



SOCIAL SERVICES CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION PACK

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Key words you may hear and what they mean

Barrister

A person who specialises in childcare law. They will represent you in court.

CAFCASS

The Children & Family Court Advisory & Support Service.

Care Plan

A plan written by Children's Services which sets out a child's needs and how these will be met.

Care Proceedings

A process that begins when a local authority thinks that your child is suffering or is likely to suffer from harm.

Child Protection Case

A meeting organised by Children's Services Conference, which invites all professionals who are working with your child.

Children's Services

The organisation which is responsible for ensuring the welfare of children. Your child's social worker works for Children's Services.



Key words you may hear and what they mean

Court

The place where care proceedings are held, usually called Family Court.

Judge

The person in court who makes legal decisions about plans for your child.

Local Authority

They deliver statutory services, such as children's social services in the area where you live.

Parental Responsibility

A person with parental responsibility is responsible for the care and wellbeing of a child. Speak to a solicitor if you are not sure whether you have it.

Solicitor

A person specialising in child care law.

Threshold Criteria

If this has been met, it means that the risk to the child is high enough that the court must act.



Who are Children's Social Services?

Children's Social Services are a department within the council. This is who your child's social worker works for. Their job is to make sure that children are safe and are being well looked after by their parents.

Why might Children's Social Services get involved?

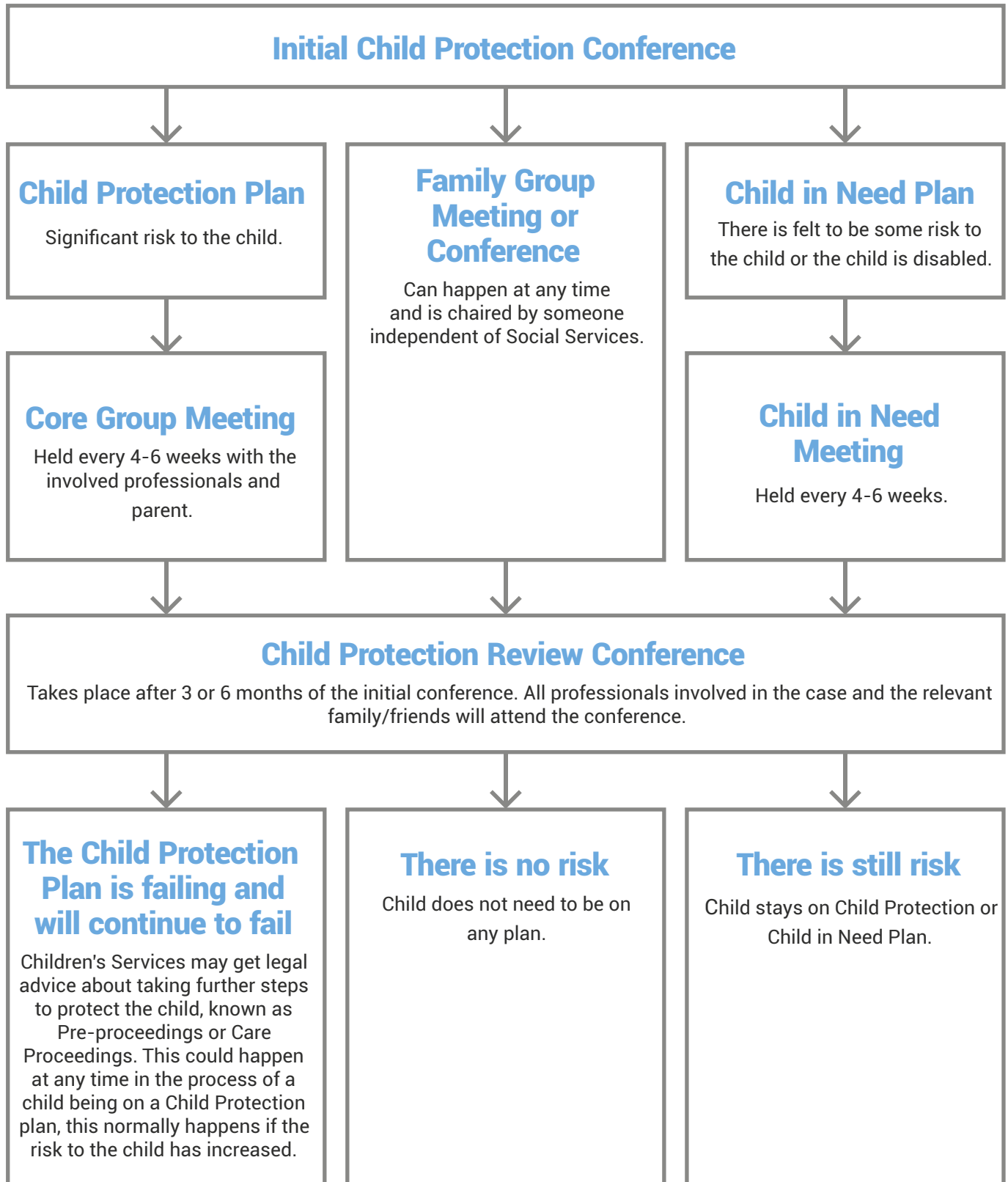
They may be told information about a child that makes them concerned. They will want to look at the situation to find out more information. They will work with you to do this. If this leads to further concerns about your child, they must do something to make sure your child is safe.

