

Child Protection Conferences

Workers and Volunteers

Keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility

Torbay Council Children's Services ■ Police ■ Health ■ Careers South West
Youth Offending Team ■ Probation ■ CAFCASS ■ Safer Communities
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Introduction

This leaflet provides information about Torbay's procedures for those professionals who are new or infrequent attendees at Child Protection Conferences. It does not replace the guidance on Child Protection procedures for the South West region, including Torbay, agreed by all the professionals and agencies represented on the Torbay Safeguarding Children Board and set out in the South West Child Protection Procedures. Every professional who may become involved with children and families where child abuse may be happening should have access to the procedures, which are available, online only at:

www.swcpp.org.uk

Further information regarding training and advice for professionals can be found on the Torbay Safeguarding Children Board website at

www.torbay.gov.uk/tscb

What is a Child Protection Conference?

A Child Protection Conference is central to child protection procedures. It is a formal meeting which brings together the family and professionals concerned with child protection and provides an opportunity to exchange information and plan together.

It is not a forum for a formal decision that a person has abused a child.

It is convened by Children's Social Care after enquiries have been made into an incident or suspicion of child abuse, or when a child who is the subject of a child protection plan in another local authority moves to Torbay.

There are two types of conference:

Initial Child Protection Conference

This is the first conference, usually arranged after child protection enquiries have been undertaken by social workers and the police. The Conference should take place within 15 working days of the strategy meeting. This means that you will often have very little notice of the conference, but it is crucial for the child's welfare that you give the conference priority.

The Initial Conference will share the outcome of the child protection enquiries, look at the relevant background information, the child/children and parents/carers individually, and on the basis of this decide whether the child is at continuing risk of significant harm.

The Initial Conference decides whether or not the child should be made subject to a Child Protection Plan, and if it does, the Child Protection Plan is then agreed.

Review Child Protection Conference

Reviews are held on all children who are subject to Child Protection Plans. The review considers what progress has been made and decides whether or not a child should stay on, or be removed from, the Child Protection Plan. The conference also decides what further work is required to ensure the safety of the child or children.

What is the purpose of a Child Protection Conference?

- To share and evaluate the information gathered during the enquiries.
- To assess the level of risk to the child or children.
- To decide whether the child requires a protection plan to safeguard their protection needs.
- To recommend a plan of action.

Who attends a Child Protection Conference?

All those professionals who are involved with the family and/or who hold relevant information are invited to the conference. Parents (and older children when appropriate) are normally invited to attend throughout. They may bring a supporter (who can be a solicitor) with them.

It can be helpful for a new or inexperienced colleague to attend as an observer, and this can be arranged (when appropriate) with the agreement, in advance, of the chairperson. It is important to avoid unnecessarily large meetings, and therefore only one observer per conference will be permitted.

Parental participation

Parents need to know the reasons for professional concerns, the powers and roles of agencies involved and the proposed changes in the family's situation that the agencies consider necessary or desirable in the interests of the child. Openness and honesty are essential in order to build a foundation of understanding and partnership between parents and professionals. The conference will only succeed in helping to protect children if it builds on relationships between professionals and families that are entirely transparent and open.

Parents need as much notice as possible of those concerns in order to seek advice, prepare their point of view, and make a constructive contribution to the conference. This process is always assisted when professionals have been able to share those concerns (and their written reports) directly with the parents beforehand.

It will usually be appropriate for parents to be present throughout the conference.

However, special circumstances may require partial attendance in order to ensure a full and proper consideration of the child's interests. Exceptionally, it may be necessary to exclude one or both parents for the whole of the conference, for instance where there is a strong likelihood of disruption to the conference or violence to a child or adult.

The chairperson decides whether there are special circumstances. If you have any concerns you should contact the chairperson as soon as possible. If he/she agrees with you, it will be helpful to the effectiveness of the conference for the new arrangements to be as carefully planned as possible, and fully discussed with the parents in advance. The chairperson's reasons for excluding parents in whole or in part must be recorded and given to the parents.

NB. Very exceptionally it may be necessary to meet without the knowledge of the parent/carer - when, for example, there is a need to safeguard children in whom illness may be fabricated or induced by carers with parenting responsibilities and where the risks are thought to be life threatening.

Agendas

Conferences should begin with everyone present, allowing for introductions to take place. Particular arrangements, for example the partial attendance of parents and/or others, are explained. Conferences rarely take less than one hour or more than two hours. Decisions and plans made at the conference will be sent to attendees within 24 hours of the meeting.

