

parent's guide to
child protection
in Camden



Camden Safeguarding
Children Board

C A M D E N S C B

Contents

- 02 Introduction
- 02 Why have I been referred?
- 03 The child protection enquiry
- 06 The initial conference
- 09 The review conference
- 10 Complaints

Introduction

If your family has been referred to Social Work Services because of child protection concerns, this leaflet will explain what will happen next.

We understand that you may be worried, upset or angry, but Social Work Services want to work with you to help you keep your child safe from harm.

If you have questions that are not answered in this leaflet, or if there is anything you don't understand, your social worker will be able to help you.

Why have I been referred?

Sometimes...

...a health visitor, school, a neighbour or another organisation may contact us because they are worried that a child is being harmed or neglected. This is called a referral.

We have to investigate these claims and make sure the child is safe. We will always tell you who has referred your family, unless the person is a member of the public who has asked not to be named.

The child protection enquiry

What is a child protection enquiry?

Social Work Services have a legal duty to make sure that all children in the borough are safe and protected. This means carrying out a child protection enquiry to look into any claims that a child is being harmed or neglected. When the enquiry is finished, a decision is made about whether or not the child needs a protection plan to help keep them safe from harm.

What is harm?

Harm to a child can include:

- **Neglect**
not caring for a child by providing adequate food, clothing etc.
- **Physical abuse**
physical punishment that causes injury.
- **Sexual abuse**
involving a child in sexual activities.
- **Emotional abuse**
not providing warmth and love.

All these forms of harm can affect children's development and stop them from doing well in later life.

Who carries out the child protection enquiry?

The child protection enquiry is carried out by a social worker, but they will need to get information from other professionals who know you and your family, such as your health visitor, your GP and your child's teacher. These are called network checks. We will always ask for your permission before we talk to other professionals, unless we think that this would place your child at more risk.

What happens during the enquiry?

A social worker will visit you at home to talk to you about the concerns, and ask you and your family questions.

The social worker will also need to see your child, and may ask to speak to them alone, if they are old enough. Normally, we would ask your permission to do this, but if your child is at serious risk of harm, we may need to speak to them alone without your permission.

If someone has committed a crime against your child, for example, an assault, a police officer may be involved in the enquiry and we may ask for your permission to interview your child on video. This is to allow the police to get evidence for court. You may go with your child to the interview, but you won't be able to sit with them while they are being interviewed.

Sometimes, we may ask you to agree to your child being examined by a doctor so we can find out if your child has any injuries, and how the injuries happened. We will always ask for your permission first, but if you don't agree, we may have to take legal advice.

During the enquiry, your social worker will always keep you informed about how things are progressing and what will happen next.

What happens after the enquiry?

When the social worker has gathered all the information, they will discuss the findings with their manager and decide what action to take next. The investigation may show that your child is not being harmed or neglected, and Social Work Services will take no further action. However, if you feel you need extra support to care for your child, we may be able to provide help. If the investigation shows that your child is being harmed or neglected, or is at risk of harm, Social Work Services may decide to hold a formal meeting called a child protection case conference.

What if my child isn't safe at home?

The vast majority of children who are referred to Social Work Services because of child protection concerns will remain at home with their parents. Very rarely, if we are really worried about a child being at risk at home, we may have to take further action to protect them.

If we think it is not safe for your child at home, your social worker will talk to you about what options there are to keep them safe.

This may involve:

- someone who is living in your home moving out because it is thought they are a risk to your child
- a friend or relative moving into your home to help you to look after your child
- your child going to stay with family or friends, who have been approved by Social Work Services
- if there is no-one that your child can stay with, your child can go to live with a Camden foster carer.

These are all temporary arrangements to make sure your child is protected while we work with you to make sure it is safe for your child to live at home.

The initial conference

What is a child protection case conference?

The conference is a formal meeting where parents, the social worker and other professionals who know the family get together to discuss the concerns and decide what can be done to keep the child safe from harm.

Who will be at the conference?

The conference is arranged by Social Work Services and is chaired by an independent person. Your social worker and their manager will be there, and so will other professionals who know your family, such as your health visitor or a school nurse, and your child's teacher.

The police attend all initial conferences if they have been involved in the child protection enquiry, and any professionals who are working with parents or carers will also be invited. A council solicitor will attend any initial conferences where the child is under 12 years old, in case the chair needs to take legal advice.

Are parents/ carers invited?

Parents and carers are always invited to case conferences and we strongly recommend that you attend so you can have your say and be involved in making plans to keep your child safe.

You can bring a friend or your solicitor to support you and help you put your views across if you want. If English is not your first language, we will arrange for an interpreter to be present to help you take part in the discussion.

If you prefer not to attend, you can talk to your social worker about other ways of making your views known, for example, writing a statement for the conference that your social worker can read out.

