

Child Protection Conference

If a referral is made to the local authority regarding the safety of a child, the local authority is obliged to acknowledge receipt of such referral and decide the way forward within 1 working day of that referral.

If the local authority considers there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, the local authority will undertake an assessment under s47 Children Act 1989.

The definition of significant harm is defined within the Children Act 1989 as: "ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development including, for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another."

If the local authority identifies actual or likely significant harm, a strategy discussion must be convened.

What is a strategy discussion?

A strategy discussion will involve all professionals involved in the child's life, such as their GP, school, nursery, etc.

The discussion allows these professionals to discuss what assessments are considered to be necessary in order to promote the child's safety and welfare, and who these assessments are to be undertaken by. The professionals will also determine whether there has been any evidence of crime that requires investigation and whether a Child Protection Conference should be arranged.

What is a Child Protection Conference?

This is a meeting where, again, all professionals are invited to meet. However, the parents and sometimes family members will also be invited to attend this meeting. In some rare cases (where appropriate), the child is invited to attend also.

A Child Protection Conference is chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer. The chair will meet with the parents and family prior to the conference commencing to explain the procedure.

The attendees to the meeting will discuss the concerns raised and determine how, moving forward, the child can be better protected. The professionals will individually voice their concerns and the parents will, thereafter, have an opportunity to put forward their comments.

The parents will then be asked to leave the room whilst the professionals decide whether it is necessary for the child to be placed under a Child Protection Plan.

What is a Child Protection Plan?

If it is felt by the professionals that the child is at continuing risk of harm, a plan will be devised to assist in promoting that child's welfare and improve their safety. It will outline the nature and source of each harm identified, what is requested to minimise that harm, who is responsible for implementing that work and when it is expected to be completed.

A lead professional will be chosen (also known as the “key worker”). This is usually the social worker. It is the lead professionals job to ensure the plan is adhered to once put in place.

A Review Child Protection Conference should occur within 3 months of the initial conference date in order to review the progress of the plan put in place. If further review conferences are required, these should take place at 6 monthly intervals.

Disclaimer: The material contained in this fact sheet is for general guidance only. It is specific to the law of England and Wales, and represents a brief outline of the law current as at the date of the fact sheet. It is not intended to constitute, or to be a substitute for, legal advice specific to your case. Information up to date as at 13 May 2019.

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