

Pre- birth Child Protection Conference

A pre-birth conference is an Initial Child Protection Conference concerning an unborn child. Such a conference has the same status as, and must be conducted in a comparable manner, to an Initial Child Protection Conference. The timing of the conference should be after the Pre- Birth Assessment has been completed and intervention work is in place. This should be arranged to take place at the point the expectant mother is 31 weeks pregnant. The only exception should be where there is a known likelihood of premature birth.

Any agency involved with pregnant women, where there are concerns about the unborn child, should make a referral at the earliest point to children's social care so that assessments can be undertaken as early as possible in the pregnancy and support can be put into place for parents at the earliest opportunity. This will allow as much time as possible for assessment, care planning and support for the baby and family.

Delay must be avoided in making Referrals in order to:

- Provide sufficient time to make adequate plans for the baby's protection;
- Provide sufficient time for a full and informed assessment;
- Avoid initial approaches to parents in the late stages of pregnancy, at what is already an emotionally charged time;
- Enable parents to have more time to contribute their own ideas and solutions to concerns and increase the likelihood of a positive outcome to assessments;
- Enable the early provision of support services so as to facilitate optimum home circumstances prior to birth.
- The referrer should clarify as far as possible their concerns in terms of how the parents' circumstances and/or behaviours may impact on the baby and what risks are predicted. It is important that the referrer considers the possible risk to the unborn child of both parents, or mother and partner, or father and his partner, even if they are not living together.

A pre-birth conference should be held where:

- There has been a previous unexplained death of a child whilst in care of either parent;
- A previous child has died or been removed from parent/s because of significant harm;
- Where a parent or other adult in the household is a person identified as posing a risk, or potential risk, to children;
- Where a sibling has previously been removed from the household either temporarily or by Court Order;

- Where there are significant Domestic Abuse issues;
- Where the degree of parental substance misuse is likely to impact significantly on the baby's safety or development;
- Where the degree of parental mental illness/impairment is likely to impact significantly on the baby's safety or development;
- Where there are significant concerns about parental ability to self-care and/or to care for the child e.g. unsupported, young or learning-disabled mother;
- Where any other concern exists that the baby may be at risk of Significant Harm, including a parent previously suspected of fabricating or inducing illness in a child;
- A child is to be born into a family or household that already has children who are subject of a child protection plan;
- An adult or child who is a risk to children resides in the household or is known to be a regular visitor.
- Where any other concern exists that the baby may be at risk of Significant Harm, including a parent previously suspected of fabricating or inducing illness in a child;

Other risk factors to be considered are:

- The impact of parental risk factors such as mental ill health, learning disabilities, substance misuse and domestic violence and abuse;
- A mother under 18 years of age about whom there are concerns regarding her ability to self-care and / or to care for the child.
- Where there are significant concerns about parental ability to self care and/or to care for the child e.g. unsupported, young or learning disabled mother;
- If the mother is aged under 13 years.
- Where there are maternal risk factors, e.g. denial of pregnancy, avoidance of antenatal care, non-cooperation with necessary services, non-compliance with treatment, with potentially detrimental effects for the unborn baby.
- Where there are concerns about the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the family, particular attention to be paid to women who may have fear of using Health services.
- Where there are concerns about Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Practice

Together For Children work with families to provide a weekly pre and post birth plan of support. This can be found on the Together For Children Hub.