

Guidance for individuals attending child protection conferences in the role of supporter and contract of expectations

Introduction

Children's wellbeing directorate encourages the meaningful participation of parents at all child protection conferences, including through the presence of advocates or supporters. The role of supporter is distinct from the role of advocate: an advocate represents a recognised, regulatory body and is present in a professional capacity, whereas a supporter will have a prior personal relationship with the parent they are supporting.

This guidance explains the role of supporters at child protection conferences, and the standards of conduct that are expected. Specific guidance exists in relation to the attendance of solicitors at child protection conferences.

This guidance has been written in accordance with Herefordshire safeguarding children board's procedures in relation to child protection conferencing (West Mercia consortium procedures).

The role of the chairperson (please also refer to the conference expectations which will be made available to you during the conference)

- the presence, number and contributions of supporters at conference is subject to the agreement of the chairperson
- the level and manner of involvement from supporters should be discussed and agreed with the chairperson in advance of the conference
- the chairperson should, at the start of the conference, make clear the presence and role of the supporter in attendance and ensure that parent(s) are happy for the supporter to hear the information shared at conference, which is likely to be personal and sensitive
- the chairperson is responsible for ensuring that all conference members conduct themselves appropriately and any person can be asked to leave the conference as a result of their conduct
- the decision of the chairperson in relation to the presence and role of the supporter is final

Supporters CAN:

- attend a conference with a parent (or person with parental responsibility), for the purpose of expressing the parent's views and supporting the parent to participate in the discussion
- in exceptional circumstances, attend a conference on behalf of a parent for the purpose outlined above, but only with the explicit, written consent of the parent being represented and only where the parent has discussed this directly with the chairperson or social worker

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- ask for clarification of information shared at conference, through the chairperson
- be present throughout the conference and hear all information shared, other than information that must be shared confidentially, without parents present
- contribute to discussions in relation to the plan, as appropriate and as part of the core group membership and the family's ongoing support network

Supporters CANNOT:

- express their own views or opinions about any of the information shared
- challenge or question any of the conference members directly
- share any of the information discussed outside of the conference: an intentional breach of data protection in relation to confidential information could result in criminal action being taken against you
- partake in the decision-making at conference with regard to the requirement or otherwise for a child protection plan
- act as interpreter of any kind – it is the responsibility of the child's social worker to ensure that alternative arrangements are in place where an interpreter is required
- receive conference minutes

Complaints

Supporters are not entitled to make representations by way of complaint in relation to the outcome of the conference or the process of decision-making leading to conference. They may however, in their role as supporter, support a parent or child to make such representations. Supporters are entitled to make a complaint on their own behalf if the manner in which they themselves have been treated causes them concern.

Statement

I have read the guidance above and understand my role and contribution to this conference, as supporter. I have had the opportunity to discuss my role with the chairperson in advance of the meeting, and to ask clarifying questions in relation to my role, where appropriate.

I understand the importance of the confidentiality of highly sensitive information and that I must not share any information discussed at conference outside of the meeting.

I understand that should concerns arise before or during the conference regarding my conduct or any aspect of the guidance above not being adhered to, the chairperson may request that I leave the conference and that ultimately the conference may be adjourned and reconvened without my presence. I understand that in this regard the decision of the chairperson is final.

Signed:

Print name:

Date: