



Child Protection Conferences A Guide for Professionals

The East Riding Safeguarding Children Board (ERSCB) is committed to ensuring risk is robustly assessed and managed and that evidence based interventions are employed to ensure that wherever possible children can be safeguarded within their families.

The Signs of Safety approach was introduced into child protection conferences in October 2013. This approach seeks to strengthen risk assessments and maximise family participation in conferences with the aim of improving the outcomes for children in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

What is a Child Protection Conference?

A child protection conference is convened when concerns exist that children are suffering, or may be at risk of suffering, significant harm. At conferences information about the children and their parent's capacity to safely care for them within the context of wider family support and their environment will be shared and analysed. Judgments will be made about the likelihood of children suffering significant harm in the future and decisions will be made about what action is needed to safeguard and promote their welfare.

If you are invited to a child protection conference then your contribution is important. Please attend. If you cannot attend, please provide a report and arrange for a 'well briefed colleague' who is able to fully participate, to attend on your behalf.

Attendance by key partner agencies is monitored and reported to the ERSCB.

What you need to do before the Conference

It is important that families do not hear new information at the conference and it is the responsibility of all agencies that have relevant information to make this available to the conference in the form of a written, legible and signed report. The report should be provided to and discussed with parents, and children where appropriate, at least **48 hours** in advance of an initial conference and **3 working days** before a review conference.

These timescales are to give families sufficient time to prepare for such important meetings about their family life. Please respect them by keeping to these timescales.

The report should be provided to the conference chair at least **3 working days** prior to conference. The expectation is that you will provide other agencies identified on the part A

(attached) with copies of your reports at least 3 full working days prior to conference to enable sharing of information between professionals.

Please also ensure that you bring a **minimum of 6 copies** of your report with you to share with professionals.

To work collaboratively towards agreed goals we need to ensure that professionals as well as families are **'held to account'** for their contribution to safeguarding children. The chair is responsible for quality assuring the practice of all the professionals involved in conference.

The Conference Process

- Thirty minutes before the conference is scheduled to start you will be taken into a room to read all the reports.
- Please do not talk about the family during this reading time.
- At the same time, the chair meets with family members in the conference room to talk about how the meeting will run and how they might best participate.
- The family may also read reports during this time and will check their genogram for factual accuracy. The family genogram is highlighted during the start of the conference and also ensures that all agencies have the correct family information, names, spellings and dates of birth.
- All conference members will then come together and the conference is convened. The social worker is the first professional asked to **summarise** what they know about the child and family, including what they consider to be the key dangers/harm factors and factors that help the child to be safer.
- Other professionals are then asked for their information. As all professionals will have read your report you only need to pull out **your key worries**. By keeping your information sharing succinct and focussed you will help to inform a clear plan to keep the child/ren safe.
- Family members are given the opportunity to ask questions about any information shared at conference, so it is important that you have prepared them for what you will be saying.
- When you are sharing the information take care in your analysis to distinguish between fact, observation, allegations and opinion. If opinions or general information is provided about a family or family member, the chair will ask the presenter to provide the evidence on which the opinion or generalisation is based. When you provide information from another source i.e. it is second or third hand, this should be made clear.

The most pertinent points that are raised during discussions are written up by the chair into the following framework:

- **What are we Worried About**
- **What's Working Well**
- **What Needs to Happen**

The chair will move between worries and what's working well seeking views from all conference members.

The conference chair will then ask 'What are you worried will happen to this child/children if nothing changes?' (**Danger Statements**)

A **Safety Judgment Scale** will also be used to ensure that all participants are enabled to make a judgement in respect of the safety of the child/ren.

The chair will then ask the social worker 'Tell me what you need to see to be willing to close the case'. The chair will read the response in the workers words and then check out whether everyone agrees and if there is anything else.

The Plan

After relevant information has been shared the meeting starts to draw up the outline child protection plan to address the harm that has been identified. You need to be able to describe in concrete terms what you will see when things are 'safe enough'. These outcome statements focus on the differences that you will see in the child. Alongside outcome statements, tasks for family members and professionals will start to be agreed. You will be asked to say what you can contribute to help achieve the outcomes and to commit to clear and achievable timescales for any tasks.

Decision Making

All professional members of the conference are asked about the future likelihood of significant harm to each of the children. This is the basis upon which a decision is then required from each member of the meeting about the status of the plan. That is, whether the plan should be a **child protection plan** or a **children in need (CIN)** plan.

Even if you have not met the family before you are still asked for your decision on the basis of the information presented to the conference. The Chair will explain the threshold for a child protection plan and will ask each professional for their view on whether the threshold for a child protection plan has been met and the reasoning behind your decision. You may be asked for a view on the category: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or neglect.

The chair makes a closing statement and includes the conference decision regarding the child/rens plan.

Attendance of Children and Wider Family at Conference

All children aged 10 years and over will normally be invited to their conference. In some circumstances the young person may choose not to attend in person but agree for their views to be represented at conference. A member of the **Children Rights and Participation Team** will always support the child if they wish. A young person may attend for all or part of the conference; the children rights and participation worker will be available to the child to help with this.

Wider family member/friends/neighbours may be invited to the conference if they need to know information in order to reduce the risk to the child and they are able to contribute to the task of keeping the child safer, they may also be invited if they form part of the **Safety Network** for the child.

There may be occasions when family members are excluded from the conference. The decision to exclude resides with the chair and the Independent Safeguarding & Reviewing Manager; for information about the basis for exclusion please refer to ERSCB procedures.

Bringing a professional observer to Conference

As part of professional development you may want to bring a member of staff from your agency to attend the conference as an observer. All enquires of this nature should be made to the chair at least one week prior to the date of the meeting. If appropriate, the chair will then seek the agreement of the family and the social worker and respond to the request. Any observers who have not followed this process **may not be** admitted to the meeting.

When will I get copies of the Plan and summary of discussion?

The child protection plan agreed at conference will aim to be sent out within 24 hours of the conference. The summary of discussion of the conference will be sent out by the unit within 20 working days of the conference. If you have any amendments to the accuracy of these, you should put your amendment in writing to the chair **within 7 working days**.

Confidentiality

Information shared verbally or in writing in the conference must only be shared outside the meeting if it is to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children. The conference summary of discussion and any reports submitted to the meeting are confidential and should not be passed to a third party without the consent of either the chair or through an order of the court.

If you have any queries about child protection conferences that cannot be answered by reading the relevant part of the child protection procedures or discussion with your named / lead / designated Safeguarding Manager, then please contact us on 01482 396999.

Feedback and Evaluation:

At some point throughout the year you may be asked to complete an evaluation form to tell us how things went and we will use this information to think about conferences in the future. We will be trying to find out if the new way of doing things is better for families and helps children become safer and get the help they need more quickly.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guidance.