Your child protection conference

This guide is for you if you have been told that a child protection conference is being held for your child.

DARLINGTON
Borough Council

A conference can feel like one of the most daunting things you might face as a parent.

We want to help you:

- understand what a child protection conference is
- know what will happen
- feel more confident to take part and share your views

What is a child protection conference?

A child protection conference is a formal meeting. It brings together:

- professionals who know your child and family (including your social worker, a health worker, a teacher, and a police representative)
- you
- any family members you would like to bring

At the end of the conference it will be decided whether your child/ren are in a need of a child protection plan because there is a risk of significant harm or whether they can be supported through a Child in Need plan or receive other support from Darlington Children Services.

Do I have to attend?

- We fully encourage you to attend and want to support you in doing so, let your social worker or the Child Protection Chairperson (CP Chair) know how they can help.
- If you prefer not to attend, you can talk to your social worker or the CP Chair about other ways of making your view known.
- If you want to attend the conference but find it difficult because of the time that it will be you can ask your social worker or CP Chair about rearranging the meeting or getting help with childcare.
- A parent may not be allowed to attend the conference if it is thought that their presence may prevent the child's needs being properly discussed, or if there may be a risk to the safety of family members or professionals. In this case the social worker and CP Chair will work with you on alternative ways of making your views known.
- If there is someone who you do not want to attend, discuss this with your social worker or CP Chair. Whether the concern is regarding a family member or professional, it is ultimately the decision of the chair as to whether an individual should / should not attend.

Who runs the meeting?

- The meeting is led by an Independent Child Protection Chair (CP Chair).
- You will usually have met them before the conference.
- Their job is to make sure the meeting is fair and that your voice is heard.

What is the meeting for?

The conference is there to:

- look at all the information together.
- agree what the concerns are.
- decide if a child protection plan is needed.
- plan what support or help may be needed to keep your child safe.

Who decides whether my child needs a plan?

- Everyone at the conference will share their views, including you.
- After listening to everyone, the CP Chair will make the final decision to if a child protection plan is needed.

If a plan is agreed, it will be placed into one of four categories:

- physical harm
- emotional harm
- sexual harm
- neglect

If the conference decides a plan is not needed, you may still be recommended support. This is likely to be a Child in Need Plan. A Child in Need Plan is voluntary - you can decide whether you want to work with professionals in this way.

However, we would encourage you to do so, as early support can help prevent concerns from escalation.

Before the conference

Your social worker will write a report for the conference. You have the right to see this report before the meeting:

- At least 3 working days before the first (initial) conference.
- At least 5 working days before a review conference.
- The CP Chair will contact you in advance of the meeting by phone and visit you prior to the conference.
- If there is anything in the report you do not agree with, you can say so. You can write your own response.

Getting ready

It can help to think about what you want to say. You might want to talk about:

- what is going well for your child
- anything you are worried about
- what support you think would help
- preparing in advance can make a big difference

If you feel that your cannot come to the conference if your ex-partner is there, arrangements can be made for you to come into the conference separately at different times.

Before the conference starts the CP Chair will meet with you first. They will:

- introduce themselves
- explain how the meeting will run
- check if there is anything sensitive that needs to be handled carefully

During the conference

You will have a chance to share your views. Many parents say they feel nervous and find it hard to say everything they want to.

It can make a real difference to:

- prepare what you want to say beforehand
- have an advocate there to support you

Who can come with you?

You can bring someone to support you. This could be:

- a friend or family member
- a solicitor (they can come, but cannot speak in the meeting)
- an advocate - we actively encourage this

Can my child attend?

Your child may be able to come to the conference. This depends on their age and what they want. They may be invited to attend all or part of the meeting.

Sharing your child's views

Children who are old enough should be supported to share their views.
They can do this by:

- speaking at the meeting, or
- having someone they trust to speak for them.

Support for children and young people

Children and young people can get support from a free independent advocate through NYAS. This support is separate from the support available for parents. The advocate's role is to help your child express their views and be heard.

NYAS Independent Advocacy for Children and Young People

Phone: 0808 808 1001

Email: help@nyas.net

Website: livingwell.darlington.gov.uk/Services/1059

After the conference

You will be sent a written record of what was discussed and the decisions made within 20 working days.

If a child protection plan is put in place

The following will happen:

- A core group will be set up - a smaller group of professionals and family members who will work together to follow the plan.
- The core group will meet within 10 working days of the first conference, then monthly for as long as the plan is in place.
- Your social worker will visit your child at home at least every 10 working days.
- A review conference will take place after 3 months, then at least every 6 months.

Child protection plan process

If a child protection plan is put in place, the following will happen.

1. Initial child protection conference

A core group will be set up - a smaller group of professionals and family members who will work together to follow the plan.

2. First core group (within two weeks)

The core group will meet withing 10 working days of the first conference, then monthly for as long as the plan is in place.

3. Core group meetings (monthly)

Your social worker will visit your child at home at least every 10 working days.

4. First review conference (three months)

A review conference will take place every three months. At this conference, a decision can be made for the child's protection plan to end or to continue.

5. Continue core group meetings

Core group meetings continue at the same intervals – monthly – for as long as the plan is in place.

6. Second review conference

A second review conference will take place at nine months. At this conference, a decision can be made for the child protection plan to end or to continue.

7. Ongoing review conferences

Review conferences continue at least every six months. At each review conference, a decision can be made for the child protection plan to end or to continue.

The plan will end when the child is no longer considered to be at risk of significant harm. This will only be decided at a review child protection conference

You have the right:

- to be invited and to attend.
- to see all reports before the meeting.
- to share your views during the meeting and have them taken seriously.
- to have someone with you for support, such as an advocate or supporter.
- to understand what needs to change to increase the safety for your child and what actions are expected of you to achieve this.
- to understand what action professionals are undertaking to increase safety for your child.
- to be treated with respect, whatever your background, race, religion, or disability.
- to receive a written record of the conference within 20 working days.
- to challenge decisions if you do not agree with them.
- to get advice independently from the social work team by contacting ParentCarerAdvocacy@darlington.gov.uk.
- to make a formal complaint if you feel the process was unfair

Safety and respect:

It is important that everyone in the meeting gets a chance to speak and that they are shown respect. The Chair will explain before the meeting starts that aggressive behaviour of any kind will not be tolerated, nor will offensive remarks. If this happens the Chair will ask the person concerned to stop and they may even be asked to leave the meeting or the Chair may end the meeting altogether.

Confidentiality:

Everything said in the meeting is confidential and can only be shared outside the meeting with those involved in helping your children. If you are worried about what information is going to be shared, please ask the Chair or your social worker to explain the rules regarding this. None of the information about your family will be shared with members of the public.

We want to hear from you

Our aim is to put you and your family first and provide you with the best possible service.

It is important that you have the opportunity to tell us what you think about the services we provide.

You can tell us when we get things right, make comments about the things we do and suggest new ways of doing things.

Your feedback helps us improve our services for all families.

You can also tell us when we get things wrong so we can put them right.

Using the council's complaints procedures is one way you can do this.

Most concerns can be resolved informally by speaking directly with the member of staff working with you, or their team manager. You can share your concerns with them and they will aim to resolve the issue by the end of the next working day.

You can make a compliment or a complaint using the contact details below.

- **Online:** use our online complaints form at darlington.gov.uk
- **Email:** complaints@darlington.gov.uk
- **Phone:** 01325 406777
- **In person:** Town Hall, Darlington, DL1 5QT

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