

Exclusions from Conferences

Involvement of family members should be planned carefully. It may not always be possible to involve all family members at all times in the conference, for example, if one parent is the alleged abuser or if there is a high level of family conflict between family members. Adults and any children who may wish to make representations to the conference may not wish to speak in front of one another.

Exceptionally it may be necessary to exclude one or more family members from a conference, in whole or in part. The conference is primarily about the child and whilst the presence of the family is normally welcome, those professionals attending must be able to share information in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Decisions about excluding a family member will be made by a conference Chair and social workers should give consideration to the following exclusion criteria and notify the Safeguarding Children Service well in advance of the conference with their concerns.

Exclusion criteria:

- There is a history of violence or threats which may endanger any conference member. This must always be considered where there is a history of domestic abuse.
- Proper consideration of the issues is likely to be impeded by the actions and behaviour or presence of the parent/carer.
- The case requires detailed consideration of the child's disclosure and/or evidence and the parent/carer is the alleged abuser.

The possibility that a parent may be prosecuted for an offence against a child is not in itself a reason for exclusion, although in these circumstances the Chair should take advice from the police, about any implications arising from the alleged perpetrators attendance. If criminal proceedings have already been implemented the view of the Crown Prosecution Service should be taken into account.

Where there is a decision to exclude a parent/carer from a conference, they will be notified of the exclusion and the reason for it in writing by the conference Chair. The Chair will also refer to the exclusion in the meeting, provide the reason and ensure it is minuted.

If the parents are excluded from the conference:

- They should be enabled to communicate their views by other means, for example, by informing the social worker or by sending a letter to the Chair.
- The decisions and recommendations of the conference will be communicated to them in person, whenever possible by the end of the next working day. This will normally be done by the social worker but will be confirmed at the conference.

- The decisions and recommendations will be communicated verbally and in writing.
- If neither parent's first language is English, the decisions and recommendations should be communicated in the parents' preferred language.

Where, in exceptional circumstances, confidential information needs to be shared but not with the family this should be passed to the Child Protection Coordinator prior to the meeting so that it can be taken into consideration during the decision making process. Such information can also be shared with other professionals where appropriate during part 1 of the conference.

Legal discussions should not take place at the conference. If the plan is for legal proceedings to be initiated, this information should be given to the parents prior to the conference if possible. The conference is not the right place for parents to be informed of such a decision.