attendance;
* All children (if appropriate) should be supported to participate in any child protection conference relating to them in a way that best supports their voice to be heard; and minimises any safeguarding or child protection risks which may cause further harm or distress.
* When a child attends all or part of the conference, it is essential that they are prepared by the Social Worker or independent Advocate who can help them to present their views. Normally, attendance would be at the initial part of the conference and the child then taken back home or to school by an appropriate person. It is not acceptable for a child to be left alone in a waiting room. Within 24 hours of the conference the Social Worker must inform the child of the outcome
* Preparing the child and parent(s) and informing them about the role, purpose and process of the conference (unless a decision is reached not to inform them). This information should include an explanation of who will be there and why. Parents should be supported to understand the needs and expectations of a child protection conference which include their role, parental rights and responsibilities. It should also be made clear to them their right to have a supporter present for emotional support. They should be provided with support and advice to help them prepare for and contribute to the conference supporting them to write down views or questions they may wish to ask.
* If the child or parents are not invited or do not wish to attend, they should be encouraged to present their contributions in writing or in another form and assisted to do so;
* If the child or adult is effected by domestic abuse or is considered vulnerable, discussions should take place with them to discuss what will help to keep them safe. Arrangements must be made by the chair and the social worker to prevent children and adults affected by abuse being present in the same room as the person responsible ~~r~~ if this will inhibit or prevent open discussions and/or lead to them being intimidated or threatened.
* Discuss whether an interpreter is required and briefing the interpreter as necessary;
* Discuss with the child and/or parent(s) whether they need any assistance to help facilitate their participation in the conference i.e. child care arrangements, transport etc.

**The conference chair is responsible for;**

* To discuss with children and their parents their preference for a hybrid conference or a virtual meeting.
* To be responsible for ensuring all participants in a hybrid conference are aware of the requirement to socially distance and to wear face coverings, and use the track and trace system and swipe the codes.
* Ensuring that children and parents are spoken to prior to the conference in a pre-meet this could be face to face or virtual, that explains the way the conference will be conducted, any confidential section, how differences of opinion will be managed what will happen next.
* Chairing the meetings in line with Covid risk assessments and requirements
* Ensuring that families are given the opportunity to actively participate throughout.
* That sufficient time is given to the analysis of the information shared and the creation of an outline child protection plan.
* The outline plan is child and outcome focussed and is clear about what needs to happen and by when so that risk is reduced for children.
* Chair to check arrangements to make sure families are kept safe during the meetings.
* Chair to check arrangements for children if they are attending the conference.
* Set the date for the core groups and agree when the midpoint check will take place.

**Other agencies**

* To make available relevant information in a written report to the conference and contribute to the discussion, assessment of risk and decision;
* To ensure that information to be presented by them at conference is known to the social worker and family, and must be shared with, the child and parents beforehand – no surprises.
* The reports should be shared with the parents and the child (if old enough) before the conference, in the same way as described for social workers.
* To ensure that their contribution is non-discriminatory;
* If there are exceptional circumstances where confidential information cannot be shared with the child or parent(s) beforehand by an agency, the agency should seek guidance from their manager, who should speak with the conference chair as to why information cannot be shared, and the conference chair should make a decision as to if this is acceptable or not .
* To ensure that information is communicated/translated in the most appropriate way taking account of the language and any sensory or learning difficulties of the child or parents;
* To ensure that they are clear about their role within the conference and the extent to which they have authority to make decisions on behalf of their agency.
* Police information – if police are to share information / intelligence that cannot be shared with families conference this needs to be prior to conference to prevent delay in starting the meeting and creating anxiety to children and families who may be attending. Professional timing for conference should be different to families i.e conference starts for families at 10:30 police and professionals attend at 10:15 if this is required.

**The below guidance has been produced to avoid distractions that may occur when working from home and will ensure that participants are fully present and able to engage during the child protection conference:**

* Use a neutral or corporate virtual background
* Use a quiet, confidential and uninterrupted space away from others and reduce distractions such as pets.
* Maintain confidentiality at all times
* Clearly explain the expectations of how the meeting will run i.e. use of mute and hands up function
* Undertake introductions of who is present and the reason for attendance
* Ensure that participants do not speak over others and take it in turns to speak.
* Consider comfort breaks, especially in meetings where heightened emotions are expressed or if the duration of the conference means participants may need refreshments away from the screen.