What happens next?

The flowchart on the next page will briefly cover the process and possible outcomes. Each step is explained in more detail on pages 7-10.



The Child Protection Process



The Child Protection Process Explained

Initial Child Protection Conference

This is a multi-agency meeting, which means you will meet with professional people, who are involved with your child. This may be your child/children's school teachers and a health visitor or a doctor, as well as your child's social worker and other professionals.

This conference is arranged when there may be risk to your child or children within a home. This then allows information to be shared about concerns of risk or abuse, which will allow Children's Services to make a decision about the future protection of your child and decide if a Child Protection Plan or a Child In Need Plan is to be put in place.



The Child Protection Process Explained

Child Protection Plan

A Child Protection Plan is put in place when there is felt to be significant risk to a child. This is to explain how Children's Services, along with other services are going to help to keep your child safe, when there is thought to be significant risk to your child.

The Child Protection Plan will:

- Explain all the concerns that the social worker has.
- Explain what you need to do to keep your child safe.
- Explain how professionals will work with you and your child to help keep them safe

Keep all documents and reports given to you in a safe place.

Core Group Meeting

These happen every 4-6 weeks with the parents and professionals involved in your child/children's Child Protection Plan.

They look at your child's needs and how they are being met with the support that is in place. Different professionals will say how your child is getting on. You will also be asked how you think the plan is working and if there is any extra support you would like.

A date will be set for the next meeting and the social worker should set a list of tasks and who is to do them.

You will be sent a copy of the minutes. Keep them safe and read them before your next meeting.

The Child Protection Process Explained

Child in Need Plan

A Child in Need Plan is put in place when there is felt to be some risk to a child. This is to explain how Children's Services, along with other services are going to help to keep your child safe when, there is thought to be some risk to your child.

The Child in Need Plan will:

- Explain all the concerns that the social worker has.
- Explain what you need to do to keep your child safe.
- Explain how professionals will work with you and your child to help keep them safe

Keep all documents and reports given to you in a safe place.

Child in Need Meeting

Much like the Core Group Meeting, they happen every 4-6 weeks with the parents and professionals involved in your child's Child in Need Plan.

They look at your child's needs and how they are being met with the support that is in place. Different professionals will say how your child is getting on. You will also be asked how you think the plan is working and if there is any extra support you would like.

A date will be set for the next meeting and the social worker should set a list of tasks and who is to do them.

You will be sent a copy of the minutes. Keep them safe and read them before your next meeting.

The Child Protection Process Explained

Family Group Meeting (or conference)

A Family Group Meeting can happen at any time during the Child Protection process and it aims to find out if you have any family or friends who could help look after your child.

This meeting will be chaired by an independent person and not your social worker. Your social worker will be there and will read through a report, to say what must happen for your child to be kept safe. You and your family will be given some private time to be able to come up with a plan on how you are going to care for your child safely.

Then you will all come back together, to agree on a plan of care that will keep your child safe.

You will be able to see the report before the meeting.

Child Protection Review Conference

After 3-6 months of Core Group Meetings, you will have a Child Protection Review Conference. Your child's social worker and the professionals will report how your child's needs are or aren't being met. There will be a discussion and vote on whether your child still needs a Child Protection Plan.

