

Child Protection Conferences - Intra and Extra-Familial Risks A Guide for Professionals

Purpose

A Child Protection Conference is convened when there are concerns that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer *significant harm*. This may be as a result of risks in the context of parenting inside the family home, or maybe due to risks presenting outside of the family home including in the context of a peer group, school context or neighborhood location, otherwise known as Extra-Familial Harm. The purpose of the Conference is to develop a plan to increase safety of the child and effectively address risks in partnership with the family.

Prior to the Conference

When you are invited to a Child Protection Conference, you will continue to be asked to prepare a report and talk through it with the family at least 3 days before an Initial Child Protection Conference and 5 days before a Review Child Protection Conference - it is really important that family members know what you are going to say, feel that you are working in partnership with them and that they are not met with any surprises. Reports should also be submitted with the same timescales to Reports must be submitted to childprotectioninvitereportrequest@hackney.gov.uk.

Timing & Location of the meeting

The calendar invite for a Child Protection Conference is sent to include the time that the Chair will be meeting with a parent. **This means that if there is an invite for a Conference at 10am or 2pm, professionals are not to join the meeting until 10:30am or 2:30pm** following the preparation discussion with the family.

Most of our Child Protection Conferences take a blended approach with the parents, social worker and Chair being present in a face to face meeting at Christopher Addison House, Hackney and most professionals joining virtually online. A parent may say that they would find it helpful and supportive to have particular professionals in person in the meeting with them and we will let you know if we need you to attend in person.

[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) requires that all professionals attending contribute to the plan and decision making process - this means that you need to attend for the whole of the meeting, which at times may require you to attend two halves of a single meeting where we have made arrangements for parents to attend separately, for example where there are concerns about domestic abuse.

A Systemic, Trauma informed and Anti-Racist approach to the Conference

For parents, attending a meeting with a large group of professionals can be daunting - they may already be traumatised by their own past experiences or the harm that their child is experiencing and also anxious about being judged even though the source of harm may or may not be within their power to address.

It is for this reason that we try where possible to ensure that only professionals who have an existing relationship with the family are directly involved in the Conference. If you would like to suggest another professional or a manager to attend alongside you please discuss with the Child Protection Conference Chair and a decision will be made balancing the needs and experiences of the family, the impact upon power dynamics in the meeting and the contribution to the actions within the plan that this additional professional may bring.

During the discussion in the Conference we will ask you to share your assessment of the family's strengths that can be built upon and will ask you to focus the discussion in the Conference upon the source of harm (whether this is in the family, peer group, school context or a neighbourhood location) and what you can do to intervene to help reduce the risk of harm and increase safety for the child.

We will ask you to take a trauma informed approach to the conversation, recognising the power differentials between parents and professionals and actively thinking about how racism, discrimination and oppression can sometimes unintentionally play out in meetings. We need to be aware of how structural racism and discrimination and racist stereotyping can lead to negative judgments about a family- a risk that we must consciously and continuously challenge in all of our work.

We will ask you to talk to family members in the meeting, not talk about them, in line with our principles of *working with*, not *doing to*. We will ask you to use plain English, be balanced in your presentation of strengths and concerns ensuring that information is factual and evidence based and avoid use of any jargon or acronyms.

To be respectful and engaging with the family if you are joining online we will ask you to keep your camera on at all times and ask you to stay for the entire meeting. Equally, a family member may prefer for you to join in person rather than online and if this is the case we will let you know in advance.

Together with the parents we will spend time in the meeting creating a plan, each of us taking responsibility for our role in reducing the risk of harm to create safety for the child. Working with parents as partners in safeguarding, *doing with*, not *doing to*.

Children's Views

Children, when of an age and understanding, may feel confident to attend the Child Protection Conference and either speak for themselves or have the support of one of the professionals working with them or a Children's Rights Officer to share their views.

The Chair will explore in advance how much of the Conference the child wishes to attend and whether they wish to speak first or wish to hear from others first.

The Chair will ask each attendee (including the family) to share in child focused language their views about the child's daily lived experience of the, what is working well, what they are worried about, what needs to change, and how this can be achieved. Professionals should avoid use of jargon and be considerate of any sensitive information that may not be helpful to share directly with the child in the context of a meeting, requiring further consideration as to

who and how this information is shared with them. This may mean that there needs to be two parts to the meeting- a section which children attend and a section which is with parents and professionals only.

After each person has spoken, others will have the opportunity to ask any question and parents have a chance to respond to the information professionals are presenting. The Chair and the Conference coordinator will be making notes throughout the Conference to inform the minutes and Plan.

Making a Decision about the Plan

The Chair will focus the Conference discussion under 3 main headings these are;

1. **Strengths and Safety Factors;** What is working well in the family? What is going well for the child(ren)? How do we build on this?
2. **Risk and Potential Harm;** Why are professionals worried about the children? Does the family have any worries about the child(ren)? How do these worries affect the child(ren) now and what might the impact be in their future?
3. **Unclear or Complicating Factors:** What else is important for us to know that we don't already know about the children? Is there anything we don't fully understand about the family or circumstances?

At every meeting a Plan will be formulated to address harm and meet each individual child's needs within the family, unless the decision is to end Social Work involvement.

All attendees will be asked to give their view as to whether a Plan should have the status of a Child Protection Plan or a Child in Need Plan and their rationale for this. Your recommendation should be based upon the information that you have heard in the meeting and the likelihood of continuing significant harm. The Chair will make the final decision regarding the type of Plan as well as one of the following categories should Child Protection be decided: emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse.

After the Conference

You will receive a copy of the Child Protection Conference Record and Decision of the meeting within 1 day of the Conference which serves as a record of the meeting.

This plan will be reviewed and progressed through Core Group Meetings and Review Child Protection Conferences at 3 months and then 6 monthly intervals.

We would appreciate your [feedback](#) following the Conference so that we are able to consider whether any changes need to be made, address any complaints and to also celebrate good practice.

Importance of Confidentiality

Child Protection Conferences often include the sharing of highly sensitive and confidential information. Information shared within the Conference should only be shared on a need to know basis.

As the Conference is a confidential meeting and that it is imperative that no one else outside of the Conference attendee can hear or see any part of a virtual meeting. This means that ideally, no one else has the opportunity to come in and out of the room you are in whilst the Conference is taking place.

We will ask you to:

- be fully focused in the meeting without any background distractions e.g. phone/emails
- have devices muted when attending virtually and not speaking
- Have cameras switched on so that family members can see that you are engaging in the discussion in the interests of being open and transparent
- use headphones and privacy screens if working in a location where others are also working
- not access the meeting from a public place.

If the Chair notices that anyone else is heard or seen during a virtual Conference they have the discretion to remove an attendee from the meeting video/call.

Equal Opportunities

Hackney is committed to equality of opportunity. We aim to treat everyone with respect, and expect that Conference attendees do the same.

Complaints

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of a Child Protection Conference in the first instance please contact one of the Service Managers for Safeguarding and Reviewing:

Sam Duggan: sam.duggan@hackney.gov.uk, 020 8356 5443 or Marissa Gardner-Wright: Marissa.Gardner-Wright@Hackney.gov.uk, 07483 431 368.

Should you not be satisfied with your response from the Service Manager please contact the Children and Families Complaints Team on 020 8356 5800 or children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk