

# **Westminster Children's Services**



## **Child Protection Conferences**

### **An Information Guide for Parents & Carers**

Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW12 6QP  
Main Switchboard 020 7641 6000 [www.westminster.gov.uk](http://www.westminster.gov.uk)

# Introduction

The aim of this leaflet is to help you understand the process of a Child Protection Conference so that you know what to expect on the day. As parents and carers it's really important that you come to the Conference well informed and fully prepared so that you are able to participate in the meeting and contribute to important decisions that are being made about your child/children.



What is a Child Protection Conference? A Child Protection Conference is a multi-agency meeting that takes place when Children's Services are worried that a child is or could be at risk of being seriously harmed. At these meetings information about you and your family is shared with relevant professionals in order to consider your child/children's safety and well-being. All children under 18 years of age living in the household will be considered.

## During the Conference the meeting will:

- Share information about your family
- Assess whether your child/children are suffering or likely to suffer "significant harm"
- Identify if any change are needed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of your child/children
- Identify what's going well for your family and what you can do as a family to keep your child/children safe
- Identify any support or assistance that your family needs and which agencies can provide this
- Decide if your child/children need a Child Protection Plan



Most children who need a Child Protection Plan need it for less than 2 years and continue to live with their family during this time. Having a Child Protection Plan does not automatically mean that your child/children will be taken away from you. It is only the court (or in emergencies the Police) who can decide that it is not safe for your children to live at home.

If your child/children require a Child Protection Plan the allocated Social Worker will work with you and other professionals involved with your family to keep your child/children safe and protected. The allocated Social Worker will explain what needs to change to make sure your child/children are not at risk and will work with you to try and achieve this.

## Who else will be at the Conference



There will be a range of professionals at the Conference and this may include:

- Your Social Worker and their Manager
- A representative from the Police Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT)
- Your child/children's Health Visitor/School Nurse
- Your child/children's Teacher or Nursery Worker
- Your GP (family Doctor)
- Adult Services
- Any other professionals you would like to attend who have worked with you or your children

There may also be some people who you have not met before. They are invited because of their expertise or because they might be able to provide the Conference with help and advice. There will also be someone to take a record of the meeting; this person is called the Conference Facilitator.

## **The Conference ‘Chair’**



The Conference is facilitated by an independent person called the ‘Chair’. The Chair has no management responsibility for your child/children’s Social Worker. The Chair’s role is to make sure the meeting runs smoothly and respectfully and that everyone is given the chance to share information, express their views and contribute to safety planning for your family. It is ultimately the role of the Chair, after hearing all the information presented, to decide whether a Child Protection Plan is required for your child/children.

The Chair of the Conference will meet with you immediately before the Conference to welcome you, explain how the Conference will run, think about the best way for you to contribute to the discussion and how any sensitive information can be handled during the meeting.

## What happens before the Conference?



Before the Conference your child/children's Social Worker will write a report which will be shared with you and the professionals attending the Conference. The report will describe your family, the concerns for your family and what is needed to keep your child/children safe. The Social Worker will share the report with you before the Conference and you will be given the opportunity to add your comments to the report.

## Should I attend the Conference?

As a parent/carer, you are invited to attend the Conference and we encourage you to take an active part. We know it can be very difficult for you to come to a meeting like this, but you are very important.

Members of your family are welcome to attend, or you may bring a friend, supporter or advocate to the Conference with you, as long as you are happy for them to hear personal information about your family.



If you would like to bring someone with you please tell your Social Worker so that this can be agreed with the Chair of the Conference. If you have a Solicitor they may also come with you as an observer, but you do not need a Solicitor to come to the Conference.

If you need an interpreter, help getting to the Conference or help with childcare, please talk to your Social Worker before the Conference.

As Child Protection Conferences are formal meetings, parents and carers are requested not to attend with their child/children so that they can fully concentrate and participate in the meeting.

The allocated Social Worker will talk to you about whether it is appropriate for your child/children to attend their Child Protection Conference. Children who are old enough are encouraged to attend part or all of the meeting. Whatever your child's age we will always try our best to represent their views in the Conference.

### **How can I prepare for the Conference?**



During the Conference you will be given the chance to comment on what others are saying and give your own information and views. You will also be asked what you think should happen in the future, including any help that you may feel you need.

Many of the professionals who attend the Conference will provide written reports setting out the facts, their views and ideas. You and your family should take the opportunity to go through this information with professionals involved before the Conference so that you know what information will be shared and any information that may be upsetting for you to hear.

