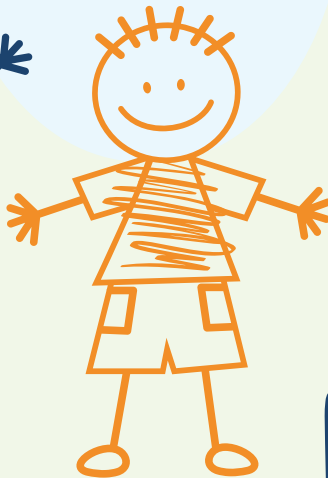


Child Protection Conferences



Guidance for
Parents and Carers



BARNSELY
Metropolitan Borough Council

I have been invited to a Child Protection Conference.

What is a Child Protection Conference?



Child Protection Conferences are held when there are worries that a child may not be safe or where their needs are not being met. We know that there are a number of reasons why this may be the situation. This is a meeting organised by Barnsley Children's Services which brings you and your child (if they are old enough) together with all the professionals already involved with your child (for example, your child's social worker, GP, health visitor and teacher) to talk with you about your child, not only about the worries but also about the strengths in your family and the things that are working well and how we can build on these. Other professionals are also invited to the meeting for example, the police or a paediatrician if they have information to share that may help.



All Child Protection Conferences will be chaired by a Child Protection Conference Chair. They are social work professionals who have lots of experience. The chair will meet with your child, depending upon age, and yourselves in advance of the meeting to ensure you understand the purpose and the process and to ensure that arrangements are appropriate to help you fully participate in the meeting.

The aim of the meeting is to discuss with you all the relevant information provided by you and everyone at the meeting, and decide with you how best to support you and your child so that the worries can be sorted out. A plan may be made with you, for you and everyone at the meeting to follow. Another meeting will be held in a few weeks' time to see how far the worries have been sorted and if any actions on the plan need to change.

Child Protection Conferences decide whether your child needs a Child Protection Plan to sort out the worries for their safety, or whether something else needs to happen. Child Protection Plans are made when a child is thought to have suffered significant harm or is likely to suffer significant harm if things don't change. Significant harm is a legal term that means the worries have become so concerning that professionals believe they need to take action to help reduce them quickly.



As a parent or carer, you have a central role in the meeting and it is important that you take part in the meeting to help us to understand what may be happening for you and your family so that the worries can be sorted out. We understand that it can be difficult to take part in such meetings and so you are welcome to have someone with you to act as your "supporter". This could be another member of your family or a trusted friend.



Child Protection Conferences cannot decide to remove a child from their family but, if your child is thought to be at serious or immediate risk of harm, we will firstly help you to work out the best arrangements to reduce the risk.



This should be someone you can rely on to give good advice and to keep your personal, and sometimes very sensitive information confidential. Your supporter is there for your support and will not be asked to give their views and opinions.

If you don't take part in the meeting, it may go ahead without you. If this happens the social worker will visit you to explain what happened and you will receive a written record of the meeting.

What if there is someone I don't want to be in the meeting?

You can talk about this with your child's social worker before the meeting takes place. In exceptional circumstances a parent or carer may not be invited to the conference. This is when the person who chairs the meeting, the Child Protection Chair, decides that someone might threaten others in the meeting or disrupt the meeting. In such cases, the parent or carer can give their views and opinions to the social worker or the chair of the meeting before the start. Their views will be read out in the meeting.



Will my child be invited?

We do encourage older children to take part in their conferences when this is appropriate. However, this depends on your child's age, understanding and views about attending. It is something that the social worker will discuss with you and your child. The decision to invite your child is made by the chair of the meeting in discussion with you and the social worker. As sensitive personal information may be discussed in the meeting it might be appropriate for a young person to take part in just a part of the meeting. If your child doesn't attend, the social worker and chair will ensure that their views are represented and shared.



What is going to happen at a Child Protection Conference?



Child Protection Conferences are usually held in large rooms with everyone sitting with you and your family around a table to talk things through.

The person who runs the meeting (the chair) will contact you before the meeting. They will talk to you about what happens in the meeting and answer any questions you may have.



