

A Guide for Parents and Carers

This guide aims to help you understand what happens if social workers are concerned about the care of your child and have arranged a Child Protection Conference.

What is a Child Protection Conference?

A Child Protection Conference is a meeting that is held because professionals have concerns about the safety and well-being of your child.

The conference will decide how serious the risks are and discuss what kind of services and support are needed to help you and your family to help keep your child safe in future.

The professionals who attend the conference will have a written report. They will have spoken to you and usually given you a copy of their report before you attend (this should be at least 2 working days before the conference).

The conference will be chaired by someone who is qualified and very experienced in the safety and welfare of children. The Chair is independent of the day to day work that happens with you and your child. They will meet with you just before the Conference to make sure that you understand the process and answer any questions you may have.

There are certain rules that govern how quickly a Conference needs to take place, this is nothing to be worried about, it is just part of the process.

There is a procedure for [Child Protection Conferences](#) which sets out more details about what should happen and when.

Who will be at the Conference?

All professionals who are involved with your child will be present, for example your child's teacher and health visitor.

Professionals who work with you will also attend, for example a drug/alcohol worker or probation officer. The police either attend or give information to all child protection conferences. Other people may also attend, such as experts on disabilities, if necessary.

Are parents and carers invited to the Conference?

If you are a parent or carer you will be invited to the conference unless there are really good reasons why the chair thinks you should not attend.

During the Conference you will be given opportunities to express your views, ask questions, and, if necessary, correct any information that is wrong.

Can I bring anyone to help me?

You can bring a friend, relative or solicitor to a Conference to support you. If you are bringing a solicitor it is important to let your social worker know before the conference.

Can my child attend?

If your child is aged 12 years or over and it is appropriate, they are welcome to attend at least part of the Conference if this is what they want. Your social worker will discuss this with you.

The views of children under 12 years will be sought, usually by the social worker, and given to the meeting.

What if I am unable to communicate well in spoken English?

If you have difficulty in communicating in spoken English, a language interpreter or sign interpreter will be made available at the conference. The minutes of the Conference can also be translated for you. Please discuss your needs with your social worker. A family member should not act as an interpreter.

If I can't attend, or I am excluded, how will my views be heard?

It is important that your views are included in the discussion - you can do this through speaking to your social worker, or by writing to the Conference Chair who will read out your letter at the Conference.

Why might parents/carers be excluded from a Conference?

Parents and carers will only be excluded in exceptional circumstances, for example, if the person is likely to disrupt the Conference or if their presence might have a negative effect on your child.

Sometimes, in very difficult situations, you might be excluded for part of a conference while information about another person is discussed, or if there are conflicts between family members which make it difficult to share information with everyone present – for example – when your child would prefer you not to hear what they want to say, or in situations of domestic abuse.

The Conference Chair will make the final decision about exclusion and the reasons will be explained to you before the Conference takes place.

Do I need legal advice?

You are entitled to receive help from a solicitor, you can get a list of solicitors specialising in childcare from Citizens Advice Bureau. If your income and savings are below a certain level, you may be entitled to legal aid to pay for any work that your solicitor does on your behalf.

What Decisions can the Conference make?

The conference may decide that your child is not at risk of harm but would benefit from some additional services. In this case a plan will be written recommending these services. This is called a **Child In Need Plan**. You will be able to contribute to this plan.

If Conference agrees that your child is at risk of significant harm, then they will make a **Child Protection Plan** for your child.

Although you will be asked for your views during the Conference, you cannot prevent your child from being made subject to a **Child Protection Plan**.

There is a procedure for [Child Protection Plans](#) which sets out more details about what should happen and when.

If your child has a Child Protection Plan, it does not affect your legal status as a parent or your responsibility for your child.

The purpose of a child protection plan is to make sure that everyone is clear about what help and support will be provided, by whom and when.

This will include expectations of you as parent/carers to work with the professionals, participate in the plan, and make any changes and improvements so that your child is safe and well cared for. Your child's health, development and general welfare will be regularly checked.

Once your child is subject to a Child Protection Plan, a number of key professionals, for example, health visitor, social worker or teacher, will have regular meetings with you. This is known as a [Core Group](#).

The Core group will work together with you to carry out the Child Protection Plan and identify ongoing needs and services for you and your family.

The plan will be reviewed after three months and then at six monthly intervals. The child protection plan will remain in place until it is believed that your child is no longer at risk of harm.

If you think the conference was not conducted fairly or that the decision has not been reached properly, there is a procedure for [complaints about child protection Conference](#) – The Conference Chair or social worker will be able to give you more information about making a complaint.

If professionals at the conference are not in agreement with the decision made at a child protection conference, there is a formal **dissent** process. To dissent means that a professional disagrees so strongly with the conference decision that they cannot have their professional name attributed to the decision.

Where a professional is not in agreement with the decision made by the child protection conference chair, the conference chair will discuss this with them within the conference. If the professional then wishes to proceed with a formal dissent, this will be recorded on the child protection conference written record.

Dissent can only be expressed within a child protection conference, dissent cannot be made by professionals who have not attended the conference or after the conference has ended.

Useful Contacts:

If you need help or advice you can contact:

Citizens Advice Bureau

- 0191 477 1392

Family Lives

- 0808 800 2222 (Freephone advice line for parents)
- www.familylives.org.uk

Social worker details:

Name:

Team:

Telephone:

For more information contact:

Safeguarding Children Unit

- Civic Centre
- Gateshead
- NE8 1HH
- 0191 4333000