

A Guide for Parents and Carers



Child Protection Conferences

This leaflet explains what happens at a Child
Protection Conference

What is a Child Protection Conference and why are they held?

A Child Protection Conference is a meeting, which is arranged by Social Services because there are serious concerns about the care or protection of your child(ren). The reason we have the Conference is to share information about your child and discuss the concerns with you and other professionals to see if any action is required to make sure your child is safe and well cared for in the future.

Who will be at the Conference?

People are invited to the Conference because they know your child or your family professionally, or because of their knowledge of child protection. Some of the people who are likely to attend include:

- *a chairperson (someone who leads the meeting)*
- *you, as the parent or carer of the child*
- *someone to support you, if you wish (a friend or relative)*
- *your child's social worker (and perhaps his/her manager)*
- *your doctor*
- *your health visitor (if you have a child under 5)*
- *a teacher or head teacher from the school your child attends*
- *a police officer who specialises in child protection*
- *a member of Social Services staff who takes notes of the meeting*
- *a community paediatrician and/or health manager*

Other professionals may also be invited to attend the Conference if they have been involved with your family, for example, a probation officer, staff from the hospital if your child has been in hospital) or perhaps an Education Welfare Officer.

The people who attend are not allowed to share information about the Conference with anyone other than the people who they work with who need to know.

Can I attend the Conference?

The Conference is about you and your family so it is important that you take part if you can. As a parent you have special knowledge about your child which makes your contribution to the Conference very valuable.

Can my child(ren) attend?

Yes, children and young people can attend the conference if they want to and if it is appropriate for them. Your social worker will talk with you about whether your child should attend, but this does need to be carefully planned. They will also help your child to prepare for the Conference, assisting them in how to present their views/wishes. It is not appropriate to bring along young children to the conference, so please talk to your social worker if you need assistance in making other arrangements.

Can I be excluded?

We believe it is very important for parents to attend the Conference wherever possible. However, there may sometimes be reasons why it is considered best for parents not to attend the Conference. For example, we may ask parents not to attend if, by doing so, it may put people in danger, or if it increases the level of risk to the child. Your social worker will talk to you about these issues if they are relevant to your circumstances.

The chairperson will make the final decision about who attends the Conference.

Can I bring someone with me?

Yes, you can bring someone to the Conference with you to offer support. This could be a friend, a relative, or your solicitor if you wish. This person can help you to put your views to the Conference, or to help explain things if you don't understand. It is important that you let your social worker know in advance if you plan to take someone with you to the Conference.

Can I write a report for the Conference?

You can write a report for the conference to be shared with all conference members. Your child's social worker or anyone you wish can help you to write the report and this should be with the social worker at least 24 hours in advance of the conference.

What happens before the Conference?

Your social worker will meet with you to talk about the Conference process and prepare you for attending. This will give you the opportunity for sharing your views and opinions, as well as hearing what concerns there are about your child(ren). Your social worker and other professionals will have written reports to share at the conference. You should always see these before the conference and have copies to keep if you wish.

What will happen at the Conference?

Your social worker will ask you to attend the Conference 30 minutes before it begins so that the person running the Conference (the chairperson) can talk to you about what happens. This will be a good opportunity to talk about any concerns you have before the meeting begins.

The chairperson will introduce everyone to each other at the beginning of the Conference and explain why the meeting is being held.

Everyone will then be asked to share information they know about you and your family. You will also be given a chance to share your information and to offer your views.

A person called a minute taker will take notes of the Conference and you will receive a copy of these notes (minutes) at a later date.

The Conference will consider all of the information and decide as a group what to do. If there are areas of disagreement regarding any decision, the final decision will rest with the chair person.

What can the Conference decide?

Having heard all of the information, the Conference may decide that your child is being kept safe and cared for adequately and that no further action should be taken.

It may be that people feel you would benefit from some help and support and this will also be discussed.

The Conference can also decide:

- Whether to make a child protection plan for your child and any other child who is living with you.
- To identify a social worker who will continue to work with you and your family (a 'key worker').
- To identify professionals who will meet regularly with you. This is known as the Core Group. The Group will usually consist of people who know you, or your child, such as your health visitor or your social worker. As a parent, you will usually be a member of the Core Group.
- The Core Group will meet and discuss the recommendations made by the Conference so that a Child Protection Plan can be agreed. This plan will list what work needs to be done by you and by the professionals involved with you, to make sure your child is protected and being cared for properly.

What can I expect if a child protection plan is made?

The conference will identify professionals who will meet regularly with you known as the "core group". This is usually people who know you or your child e.g. health visitor, midwife, social worker. As the parent/carer you will usually be a member of the core group.

The core group will meet to talk about the recommendations made by the conference so that a detailed child protection plan can be agreed. This plan will be a list of things which need to be done some by you and some by the professionals to make sure your child is protected and cared for properly.

A social worker will be identified who will work with you and your family.

They will need to visit you regularly, at least once every 10 working days.

They will need to spend some time with your child/children alone to check out their views about the progress of the Child Protection plan. It is essential that they check the home conditions including the child's sleeping arrangements.

They will need to find out more about your family's circumstances, to complete multi-agency children and families assessment which will be shared with you, as it will help to plan how best to future safeguard the children in your family.

The conference will meet again in three months to review how well the plan is working and to set another plan if it needs to. The plans then get reviewed every 6 months after that.

Your social worker will be expected to share their conference report with you in advance of the conference as will any other professionals involved with your family. If your social worker cannot meet with you and your family in person they will try to ensure that it is delivered to you by hand in the first instance or by post if that is not going to be possible.

What is a child protection plan?

A child protection plan is a list of things that everyone involved with your child- including you - agrees to do. It helps to make clear the changes necessary to keep your child safe.

It will spell out what needs to be done, by who and when.

This plan will be regularly checked at the core group and the review child protection conference to see that it is working and the necessary changes are being made.

Can the Conference decide to take my child(ren) away?

This is something which we only talk about and consider as a last resort. The law says that every effort must be made by Social Services to work with you while your child stays at home. However, sometimes the professionals in the Conference may feel that your child is at serious risk of harm living at home. The Conference **cannot take your child away**, but it can recommend that Social Services seek legal advice.

Can I appeal/complain if I am unhappy about the decision of the Conference?

If you are unhappy about any aspect of the conference and you wish to discuss your concerns, you should write or speak (with the social worker's help if you wish) to the chairperson.

The chairperson will consult with customer care and decide how best to resolve the matters you raise.

You may wish to make your concerns known via a formal representation to Specialist Children's services. The Complaints Team ensure that representations from parents are placed on the record and shared with management. The team can also help you to put your representation in writing. If you wish to contact the Complaints Team direct you can do so by writing, emailing or telephoning:

Children's Social Services, Complaints Team, Kroner House, Eurogate Business
Park, Ashford, TN24 8XU
Tel: 03000 410304 Fax: 03000 422769
Email: cscomplaints@kent.gov.uk

You may also wish to contact any of the following organisations for advice or support:

Kent Central Duty Team: 03000 411111

Out of Hours Service: 03000 419191

If you need to speak to a social worker in an emergency outside office hours.

Parentline Plus: **0808 800 2222** (freephone)

Support line for anyone parenting a child

Family Rights Group: **0800 7311696**

Offers a free, confidential advice service for families whose children are involved with Social Services