- The professionals invited to the meeting should have already provided reports that say what they think is working well for your child and what the worries are. You should have had copies of these reports in advance but sometimes these reports are provided only just before the meeting. You will be given some time to read any you may not have seen. The chair will also ask you about how you feel about talking in the meeting and help you with this if you feel nervous about speaking. People in the meeting are friendly and are there to help.
- At the start of the meeting everyone says who they are. You might know some people – your child's teacher for example.
- The chair of the meeting will talk with you about the worries about your child and about strengths in your family, particularly those that might help to sort out the worries. They will ask you what you think about things and what you think might help.
- Your child's social worker and other people in the meeting will also have an opportunity to talk about things and you can ask them questions if you wish.
- The main points of the things discussed in the meeting are typed during the meeting by a Business Support Officer.
- There maybe a confidential slot where police will share information with professionals, given that this information may involve other people or relate to ongoing investigations families are not invited to this part of the meeting.
- The Child Protection Conference Chair will summarise what has been said and ask you and everyone in the meeting to answer on a scale of 0–10 how safe they think your child is. Each person will explain how they got to that scale to help you understand how they got to that number and why.
- The chair of the meeting will go over the main points of what has been said and check with you and everyone else that these points have been understood. The chair asks the professionals in the meeting whether they feel your child needs a Child Protection Plan to help everyone to know what should happen, including those of you and your family to sort out the worries that have been discussed.



What kind of decisions are made?



After hearing from you and others about the strengths and what worries remain regarding the care of your child, it will be decided whether the plans that have been made in the meeting, to help to sort out the worries should be a Child Protection Plan or a Child in Need Plan. This depends on the level of worries for your child.

A Child Protection Plan means that a social worker will visit your child at home and meet with you and your family, at least once every two weeks and you will be asked to attend meetings every four weeks to look at the plan, what is going well, the worries and anything that needs to be done differently.

Both kinds of plan should be made and agreed in the meeting and they must be clear about what needs to happen to change things for the better for your child as quickly as possible. The plans should also be clear about what is expected of everyone, including you and, in some cases, your child, and how quickly required changes should be in place.



What happens after the Conference?

Another Child Protection Conference will be held within three months of the first meeting to see if the Child Protection Plan is working to sort out the worries. This new meeting will be very much the same as the first meeting, except it is hoped that many of the worries may be well on their way to being sorted out. The Child Protection Plan is changed and updated in this meeting as things change.



The Child Protection Plan will not normally be ended at this point as it is unlikely that there has been enough time for all of the worries to have been sorted out and to be able to tell if the things that have changed for the better will stay changed.

Another review Child Protection Conference will be held within six months where it will be decided whether the worries have been sorted out to the extent that a Child Protection Plan is

no longer needed. If the Child Protection Plan is still needed, this will be updated, and a further meeting arranged to take place within six months. The meetings continue until the worries have been sorted out to the extent that a Child Protection Plan is no longer needed.

If you have any questions you can contact your child's social worker or the chair of the Child Protection Conference.

What if I have a complaint about the meeting?



We know that meetings about very personal issues can feel very uncomfortable. We hope that we have supported you to be able to join in the Child Protection Conference and give your views and opinions about things.

However, if you feel that we have got something wrong or you are unhappy with the plan for your child you can talk about this with your child's social worker or the chair of the meeting.

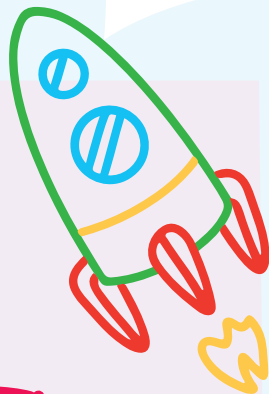


You can contact our feedback and improvement team by emailing:

customerresolutionteam@barnsley.gov.uk



Key resources:



To find out how our social workers work with families in Barnsley, take a look at our **Stronger Together practice model**.



You can also find further **information and guidance on child safeguarding** on our website.