Some parents like to bring a photo of their child/children to share with people at the Conference. Some parents also write their own reports. If you would like to write a report, your Social Worker may be able to find someone who can work with you to help you present your views and opinions. You may want to write down your views in the boxes provided in the letter we sent you.

If you don't want to write things down you can still think about what you would like to say at the meeting and perhaps bring some brief notes for yourself to jog your memory.

Please remember that your honesty will help professionals to support you and your family in the best possible way and ensure that we can help you achieve the best results for your child.



**You might find it useful to think about the following...**

<b>Risk/ Concerns</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Services/ Support</b>	<b>Next Steps</b>
Do you agree or disagree with your Social Workers report?	What do you think are the strengths of your family?	Do you have family or friends who could help you to improve things?	What do you think needs to happen after this Conference?
What do you think needs to change in order for your child's well-being to improve?	What are the things you think you do well?  What positive things would you like professionals to know about you and your family?	Does your family need any extra services or support?  How would this support help you?	What do you think you or others could do to improve the current situation?
What needs to change for your child to be safer?			

## What happens at the Conference?

The Child Protection Conference is a formal meeting, which follows an agenda (list of things to be talked about), which you will be given at the start of the meeting.



The first part of the meeting will be sharing information about your child/children and your family. The Conference wants to hear not only about the concerns in your family but also about the things that are going well. You and the professionals working with your family will be asked to share information with the Conference and will be given the opportunity to ask any questions.

The Chair will note any relevant information onto a white board under the following headings for everyone to see:



- 1. Danger/Harm**
- 2. Complicating factors**
- 3. Grey areas**
- 4. Strengths/positives**
- 5. Safety/protective factors**





Following a group discussion, the second part of the meeting will involve you and the professionals present developing a 'plan' which aims to address any concerns or unmet needs for your child/children discussed in the Conference.

After the plan is put together, the Chair will ask the other professionals to give their professional view as to whether your child/children require a **Child Protection Plan**, or if your child/children can be sufficiently safeguarded with a **Child in Need Plan**. The Chair has the final say as to what type of plan is put in place.



You should leave the Conference clear about what (if anything) needs to change and who will work with your family to help you achieve these changes.

## What happens if my child/children need a **Child Protection Plan**?



A child protection plan is a list of all things that need to happen in order for your child/children to be safe. If your child/children need a Child Protection Plan, a 'Core Group' of people – the main professionals involved with your family – will arrange to meet regularly with you until the next Child Protection Conference takes place. As part of the Child Protection Plan the Social Worker will be visiting your family regularly, and this will include announced and unannounced home visits.

## What happens after the Conference?



After the Conference you will receive the **minutes** (notes) of the meeting from the allocated Social Worker. This will also include a copy of either the Child Protection Plan or the Child in Need Plan. The allocated Social Worker will go through this with you. If you think the minutes are not an accurate reflection of what was said at the meeting, you should contact the Chair of the Conference.

If a Child Protection Plan is made, you will also be asked to attend **Core Group Meetings**. These meetings take place regularly and will be attended by you and the key people working with your family. The aim of these meetings is to review the progress of the Child Protection Plan and consider whether any changes are needed to the Plan between Child Protection Conferences being held.



Your Social Worker will arrange for the first Core Group meeting to take place within 10 working days of the Conference and then at regular intervals (at least once every 6 weeks) until the next Conference takes place.

The next Conference will be held within three months and then every six months for as long as your child/children need a Child Protection Plan. At each Conference a decision will be made about whether a Child Protection Plan is still necessary to safeguard your child/children. A Child Protection Plan will only end if the Conference Chair decides that a child is no longer considered to be at risk. In this case, the Conference will consider what other arrangements for support can be put in place.

# Safety and Respect



**As a parent/carer you should expect and be expected to:**

- Be treated with respect
  - Respect others
  - Be listened to and listen to others
  - Be involved in making decisions
- Accept you may not always agree with the decisions made
  - Get the help that has been offered to you within the agreed timescales
  - See a copy of the Social Worker's report before Conference
  - Get a copy of the Conference minutes and the 'Plan' within 15 working days of the meeting

It is important that everyone in the meeting gets a chance to speak and share information. Aggressive, threatening or offensive behaviour of any kind will not be tolerated in the meeting. If this happens the Chair will ask the person to stop and if they don't they may be asked to leave the meeting.

## Confidentiality

Everything that is said in the Conference is confidential and will only be shared outside the meeting with professionals involved in helping your child/children and family. If you are worried about what information is going to be shared, please ask the Chair or the Social Worker. No information about your family will be shared with other families or members of the public.

