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SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP



Guide for professionals working with children who are subject to a child protection plan

What does Child Protection mean?

Child Protection is defined in Children Act 1989 as there being reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. The Local Authority is required by Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to make enquiries to help it to decide whether it should take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. Section 47 of the Act justifies compulsory intervention in family life in the best interests of child.

What is Significant harm?

There are no complete criteria for establishing significant harm. Whether the harm, or likely harm, suffered by the child is significant is determined by comparing the child's health or development with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child.

What process is followed in Child Protection cases?

Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a strategy meeting should be held. Strategy meetings should be multi-agency where possible and involve all key professionals involved with the family. Children's social care, health and the police should always attend. The strategy meeting should decide whether section 47 enquiries should be initiated and agree a plan to adequately safeguard the child while the investigation is being undertaken. If the conclusion of the strategy meeting is that there is no evidence to pursue a section 47 enquiry, then consideration should be given to what level of support might be suitable for the family.

The Local Authority is required by section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to make enquiries to decide whether it should take action to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. As part of the Section 47 enquiry the social worker must see the child and meet with the family. The Social Worker should contact the other agencies involved with the child and ask for their assessment of the child in the light of the concerns shared. A section 47 enquiry may run concurrently with Police investigations, when a joint enquiry takes place, the Police have the lead for the criminal investigation and Children's social care have the lead for the section 47 enquiries and the child's welfare. At the end of a section 47 enquiry, Children's social care must determine if the threshold for significant harm has been reached. If this threshold is met then an Initial Child Protection Conference should be called. In some cases it may be that the threshold was met but the child is not judged to be at continuing risk of significant harm or that the threshold was not met, in both of these cases consideration should be given to what intervention may be appropriate for the family, if any.

Initial Child Protection Conference and Outline Child Protection Plan

An Initial Child Protection conference brings together and analyses all relevant information in a multi-agency setting and plans how best to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, this should be held within 15 working days of the strategy meeting. The conference will consider the evidence presented and making a judgement about whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm and the likelihood of a child suffering significant harm in the future.

As a professional attending it is important that you have a good knowledge of the child and any plan that may already be in place, and be prepared to share your agencies information and developments with the whole meeting, including parents. All professionals and the family will have the opportunity to talk about what they are worried about, what is working well and what needs to change.

It is also important that you have an understanding of the threshold guidance and the categories of harm guidance that is provided with every electronic invite. You will need to have considered prior to the meeting your professional judgement on threshold You should have considered how the threshold would be applied in relation to the case you

are there to discuss in advance, but be prepared to listen to all the information before sharing your final professional judgement and rationale.

You will be asked to scale the situation for the child on a 0-10 rating, this is done in line with the Signs of Safety Approach and is a useful tool to find out how the professionals and family involved feel that things are progressing.

The conference will agree what future action is needed to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, including whether a Child Protection plan is required and under which category of harm. The outline Child Protection plan will be agreed towards the end of conference and this plan will be further developed and added to by the Core Group members. The plan will state what each person/professional has agreed to do at the meeting. You will play an important role within this, working to the plan is your opportunity to improve the care, support and protection for a child. It is important that professionals take their own responsibility to progress their own actions/work streams within the plan in a timely way. This joint enterprise determines the success of the planning process. As a conference attendee you will receive a copy of the outline plan.

Should the conference be being held virtually or face to face, it is important you arrive into the meeting on time and if virtual checked in advance that you have the ability to access the meeting. If you are attending on behalf of a colleague, it is expected that there has been a good handover so that the person attending has a sound knowledge and can inform the meeting. If no-one is available to attend on behalf of your agency the social worker will need to be made aware of this in plenty of time before the meeting and it is expected that a written update will be provided in your absence, within this report you will need to give your professional judgement on whether the threshold of significant harm is evidenced or not, and most importantly your rationale for this decision.

When will the plan be reviewed?

The first core group meeting to review the Child Protection plan must be within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection conference. After that the core group should meet within six weeks of the first meeting. Membership of the core group will have been identified at the Initial Child Protection Conference, often including parents, wider family members, professional partners involved with the family and children of sufficient age and understanding. The core group is responsible for the detailed formulation and implementation of the Child Protection plan, previously outlined at the conference.

Once again as a professional attending it is important that you have a good knowledge of the child, be prepared to share developments with the whole meeting including parents, be aware of your part within the plan and be prepared to update the meeting on your actions. As a core group member you should undertake your roles and responsibilities in line with the agreed Child Protection plan or, if this is not possible, you should raise with the group.

Review Child Protection conferences consider whether the Child Protection plan should continue or should be updated, the threshold of significant harm is reviewed along with the progress of the Child Protection plan. The first Child Protection Review conference should be held within three months of the date of the Initial Child Protection conference. Further reviews should be held at intervals of no more than six months. As at the Initial Child Protection conference you should be prepared to share your agencies information, give your professional judgement and rationale on threshold, and be ready to contribute to the Child Protection plan.

What happens if a plan is not needed?

If it is felt that the threshold criteria has not been met and there is no requirement for a Child Protection plan, consideration may be given to whether a Child In Need plan, Early Intervention or Universal Services would be the right intervention for the family. This will be discussed as a multi-agency group and all professionals will have the opportunity to give their professional view.

If a professional wants to challenge a decision then they must raise this with the allocated social worker and professionals are encouraged to use the multi-agency escalation policy if needed.

Categories of harm – the full definitions of abuse are detailed in Working Together 2023

Physical abuse – ‘A form of abuse which may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.’

Emotional abuse – ‘The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development.’ There are multiple yet not exhaustive examples detailed in Working Together 2023. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

Sexual abuse – ‘Involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, not necessarily involving a high level of violence, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening.’ They may include physical contact and non-contact activity. Sexual abuse can take place online, and technology can be used to facilitate offline abuse. There are multiple yet not exhaustive examples detailed in Working Together 2023.

Neglect – ‘The persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse.’ There are multiple yet not exhaustive examples detailed in Working Together 2023.



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