

Child Protection Case Conferences

Information for parents
and carers



Listening to **children**



Introduction

This leaflet is being sent to you as a Child Protection Case Conference is being held regarding your child or children. This leaflet will help you understand what to expect.

What is a Child Protection Case Conference?

A Child Protection Case Conference is a **meeting** held about your child or children. The Government says that a conference must be called when Children's Services are worried that a child may be at risk of **significant harm**. Children may be at risk of significant harm because of **abuse** or **neglect** and where this is the case a Children's Service must, by law, intervene to work with families to ensure the child is protected.

What is decided at the case conference?

The purpose of the conference is to

- share information about your child or children
- decide if they are suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm
- decide if they require a Child Protection Plan to safeguard and promote their welfare

Most children who need a Protection Plan do so for **less than two years** and **stay living with their family** during this time. Having a plan does not mean that your children will be taken away from you. It is only the court (or in emergencies the police) who can decide that it is not safe for your children to live at home.

If your child requires a protection plan your child's social worker will aim to work with you and the other professionals involved to keep your child safe and protected. Your social worker will explain to you what needs to change to make sure your children are not at risk and will work with you to try and achieve this.

Who will be at the conference?

As parents you should usually be invited to the case conference. This is to give you the chance to hear what is being said, ask questions and have your say.

There will also be professionals at the conference who may include:

- your child's social worker and their manager
- a representative from the police child abuse investigation team
- your child's health visitor
- your child's teacher
- your GP (family doctor)
- school nurse
- nursery worker
- probation officer
- a minute taker who makes notes of the meeting.

The meeting will be chaired by one of Barnet's Reviewing Officers. The Reviewing Officer works separately to your child's social worker and is meant to provide an element of independence in the chairing of the meeting.

Do parents always attend?

You will usually be invited to the conference. We know it can be very difficult for parents to come to a meeting like this but we believe you are very important. We will do all we can to make it possible for you to attend and take part fully.

If you need an interpreter, help getting to the conference or with childcare please talk to your social worker before the meeting.

You can bring a friend, supporter or advocate to the conference and if you would like to bring someone please tell your social worker. If you have a solicitor they may also attend as an observer but you **do not need** a solicitor to come to the conference.

Occasionally we are not able to invite parents where we believe they may be aggressive or disrupt the meeting. In these situations we should ask for a parent's views before the meeting so they can be represented.

If you are worried about someone else attending, such as a violent partner, please talk to your child's social worker about this.

If you do not want to come to the conference you can send a letter, taped message or someone else in your place to give your views. However, in general, it is much better if you can attend in person and we will try our best to support you in this.

What will happen before the conference?

Before the conference your child's social worker will write a report which will be shown to those attending the conference. The report will describe your family, the concerns about your child and what is needed to keep your child safe.

You should be shown a copy of the report before the day of the conference and have a chance to comment on the report.

On the day of the conference you will be invited in before it starts to meet the chairperson and be shown the meeting room. The chairperson will explain in more detail about the meeting and answer any questions you have.

What will happen during the conference?

The conference is quite a formal meeting, which follows an agenda (list of things to be talked about).

The conference will start by talking about the incident or concern that caused the Children's Service to become involved with your family.

The first part of the meeting will be **sharing information** about your child and the concerns that professionals have. Each professional will give a report and then you will have a chance to comment and ask questions.

None of the information shared at the conference should be a surprise to you, although the matters discussed may be upsetting to hear. **If you need a short break** please ask the chairperson who will arrange this.

After the information is shared you will get another chance to comment.

The chair will then go on to discuss the **risks** to your child in more detail. The chair will summarise the factors of concern as well as the positives and strengths in your family.

You will have already met with a social worker who will have explained their concerns to you about your child or children. Your child may be at risk because of physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, sexual abuse or more than one of these concerns.

The chair will then ask the conference members if they believe your child or children are at risk of **significant harm** and if they require a protection plan. Conference members will also be asked which **category** of harm they are concerned about. The categories are:

- physical abuse
- emotional abuse
- neglect
- sexual abuse

The chair will then make the **decision** about whether to draw up a Child Protection Plan and which category of harm the plan should address.

What happens if my child requires a Protection Plan?

The protection plan will address all the concerns and list what needs to be done to keep your child safe. The plan will be carried out by the **core group**, which will include the professionals who work closely with your child. You will be invited to join the core group and will be involved in carrying out the protection plan. The protection plan will involve a social worker visiting you and

your child regularly and helping with things like your child's health and education and any other services they may need.

After the conference

After the meeting please ask to talk to the chairperson or your child's social worker if there is anything you want to ask. After the conference you should receive the minutes (notes) of the meeting which will also contain the Child Protection Plan. If you feel the minutes are not an accurate reflection of what was said at the meeting please contact the chairperson,

Confidentiality

Everything that is said in the conference is confidential and can only be shared outside the meeting with those involved in helping your child. If you are worried about what information is going to be shared, please ask the chairperson or your child's social worker to explain the rules regarding this. None of the information about your family will be shared with members of the public.

Safety and Respect

It is important that everyone in the meeting gets a chance to speak and that they are shown respect. The chairperson will explain about this before the meeting starts. Aggressive behaviour of any kind will not be tolerated nor will offensive remarks. If this happens the chair will ask the person concerned to stop and they may even be asked to leave the meeting or the chairperson may decide to end the meeting altogether.

Can the conference decide to take my child away?

No, the conference cannot decide to take your child away. Only a court (or in emergencies the police) can do this. The most that a conference can do is say that it thinks the danger is so great that this should happen. If the Children's

Service agree then they would need to prove to a court that this would be the right thing for your child.

However, whenever possible we aim to work with families of children at risk while they are living at home and we will tell you what we think needs to change and how we will help you with this.

What help will I be offered?

All children on the register have a social worker and he or she will talk to you about the kind of help your child needs. This could be help with their health or education or support and advice to you in looking after your child.

What can I do if I am unhappy with the conference decision?

You have the right to complain about the process of the conference or the decision to make your child the subject of a protection plan or end their plan. You can do this by:

- talking to your child's social worker or the chairperson after the conference
- writing to the conference chairperson
- making a complaint to the manager of the chairperson
- making a complaint using Barnet's complaints process, a leaflet is available.

You can write to the chair or his/her manager (the Senior Safeguarding Officer) at the address below:

The Safeguarding Division
North London Business Park
Oakleigh Rd South
London N11 1NP

More information about complaining about the **process** of the conference or the **decisions made** can be obtained from the conference chairperson or the

Senior Safeguarding Officer. Information is also set out in the 'London Child Protection Procedures'.

If you wish to complain more generally about the service you or your child have received this will usually be dealt with under The Council's complaints process and addressed by the manager of your child's social worker.

Where can I find out more?

The 'London Child Protection Procedures' explain in full the arrangements for case conferences.

These are available on the internet at www.londoncpc.gov.uk/procedures

If you have any queries regarding this leaflet please contact your child's social worker or the conference chairperson

Social worker's name

tel:

Chairperson's name

tel:

Equalities Statement

Barnet Council believes all residents should be treated equally, regardless of their race, religion, disability, gender, age or sexuality.

If you would like this leaflet translated into another language, please contact your social worker who will arrange this.