

Child Protection Conferences

A guide for professionals

The City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Board (CHSCB) 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.

An new approach to Child Protection Conferences has been adopted by Children's Social Care, with the endorsement of CHSCB, that seeks to strengthen risk assessment and maximise family participation, to improve outcomes for children.

Purpose

A Child Protection Conference is convened when concerns exist that children are suffering, or may be at risk of suffering, significant harm. At Conferences information about the children and their parent's capacity to safely care for them within the context of wider family support and their environment, will be shared and analysed. Judgments will be made about the likelihood of children suffering significant harm in the future and decisions will be made about what action is needed to safeguard and promote their welfare.

Methodology

Good outcomes for children are most likely to be achieved when families feel hopeful, when full information is obtained about family resources and strengths, and when positive relationships exist between families and professionals. Hackney's approach to Child Protection Conferences maximizes these things.

Conferences are now organized in a way that reflects features of

- systemic and behavioral practice methods that are effecting positive change for families in Hackney
 - Family network meetings. These meetings seek to engage the whole family system in reflecting on what needs to happen to keep children safe and devising family enacted plans to achieve change. They have been shown nationally and in Hackney to enhance safety and produce good outcomes for children
 - The Signs of Safety approach to risk assessment. This combines a forensic approach to risk assessment, with a constructive, collaborative approach that fits well with the systemic and behavioral methodologies utilized in Hackney. This approach expands the investigation of risk to encompass strengths and 'signs of safety' that can be built upon to stabilise and strengthen the child's and family's situation. Integral to the approach is the premise that
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the risk assessment process must be undertaken with the full involvement of all stakeholders, including the range of professionals involved in a family's care, the child's family and the child themselves.

Principles

- All those attending the Conference, including the family, should feel respected and listened to and actively involved
- Family strengths and potential, and what is working well within the family must be highlighted
- A common understanding should be reached regarding what those involved are concerned about and what they fear may happen should change not occur
- A plan should be formulated to address risks and ensure children's needs are met
- Family and their extended network should be encouraged and facilitated to play a central role in ensuring children are safeguarded and their needs met

These things should enable a constructive partnership between families and professionals, so there is cooperative working towards mutually agreed goals, enhancing child safety.

The Conference Process

Conferences will consist of the following broad stages:

- The Chair meets with family members before the conference to talk about how it will run and how they might best participate.
 - There is an 'ice-breaker' session at the start of the conference where the family help to provide information about significant members of their family and network. This helps put families at their ease, and reinforces the fact they are able and expected to contribute.
 - The family, as well as professionals, are then encouraged to share information and views. Key information shared during this session, once accuracy has been confirmed by the Chair, is recorded on an assessment framework displayed on the wall. The Framework has five headings:
 - Danger/Risks (Detail regarding incident(s) bringing the family to the attention of the agency, pattern/history)
 - Safety (Strengths demonstrated as protection over time, pattern/history of exceptions)
 - Strengths/Protective Factors (Assets, resources, capacities within family, individual/community, presence of research based protective factors)
 - Complicating Factors (Conditions/behaviours that contribute to greater difficulty for the family, presence of research based risk factors)
 - Grey Areas (Issues in dispute where fuller information may be needed)
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This structure actively assists the conference by enabling information to be shared in such a way that it is 'sifted' and organised to help participants attach risk value and meaning to each piece of information, and ultimately the whole picture.

- It is important that the Conference considers information provided by the children concerned, and their wishes and feelings. Those present will be asked to provide information and where appropriate children and young people will attend all or part of the meeting to contribute directly.
- A plan will be formulated to address any risks and needs.
- All those present will be asked to consider whether the plan should have the status of a Child Protection Plan. If so a core group of family members and key professionals will be identified to work out in detail how the plan will operate and ensure support and monitoring occurs in between Conferences.
- A record of the Conference containing the completed Assessment Framework, any additional significant information, and the plan, will be circulated within 15 working days of the Conference

Expectations of Professionals

To ensure Conferences are as constructive as possible professionals invited will be expected to:

- share information contained within their reports with the family and CSC prior to the Conference [two days before an Initial Conference and five days before a Review Conference]. Families should not be subject to surprises at meetings which may impact on their ability to take part.
- avoid reading out reports in full, and instead to contribute pertinent information at each of the information-sharing, risk assessment and planning stages.
- clearly and succinctly articulate information about strengths as well as concerns and what needs to happen.
- be respectful of the child's and family's wishes and understanding and conduct themselves in a way that would maximise family participation; jargon and unnecessarily repeating negative information about the family should be avoided.

Equal Opportunities

Hackney is committed to equality of opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect.

Complaints

Should you wish to make a complaint about any aspect of a Child Protection Conferences please contact the Quality and Improvement Unit on 020 8356 5800 or children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk

