

FAMILY LAW

Child Protection Conferences – Information for Parents.

When will a child protection conference be held?

Social Services have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to protect children from suffering harm. Social Services will hold a Child Protection Conference to decide whether a child's name should be placed on the Child Protection Register.

What is the Child Protection Register?

The child Protection Register is a register Social Services must keep which lists all children in its area who are judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm and for whom there is a child protection plan. The purpose of the register is to make agencies and professionals aware of children who may need safeguarding.

Who will be at the Conference?

- The conference will be conducted by the chair who is responsible for chairing the meeting. The chair is independent of Social Services but often has a social work background.
- The child's social worker and that social worker's team manager.
- The child's Health Visitor or doctor
- Foster carers
- The child's teacher or head teacher or nursery worker
- The police will attend if they have been involved with the child
- The child's parents and legal representatives

The chair decides who should be invited to the conference. Parents should be informed about the conference and be invited to attend all or part of it although a parent may be excluded if there is an exceptional and very good reason.

What will happen at the conference?

The exact order of events varies from local authority to local authority. Reports are prepared by the professionals involved; your child's social worker should go through his or her report with you before the conference. Reports from other professionals will be shared. You can comment on the information. If you prefer we can speak for you. When the conference is discussing the decisions it needs to make we and you may be asked to leave the room.

Will my child be registered?

Your child's name will be put on the register if the conference decides there is, or is a likelihood of, significant harm leading to the need for a child protection plan because:

- There is at least one identifiable incident, which can be described as having adversely affected the child. They may be acts of commission or omission (that is either something was done which affected the child or something was not done which should have been done which affected the child.) Professional judgement is that further incidents are likely
- If there has been no actual incident, significant harm is expected on the basis of professional judgement based on known facts about the child and family gathered during the investigation process and on knowledge of research findings.

What are the categories for registration?

If your child is registered the conference must state which category or categories of registration it is using. The categories are:

- Neglect
- Physical injury
- Sexual Abuse
- Emotional Abuse

What happens if my child is registered?

If the conference decides to register the child it must make recommendations which include

- appointing a key worker (usually the child's social worker)
- identifying a core group of professionals and parents who will develop and implement the child protection plan
- establish how parents and children and members of the wider family should be involved in the planning process
- establish timescales
- outline the child protection plan identifying what needs to change to protect the child
- identify what further assessments if any are needed
- consider the need for a contingency plan

Will there be another conference?

If the child is registered there will be a child protection review conference within three months of the initial child protection conference and further reviews will be held at no more than six monthly intervals. At each conference the decision will be made whether to continue the registration or not.

What happens after the conference?

You will be provided with minutes of the conference, which will note what your comments were on the issues raised. You may be part of the core group and involved in developing the plan that way.

Is there any support for parents in my situation?


You can contact 'Families in Care' 0191 230 0977 who offer support for families with social services involvement.

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GETTING URGENT ADVICE

At David Gray and Company we understand that you may find yourself in a situation where you urgently need to speak to a solicitor. This could be because you have suffered or are afraid of violence from a partner or former partner or because your relationship is breaking down and you are worried about any immediate steps that you should take. To deal with these urgent

situations, we operate an emergency rota, which means that you will always be able to speak to a family solicitor in an emergency situation. We can then help you decide what further steps need to be taken.