

Child Protection Conferences -A Guide for Professionals

LBH LSCB is committed to ensuring risk is robustly assessed and managed and that evidence based interventions are employed to ensure that wherever possible children can be safeguarded within their families.

The Signs of Safety approach, introduced in 2014, seeks to strengthen risk assessments and maximise family participation.

Your contribution in a child protection conference is important

Please attend. If you cannot attend, please provide a report and arrange for a 'well briefed colleague' who is able to fully participate, to attend on your behalf.

Attendance by key partner agencies is monitored and reported to the LSCB.

What you need to do before the Conference

It is important that families do not hear new information at the conference and it is the responsibility of all agencies that have relevant information to make this available to the conference in the form of a written, legible and signed report. The report should be provided to and discussed with parents, and children where appropriate, at least **48 hours** in advance of an **initial** conference and **3 working days** before a **review** conference.

These timescales are to give families sufficient time to prepare for such important meetings about their family life. Please respect them by keeping to these timescales.

The report should be provided to the Conference Chair at least **3 working days** prior to conference. Please also ensure that you bring a **minimum of 6 copies** of your report with you to share with professionals.

The Conference Process

Thirty minutes before the Conference is scheduled to start you will be taken into a room to read all the reports.

Please do not talk about the family during this reading time.

At the same time, the Chair meets with family members in the conference room to talk about how the meeting will run and how they might best participate.

The family may also read reports during this time. The family genogram may be highlighted during the start of the conference. All conference members will then come together and the conference is convened.

The Social Worker is the first professional asked to **summarise** what they know about the child and family, including what they consider to be the key dangers/harm factors and factors that help the child to be safer.

Other professionals are then asked for their information. As all professionals will have read your report you only need to pull out **your key concerns**. By keeping your information sharing succinct and focussed you will help to inform a clear plan to keep the child/ren safe.

Family members are given the opportunity to ask questions about any information shared at conference, so it is important that you have prepared them for what you will be saying.

When you are sharing the information take care in your analysis to distinguish between fact, observation, allegations and opinion. If opinions or general information is provided about a family or family member, the Chair will ask the presenter to provide the evidence on which the opinion or generalisation is based. When you provide information from another source i.e. it is second or third hand, this should be made clear. Please avoid using acronyms or jargon, to ensure that all participants understand the information you are sharing.

The most pertinent points that are raised during discussions are written up by the chair into the following framework:

What are we Worried About

What's Working Well

What are the views of the child

What Needs to Happen

The chair will move between worries and what's working well seeking views from all conference members.

The conference chair will then ask 'What are you worried will happen to this child/children if nothing changes?' (Danger Statements)

The chair will then ask the social worker 'Tell me what you need to see to be willing to close the case'. The chair will read the response in the workers words and then check out whether everyone agrees and if there is anything else.

The Plan

After relevant information has been shared the meeting draws up the plan to address the harm that has been identified. You need to be able to describe in concrete terms what you will see when things are 'safe enough'. These outcome statements focus on the differences that you will see in the child. Alongside outcome statements, tasks for family members and professionals will be agreed. You will be asked to say what you can contribute to help achieve the outcomes and to commit to clear and achievable timescales for any tasks.

Decision Making

The Chair will explain the threshold for a Child Protection Plan and all professional members of the conference are asked about the future likelihood of significant harm to each of the children. A scale will also be used to ensure that all participants are enabled to make a judgement in respect of the safety of the child/ren. Professionals will write their scaling number on a post stick note which will be handed to the chair. Whilst the final decision on the status of the plan, that is, whether the plan should be a Child Protection Plan or a Children In Need plan is made by the Chair, the professional's contribution in the conference inform this decision. You will be asked for a view on the category: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect.

Even if you have not met the family before you are still asked for your decision on the basis of the information presented to the conference.

The Chair makes a closing statement and includes the conference decision regarding the child/rens plan.

Further meetings

Following the initial child protection case conference, if the child is made subject of a child protection plan a core group will need to be identified and a date set for the first core group meeting. This is required to take place within 10 workings days of the child protection case conference.

If a child is made subject of a Child In Need plan a date will be identified for a Child In Need meeting, usually within 4 weeks of the case protection case conference.

If the child is made subject to a child protection plan a date will also be set for a review meeting. This is usually 3 months from the Initial Child Protection Case conference, and 6 months thereafter.

Therefore please ensure you come prepared with available dates.

Feedback and Evaluation:

At some point following the conference we will be asking you to complete an evaluation form to tell us how things went and we will use this information to think about conferences in the future.