Child Protection
A Guide for Parents and Carers
WHY ARE PEOPLE CONCERNED WITH MY CHILD AND FAMILY?

This is a natural question to ask but keep in mind that:

- The law states that Social Services must look into any information given to them regarding the safety of a child.
- The welfare of a child is always the most important matter even when parents or carers are upset and disturbed by enquiries which need to be made to ensure their child is safe.
- Professionals such as teachers, doctors, health workers and others have a responsibility to contact Social Services if they have concerns about the safety of a child.
- If enquiries are to be made about your child you will want to know what happens and how you will be involved.
**HOW WILL I BE INVOLVED? WHAT WILL I BE TOLD?**

- You will be told of any concerns about your child.
- Your opinions and views will be listened to in a way that is as comfortable as possible for you. You may have a friend, interpreter, advocate or solicitor present if you wish.
- You will be told of your rights.
- You will be treated with respect.
- Information about you and your family will be kept confidential and will not be passed on to others unless it is essential for the protection of a child.
- Most importantly, in the majority of cases children are not removed from their homes. It is recognised that the best place for children to be is with their families.

Where there is a need, Social Services will offer help and support to ensure that a child remains safely at home.

**WHO DO SOCIAL SERVICES SPEAK WITH DURING THEIR ENQUIRIES?**

They will want to talk to:

- The parents/carers of the child when they will explain the reasons for concern about the child.
- The child will be seen and, if old enough, spoken with.
- Other important members of the family.
- The child’s health worker or nursery or school teacher or doctor, and any other important people in their life.

**WHEN A MEDICAL EXAMINATION IS REQUIRED**

Occasionally, Social Services may request that your child is medically examined.

The main consideration in requesting this examination is always the welfare of the child.

You will be asked to give your permission, however, it is possible, where appropriate, for Social Services to apply for a Court Order to insist upon a medical.
WILL THE POLICE BE INVOLVED IN THE ENQUIRIES?

In some situations when the Police need to decide if a criminal offence has been committed they will want to talk to you. Usually these Police officers will be from the Police Public Protection Unit. They will not be uniformed and are experienced in dealing with such cases. They will usually visit with a social worker.

Remember that you should always ask to see the identification of any police officer or social worker who comes to see you.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THE ENQUIRIES?

In many cases enquiries show that there are no grounds for concern. If this is the case you will be told so as soon as possible, generally by the social worker who first visited. You will also be sent a letter of explanation.

If you have become distressed, you may wish to accept the offer of support from Social Services. This decision will be yours to make.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE ENQUIRIES SHOW THAT CONCERNS STILL EXIST?

A meeting called a Child Protection Conference will be held.

When you are invited to attend this meeting you will be told by the social worker who else is to be invited and why.

The following pages explain:

- The purpose of such meetings.
- Who is likely to be present.
- What will happen.
The purpose of the meeting is to decide whether or not there is a risk to your child’s safety.

If the meeting decides that there is a serious risk, your child’s name will be placed on the **Child Protection Register**.

This does not mean that your child will automatically be taken into care but it does mean that a **Child Protection Plan** will be made.

**WHO WILL BE THERE?**

- The child’s parent(s) or carer(s) with a friend or advisor if they wish.
- The child, if of sufficient age and understanding, if he/she wishes to attend. An independent Advocacy Service is available to support and/or represent the young person, if requested.
- Social workers.
- The child’s nursery or school teacher.
- Representatives of Health, such as a health visitor or the family GP, may be there.
- A police officer.
- Other important people in your child’s life may be there e.g. youth worker.
- A minute taker who will take notes.
WHAT WILL HAPPEN AT THE MEETING?

- The point of the meeting is to make sure that all important matters about the child’s safety are discussed, that everyone present has a fair opportunity to give their views and that careful decisions are made about the future of the child.

- To ensure that everyone is treated with respect and everyone has the chance to give opinions without interruption, a Chairperson will lead the meeting.

- The Chairperson, who is independent of Social Services, will have had special training and will be experienced in leading such meetings. It is very likely that he/she will speak with you in private before the meeting.

- Child Protection Conferences have to follow certain rules and it is easy to be worried by this. There is no need; the Chairperson will organise the meeting and will do his/her best to put everyone at ease and to keep everyone’s mind firmly on the most important matter - The interests of the child.

- Everyone present -including you - will be asked to introduce himself or herself at the beginning of the meeting. The Chairperson will then make clear the reasons for the meeting being held.

- In turn, all present will be given an opportunity to give details of any knowledge or concerns about the child. You might not be the first to be asked to speak but you will be given the opportunity.

- Many people feel anxious on such occasions and it is therefore a good idea to spend some time before the meeting collecting your thoughts and remembering what you want to say. Take some notes in with you if you wish.

- You will have received a copy of a report by a social worker about the enquiry at least one day before the meeting, giving you time to think about any responses that you want to make.

- Reports will be presented by other professionals at the meeting. You will be able to see a copy.

