

Version Control			
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1. Guidance for facilitating a virtual Child Protection Conference – involving parents

Issued 6th April 2020

INTRODUCTION

This is further guidance to support consistently good practice for including parents and families in virtual case conferences and is targeted at all IROs, Social workers and managers who convene, chair or participate in child protection conferences.

The aim is for the IRO service to continue to provide independent chairing of conferences and oversight to planning for children whilst reducing the amount of face to face contact and any risk of transmission of COVID 19.

Since 23 March all child protection conferences have been managed as Skype meetings to enable professionals and family members to participate.

It is recognised that it may prove difficult for parents to participate in a virtual conference (particularly in the Initial Child Protection Conference) when they may not know the other participants and where they are isolated from available support.

From parental feedback we know how anxious parents can feel leading up to a child protection conference, this guidance sets out steps to reduce this anxiety and create a way for all staff to support parents' participation and co-production of safety planning for children and to maximise their full engagement and contribution to the conference by being able to share their views. This will make decision making robust and the foundation for safety planning with families to be established.

Any communication using Email must be by secure email including use of EGRESS for communication with parents.

There are two approaches to enabling parents to participate in our virtual child protection conferences:

Option 1: This is the primary option and should be used unless exceptional circumstances are identified

- Parents are encouraged to participate fully in the full virtual conference.
- This will require the SW and Chair to undertake preparation work with parents **prior** to the date of the meeting – a minimum of 24 hours before the meeting.
- During the conference the Chair will need to manage the discussion very carefully to ensure parents know who's talking and are given the space to respond and share their views.

- All participants will need to state who they are each time they talk.

Option 2: Only used where risk to parent or the child may be increased by participation and information being shared in an open meeting – must have agreement from IRO

- Meeting is planned as a 3-part conference process
- Parents will only virtually meet (via skype) with the IRO
- Rational must be clearly recorded in the record of the meeting.

2. How to prepare for a virtual conference – steps for Option 1

Option 1 -Pre-conference consultation and preparation

- IRO will hold a pre-conference discussion with the SW to share information to plan for the practicalities of the meeting and consider the current assessment/ analysis. This will also be an opportunity to discuss the practical means of ensuring parents (**and interpreters**) can take part in the conference, sharing telephone numbers and emails addresses.
- SW's will have video or audio discussion with family about the conference and their assessment and ensure they have shared their report.
- The police will send their report to the SW 24 hours before the conference. SW will share the OPEN police information with the family prior to the conference and gauge their reaction to this.
- SW will undertake a brief risk assessment regarding who will be invited to take part in the conference. This will take into consideration the increasing risk factors of the restrictions due to Covid-19. This risk assessment will be shared and agreed with the IRO.
- The IRO will have a pre-conference discussion with parents (by Skype or What's App video if available) and where appropriate, the child/ren, in advance of the conference for discussion and preparation. This should take place at least 30 minutes before the Conference.
- The pre-conference discussion with parents and children will include: explanation of the conference purpose, agenda and decision making.
- Consideration will be given to how to ensure confidentiality and manage any risk that may be present at the time of the meeting, ask parents who is in the house/room with them at the time of the meeting and request they ensure confidentiality. We will ask that no professional or family record the conference but accept this cannot be monitored.
- It is essential the IRO is well prepared for the meeting and follows the standards and expectations for case conferences.
- The IRO will discuss with parents the best means of the outcomes being sent to them. (email via password protection)
- A confidential slot will be held prior to the conference between professionals to share all police information, open and confidential, so that agencies are aware of the full content of the police reports. During this slot, a discussion will be held regarding what agency information has been shared with the family, their reactions to this and consequently to agree what can be shared in the open forum during the conference.

Option 1- The Conference

- All child protection conferences must be informed by multi agency information, to consider the end of a plan there needs to be the right professionals present and always police information.
- Be mindful of if parents and children are at home together and the meeting is adding to their stress, and if information or comments shared create additional risk of conflict.
- The Chair will find a way to calmly and safely manage these situations including if necessary pausing the meeting.