Following the Review Conference this may happen

- If things are much better, your child may be put on a Child in Need Plan, instead of a Child Protection Plan.
- The Child Protection Plan may continue as there are concerns your child's needs are not being met.
- If serious concerns are raised the chair may ask the social worker to contact a solicitor about going to court.

What happens at Court?

The judge will check that all efforts were made by Children's Social Services to keep your child with you. If they have and they agree the child should be looked after, a Guardian who works for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service will be asked to care for your child. Within six days of this, you will get a date for your first hearing. Your child's guardian will write a report to explain what they feel will be best for the child. This will be done by the guardian speaking with the parents, other family members and the child.

First Court Hearing

During the first court hearing it will be decided

- If the court agree with the interim care plan
- Where the child will live
- Who the child will see until the last hearing has been held.
- Inform everyone what needs to be completed and what evidence and information is required.

This will be done by deciding on a Temporary Legal Order for the child until the court proceedings have finished. Most court orders last for 8 weeks.



Court Orders

There are four types of order the court can issue for the duration of the proceedings:

Interim Care Order

This is only used when there is evidence to show that the threshold criteria has been met, and the court needs to act. This would happen if there has been or is likely to be, significant harm caused to the child, if they remain in their parents' care.

Children's Services will share parental responsibility for the child, deciding where they should live, even if the parent disagrees.

The court must look at protecting the child, but also look at the danger of taking the child from its own family. Children's Services may decide another family member is to look after your child.

Interim Supervision Order

This would be chosen if there is good reason to believe the child has been or is likely to be significantly harmed.

The court decides where the child lives, though this can be with the parent, and they decide who can see them.

Children's Services do not have parental responsibility but continue to work with the family.

Interim Residence Order

This will enable a person within the family (not the parent) to be identified as able to look after the child until the final hearing.

Interim Contact Order

The court will look at how and when the parent can see the child.



Interim Hearings

Between the first and final hearing there will be at least two further important hearings, to allow the court to look at who your child sees and lives with until the final hearing. These are the Case Management Conference and the Issues Resolution Hearing. You will also need to prepare for the final hearing.

Case Management Conference

This will be within 45 days of the first meeting. Two days before the hearing all the involved solicitors will meet to try and agree on a care plan.

This plan will identify the main concerns; see what has been done and what is still to be done. The court will then look at the care plan.

Issues Resolution Hearing

This will normally take place between 16 and 25 weeks after the first meeting.

The court will look at the care plan and how it is working, see what has been done and what is still to be done, find out what has and has not been agreed by everyone.

Before this hearing you can meet with your solicitor to say what you think.

Preparations for the Final Hearing

To prepare for your final hearing you can meet with your solicitor and read through all the reports and other documents. This is a good time to ask any questions you may have.

This is where you can work with your solicitor to prepare a statement for the final hearing.

Possible outcomes of the Final Hearing

The outcome of the final meeting may be one of the following:

Care Order

A care order gives the local authority parental responsibility of a child. You will still have some responsibility, but the local authority can override your wishes. Children's Services will make a plan as to where your child will live and who and when you and other people can see your child. They may decide the child is to live with you, a family member or foster carers.

Supervision Order

Children's Services will usually put a plan in place to tell you what you will do and what Children's Services will do. You are responsible for your child and Children's Services will watch how you look after your child. This will usually last for one year.

Residence Order

This means your child will live with someone else. This might be a family member, but they share parental responsibility with you. The court will decide when you see your child.

Special Guardianship Order

This means your child will live with someone else on a long term basis and you and the child's Special Guardian will share parental responsibility. This is more permanent than a resident's order, as you cannot ask to have it stopped without the court giving you permission to ask.

Contact Order

This tells you when can see your child, where you can see your child and when other people who are close to the child can see them.

Adoption

Adoption is when a child will live with another family permanently, meaning they become a part of their family and are no longer a part of your family.

Adoption can be suggested by social services at any stage of the child protection process. The court may also decide that adoption is the best decision for the child. Adoption is permanent and cannot be removed once it has been made.

The steps for adoption are as follows:

- Children's Services will seek advice from an Adoption Panel
- A recommendation is made
- The court will make a decision
- The court will make a placement order
- The child will live with the adoptive family for 10 weeks as a trial period
- The adoptive parents will then ask the court for an Adoption Order to make them the legal parents of the child.



