

Why is Wandsworth Children's Services involved with your child?

Wandsworth Children's Services has a duty to become involved with children and their family where there are worries that children are at risk of harm.

Wandsworth Children's Services has been working with you to try and address the risks and to make improvements to your child/children's lives.

Further help and information

South West London Law Centre

76 Falcon Road SW11 2LP.
Telephone: 0207585 0716

Civil Legal Advice

Offers free and confidential legal help direct to the public.
You can also find a specialist legal adviser in your area.
Telephone: 0845 345 4345 or
visit: gov.uk/civil-legal-advice

Law Society

Telephone: 020 7242 1222 or
visit: lawsociety.org.uk

Family Rights Group

A national charity that gives free, independent advice to parents and family members whose children are involved with local authority Social care services.
Confidential advice line: **Freephone** 0808 801 0366
lines open 10am-3:00pm Monday to Friday,
excluding Bank Holidays; or
visit: frg.org.uk

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

Free face-to-face information and advice on legal, money and other problems.
Find your local CAB in the phone book or
visit: citizensadvice.org.uk

Pre-Proceedings

A Guide for Parents

I have been sent a letter before proceedings – what is this?

A letter before proceedings is sent when Wandsworth Children's Services feels that positive changes have not happened despite working with you to try to make this happen.

The aim is to give you the opportunity to make some positive changes for you and your children, if this does not happen Wandsworth Children's Services will consider whether it is necessary to go to court.

A letter before proceedings sets out:-

- A summary of what Wandsworth Children's Services are worried about and also what the strengths you have within your family.
- A summary of what support has been offered to you.
- What you need to do to ensure that Wandsworth Children's Services do not go to court and the timescales for doing these things.

The letter will ask you to come to a meeting called a 'pre-proceedings meeting' to discuss the contents of the letter and agree a plan to try to make positive changes and keep your child/children safe.

The letter is very important and you should not ignore it. You should take the letter to a Solicitor immediately, once you show them a copy of the letter you will be entitled to free and independent legal advice.

What is a pre-proceedings meeting?

This is a really important meeting and could be the last chance for you to make changes to show that your child is safe in your care before Wandsworth Children's Services decide whether or not to go to court about the care of your child. The aim is to try to make improvements so court proceedings can be avoided. You must attend the pre-proceedings meeting and it is strongly recommended that you also bring your Solicitor with you.

The meeting will be chaired by a Social Work Manager and will also be attended by your child's Social Worker and their Solicitor.

You will have a chance to say what you think is the best way to look after your child/children. The aim of the meeting is to reach a formal agreement about the things you and Wandsworth Children's Services must do to keep your child/children safe and well in your care. You will have the opportunity to have a confidential discussion with your Solicitor before agreeing to anything proposed by Wandsworth Children's Services.

You will be asked to provide names of family members and friends who can help you to look after your child/children or, who may want to be considered as full time carers for your child/children in the event it is decided you are unable to do this. Wandsworth Children's Services will ask to hold a Family Group Conference where all the important people in your life can come together to discuss how they will support you and your child/children.

A review meeting will be scheduled at the pre-proceedings meeting for approximately six weeks time. Wandsworth Children's Services will come to a decision after an agreed time, but approximately 12 weeks, as to whether you have made the changes required and your child is safe in your care.

If you have made the changes that were agreed, then the pre-proceedings process will end. However, if changes have not been achieved then Wandsworth Children's Services will consider whether to make an application to go to court about the long term care of your child/children. If this is the decision it will be explained fully to you and you will receive a letter explaining the plan and timescales for doing this.

What do I do next?

- 1 Read the letter before proceedings very carefully and make sure you understand Wandsworth Children's Services concerns, and what you can do about them.
- 2 Check when the pre-proceedings meeting is and make sure you can go. Phone your child's Social Worker and confirm your attendance.
- 3 Take your letter to a Solicitor – they should come with you to the meeting. It is very important that you use a Solicitor who is an expert in family law. The list of Solicitors you have been sent with your letter before proceedings are all family law Solicitors who are fully independent to Wandsworth Children's Services.