

Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership

Child Protection Conferences

Information for parents and carers



Keeping Children Safe

When professionals that are working with your family have worries and concerns about the safety and wellbeing of your child(ren), they may hold a child protection conference to decide what should happen next. This leaflet will take you more about what happens at a Child Protection Conference

As a parent or carer it is really important that you come and take an active part in sharing information, be involved in decision making and helping make plans for your children.

You will be supported by your child's social worker to prepare for the conference. This will include if you want to write anything to be shared with the Conference Chair or shared with everyone attending the conference.

There may sometimes be reasons why it is considered best for family members or children and young people not to attend the Conference. The Conference Chair will make the final decision about who attends the Conference. If there is someone you do not wish to attend the conference, please discuss this with your social worker.

Can I bring someone with me?

Before the conference your social worker should have spent time with you finding out who supports you within your family and friends' network, it is really important that these people come to the conference with you. They can be there to support you in the conference but also part of safety plans for your family.

Before the conference your social worker should have talked to you and your child(ren) about who the most helpful and important people are in your life. We call this your family network. It is really important that at least some of these people come to the conference with you as they can be there to support you and share their views about what works well in your family as well as what their worries may be. We would want these helpful people to be part of creating a plan that best works for your family to keep your child(ren) safe. You can bring a solicitor with you if you wish. If you need an interpreter or have any other particular requirements, these will be provided for you. Please discuss this with your social worker.

Will my child(ren) be there?

We will try very hard to ensure your children are involved in the conference. Depending on their age and understanding they might be able to attend the conference with you. They might be able to attend another smaller meeting with you, their social worker and the Conference Chair or the Conference Chair may spend time talking to them.

It is really important that we know what they think about the worries and what's working well so their social worker will spend time with them talking about this 'and they will share their views at the conference.

If you and your child agree then there can be a referral made to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS), which is an advocacy service who can support your child to give their views.

Your child can also attend via video if they wish to.

We also now have the Mind of My Own App where your child can say what they think on an electronic device which will send their information to the conference chair. Your child will have this leaflet within the information they get before the conference.

Who will be at the conference?

The conference will be led by a Conference Chair. In Durham this is an Independent Reviewing Officer who works for the Local Authority but is not your child's social worker. There will also be people who work with your family such as your child(ren)'s social worker, and other people who know your family such as:

- GP
- The police
- Senior social worker/manager
- Health services, e.g. Health Visitor or School Nurse
- Education, e.g. school or nursery
- Probation officer

At the moment, our Initial Conferences are happening with some attendees in an office and some attendee's being on a screen via TEAMS. So that you, your child(ren) and your important people who are part of your family network are as supported as possible during the conference, you will be in the office with your social worker and the Conference Chair, with other professionals joining via TEAMS. This

might change in the future and other people could then also be in the room together.

The Conference Chair will always spend time talking to you before the conference so that you are really clear about what will happen in the meeting. This could be a phone call before the meeting or a visit from the Conference Chair or spending time with you alone before the meeting.

Why will the police be at the conference?

The police officers from the Safeguarding Unit are there because of their special expertise. They give information about any adults in your child(ren)'s life and whether they have cautions or convictions to do with children, violence or illegal drugs. Some other offences that may affect children's lives may also be shared during the conference.

Will I know what the professionals think before the conference?

Before the conference the professionals attending will contact you to arrange a time and place to share their conference report with you. You will be able to say what you think of the reports. Reports will be shared with you two days before an Initial Child Protection Conference or seven days before a Review Child Protection Conference.

What Happens at the Child Protection Conference?

At the start of the conference everyone will be asked to introduce themselves. The Conference Chair will check everyone has received all of the reports and has had a chance to read them. They will not fully go over their reports within the conference, so it's very important that everyone, including you, have read these beforehand.

The Conference Chair will want to make sure that everyone knows what you think, what your children think and what and what the people most important to you think. The Conference Chair will start by asking you first, however someone else can speak for you if you don't feel confident to do this'.

The Conference Chair will then ask about the worries, including the danger statement that your social worker should have prepared with

you. This tells us what the professionals are worried about and might also include what you are worried about. Your network of important people might also share these worries or have other worries. We need to know what the worries are so that we can work together to make things better.

It is then very important that we talk about what is working well for your family and what your life will look like when things are better, and your children are safe. Your social worker should have talked to you about your goals and agreed them with you however your social worker will be clear with you about what they feel life needs to look like for the children so that your social worker no longer needs to be involved.

There will be a plan that your social worker will have created with you and your important people so that it works best for your family. We will go over this plan at the conference to check that you and everyone else agrees with what is in the plan. We can then change this at the conference if need be. It is very important that we find a way to work together to create a plan that will keep your children safe. The plan will be clear about what you will do, how your network of family and friends would know if you were struggling and what they will do to support or step in to keep the child(ren) safe. The plan will also be clear about what professionals will do to help.'

When all of the information has been shared the Conference Chair will ask a Scaling Question. This is a question to help us think about how well you and your family network are keeping your child(ren) safe and what needs to happen next so that things continue to get better, where 10 is we know that there is a plan with your network that is working to keep children safe. Zero is we are so worried about the children that we need to take action quickly to keep them safe.

