**Understanding child protection enquiries and investigations**

**Information for parents and carers**

**What is a child protection investigation or enquiry?**

Under the Children Act 1989, Children’s Social Care has a duty to make enquiries and assess the situation when they receive a report that a child may be **at risk of significant harm or abuse**. This is called a Child Protection Investigation or Enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989. When we make these enquiries, we follow our local Child Protection Procedures, which are informed by government guidelines.

We realise that this can be a stressful and worrying time. However, we believe that most parents want what is best for their children and if there are difficulties we would like to help resolve these. We do believe that wherever possible children are better being brought up by their family, as long as this is safe.

**What is child abuse or significant harm?**

Government guidance sets out four main ways in which can children suffer harm or abuse. These are:

• Physical abuse: when adults injure or hurt a child or knowingly do not prevent them being injured.

• Emotional abuse: when children are persistently denied love and affection. Children suffer when they are constantly shouted at, threatened, ridiculed or taunted. Children also suffer when their carers are in an abusive relationship.

• Neglect: this occurs when adults fail to meet children’s basic needs such as food, clothing, warmth and medical care. Leaving young children on their own is another example of neglect.

• Sexual abuse: when children are used by adults to meet the adult’s sexual needs. It includes showing children pornographic material, such as videos or social media.

**What happens when Children’s Services receives information that your child may be at risk?**

When a child protection concern about your child has been raised with Children’s Social Care, these concerns are discussed with the Police and it is agreed whether the Police and Children’s Social Care need to make enquiries together or whether Children’s Social Care will do it alone. The Police are involved if it is thought a crime has been committed. A strategy meeting is called to discuss and share information and plan the enquiries.

To help us understand whether or not there are serious concerns we will need to do an **assessment** of the situation. This is called a **‘single assessment’**. As part of this assessment we want to hear about what you think about the concerns which have been raised. We also want to learn about any problems or difficulties that you may have for example with housing, finance or relationships, and what difficulties your child may also be experiencing. We want to hear about what is going well in your family as well as any difficulties you may be experiencing.

We ask for information from other agencies who have been involved with you and your children such as schools, health visitors, doctors, police etc. This is so that we can arrange, if necessary, appropriate support and help.

We will want to speak to your child/children on her/his/their own. We cannot do this without your permission and without your child’s agreement.

In some situations we will want to arrange a medical assessment for your child/children. This cannot be done without your permission and your child’s agreement. You will usually be able to attend the medical assessment and speak to the doctor yourself. The purpose of the medical assessment is to find out if any treatment is needed and if there is an injury, what caused this.

If your child makes an allegation of sexual or physical assault an investigation may be carried out jointly by Police and Children’s Social Care. In these circumstances we may want to do a video interview. We need your permission and your child’s agreement to do this. You will usually be able to accompany your child and may be able to watch the interview on a video link.

The interview will be carried out by a specially trained police officer and/or social worker.

We aim to complete the enquiry/investigation as soon as possible. If there are delays, we will explain why and tell you the reasons for this.

**What are your rights?**

Your rights as a parent are not affected. We want to work with you and your family in a transparent way in the best interests of your child.

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| **Your rights** | **Your child’s rights** |
| To be heard | To be heard and taken seriously |
| To be kept informed and involved | To be kept involved and informed, according to his/her age and understanding |
| To seek legal advice | To be protected and supported |
| To ask for explanations | To ask for explanations |
| To be supported | To have his/her views and feelings considered |
| To complain (please ask for a leaflet) | To complain |
| To appropriate confidentiality | To appropriate confidentiality |
| • To have an interpreter (if you need support in communicating in English) | To have an interpreter (if your child needs support in communicating in English) |
| • To have your cultural and religious background taken into account. | • To have his/her cultural and religious background taken into account. |

**What happens next?**

If after the investigation and assessment it is decided that your child is not at risk of suffering significant harm, no further action will be taken under child protection procedures, although the social worker may be of the view that you and your child need help and support. This can be arranged by the social worker or by calling a planning meeting.

If after the investigation and assessment there are difficulties which cannot be resolved in this way a Child Protection Conference will be arranged. You will be invited to this meeting along with other professionals involved with your child(ren) and a decision will be made whether or not your child(ren) needs a protection plan and what help and support are required to keep your child(ren) safe.

You can call us on 01432 260665 if you need to speak to someone.

This information can be made available on request in other formats, including large print, Braille, audio and other languages.