During a case conference, the following areas will be covered:

1. A sharing of information and opinion in respect of the children.
2. A discussion about the level of risk based on the information available.
3. A decision will be made as to whether to make a child subject to a child protection plan. The category of harm should be clearly stated and recorded.

If a child is made subject to a child protection plan, an outline plan will be formulated, identifying the roles of the people who will help the child and family, this identifies members and what is known as the 'core group' and determines when core groups should take place.

A key worker, usually the social worker, will be identified who will be responsible for co-ordinating the child protection plan. Any significant changes or events should be reported to the key worker.

Preparation for the conference

The Torbay Safeguarding Children Board supports the policy of all agencies and professionals submitting written reports to the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service at least 24 hours before the meeting. Any relevant information, such as children's drawings, may be brought to the conference. If you are unable to attend, please advise the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service at the earliest opportunity, who will ensure that any reports from you are shared with the conference.

The conference is chaired by an Independent Chairperson from Children's Services with no line management responsibility for individual cases. You should discuss with the chairperson beforehand any concerns you may have about sharing particularly sensitive or confidential information.

If during the conference you would like clarification of any points, do feel free to ask the chairperson. It is part of his/her role to enable all participants to contribute fully to the conference. The chairperson will ensure that the focus of the meeting is on the child. He/she will summarise the main issues and seek contribution from members about the decision and recommendations.

Where agreement cannot be reached the chairperson will decide. When there is a complaint or area of concern arising from the operation of the inter-agency child protection procedures, the chairperson will inform members of the method of referral to the Torbay Safeguarding Children Board.

Expectations of Professionals

- Every agency invited to attend a child protection conference is expected to be represented.
- All attendees will remain until all decision making is complete. (Case Conferences usually last between 1 - 2 hours and professionals must allow sufficient time for their attendance and full participation)
- Agencies must ensure that their representative is fully informed and able to bring all relevant information to the child protection conference, including relevant information about parents and significant adults.
- All agencies will provide a written report, which is sent to the chairperson at least 24 hours before the meeting.
- You will be asked to consider all the information shared at the child protection conference and form an opinion about the risk to the child and whether the child should be subject to a protection plan.

- A decision to make the child subject to a child protection plan is made by consensus or the majority view of professionals at the meeting. Where there is a split decision, the final decision rests with the conference chair.
- You may be expected to become part of a core group and have a role in the child protection plan. If you are a member of the core group you are expected to attend core group meetings.
- The core group has responsibility for developing, implementing and reviewing the child protection plan ensuring the welfare of the child remains paramount.
- The first meeting of the core group will take place within ten working days of the initial child protection conference. The core group will then meet at least every four weeks.
- Child Protection conference minutes are issued to professionals but not the agency reports, however, these can be requested from the Safeguarding and Reviewing Service.
- If you do not agree with the decision of a child protection conference or core group in the first instance please discuss this with the chair. If you are unable to resolve the issue you should use the Torbay Safeguarding Children Board escalation policy available at **www.torbay.gov.uk/tscb**

Confidentiality and the exchange of information

Arrangements for the protection of children from harm, and in particular child protection conferences, can only be successful if the professional staff concerned do all they can to work in partnership and share and exchange relevant information. The degree of confidentiality is governed by the need to protect the child, and confidentiality may not be maintained if the withholding of information will prejudice the welfare of the child. Such information will not be disclosed for any other purpose without consulting the chairperson.

Legislation gives a parent (and a child able to make an informed request) a right of access to personal information held by a local authority (which includes attached reports) about him/herself. The local authority does not grant a request by a parent on behalf of a child unless it considers that the application is made in the child's, not the parent's, interest. The legislation provides exceptions to permit the withholding of information which would disclose the identity of third parties; would be likely to result in serious harm to the physical or mental health or emotional condition of the individual or any other person; would be likely to prejudice the apprehension or prosecution of offenders in criminal proceedings or the local authority's case in civil proceedings.

It should be remembered that the fundamental principle underlying the right of access to information is that people should be able to know what is recorded

about them. The question of confidentiality is a complicated one, and although it may be that conference minutes are largely unavailable to a parent who has not been invited to the conference, usually because they are discussing the child rather than the parent, it is always advisable not to assume this. The court is not constrained by the exceptions, and has the power to order disclosure. In civil proceedings a Children's Guardian is normally appointed by the court and he/she has a right of access to local authority records.

Contact us

For more information please contact the TSCB Business Unit:

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Website: www.torbay.gov.uk/tscb

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This leaflet can be made available in other formats and languages. Contact 01803 207176.