Your privacy  
is important to us...



## Equal Opportunities



Westminster City Council is committed to equal opportunity. We will treat everyone with respect, regardless of race, disability, gender, age, religion or sexual orientation.

If you need this information in a different format such as audio tape or in another language, please ask the allocated Social Worker.

### What can I do if I am unhappy with the Conference decision?



You have the right to complain about the process of the Conference or the decision to make your child/children the subject of a Child Protection Plan. If you are unhappy with the decision then please talk to the Chair. The only way a decision can be reversed is if a further Conference comes to that conclusion. If you don't want to talk to the Chair or after talking to the Chair are still dissatisfied with the decision, you can make a formal complaint using Westminster's complaints procedure. Please refer to the leaflet provided.

Social worker's name:

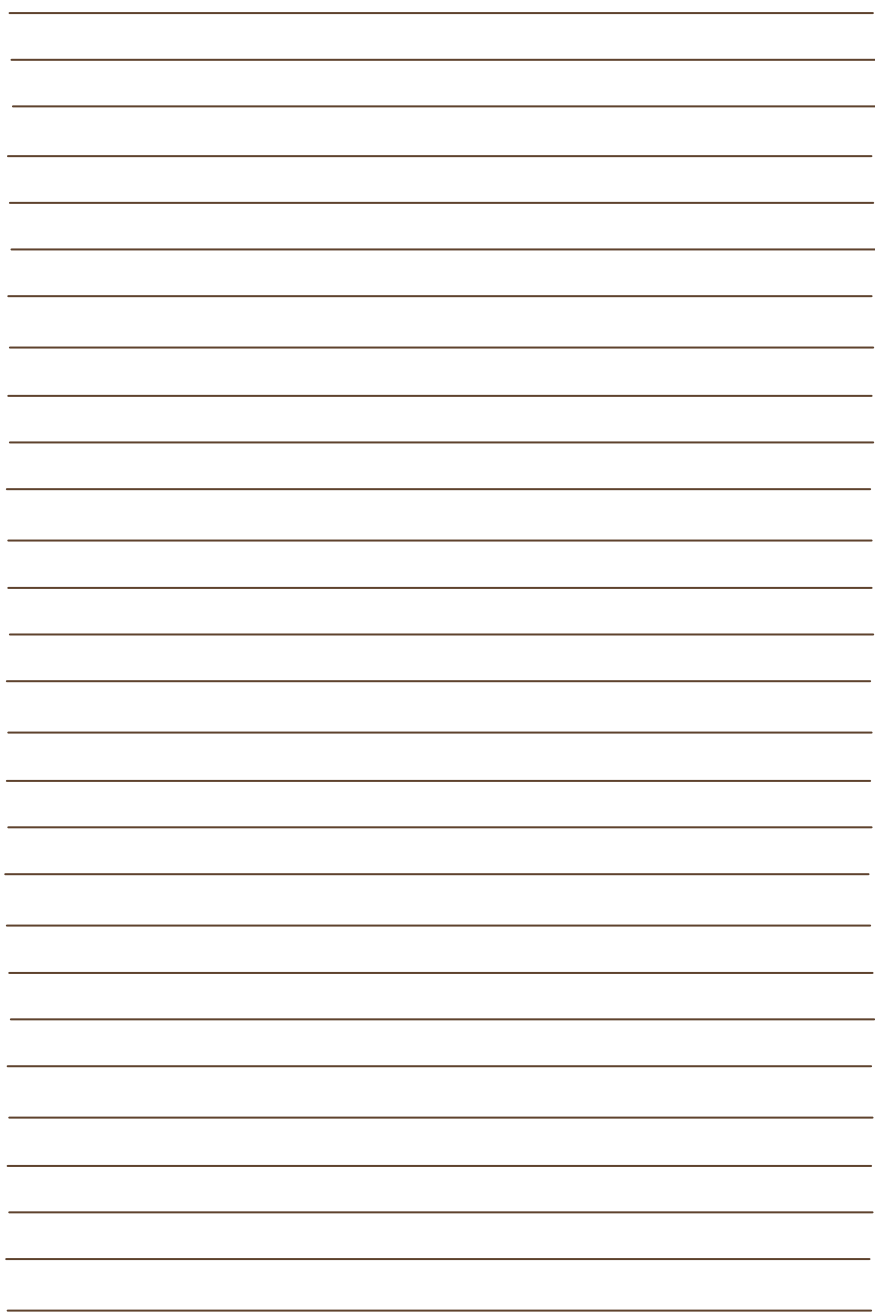
Tel:

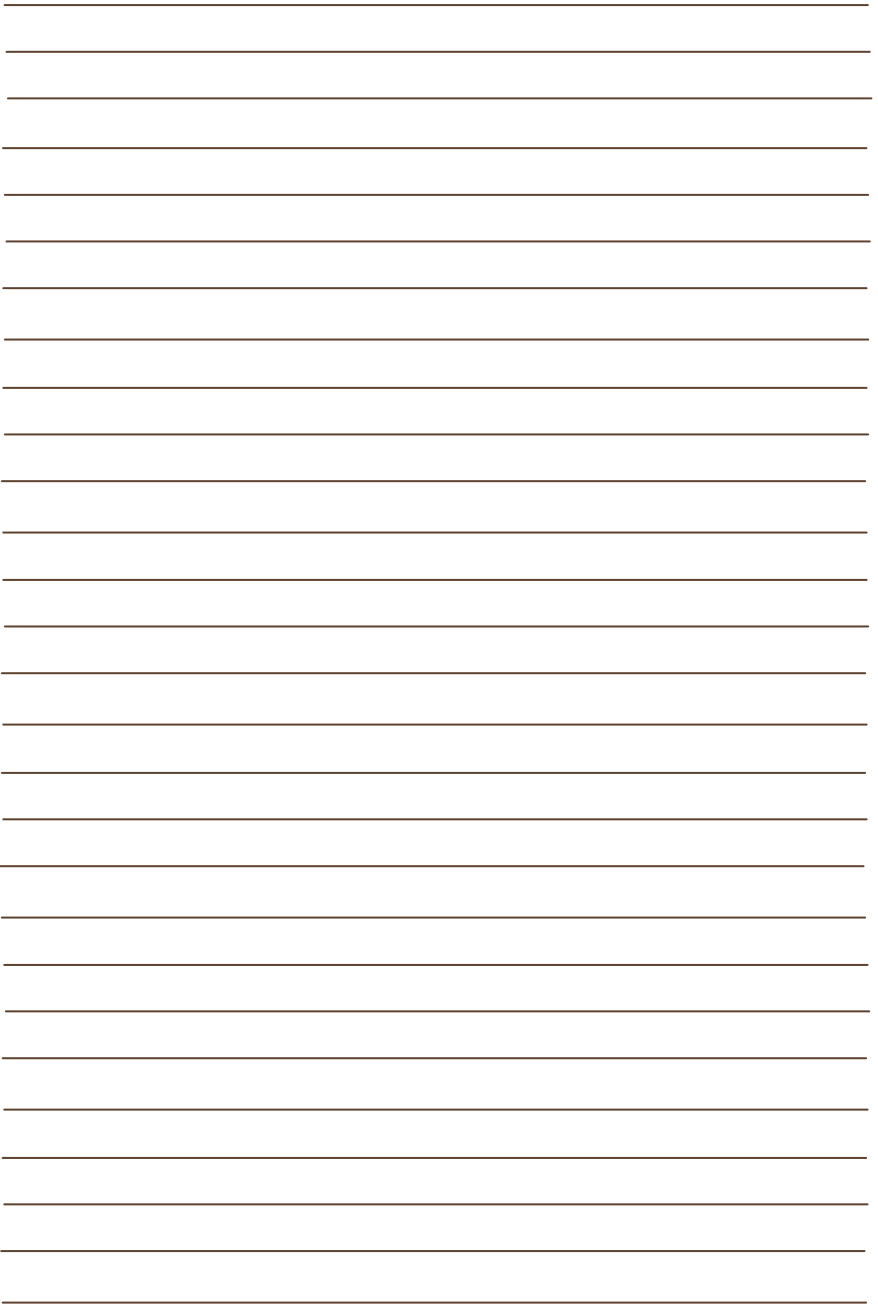
Chair's name:

Tel:

If you are unhappy with the actions of a particular person or agency then we advise you to try to sort out the problem with the individual and their managers first. If you want to take the complaint further you should ask them for a leaflet on their agency's complaints procedure.









## **Useful Contact Numbers**

**To speak to your Social Worker call 020 7641 - 6000**

**To speak to a Social Worker after 5pm and on weekends and bank holidays call the Emergency Duty Team 020 7641 - 6000**

**To speak with the 'Chair' of the Conference call 020 7641 - 7668**

**If you or your children are at risk or in danger call the Police on 999**

**YOUR CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCE**

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW...

**WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL**