How we chair Initial child protection conferences

21 January 2019

15:10

Preparation

* The Social Worker prepares for the conference using the Genogram (which will be displayed on wall at initial conference), case mapping, danger statements and safety goals, safety plan, draft timeline/trajectory.
* The chair needs to work with the social worker to work out what would help family members participate fully in the process, such as interpreters, seating arrangements, visual aids or any other aspect that may prevent them being fully involved or able to contribute.
* The chair must recognise that when they receive the report to conference that they are playing catch up with the danger statements and safety goals. It is therefore important that they spend time with the social worker to talk through any questions that they have about the danger statements and safety goals as it is the network who have the shared understanding of the language used.
* Conference chairs should never alter danger statements and safety goals prior to conference without first having discussed this with the worker and allowing time for the family and the network to consider the chairs concerns. Altering the information prior to conference without their knowledge can make parents feel that there is a hidden agenda or that people have not been honest with them.

Building a relationship with the family.

Before the conference starts the chair should spend some time with the family to:

* Settle them into the room and work out what they are most worried about happening in the meeting and what would help them to stay in the room.
* Always acknowledge that the meeting can be hard for families but their input is valued and needed in order to make the child's situation safer.
* There may be things that the family disagrees with but it is important that they hear the professionals concerns.
* Advise family that you would like to start the conference by asking them first, to tell the conference what they think the professionals worries are and why we are at conference and how you can support them to do that.
* Advise family members that it is okay if they want a break and always ensure they know what to do if they feel distressed.
* We must honor the difficulty some experience in the situation of the Child Protection Conference and this can be eased by acknowledging this and offering options for the family to take time out if they need to.
* Use this time to check out that the family have seen the report and have an understanding of the concerns.
* Chair reviews the Genogram with the family.
  + Is there anyone missing?
  + Do we have the right names and ages?
  + Is there anyone who can support you that you want to add?

At the start of the conference:

* Welcome everybody into the room and introductions.
* Setting rules re confidentiality, boundaries and expectations.
* Chair introduces the Genogram to the conference (at initial conference)

**First Question of the conference goes to the family:**

**Ask parents to tell conference what the professionals are worried about?**

**It is important to make sure that the family understand what people are worried about, even if they disagree. If child is attending the conference it may be appropriate to check in with the child as what do they understand about the worries.**

Chair writes these in the "what are we worried about?" column on the board.

*(If the parents response is not clear or they do not know, then, this is a setback in the meeting but the chair must take the time with everyone there to explain to the family what the Local Authority Concerns are and check that the family have established a shared understanding of those concerns. It is not enough to ask the family if they now understand, you must re ask them what they think people are worried about in their own words. This is because failure to understand the concerns will make the safety goals and safety plan confusing and it is likely they will not make the connection between the dangers and what needs to happen.)*

Chair checks with the social worker and other conference members that they agree with the worries that have been expressed , do they have anything to add? Do they think all the worries have been spoken about? Chair adds anything extra that they feel is relevant to the board, maybe worries or "complicating factors."

Childs voice:

(If child is not attending conference, chair can check in with the advocate at this point.)

What does the child know about the concerns?

*The chair needs to establish what the child knows about why the professionals are involved and what they are worried about. This is the opportunity to use the child's three houses/safety house to share with everyone involved and show how they see their situation in relation to the concerns.*

*Strengths and Safety*

**First Question goes to the family:**

**Tell us about the strengths of your family and how you keep your child safe?**

Chair writes these in the "what's working well" column on the board.

Chair checks with the social worker and other conference members about the strengths and safety that they have seen in this family. Use the appreciative inquiry questions (EARS) to explore this?

If people start to get ahead and plan actions, then park that idea in the "what needs to happen" column under next steps, to be explored and developed before the end of the conference.

Danger statement and safety goals (Initial- introduce and strengthen with new information if necessary)

Safety Plan

Social worker to present the safety plan.

|  |
| --- |
| What else needs to happen to ensure this child’s safety? |
| Are there any other important things that we have missed in the Plan? |
| How has this safety plan been explained and communicated to the child/ren? |

Next steps

**If they haven't already brought a draft safety plan to conference, next steps should always include:**

1. **Family will make and keep to a family safety plan (shared and agreed with the social worker)**
2. **Family find their safety network, and agree how they will be involved and communicated with.**
3. **Words and pictures**

**If they have already developed a safety plan:**

1. **Family will follow their family safety plan (Shared with social worker)**
2. **Talk about the safety network, is it strong enough?**
3. **Words and pictures**

**And any other next steps e.g. breakthrough mentor, alcohol services.**

**Scaling question**

A safety scale should be created matched with **each** danger statement and safety goal(no more than 4 danger statements and safety goals).

The 0 and 10 end points of the scale need to be clearly defined in line with the danger statement (0) and the safety goal (10) so the scale clearly measures the current safety of the child/ren in relation to the danger expressed in the danger statement. The same safety scales should be used throughout the assessment and casework. In this way everyone has a clear way of understanding, measuring and discussing the seriousness and what progress has been made.

**Ask everybody in conference to give a score and ask what they need to see for the score to move up the scale?**

Chairs, advocates or note takers do not score.

Contingency

If necessary the chair will facilitate a discussion as to what will happen if things do not change or become worse for the child. It is important to explain that while we want to work in partnership with the family if the situation means that the child continues to be at risk of harm despite the best efforts of the family network then the Local Authority will have to impose their own plan to keep the child safe. It is important that the family are aware of this and what this would entail for them and their child. Using terms such as seeking legal advice is not clear enough for families and professionals must explain in full why they would seek legal advice, for what purpose and the potential outcome.

Conference decision

Chair asks social worker for their recommendation for a child protection plan or child in need plan? And what category if a Child protection plan is chosen (neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation)

Then the chair checks the views of all the other professionals in the room.

Chair clarifies members of the core group, who will continue to develop and review the safety plan with the family.

Chairs rationale

Chair summarises the reasons for plan decision and records their views.