

Child Protection Conference and the child/young person's participation

This is an guide to outline how Sheffield assist children/young people in participating in Child Protection Conferences

The child/young person's participation

Child Protection Conferences are essentially a meeting for adults however, when deemed appropriate and following agreement of the Conference Chair, children over 11 years of age are encouraged to attend for all, or part of the Conference. Many are too young to understand, and the matters being discussed are often not suitable for children/young people to hear. The child/young person's voice however, should always be evident and it is essential that the needs of the child/young person are at the centre of the Conference.

Child/Young Person's Advocates

All children aged 5 and over who are subject to an Initial Child Protection Conference will be offered an independent advocate once consent from their parent/carer has been gained. Based on a triage system, 50% of those advocated for at the Initial Child Protection Conference will be offered advocacy support at the first Review Child Protection Conference. This will be arranged by the advocate allocated to the family.

The advocate will work with the child/young person to help them articulate their views and experiences and either attend the Conference on behalf of the child, or in the case of older children/young people, help them to participate in the Conference. They will also help the child/young person to understand what happened and what the plan is following the Conference. Advocates will share their report with the parents/carers in advance of the Conference. They will also brief the Chair where necessary to ensure the child/young person's participation is properly managed.

Social Workers

Social workers will need to speak to advocates to provide relevant information to ensure the advocate is able to complete their work with the child/young person in advance of the Conference. Parents/carers and the Conference Chair will see the advocates written report prior to the Conference. The social worker should ensure that they have ascertained the child/young person's wishes and feelings, and complete the relevant assessment, in addition to the work of the advocate.

Independent advocates will support a proportion of children/young person by providing advocacy at the first Review Child Protection Conference and this will be agreed at the end of the Initial Child Protection Conference with the advocate, Conference Chair, and social worker. It will also be dependent upon if the child/young person wants it. Social workers should continue to take responsibility for ensuring that wishes and feelings work is completed, building on the initial advocates' work if the child/young person is happy for it to be shared.

The child/young person will receive the booklet "*Child Protection Conferences: A guide for children and young people*". The leaflet will be sent out via Safeguarding, and it is the responsibility of the social worker to discuss this with the child/young person and ensure that this is brought to Conference.

Direct involvement of a child/young person in a Conference

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

- The child/young person attends for all or part of the Conference, taking into account confidentiality of the parent/carer and siblings
- Whether they should be present with one or more of their parents/carers
- Whether the Chair meets with the child/young person alone before the meeting or with their parent/carer

Conference Chair tasks in relation to child/young person's attendance

The child/young person can 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/carer or whether the child/young person will be accompanied by a supporter. If the child/young person is attending the Conference the advocate can be present if the child/young person wishes them to be. If the Conference Chair is seeing the child/young person separately then the advocate could also be present if requested.

Consulting with the child/young person, post Conference

Whether the child/young person has attended the Conference or not, the social worker will need to spend time after the meeting to fully inform them of the decisions that have been made. This should be done directly following the Conference if the child/young person attended, or as soon as possible after the Conference if they did not attend. It is important that the child/young person is informed by the social worker and/or advocate, and that this task is not left to the parents/carers. The social worker will be responsible for giving new information to a child; this is not the

responsibility of the advocate. The Conference should devise a plan of how the child/young person should be told. The plan needs to be recorded on the electronic file. If this has not been done, the reasons why not should be recorded and signed by the Senior Fieldwork Manager. Where an advocate has been involved they will, if the child/young person request it, also feedback to the child/young person, answering any questions they had and explaining what will happen next.

Children/young people who attended the Conference will receive their own copy of the minutes, which are sensitive to their needs. The social worker will ensure that this is discussed with the child/young person and parent/carer to ensure that it is appropriate. The advocate will provide the child/young person a copy of a child-friendly version of the plan via the advocate's feedback session with them.

A decision will be made at the Conference about the child/young person's inclusion in the core group.

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