If you want to attend the conference, but find it difficult because of the time it will be held, because you have children to look after or collect from school, you can ask your social worker about rearranging the meeting or getting help with childcare.

Very occasionally, a parent may not be allowed to attend the conference if it is thought that their presence may prevent the child's needs from being discussed, or if their behaviour may be a risk to the safety of family members or professionals.

Are children invited?

Usually, children who are over the age of 12 are invited to attend conferences unless it is thought that this is not in their best interests. All children's views can be presented to the conference by their social worker if they are not able to attend.

What happens at the conference?

Your social worker will write a report for the conference that explains what has happened and what changes need to be made to make sure your child is safe. You should get a chance to read this at least two days before the conference.

Before the conference starts, the chair will meet with you to talk about what will happen, how the conference will proceed and how parents can contribute to the discussion. At the start of the conference, the chair will ask everyone to introduce themselves.

Everyone will have an opportunity to comment on the report and share information. The conference will discuss whether your child is at risk of harm and what can be done to make them safe.

Any information shared at the conference will remain confidential, and will only be passed on to other professionals if it is necessary to protect your child from harm.

What the conference **can do:**

The conference can decide whether or not your child is at risk of harm and make a plan called a child protection plan that helps to keep your child safe.

The conference will also look at whether other children in the family need to be protected from harm.

Even if your child doesn't need a child protection plan, the conference may recommend that you get extra support to care for your child from Social Work Services and other agencies.

...and can't do:

The conference cannot remove your child from your care; only a court can do this.

What is a child protection plan?

If the conference decides that your child is at risk of harm, they will make a child protection plan, which contains all the things that have to happen to make sure your child is kept safe.

The conference will decide which professionals should work closely with you to make sure the plan is carried out. Normally, your social worker, health visitor and a teacher would be in this group, which is called the core group.

What happens after the conference?

At least 10 days after the initial conference, the core group will meet with you for the first time, and will continue to meet with you regularly to support you and help you to keep your child safe.

The core group will plan what work needs to be carried out to make the changes needed to make sure your child is safe and work towards discharging the child protection plan.

To do this, the core group will draw up an agreement with you that sets out exactly what everyone needs to do to bring about the changes required. It is important that you attend.

The review conference

Any decision...

...that was made at the initial conference has to be reviewed after three months and then six months after that. The review conference is the same as the initial conference; you will be invited to attend and the social worker will prepare a report for everyone to discuss. The police will only attend a review conference if they were involved in the child protection enquiry.

During the review conference, everyone will look at:

- what progress has been made
- whether the child protection plan has been carried out
- whether your child is still at risk of harm.

The conference may decide that your child is no longer at risk and that a child protection plan is not needed, but Social Work Services and other agencies can still offer services to support you and your family if you need them.

If the conference thinks that your child is still at risk, they will look at the child protection plan to see if it needs to be changed to help you and your child and set a date for the plan to be reviewed.

Complaints

If you are not happy...

...with the way Social Work Services have carried out the child protection enquiry...

You can make a complaint through our complaints procedure by calling Freephone **0800 393 561** or writing to The Complaints Officer at:

Freepost RRAR-KKUL-RCEZ
London Borough of Camden
Children, Schools and Families
Crowndale Centre
218 Eversholt Street
London NW1 1BD

If you are not happy about the way the conference was run or the decision that was made...

You can speak to the chair at the conference and they will try to sort it out immediately, or you can make a complaint through Camden's Safeguarding Children Board complaints procedure:

- Write to the chair within 28 days after you receive the minutes from the conference. The chair should contact you within seven days of receiving your letter to arrange a meeting. You can bring a friend or relative with you to the meeting to support you.
- At the meeting, the chair will talk to you about the reasons for your complaint, and what action can be taken to resolve things. There will be someone present who takes notes of this meeting, and you should receive a reply from the chair and a copy of the notes seven days after the meeting.
- If you are not happy with the chair's response, you can write to Camden's complaints manager within 28 days, giving the reason why you do not accept the chair's decision.

- The complaints manager will arrange for the Camden's Safeguarding Children Board Complaints Panel to meet within 28 days of receiving your letter to look into the matter for you.
- The panel members who hear your complaint will not have been involved in your case. You will be invited to attend the panel hearing to give your views, but if you don't want to attend, you can write to the panel instead.
- The panel should send you their decision within seven days of the panel hearing; the panel may decide that the conference wasn't run in the correct way, or that the decision made at the conference was wrong.
- If this is the case, the panel can ask for the conference to be held again, with a different chair, **but it cannot overturn the decision made at the original conference.**

Camden Safeguarding Children Board

Unit 6/7, Crowndale Centre
218 Eversholt Street
London
NW1 1BD

Tel: **020 7974 6639**

Fax: **020 7974 6708**

www.cscb.org.uk