

Child Protection Conferences

A guide for families

- parents, carers and young people



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Wiltshire
COUNTY COUNCIL



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This leaflet explains:

- How conferences work to protect children.
- Why we hold Child Protection Conferences.

What is a child protection conference?

A Child Protection Conference is a multi-agency meeting held on behalf of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) to decide if a child/ren are at risk of significant harm and if so recommend a child protection plan, as required by government.

Before a decision to hold a Child Protection Conference is made, a multi-agency investigation will have been carried out (enquiries under section 47 of the 1989 Children Act). As part of this investigation, children and parents will have met a social worker to discuss the concerns.

The duty of those involved in child protection work is to ensure the safety and well-being of children about whom there are concerns. It is very important that the right decisions about their needs are made, and your involvement is vital, in looking at what needs to change.

The social worker will be responsible for preparing a report for the conference, setting out the concerns and also including the views of the child/ren. This report should be made available to you at least two days before the day of the conference so that you are able to add your views to the report. It is also expected that other agencies have shared their report with you beforehand.

What happens at a child protection conference?

The conference will:

- Be chaired by an independent Chairperson (Child Protection Co-ordinator), on behalf of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. This is a person who has had no previous involvement with your family
- Clarify why the meeting has been called and share information.
- Assess the risks and decide if the child is at risk of significant harm.
- Identify what needs to happen in order for the risks to the child to be reduced.
- Decide if any child/ren need a child protection plan, and, if so agree the type of risk – physical, sexual, emotional abuse or neglect.
- Agree the outline of a multi-agency child protection plan.

Who can come to the conference?

It is very important that parents are able to attend conferences about their children and are able to participate in the discussion. Conference members should be clear in identifying what they believe needs to change. Parents should then be clear about their own role and responsibility in keeping their children safe, and know what they have to do in order for the risks to be reduced.

If the child is old enough (usually a young person aged 10 or over) they will be invited to participate in the conference. The views of children are central to the conference. Young people will be contacted by the Children's Advocacy Service and a worker will meet with them to help them to express their views about what has happened and what they

need. If such young people do not wish to attend the conference, the advocate can attend on their behalf and express the child's views.

Parents are central to the discussion and attendance is vital, however there are rare circumstances when parents may not be allowed to attend for all or part of the conference. If this happens the reasons are explained, and their views are sought and reported by the social worker to help inform the conference.

There are no facilities for babies and young children at the conference venues – please contact your social worker if this presents any difficulties for you.

We want to work with you. Your views are very important in putting together a plan to protect the child/ren and to help you.

Parents may ask one adult to come with them to support them. This could be a friend, relative, solicitor or advocate – agreed first by the Chairperson (Child Protection Co-ordinator). The person who comes with you may listen and observe, but not speak for you – although they may ask for a short break in the conference if this would help. Remember that personal information about you and your family will be shared – this may include relevant criminal convictions. If you want someone to come with you, please give your social worker their name and address before the conference.

Representatives from the Children & Families Branch, the Health Authorities, the Police and Probation Services are always invited to conferences. Your doctor, health visitor or school health nurse, and representatives from the child/ren's school(s) are also invited to help make the right decisions. Your social worker will talk about this with you. They will be expected to provide a report, many will attend in person.

Everyone at the meeting is bound by strict rules of confidentiality. Your family will not be talked about by anyone except those who need to know to help with the child protection plan for your child.

What happens when a child is made subject to a Child Protection Plan?

1. It is usual that the core group made up of your family and professionals involved – will meet together within 10 days of the initial conference in order to set out detailed plans in a written agreement.
2. Your child's situation will be looked at regularly at further child protection conferences and core group meetings, and, except in rare instances, you will be invited. Conferences are held within three, then within every six months.

What happens after a conference?

1. If a child is made the subject of a child protection plan, then a social worker will be appointed as the *key worker* and a *core group* of professionals will work with the family, and carry out a multi-agency *core assessment* of the child/ren. Parents are always in the core group, and these are usually held once a month.
2. The aim of a child protection conference is to look at the risks to a child within the home situation, and the role of their parents in keeping them safe. Most children who have child protection plans stay living at home with a plan of support from professionals and other family members.

It doesn't happen often, but if the agencies attending the conference think that it is too risky for a child to stay at home, there will be a recommendation that the child be cared for outside of the home. This could be either by members of the extended family, or alternative care such as foster care, arranged by the Children and Families Branch, either by agreement with you or by taking legal action in order to place the child in the care of the Local Authority. If this happens to you, your social

worker will explain this to you and encourage you to take legal advice. This could be a temporary measure while we work with you to return the children when it is safe to do so.

3. A copy of the child protection plan will be sent to you shortly after the conference. Following this, a copy of the conference minutes (a summary of the main points discussed and the plan, together with all reports) will be sent to you, normally within ten working days.

When does the child protection plan end?

If the agencies attending a review conference agree that a child is no longer at significant risk of harm, the removal of the child's name from the list of those with child protection plans will be considered at that meeting. This decision will be guided by the independent conference Chairperson (Child Protection Co-ordinator), after taking into account the recommendations of those agencies invited to attend.

Is the list of children with child protection plans, kept confidential?

Yes. The names of children with child protection plans are never made public.

The list of children registered with child protection plans is part of a computer record, monitored by Child Protection Co-ordinators, and maintained by a custodian. Only identified authorised professional staff have direct access to the information held.

All Social Services Departments throughout Great Britain, on behalf of Local Safeguarding Children Boards, are required by government to keep a list of children in the Authority who are believed to be at risk of

significant harm, and where a child protection plan is necessary in order to reduce the risks. This helps to co-ordinate the work of professionals working with the family. If a registered child moves into another area of the country, that area automatically maintains the child protection plan, and continues to hold conferences until de-registration.

Who can I talk to about this and where can I get more information?

Please get in touch with your social worker if you want to talk more about this.

If you are unhappy with the help you have been given, and you cannot sort this out, then you can make a formal complaint. Your social worker will tell you how you can do this.

If you strongly disagree with the decision of a conference you can appeal against that decision. You should initially contact the child protection Chairperson (Child Protection Co-ordinator) to discuss your concerns. Following the initial child protection conference you will be sent a feedback form to help us provide a better service to you.

You also have the right to consult a solicitor or an independent adviser at any time (for example, the Citizen's Advice Bureau).

More information about child protection in Wiltshire, can be found at www.wiltshirelscb.org. This includes information on;

- Multi-agency child protection procedures
- Conferences (chapters 3 and 4 of above)
- A 'Safe Parenting Handbook' with helpful tips about parenting children of all ages.

You can find further information on childrens welfare on the government website, www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

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This booklet was published by Wiltshire Local Safeguarding Children Board working in partnership with Wiltshire County Council Department for Children & Education Children & Families Branch. You can contact us in the following ways:

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This leaflet can be made available in alternative formats: large print, braille, audio tape or disk.