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# A guide to Child Protection Conferences

Information for parents and carers



# A Child Protection Conference

A Child Protection Conference is a meeting held between parents/ carers, children\*, and services when there is concern that the child may be suffering or at risk of significant harm.

The Child Protection Conference is held to share information about your child and discuss concerns with you and other professionals to make decisions about your child's future safety, health and development.

As a parent or family member you will be invited to attend the conference and encouraged to take part. You may hear the words Signs of Safety being used; this is a method used to help capture everyone's views to help keep your child safe.

## **The purpose of the conference is to:**

- Share information about your child's safety and well-being.
- Listen to the views of your child.
- Identify the strengths within your family.
- Assess whether your child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm from abuse or neglect.
- Identify the changes needed to ensure the safety of your child.
- Identify who will help and support your family to make these changes.



The conference is attended by people who know your child and family. This may include professionals such as health visitors, social workers, teachers, doctors, police etc. You may not always know everyone who attends, but they will be there because they have important information to be shared within the conference. The Independent Chairperson will ensure that everyone introduces themselves and their role.

## Parents

As a parent, you will be kept informed about the decision to hold a child protection conference and about the process. This is so that you can get legal advice and prepare what you want to say to the conference.

You may wish to have help with an interpreter if you speak a different language, or you may have special requirements. Please tell the social worker if you do, so that arrangements can be made to help you.

If you have a learning difficulty or disability you can have an advocate to help you prepare and take part in the meeting. In Solihull this advocacy is provided by [Solihull Action Through Advocacy \(SATA\)](#). You can contact them by emailing [office@solihulladvocacy.org.uk](mailto:office@solihulladvocacy.org.uk) or by telephone **0121 706 4696**. An advocate is an independent trained person who can support you to understand and take part in the meeting. They can help you work out how to express your views and ask your questions, or express them on your behalf if you are unable to. They can also help ensure your rights are explained to you.

All parents should usually be allowed to attend a child protection conference. If there are issues of domestic abuse, parents may be invited to attend separately. **In exceptional cases, the chair may say you can't attend the child protection conference, for example, if:**

- you're the alleged abuser
- there is strong evidence that you'll be violent to someone either during the conference or afterwards
- you have very severe mental health problems
- you arrive at the conference under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

## Who can attend?

Other family members could be invited to the conference if they are involved in the child's life, for example, if they supervise contact.

If you, as a parent, want another family member or friend to attend to support you, talk this over with the social worker. It is not always appropriate as there is lots of sensitive information shared and their attendance will need to be agreed with the Independent Chairperson. If it is agreed that someone will come with you, they may listen and observe, but not speak for you, although they may ask for a short break in the conference if this will help you. You may want to bring a solicitor with you, but you will need to arrange this with the Independent Chairperson who will make the decision. The solicitor can only be there to support you, not to represent you legally.

It is very important that parents attend the Initial Child Protection Conference. It is your child that is being discussed and you have a right to know what is being said.

**However, if you do not wish to come, you do not have to and it will not be held against you, but the conference provides you with the opportunity to be able to:**

- give your views about what is happening
- ask your questions
- say what help you think your family needs

\*Depending on the consideration of age and understanding, your child may also wish to attend the conference. Children who do attend can have an independent advocate attend with them to help them during the meeting. Children can also have an independent advocate to meet them before the conference to ensure they have an opportunity to share their views wishes and feelings, even if they are not able to attend in person. The advocacy service in Solihull is provided by the [National Youth Advocacy Service](#) .

## What will happen?

You are asked to attend before the professionals for the first part of the meeting. This is when you will meet the Independent Chairperson. They will explain how the meeting will run and how you can contribute to the discussions.

In the next part of the meeting, the agencies attending the conference who have contact with your child or yourself will have been asked to prepare a report (they should have spoken to you about this and shared their reports).

The Social Worker will be asked to present Danger Statements - these are statements that explain the reason for the conference. They state who is worried, what they are worried about, and what is happening/could happen to the child in the short and long term if nothing changes.

**The chairperson will then speak with conference members including yourself to gather information that :**

- What is working well
- What people are worried about
- What complicates things
- How people could help keep your child/children safe.

The important information is written on a whiteboard so everyone can see, and you will receive a copy of this information after the meeting. When all the information has been shared the Chairperson will ask what people are worried will happen if nothing is done to change the situation. Scaling questions may be used to help assess how worried everyone, including yourself is. A scale of 0 -10 is used, where 10 is good and 0 means people are very worried for the child's safety.

The conference will agree Safety Goals, these will describe what will need to happen to assure everyone that your child is safe now and in the future. Everyone at the conference, including you, will start to identify what will be happening and how everyone will know that the child is safe, and outline actions that need to happen to help achieve the Safety Goal.

## The outcome

The outcome of the conference will be decided from these discussions by those pre-sent.

- If it is identified there are no concerns about your child's safety, your family will continue to work with the services you have always been involved with; for example, your child's school, GP, or a health visitor etc.
- If there are some concerns about your child's safety, the social worker may work with you and your family alongside other professionals on a Child In Need basis.
- If your child is considered to have either suffered, is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm, it will be agreed that a Child Protection Plan will be created to make sure that there are safeguards in place to reduce the risks to your child. You will be invited to meet with a core group of professionals within 10 days of the conference, to build on the outlined actions discussed and create the Child Protection Plan.

**Once a decision is made that there are concerns of significant harm, the conference will consider which category best describes the concerns.**

**These are:**

- Neglect
- Physical
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional abuse

The child protection plan will help to co-ordinate the work of everyone involved with the child.

## After the conference

A date for a review conference in 3 months time will also be agreed, where you will all be invited back to discuss the progress made to meet the safety goals. Each review meeting can have any one of the outcomes outlined above, however if people attending the review conferences feel that there is no progress, or at any point in time significant harm has increased for the child, Children's Services may seek legal advice to decide what needs to happen to make the child safe. You will be fully in-formed if this should happen.



Following the conference, you will be asked to complete a conference feedback form. Your views are very valuable, and although the information you provide in this form will not change what has happened in the conference you attended, it may help to inform what is working well, or things that may need to be changed in the future.

If it has been decided that your child requires a child protection plan and you think the decision is unfair you should talk to the social worker about it.



The social worker may be able to explain further why the decision was made and answer any questions that are worrying you. If you still disagree you can contact the person who chaired the Child Protection Conference to explain why, and an informal meeting will be arranged so that you can discuss it.

## Unhappy with the result

If after this meeting you are still unhappy with the decision made by the Child Protection Conference, you have a right to raise a complaint with the conference chair or the manager of the child protection & review unit. If you are still unhappy you can request for it to be looked at by a panel of people made up of representatives from multi-agencies such as health, police, education and children and families social care who are part of the Local Safeguarding Children Partnership. This panel can make recommendations to the Child Protection Conference after considering both your view and that of the conference members. However, the final decision about whether a child requires a child protection plan can only be made by members of the child protection conference. **A complaint must be sent to the Conference Chair or the Child Protection and Review Unit Manager within 28 days of the Child Protection Conference in respect of which the complaint is made.**

**If you are unhappy with an individual agencies, their performance and the provision or non-provision of services you should follow the relevant agency's complaints procedure.**

For independent information you may wish to contact:

**Solihull Citizens Advice** – general advice queries **0808 2787 976** open Monday-Friday 10-14:30

**Family Rights Group**—A free telephone advice line **0808 801 0366** open Monday to Friday between 9.30am and 3pm (excluding Bank Holidays).

For Textphone dial **18001** followed by the advice line number. Or you can access their website at <https://frg.org.uk/get-help-and-advice/>