

Children's Services

Principles for Child Protection Conferences

1. Purpose

This guidance sets out the principles that govern our conduct of Child Protection (CP) Conferences. It is intended for young people and families who attend CP Conferences, as well as for Quality Assurance Reviewing Officers (QAROs) who chair Child Protection Conferences, social workers and our safeguarding partner agencies. This guidance aligns with the requirements of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*.¹

2. Our approach

Dorset Children's services work with children and families is strengths-based and restorative. This means that we help families to identify what they are good at, and to use these strengths to deepen family relationships and improve their children's lives. The needs of children are at the centre of everything that we do and are the focus for all practitioners, irrespective of their professional background. We support and challenge one another to ensure that children have the best lives possible.

3. What does this mean for our Conferences?

A restorative, strength-based approach means that we have high expectations of what can be achieved by CP Conferences and that we expect everyone to play their part in making conferences effective. We will challenge those who do not do this.

4. Our key principles are:

- 4.1 We use language that helps everyone to get a clear picture of the child's needs, any risks they may face, and the help they need. Above all, the conference will state clearly what a good solution looks like for the child.
- 4.2 The family are supported to lead the conference by identifying what needs to change and how they feel about the concerns that need to be addressed.
- 4.3 Reports will be sent out by Children's Services and other agencies so that all those attending receive them at least 2 working days before an initial CP conference and 5 working days before a review conference. Everyone attending should read the reports before the conference to avoid taking up valuable time that can better be used to support the family and provide solutions to reducing risk.

¹ [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), Department for Education, 2018

- 4.4 The child's Social Worker will identify whether the young person and/or their family need help to understand the reports and arrange this where necessary.
- 4.5 CP Conference reports should give a full picture of how children and families are progressing with respect to the child's health, education and general development. However, these areas will not be discussed in the conference unless they are directly relevant to the risks or harm faced by the child.
- 4.6 Membership of the Child Protection Conference will be appropriate to the child's circumstances and needs. Professionals attending will have sufficient expertise to contribute effectively to the conference.
- 4.7 The QARO will undertake a pre-conference consultation with the social worker and team manager to support preparation for the conference. Where required this will be extended to key partnership agencies e.g., if there is confidential information that needs to be shared and planned for, split conferences or exclusions.
- 4.8 The QARO chairing the conference will speak with the parents (and, where appropriate, the young person) before the conference takes place to ensure that they know what to expect. The QARO will help parents to prepare to talk about their child/ren as the experts in their care.
- 4.9 During the CP Conference, the QARO will ensure that the parents have the opportunity to reflect on the concerns that are expressed for their child(ren). The conference will help them to consider the strengths that they and other family members have that will be needed to address the harm or risks involved.
- 4.10 The QARO will ensure that parents are helped to identify the support they require from those in the conference as part of the support plan.
- 4.11 The QARO will ensure that the conference adopts a plan of support. This will be before any decision is made as to whether the plan is for Child Protection or Child in Need.
- 4.12 If a Child Protection plan is adopted by the conference, the allocated Social Worker is responsible for implementing the plan with the child and their family, to reduce or remove the risk of significant harm.
- 4.13 Child Protection plans will be reviewed regularly by some or all of those who attended the first conference; the family will always be included. If a review conference agrees that the Child Protection plan is not sufficiently reducing the harm or risk to the child, the QARO will ensure that additional measures are considered. These could include proceedings to bring the child into the care of Dorset Council.
- 4.14 The QARO will track progress of the Child Protection plan at a midway review.

- 4.15 Where practice does not meet the required standard, QARO's will escalate to the relevant practitioner.