Option 1- Post Conference

- After the meeting the SW will hold a video or audio meeting with the parents to ensure they have understood everything, that their views have been heard and to confirm the safety plan.
- If the conference has indicated an increased risk within the family home to children or adults then the IRO will discuss the concerns with the Team Manager and consider the response
- The child protection plan, decision analysis and outcome will be circulated within 5 working days of the conference via secure email.
- The IRO will consider with the family and Social worker the best way of sending their outcomes. (password protected).
- Any additionally sensitive situations where it is a worry that a parent may misuse the outcomes then the IRO will consider redaction of the outcomes for both parents to ensure that we do not increase risks to victims who may be living with perpetrators. SW and IRO's to advise victims of this.

2. How to prepare for a virtual conference – steps for Option 2

Option 2 -Pre-conference consultation and Preparation

- IRO will hold a pre-conference discussion with the SW to share information to plan for the practicalities of the meeting and consider the current assessment/ analysis. This will also be an opportunity to discuss the practical means of ensuring parents (**and interpreters**) can take part in the conference, sharing telephone numbers and emails addresses.
- SW's will have video or audio meeting with family about the conference and their assessment and ensure they have shared their report. Including the open police information shared 24 hours before the conference.
- IRO will have a video or audio discussion with the parents prior to the meeting with professionals.
- The pre-discussion will consider the assessment/analysis as outlined in the SW report and professional reports and discuss safety planning.
- IRO will engage parents in thinking about safety planning and what they think this might look like. The IRO will record this pre-meeting discussion on case notes

Option 2 – The Conference

- IRO will hold a virtual meeting which will include the SW and professionals only. They will proceed with the conference, planning and decision making as usual practice taking into account the parent's views/suggestions.
- The IRO and social worker will ensure that the views of the family are shared in the meeting

Option 2 – Post Conference

- SW will hold a video or audio meeting with the parents to ensure they have understood everything, that their views have been heard and to confirm the safety plan.
- If the conference has indicated an increased risk within the family home to children or adults then the IRO will discuss the concerns with the Team Manager and consider the response
- The child protection plan, decision analysis and outcome will be circulated within 5 working days of the conference via secure email.
- The IRO will consider with the family and Social worker the best way of sending their outcomes. (password protected).

- Any additionally sensitive situations where it is a worry that a parent may misuse the outcomes then the IRO will consider redaction of the outcomes for both parents to ensure that we do not increase risks to victims who may be living with perpetrators. SW and IRO's to advise victims of this.

3. Contingency planning

Contingency

If a virtual conference is unable to proceed due the unavailability of professionals and parents, the following will take place:

- SW and IRO to discuss the case, concerns, safety plans, and for RCPC's the progress of plans and any new risks and information.
- IRO will have individual telephone conversations with key professionals
- SW and IRO will create/update the safety plan. Conference Clerk will be part of this virtual meeting, take notes and write up plan.
- SW to hold a video or audio meeting with the parents to discuss current assessment/analysis, safety plan and conference decision.
- CP plan and outcome to be circulated to parents and professionals as above

Postponement

Any decision to postpone a conference will need to be agreed with the Safeguarding Service Manager and Service Manager of the Locality team with a clear rationale recorded on the child's record.

For a situation where the wider conference arrangements are changed, due to changing capacity or service priorities, this will be agreed at the Director's level and communicated as an update to this guidance.

How we are reviewing arrangements

These arrangements are being kept under careful. Daily meetings are being held to review professional and family feedback, capacity and priorities so that any necessary changes to these arrangements can be made.

Important GOOD PRACTICE TIPS- to facilitate effective virtual child protection conferences:

- The SW and professionals will need to ensure that they have shared their reports/concerns with the family in advance of the conference. Not on the day.
- Professionals will need to send their reports to the SW, IRO and other professionals, in advance of the conference. This includes social work report being shared with attendees before the meeting in good time that they can read it before the start of the meeting.
- SW to share with the IRO parents' telephone number and email address within the pre-conference discussion to ensure smooth setting up of the meeting.
- Where appropriate children should be invited to participate in the conference. Referrals to the Children's Advocate should continue. The Children's Advocate will hold a virtual meeting with children and feedback at the conference. (this will be reviewed as there are changing expectations to support front line services)

- Conferencing online should aim to be concise and focus on what must be shared for the safety of the children.
- There must be a continued awareness during the conference of the impact of the meeting on children and adult's safety and emotional wellbeing. The aim is not to increase risk/ make things worse in the household when a conference is being held or result in repercussions.
- All virtual meetings and its participants will apply and follow the same principles and practice standards around confidentiality and data protection

Kelda Claire – Service Manager – Safeguarding and Performance. 06.04.2020

6 April 2020