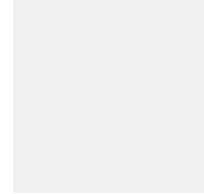


Facilitating the Participation of Children and Young People in Child Protection Conferences



RELATED CHAPTERS

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the following:

Advocacy and Independent Visitors Procedure

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1. Introduction

It is the policy of Walsall Local Authority that children and young people should participate in and contribute to any child protection process which they are involved in. The local authority has a duty to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children and young people and to give due consideration to them, having regard to the child or young persons age and understanding and the local authority's responsibility to act in the best interests of the child.

Children and young people will have the right to an advocate to support them to participate in child protection conferences and review meetings. See **Advocacy Provider** for the name of the commissioned service.

Advocacy is led by the wishes and feelings of children and young people and not on the advocates' opinion or the best interest criteria.

Advocacy aims to offer a high level of confidentiality to children and young people. However, this is breached where the child or others are at risk of **Significant Harm** when local authority child protection procedures will be followed.

2. The Process

At the point of convening a child protection conference, social worker will consider the child's participation in light of their; age, understanding and expressed wishes.

To aide the child's participation at the child protection conference the social worker will inform all children and young people 10 years and over of their right to an independent advocate. The social worker may choose to discuss the service with younger children depending on their level of understanding.

If the child wishes to see an advocate for more information/support the following will need to be actioned and considered;

1. Social worker to discuss implications of child's participation with chairperson.
2. For legal and practical reasons, permission for children to attend conferences should be sought from parents – social worker to discuss and obtain this.
3. Social worker to make a referral to the advocacy service (see **Local Contacts chapter**). It should be received in sufficient time for the advocate to make contact with the young person to ascertain what type of support/involvement is required.
4. Advocate visits the child to explain their role and agree the form of participation. e.g:
5. Consideration will need to be given to any ongoing civil or criminal proceedings and the implications for rules of evidence.
 1. By providing information (young person and advocate do not attend)
 2. Advocate speaks on behalf of young persons (young person may or may not attend)
 3. Child speaks directly to the child protection conference
 4. Child is supported in providing information to the conference in a medium conducive with their communication needs
6. Consideration will need to be given to parental participation and any conflicts of interest which may impact on the young person's participation.
7. Consideration will need to be given as to whether a closed section is required and how this will be explained to the young person.
8. Any special needs arising from language, culture, disabilities. Advocate may need to use

interpreting services.

9. Venue is booked allowing sufficient time for pre-conference discussions between chair and young person as well as parents.
10. Consideration should be given to the impact on the child of the formality of the child protection conference environment and any appropriate adjustments that need to be made.
11. Social worker provides all appropriate paperwork and information required to the young person and advocate before the meeting.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The Social Worker

- To inform the children 10 plus of their right to an advocate, verbally and by providing the child with information about the **Advocacy Provider**.
- To discuss the child's participation with conference chairperson
- Gain the consent of the parents for the advocates involvement
- If appropriate make a referral to the **Advocacy Provider** for an advocate in sufficient time prior to the conference
- Providing all required paperwork and information to the advocate in sufficient time to allow adequate preparation
- Negotiating with parents re their participation and how this may impact on the young persons involvement

The Advocate

- Meeting with the child and identifying with them their preferred method of participation
- To clarify any issues the child may have about the purpose of the meeting
- Informing the chair if the child is attending or not and how the child's views will be represented
- Reading the relevant information (reports) supplied, in order to assist the child in understanding the information to be presented to the meeting
- To present the child's wishes and feelings in the form agreed with the child and conducive with their communication needs (written, verbal, tape, drawings etc), whether the child chooses to present or not at the meeting

- To meet with the child after the meeting to obtain feedback on how they felt about their participation and the role of the advocate
- To feedback any relevant comments to chair and s/w

Conference Chairperson

- Where the child is attending the chair will meet with the child and advocate prior to the conference
- Chairs will deliver an opening statement which will advise all conference attendees to be mindful of their responsibilities in avoiding questioning the child or young person in a manner which would subject them to evidential enquiry or to hear, read or give evidential facts
- Chairs will consult with parent(s) attending in order to positively facilitate the proposed plan for the child/young persons attendance
- Chairpersons are responsible for facilitating introductions for children and young people, ensuring that the language is appropriate and managing the process in a way that is not oppressive to the child/young person
- The chair will be available following the conference to further advise the child/young person and/or the advocate of the outcomes of the conference if they wish.

4. Advocacy Process for Child Protection Conference

See the Flowchart about the Advocacy Process for Child Protection Conferences in the Local Guidance Area