## The child’s participation

Child Protection Conferences are essentially a meeting for adults and in the main children do not attend. Many, of course are too young to understand and the matters being discussed are often not suitable for children to hear. The child’s voice, however, should always be evident and it is essential that the needs of the child are at the centre of the conference.

**Children’s Advocates**

All children aged over 5 who are subject to an initial child protection conference will be offered an independent advocate. This will be arranged by the convening team within 1 working day of a request for a conference.

The advocate will work with the child to help them articulate their wishes and feelings and either attend the conference on behalf of the child or in the case of older children help them to participate in the conference. They will also help children to understand the outcomes from the child protection conference. Advocates will share their report with the social worker in advance of the initial conference. They will also brief the chair where necessary to ensure the child’s participation is properly managed.

**Social Workers**

Social workers will need to liaise closely with the children’s advocate and ensure that they understand the wishes and feelings of the child in advance of the initial conference. Where there is no allocated advocate the social worker should ensure that they have ascertained the child’s wishes and feelings and completed the relevant form.

Independent advocates will support a proportion of children by providing advocacy at the first initial child protection review case conference and this will be agreed at the end of the initial conference with the advocate, conference chair and social worker. Social workers should continue to take responsibility for ensuring that wishes and feelings work is completed using the initial independent advocates’ work as a starting point.

The child must receive written information in their preferred language to explain the purpose of a child protection conference and receive the booklet “*Information for children about child protection conferences and plans*”. It is the responsibility of the social worker to provide this.

For those with communication difficulties an alternative medium, for example tape, should be offered.

**Direct involvement of a child in a conference**

In advance of the conference, the Chair and social worker should agree whether:

* The child attends for all or part of the conference, taking into account confidentiality of the parents and siblings
* Whether they should be present with one or more of their parents
* Whether the Chair meets with the child alone before the meeting or with their parent

**Conference Chair tasks in relation to child’s attendance**

The child will be seen prior to the conference by the conference Chair. A decision will have already taken place about whether this will be in the presence of a parent or whether the child will be accompanied by a supporter.

**Consulting with the child, post conference**

Whether the child has attended the conference or not, time will need to be spent after the conference to fully inform them of the decisions that have been made. This should be done directly following the conference if the child attended or later the same day if they did not attend. It is important that the child is informed by the social worker or a trusted professional and that this task is not left to the parents. Where a child advocate has been involved this task will normally fall to them or jointly with the social worker. This needs to be recorded. If this has not been done, the reasons why not should be recorded and signed by the team manager.

Children who attended the conference will receive their own copy of the minutes.

A decision will be made at the conference about the child’s inclusion in the core group.