You will also be asked this question as it's very important that we know what you think, however when the professionals are asked, they must give really clear reasons for the number that they give and say whether they think your children need a Child Protection Plan. This is the decision of the professionals.

If professionals do decide that your children need a Child Protection Plan, then they will have a category of need which explains what we are worried about. The Conference Chair will clearly explain why the category has been chosen.

The categories of need are:

Emotional harm

Physical harm

Sexual harm

Neglect

Professionals might decide that your children don't need a Child Protection Plan. If this happens then they will continue to support you and your children as Children in Need and the plan we agreed earlier in the conference will not need to change.

A record of the meeting will be given to everyone who attended the meeting.

Most conferences take about one to two hours, although sometimes they may be a bit longer.

What if it is decided that your child needs a Child Protection Plan?

A core group will be set up to work with your family. It involves you, your network of family and friends, the social worker, health visitor if your child(ren) is under 5 years of age; or someone from your child(ren)'s school if your child(ren) is of school age; and could include professionals directly working with you such as probation or mental health services. This group will meet regularly (usually monthly) to see how things are going and if the plan is working. The first meeting will be held within ten working days of the conference. The Child Protection Plan will be looked at and any changes needed made at every Core Group Meeting to make sure this is still right for your family.

Alongside the Core Group there will be opportunities for you and your network of family and friends to come together and strengthen the plan you have created. This won't include professionals, other than your social worker, as it is important that you and your important people have a separate space to decide on what will work best for you as a family to keep your child(ren) safe. Your ideas will become part of your child's overall plan will get shared at the Core Group and Review Conference.

After three months, a Review Child Protection Conference will be held. This will look at the progress that you and your family have made and decide if you still need to have a plan for your child(ren). The Conference Chair will go over the plan at the conference and see if it is working. Further changes can be made to the plan within the review conference to ensure

it is keeping the children safe and everyone continues to agree to the plan. Review Child Protection Conferences will be held every six months until it is agreed that a plan is no longer needed. At the end of every Review Conference the Conference Chair will ask the Scaling Question again to see if professionals continue to think that a plan is needed and see if the scores have gone up which means the children are safer. Everyone can then see how well the plan is going. Review Child Protection Conferences are usually shorter than the initial conference.

'What is a child protection plan?'

'A child Protection plan makes sure that you and your child(ren) get the help you need so that your child(ren) can be safe. We know that problems thrive where there is secrecy and shame and we know that children who are connected to lots of people who care about them do better than children who don't have many people looking out for them. This is why we will ask you and your important people to create a plan that means that your children are safe, no matter what.

It will be created from the beginning with you, your children and your network of family and friends and make sure the people who know you all work together with your family to help make things better. You will have the most important part to play in making sure the plan works and in keeping your child(ren) safe. You will receive a written copy of the plan.

Who will know that my child has a Child Protection Plan?

Confidentiality is very important and everyone present at the conference will be reminded of this. Only those people who need to know are given information about you and your child(ren). If someone tries to find out whether your child(ren) has a Child Protection Plan they will only be told after their identity has been checked, and it is agreed that they need to know. You will need to consider who you want to share this information with and whether the people you tell will keep the information confidential.

Sharing information

If a Child Protection Plan has been made to keep your child(ren) safe, other organisations that need to know will be given the relevant

details for their records. This is to make sure that all the information about your child(ren) is carefully considered if they need action or attention from professionals who were not at the Child Protection Conference.

Health professionals who may provide care for your child include:

- Health visitors
- School nurses
- GP practices
- Hospital Services
- Midwives

Organisations that will receive notification about children who have Child Protection Plans are:

- The police
- Your child(ren)'s school or nursery

Other organisations may be informed of your child(ren)'s circumstances if they need the information to help keep your child(ren) safe.

Can I complain if I do not agree with my child having a Child Protection Plan?

If you are unhappy about the way the conference was conducted, you can speak to the Conference Chair, or their manager to make a complaint. There is a leaflet in this pack which tells you how to make a complaint.

Feedback from parents who have had children on Child Protection Plans.

A father's feedback on the conference chair.

'Your presence and demeanour on the day was really helpful. You seemed kind, calm and supportive. Personally I also appreciated your understated authority - you seemed very much in charge and I respond well to that sort of thing.'

A mother's perspective on meeting with the Conference Chair before the conference.

'I do specifically remember you coming to talk to us before the conference, though, as you were very calming and helpful and were the first person who explained what would happen in the room.'

A mother's view on how the children protection plan helped their family.

'It sounds cliché but it has made us stronger as a family unit. It has made us value family time more and brought us all even closer than we already were.'

Feedback from a social worker about a conference.

'I thought it was excellent that three of the four children attended the conference and had such a voice in the ICPC, the children's voice has been so central to the discussions. The children had lots to say and it was so good to hear them sharing their experiences in the meeting. The children's mother was also encouraged to be part of the meeting and was very vocal throughout the meeting, she commented.'