

**Child Protection Conferences – A Guide for Parents and Carers**

**I have been invited to a child protection conference. What is a Child Protection Conference?**

Child protection conferences are held when there are worries that a child may not be safe or where there needs are not being met. We know that there are a number of reasons why this may be the situation. This is a meeting organised by North Yorkshire Children and Families Service, which brings you and your child (if they are old enough) together with all the professionals already involved with your child (for example, your child's social worker, GP, health visitor and teacher) to talk with you about your child, not only about the worries but also about the strengths in your family and the things that are working well and how we can build on these. Other professionals are also invited to the meeting for example, the Police or a paediatrician if they have information to share that may help.

**The aim of the meeting is to discuss with you all the relevant information provided by you and everyone at the meeting and decide how best to support you and your child so that the worries can be sorted out. A plan may be made with you, for you and everyone at the meeting to follow. Another meeting will be held in a few weeks’ time to see how far the worries have been sorted and if the plan needs to be changed.**

Child Protection Conferences decide whether your child needs a Child Protection Plan to sort out the worries for their safety and welfare or whether there is a different way this can be done. Child Protection Plans are made when a child is thought to have suffered significant harm or is likely to suffer significant harm if things don’t change.

**Child Protection Conferences cannot decide to remove a child from their family but, if your child is thought to be at serious or immediate risk of harm we will firstly help you to work out the best arrangements to reduce the risk.**

As a parent or carer you have an important role in the meeting and it is important that you take part in the meeting to help us to understand what may be happening for you and your family so that the worries can be sorted out. We understand that it can be difficult to take part in such meetings and so you are welcome to have someone with you to act as your “supporter”. This could be another member of your family or a trusted friend. This should be someone you can rely on to give good advice and to keep your personal, and sometimes very sensitive information confidential. Your supporter is there for your support and will not be asked to give their views and opinions.

If you can’t join in the meeting, please let your child’s social worker know as soon as possible, it may be that we can help and it might be possible for you to join in the meeting in some other way. If you don’t take part in the meeting, it may go ahead without you. If this happens the social worker will visit you to explain what happened and you will receive a written record of the meeting.

**What if there is someone I don’t want to be in the meeting?**

You can talk about this with your child’s Social Worker before the meeting takes place. In exceptional circumstances a parent or carer may not be invited to the conference. This is when the person who chairs the meeting decides that someone might threaten others in the meeting that or disrupt the meeting. In such cases the parent or carer can give their views and opinions to the Social Worker or the chair of the meeting before the starts. Their views will be read out in the meeting.

**Will my child be invited?**

We do encourage young people to take part in their conferences when this is appropriate. However, this depends on your child’s age, understanding and views about attending. It is something that the social worker will discuss with you and your child. The decision to invite your child is made by the chair of the meeting in discussion with you and the social worker. As sensitive personal information may be discussed in the meeting it is might be appropriate for a young person to take part in just a part of the meeting.

**What is going to happen at a Child Protection Conference?**

**COVID-19 Arrangements.**

**Child Protection Conferences are usually held in large rooms with everyone sitting with you and your family around a table to talk things through. This is currently not possible due to the Corona virus (COVID -19) and so the meetings are held on line with families and professionals joining the meeting by Skype – a free app is available from the Apple or Android App stores for download to your smart phone, tablet or computer – please note that this is not the Skype for Business version. Details will be sent to you about how you can join the meeting using this app and help will be available to you if needed to make this work okay, it will need to be tested well before the meeting so that any problems can be sorted out. Most people find it best to join the meeting with the camera on your phone or table turned on so that everyone can see each other – it is easier to see a smile than to hear one in a voice! However some people may not be able to use the camera because of technical issues and so only their voices will be heard in the meeting.**

* The person who runs the meeting (the Chair) will contact you before the meeting. They will talk to you about what happens in the meeting and answer any questions you may have.
* The professionals invited to the meeting should have already provided reports that say what they think is working well for your child and what the worries are. You should have had copies of these reports in advance but sometimes these reports are provided only just before the meeting. You will be given some time to read any you may not have seen. The chair will also ask you about how you feel about talking in the meeting and help you with this if you feel nervous about speaking. People in the meeting are friendly and there to help.
* The main points of the things discussed in the meeting are typed on a screen which should be visible to everyone. You and everyone else can check what is being typed and let us know if things have not been typed accurately – we don’t usually bother abut spelling mistakes as these are sorted out after the meeting.
* At the start of the meeting everyone says who they are. You might know some people – your child’s teacher for example.
* The chair of the meeting will talk with you about the worries about your child and about strengths in your family, particularly those that might help to sort out the worries. They will ask you what you think about things and what you think might help.
* Your child’s Social Worker and other people in the meeting will also have an opportunity to talk about things and you can ask them questions if you wish.
* The chair of the meeting will go over the main points of what has been said and check with you and everyone else that these points have been properly typed up. The chair asks the professionals in the meeting whether they feel your child needs a Child Protection Plan to help to coordinate everyone’s efforts, including those of you and your family to sort out the worries that have been discussed.

**What kind of decisions are made?**

After hearing from you and others about the strengths in your care of your child and what worries remain it will be decided whether the plans that have been made in the meeting, to help to sort out the worries, should be a child protection plan or a child in need plan. These are very similar, the main differences being that a child protection plan means that a Social Worker will visit your child at home and meet with you and your family, at least once every two weeks and the times given for the main changes that are needed to sort out the worries about your child are likely to be shorter. Both kinds of plan should be made and agreed in the meeting and they must be clear about what needs to happen to change things for the better for your child as quickly as possible. The plans should also be clear about what is expected of everyone, including you and, in some cases, your child, and how quickly required changes should be in place.

**What happens after the Conference?**

Another child protection conference will be held within three months of the first meeting to see if the child protection plan is working to sort out the worries. This new meeting will be very much the same as the first meeting except it is hoped that many of the worries may be well on their way to being sorted out. The Child Protection Plan is changed and updated in this meeting as things change.

The child protection plan will not normally be ended at this point as it is unlikely that there has been enough time for all of the worries to have been sorted out and to be able to tell if the things that have changed for the better will stay changed.

Another review child protection conference will be held within six months where it will be decided whether the worries have been sorted out to the extent that a child protection plan is no longer needed. If the child protection plan is still needed, this will be updated and a further meeting arranged to take place within six months. The meetings continue until the worries have been sorted out to the extent that a child protection plan is no longer needed.

If you have any questions you can contact your child’s Social Worker or the Chair of the Child Protection Conference.

**What if I have a complaint about the meeting?**

We know that meetings about very personal issues can feel very uncomfortable. We hope that we have supported you to be able to join in the Child Protection Conference and give your views and opinions about things. However, if you feel that we have got something wrong or you are unhappy with plan for your child you can talk about this with your child’s social worker or the chair of the meeting you can contact our Complaints and Commendation Officer directly on 01609 534193 or by email: cyps.contactus@northyorks.gov.uk

**If you want to read this guide online please visit:**

<https://www.safeguardingchildren.co.uk/parents-carers/child-protection-conferences/>