- If you agree that there are concerns about your child say what you think you and your family could do to help to improve matters.

- If you are not in agreement make your comments as calmly and clearly as you can.

- You might wish to give your views in writing as well as speaking about them so that you can be sure that you will not forget any points you wish to make. There is no reason why you should not ask for help in writing your views. This is up to you.

- When everyone’s views and knowledge of your child have been shared and there has been a full discussion a decision will be made by those at the meeting about whether or not to place your child’s name on the [Child Protection Register](#).
WHAT IS THE CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER?

- The Child Protection Register is a register (record) of names of children considered to be suffering significant harm or at serious risk of harm.

- A child whose name is on the register will have a key worker chosen to work with them and their family. This is usually a social worker.

- A child whose name is on the register must have a plan made to help and support them. This plan will be reviewed by a Review Child Protection Conference within three months and then at least every six months for as long as your child's name remains on the Child Protection Register.

- The Review Child Protection Conference must decide if a child’s name should remain on the Register or not. If there are no longer concerns then your child's name will be removed from the Child Protection Register.

- Between conferences you will be invited to attend further meetings called Core Groups, usually with fewer people than at the Review Child Protection Conference. The Core Group meets to help ensure that the Child Protection Plan is working well.

- The Register is not a court order.

- It does not mean that your child will automatically be taken into care.

WHAT IS A CHILD PROTECTION PLAN?

- The Child Protection Plan will set out what is needed to ensure your child’s safety and what will be provided to help you and your family.

- It says what Social Services agree to do to safeguard your child.

- It says what Social Services agree to do to help the family of the child if this is needed.

- It says what the parent(s) or carer(s) of the child agree to do to improve the situation.

- It says what other agencies, such as the child’s school, agree to do to help.
WHO AGREES THE CHILD PROTECTION PLAN?

- The Plan will be discussed and agreed at the Child Protection Conference, when it is decided to place a child’s name on the Register.

- The Chairperson will make sure that everyone at the meeting understands what is expected of them in the Plan.

This is important if it is going to work well.

SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE

- **Do I have the right to attend the Child Protection Conference?**
  Parents have a right to attend. However, there are some exceptional and rare circumstances when parents are not included. If this is the case, you will be given the reasons.

- **Will I be there throughout the meeting?**
  Any exclusion of parents for part of the meeting is unusual and again, if it happens, you will be told why.

- **Do I have to attend?**
  In order to ensure that the best is done in the interests of your child you should definitely attend.

- **What if I can’t make a meeting?**
  Discuss any difficulties you might have regarding work or childcare arrangements with the social worker as soon as you can. He/she will do their best to help. If you are unable to keep an appointment you should let them know as soon as possible.

- **Who can I take to the meeting?**
  You don’t have to take anyone, but if it makes you feel more at ease you might consider:
  
  a. A friend you trust and who is good at giving calm explanations. Remember that your friend may hear personal information about you and your family.
b. An advocate who will help you to put your points forward. Ask the social worker about this.

c. A solicitor who is a specialist in this sort of work.

- **If my child is placed on the Child Protection Register will he/she stay on it forever?**
  When the circumstances for placing the child on the Register have improved and members of the Conference feel that your child is no longer at risk then he/she will be ‘de-registered’. There are other reasons for doing this such as the child reaching 18 years of age.

- **What happens to reports and files about my family?**
  The law says that you have a right to see what is written about you although some details may not be shown to you on the grounds of confidentiality for another person.

  Minutes of meetings will be given to you without delay and the key worker will discuss them with you.

  Information in these files is shared only with those professionals who need to know in the best interests of the child.

  Very great care will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of these files.

- **Can I complain if I feel that I haven’t been treated fairly?**
  Yes. If you are unhappy about the way the enquiry has been carried out or with the way Social Services or any of the other agencies has been involved with your family you have the right to complain.

  It is best to speak to the person you have been dealing with directly (e.g. social worker, teacher, police officer, health visitor) or their manager first. If you are still not satisfied you might wish to make a formal complaint.

  Ask for information about their complaints procedure.

  You also have the right to complain about the way the Child Protection Conference was handled and appeal against the decision that was made.

  The first stage of this process is to ask for an interview to be arranged for you with the conference Chairperson. You should contact the Child Protection Co-ordinator (the name and number will be on your letter of invitation to the conference) to arrange this within 21 days of becoming aware of the conference decision.
An enquiry into the wellbeing of your child is bound to be upsetting and stressful, however please try to keep the following in mind.

- Everyone involved will try to do the very best thing for your child.

- It might help to talk to someone you trust who you know is sensible and who will not talk to others about your business.

- Write down the names of social workers involved along with their work telephone number and office address. Being worried makes us all tend to be forgetful.

- Make a note of the times, dates and venues of meetings you need to attend. It is easy to forget such details when feeling stressed.

- Remember that in most situations where enquiries are made, children do remain at home with their families.

- Please try to co-operate with the people who are involved with the enquiry. Remember, they are just doing their job, which is to do the best for your child.