Pre-Birth Assessments

A pre-birth assessment aims to identify and protect vulnerable children and support families before a child is born. It does this by looking at:

- The needs of the unborn child
- The risks to the unborn child
- If the parents can recognise the needs and risks to the unborn child
- What support the parents may need

Why would a pre-birth initial assessment take place?

Pre-birth initial assessments must take place when a pre-birth referral is made for one of the following reasons:

- There has been a previous unexplained death of a child whilst in the care of either parent.
- A parent or other adult in the household, or regular visitor, has been identified as posing a risk to children.
- A sibling is under a Child Protection Plan, or the parent is a Looked After child.
- A sibling has previously been Looked After voluntarily or via a Court Order or Police Protection.
- Domestic violence is known to have occurred.
- The parent's substance misuse or mental illness/impairment is likely to have significant impact on the baby's safety or development.
- There are concerns about parental maturity and ability to look after themselves and the child.
- The degree of parental learning disability is likely to have a significant impact on the child's safety.
- There are concerns about a parent's capacity to adequately care for their child, because of the parent's physical disability.
- A child under 13 is pregnant.
- Any other concern exists that the baby may be likely to suffer significant harm.

When does a Pre-Birth Conference take place?

The pre-birth conference should take place at least 10 weeks before the due date of delivery. This allows as much time as possible for planning support for the baby and family.

Child in Need

At the completion of the Initial Assessment, a decision may be made to do a Pre-birth Core Assessment. Both involve relevant multi agency professionals and the family.

There should be at least one joint visit made with the health visitor and midwife during the course of the assessment.

Child protection may follow this stage or in cases where there is a likelihood of significant harm to the child.

A Strategy meeting must be held within 72 hours if:

- There is concern that the child is suffering complex types of neglect or maltreatment.
- There is an allegation of sexual abuse.
- An emergency order was taken to protect the child in circumstances where a strategy meeting could not be held.
- There are allegations against staff, carers, volunteers or anyone professionally involved with the child.
- Fabricated or induced illness is suspected.
- There is an allegation that a child has abused another child.
- There are ongoing concerns about the child's welfare and a need to share concerns and agree a course of action.
- There are concerns about the future risk of harm to an unborn child.

This list is not exhaustive and it is expected that most referrals will need a Strategy Meeting.

Strategy Meetings

At a Strategy Meeting

These meetings may be held at the hospital in which the pregnant woman would be giving birth in.

The meeting should be chaired by Children's Social Care Services Team Manager and where appropriate involve:

- Community Midwife
- Maternity Services Manager
- G.P
- Health Visitor
- Police
- Named Nurse/Doctor for Safeguarding
- Social Worker
- Obstetricians
- Other professionals as required e.g. Mental Health services, Probation, and Substance Misuse Professionals
- A Legal Advisor



Useful contacts

Gingerbread

Offers a range of services for lone parent families throughout England and Wales.

Helpline: **0808 802 0925** Mon: 10am – 6pm Tues/Thurs/Fri: 10am – 4pm

Wed: 10am – 1pm and 5pm – 7pm

Website: **www.gingerbread.org.uk**

Family Rights Group

Provide legal and practical advice to families involved with social care services.

Freephone Helpline: **0808 801 0366** Mon - Fri 9.30am - 3pm

Website: **www.frg.org.uk**

Family Lives National

Charity providing help and support in all aspects of family life.

Parentline: **0808 800 2222** Service is open 9am – 9pm, Monday to Friday
and 10am – 3pm Saturday and Sunday

Email: **askus@familylives.org.uk**

Website: **www.familylives.org.uk**

Home-Start UK

Volunteer parents provide support to parents and carers, who are struggling and looking after at least one child under five.

Tel: **0116 464 5490**

Email: **info@home-start.org.uk**

Website: **www.home-start.org.uk**



CONTACT US

St. Helens Advocacy Hub

Tel: 0300 3030 202

Email: referral@sthelensadvocacyhub.org.uk

Website: www.sthelensadvocacyhub.org.uk

Online chat: <https://www.n-compass.org.uk/get-support/advocacy/>

*The information in this document is correct as of March 2026**