

# What is Child Protection?

## - Information for Parents

### What is child protection?

Dorset Children's Services has a duty to make sure all children and young people in Dorset are safe from harm. If we believe a child or young person is at risk, then we must take steps to understand these risks and work with families and other professionals to keep children safe. This is child protection.

### Why is there a child protection enquiry for my child?

We start a child protection enquiry (sometimes called a Section 47 enquiry) when one of our social workers, another professional or a member of the public tells us they are worried a child or young person is not safe or is at risk of harm.

We have a legal duty to investigate all safeguarding concerns or allegations to make sure the child is safe. We always aim to be open and honest but sometimes it may not be possible to tell you where the concerns have come from, for example if this could put your child at risk of further harm or if the concern has been raised by a member of the public.

The Child Protection enquiry will help us to understand your child and your family's circumstances. When the enquiry is finished, we will decide if we think your child is at risk of harm and a Child Protection Plan is needed to keep your child safe and support your family.

### What happens in a Child Protection enquiry and who is involved?

The social worker will speak to you as the parent or carer of your child and will also speak to your child directly on their own. We always aim to gain your (the parent's) permission to speak with your child, but sometimes if we are worried about their welfare and safety, we will need to speak to your child without your agreement.

The social worker will also gather information and talk with the professionals who know your child and your family, for example your child's school, yours and child's GP and health visitor. **We must complete the Child Protection enquiry within 15 working days.**

### What support is there for me?

We understand that being part of a child protection enquiry might be worrying and make you feel uncertain about what may happen. A Quality Assurance Reviewing Officer (QARO), who is not part of the enquiry will:

- Call you, introduce themselves and answer your questions.
- Offer you support and explain what will happen.
- Answer any questions you may have about the enquiry.
- Explain your rights and what could happen next.
- Ensure you and your child are fully involved.
- With your consent, feedback your views to your allocated social worker.
- Help you to raise any concerns and explain how you can complain if you are not happy.
- Make sure that the Child Protection enquiry is done properly and fair to everyone.
- A duty QARO can be contacted any time from Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm on 01305 225940.

## What will happen after the Child Protection enquiry?

When the enquiry is completed, the social worker will share their findings with their manager and together they will decide what should happen next. They will decide one of the following:

- If the enquiry finds that your child is not at continued risk of harm Dorset Children's Services will take no further action.
- If the enquiry finds that your children and family need help and extra support, Dorset Children's Services will offer this to you.
- If the enquiry finds that your child is not safe or is at risk of harm, Dorset Children's Services will arrange a formal meeting called an initial child protection conference.

## What happens at a Child Protection Conference?

We want families to play a leading role in the conference and in the development of their plan, you will be supported by your QARO to be able to do this.

A child protection conference is a meeting to talk about:

- What is going well for your child and family
- What we are worried about within your family and the care of your child (or children)
- What needs to happen to make sure your children are safe.

The meeting will focus on developing a plan to support you and your family to keep your child safe, this will include what the professionals who work with your child and family can do to help and support you.

If there are any reasons that might stop you and your child's other parent from coming to the conference at the same time, (for example concerns around domestic abuse), we can arrange for the conference to be held in two parts.

## How will I be supported with the Child Protection Conference?

Before the Child Protection Conference takes place, the QARO will visit you at your home to help you to prepare. The QARO will:

- Provide you with information needed for the conference – which will include offers of help and support from the professionals that are going to attend the conference.
- Help you to think about the help that is on offer and which of these things you think are the most helpful to you and your family.
- Ask you if there is anyone you would like to come with you to the Child Protection Conference, this might be a family member or a close friend you trust who can offer you support.
- Will explain who will be attending the conference.

## Advocacy

As a parent, you can have an independent advocate to help you speak up at the Child Protection Conference. You can find out more about advocacy from your QARO.

Your child can also have an advocate at the Child Protection Conference; your child's social worker will arrange this. The advocate will help your child to plan what they want to say at the conference and will speak up for them if they want this. The advocate will need to see your child alone to hear their views and wishes. For more information about advocacy for children, see the [National Youth Advocacy Service website](#).

## Making sure the plan is working

When the Child Protection Conference agrees the plan, it will also agree who will be responsible for making sure that the things in the plan happen. The professionals with the most responsibility for making the plan happen are known as the Core Group, and they will meet regularly. Your child's social worker will tell you what happens at these meetings.

There will be a Review Child Protection Conference, usually after 3 months. You and your child, and some of the professionals who came to the first conference will meet again to decide whether the plan is working. Again, your QARO will help you to prepare for this meeting and will answer any questions you have about it. Your advocate can support you at this meeting also if you wish.

## What happens next?

Usually, child protection plans are successful. They help families to become more confident about keeping their child or children safe. When this happens, the child protection process comes to an end with a final child protection conference.

## What if I am not happy with Dorset's Child Protection work?

If you are not happy with something that Dorset Children's Services have done, you may wish to speak to your social worker or QARO. It is part of the QARO's role to voice any concerns you have. If this does not help, or you wish to make a formal complaint straight away, please:

**Call:** 01305 225076, or

**Write to:** The Complaints Officer at our Freepost or email address below:

Complaints  
Freepost RRYH-AGJZ-TRGG  
Dorset Council  
County Hall  
Colliton Park  
DORCHESTER  
DT1 1XJ

**Email:** [complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk)

**Online:** You can use our online form by putting the following in your internet browser:  
Complain to Dorset Council - Dorset Council