

Information for Families involved in a Child Protection Investigation

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to help families who are involved in Child Protection Investigations understand:

- Why people are concerned;
- What is likely to happen during an investigation;
- What will happen after the investigation;
- Where you can get help.

Responsibilities of agencies and others

Everyone has a responsibility to make sure children are safe and well cared for. Concerns about children or unborn babies are normally reported to:

- Social Work;
- Police;
- Health (e.g. Health Visitor, GP);
- Any other professional involved with the child or family e.g. Teacher, Housing Officer.

Why are people concerned about your child?

Concerns may have been raised about your child or your child may have spoken to someone for a variety of reasons. It may be believed that your child has experienced or is at risk of:

- Physical injury (being hit, kicked, punched, strangled, poisoned);
- Neglect (not being properly fed, clothed, washed, supervised, taken for medical appointments);
- Sexual abuse (inappropriate sexual behaviour or language, assault, exposure to pornography, sexual exploitation either on line or in real life);
- Emotional abuse (constantly criticised, ignored, humiliated, exposed to domestic abuse).

What usually happens during a Child Protection Investigation?

Social Work staff and the Police have a legal responsibility to investigate any concerns, (Health staff have a duty to help) which suggest that your child (or any child in your care) has been abused or is at risk of abuse.

At all times the safety of your child comes first. Usually the Social Worker and the Police will want to:

- Speak to your child
- Speak to you
- Speak to other relevant people (e.g. family members, teacher, health visitor etc.)
- Make further enquiries if necessary
- Discuss with Health staff whether it is necessary for your child to have a medical examination.

We know that this is a stressful time for children and families. It is important that:

- You understand what is happening
- Your views and your child's views are listened to

Usually Police and Social Work will tell you before they interview your child. However, in some circumstances this might not be possible. You will be told the reason why your child was interviewed or other action was taken without your knowledge or consent at a later stage. If you refuse to let your child be spoken to, other legal measures may be considered. Your child will be interviewed by specially trained Social Workers and Police Officers. This interview will be filmed. Usually Social Workers and Police officers will ask your child if they consent to be interviewed or medically examined (this will depend on your child's age and level of understanding.)

Where possible you will be kept informed of what is happening. If you feel you have been treated unfairly you can ask for the name of the person who you can complain to. The Social Worker should tell you their name and give you their contact details.

What happens at a medical examination?

If a medical examination is necessary your child will be examined by a Children's Doctor (paediatrician) to make sure there are no injuries or other problems (e.g. poor growth, infections) that require treatment. Sometimes a Police Doctor might be there too. If there are any injuries these may be photographed by the Police for evidence. The Doctor will explain everything that is happening and if further tests or treatment are needed.

What happens after the investigation?

After the investigation is completed one or more of the following might happen:

- No further action (you will continue to receive support from Universal services such as your GP, Health Visitor, school);

- A Child's Planning meeting is arranged to agree a Child's Plan; or
- An Initial or Pre-Birth Child Protection Planning Meeting is arranged to consider the risks to your child and plan with you to protect him/her.
- Voluntary arrangements may be made for your child to live with a family member, friend or foster parent;
- Further legal action may be taken to protect your child;
- The Children's Reporter may be advised of investigations and may wish to make further enquiries or arrange a Children's Hearing.

In the majority of cases children are not removed from their home and continue to live with their own families with help and support as required.

Legal advice

You can get legal advice from:

- A solicitor;
- Child Law Centre - Freephone 0800 328 8970
- Parentline - 0808 800 2222

What happens at a Child Protection Planning Meeting?

The professionals involved in the investigation decide whether a Child Protection Planning Meeting should be arranged. The meeting is chaired by an independent Chairperson who doesn't manage anyone involved in the investigation. People who know you and your child, or who were involved in the investigation are invited to attend the meeting e.g. health visitor, teacher, doctor, police officer, social worker, housing officer.

You and your child will be invited to the meeting. There may be part of the meeting which you will not be able to attend if professionals have to discuss information they cannot share with you e.g. the Police may have information about someone else which they cannot share with you.

The Chairperson will meet with you before the meeting and explain all this to you. Your views will be listened to and you will be given the chance to correct any information which you think is wrong.

The meeting will only go ahead without you in rare circumstances as it is important that you are part of the discussion and planning.

People at the Planning Meeting:

- Share information about the matters causing concern;
- Review any decisions or action taken so far;
- Decide whether your child is at risk and their name should be placed on the Child Protection Register;
- Agree a Child Protection Plan or Child's Plan;
- Identify a Core Group (the people who will support you and your child), and
- Agree a date for a Review Planning Meeting (if necessary). This meeting will consider whether your child is still at risk and whether registration should continue.

After a Planning Meeting

After a Planning Meeting the Core Group, which you will be part of, meets regularly to make sure everyone is working together to reduce the risks to your child. The need for any additional support will be discussed at these meetings.

Useful telephone numbers:

Duty and Child Protection Team - 01506 284700

Out of office hours if you need to speak to a social worker urgently phone the Social Care Emergency Team on 01506 281029/9

Police - 101 (999 in an emergency)

Children's Reporter (West Lothian Team) – 0131 244 3130 or WestLothianMailbox@scra.gov.uk

If you have any questions please ask your social worker