



# Module: Strategy Discussions, Child Protection Conferences and Core Group

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# House Keeping

- Welcome to this training session
- Introductions - Please give your name and role/post in the chat
- Please indicate if you any experience of attending either strategy discussions, child protection conferences and/or core groups.
- Microphones muted unless speaking
- Cameras
- Use chat/raise hand to ask a question
- Question from you
- Evaluation form

# Learning outcomes

1. Examine professional roles and responsibilities when participating in strategy discussions, Child Protection conference and Core Groups to safeguard children. (e.g. purpose of meetings, professional availability, knowledge child/family)
2. To demonstrate knowledge of S47 Investigations, Child Protection Conference, Core Groups and Care Proceedings and how they are configured locally
3. To demonstrate knowledge and use of appropriate SSP policies, procedures and guidance (including SWCPP) when making decisions and assessing risk (*including the child subject of the referral and siblings/others at risk, e.g. children/parents at another home*)
4. To be able to demonstrate an understanding of the issues on information sharing, consent and capacity when participating in strategy discussion, Child Protection conferences and core groups



# Learning from Case Reviews and Audits

# National Review Learning

National Panel [Annual Report 2020](#) - 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020 highlighted weak information sharing and risk assessment which undermined the quality of child protection practice.

Lack of appropriate and timely sharing of information between agencies, the needs of and risks to children will either not be recognised or not responded to appropriately.

**Six key practice themes:** not new but most urgent and difficult.

- i) Understanding what the child's daily life is like.
- ii) Working with families where their engagement is reluctant and sporadic.
- iii) Critical thinking and challenge.
- iv) Responding to changing risk and need.
- v) Sharing information in a timely and appropriate way.
- vi) Organisational leadership and culture for good outcomes.

# Learning from local multi-agency audits: Star & Arthur, Ben & Bella

[SSP 7 minute brief Practitioner Guide to strategy discussions.](#)

LCSPR Babies with injuries– information sharing

[https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1032/lcspr\\_babies\\_with\\_injuries\\_report](https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1032/lcspr_babies_with_injuries_report)

LCSPR Bella and Ben January 2023

[https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1199/bella\\_and\\_ben\\_full\\_report](https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1199/bella_and_ben_full_report)

LCSPR Alan March 2023

[https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1238/alan\\_full\\_report](https://safeguardingpartnership.swindon.gov.uk/downloads/file/1238/alan_full_report)

Rapid Reviews – understanding of DA in the wider context of violence families; information sharing; reassessing new families; speed at which child’s life can change

LCSPR Babies with Injuries Report - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership

LCSPR Babies with Injuries Report

# Learning from reviews and audits: Working with Fathers

[Triennial Analysis for Serious Case Reviews \(2014-2017\)](#) highlights a failure to identify significant figures within families. Men are often invisible or absent in assessments resulting in very little information known about them.

[Hidden Men – learning from case reviews](#) identified 2 categories of ‘hidden’ men.

- men who posed a risk to the child which resulted in them suffering harm, and
- men who were capable of protecting and nurturing children but were overlooked by professionals.

Professionals should open conversations about parental relationships, failure to do so could possibly overlook any potential risk.

Similarly, failing to identify or engage fathers ignores their importance in a child’s emotional and psychological development.

For further information see [SSP 7 minute brief Working with fathers.](#)

# National Panel Report

[The myth of invisible men.](#) Focus was safeguarding children under 1 from non-accidental injury caused by male carers. Evidence gathered highlights:

- Urgent need to improve how the system sees, responds to and intervenes with men who may represent a risk to the babies they are caring for. The role that they play in a child's life, their history of parenting and their own experiences as children and how this effects them as adults, are too frequently overlooked by the services with responsibilities for safeguarding children and for supporting parents.
- Universal services, such as midwifery/health visiting, during the periods before and immediately after birth, do not regularly, significantly and substantially involve fathers. Appears to set a pattern in practice which is replicated throughout targeted and specialist services, and into the family courts. Opportunities for offering support to men who might need it in their role as fathers, for early identification of both parental/children's vulnerabilities, and potential risks that these indicate, are not maximised.

When fathers do not live within the family home they can often be forgotten however, they play a key role in their children's lives and should be given equal consideration to other adults within the home.

**Think** – Have I considered the children's father in this discussion?

[For further information see SSP 7 minute brief Working with fathers.](#)

# A co-ordinated approach – safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility

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- Everyone who works with children has a responsibility for keeping them safe. No single practitioner can have a full picture of a child’s needs and circumstances and, if children and families are to receive the right help at the right time, everyone who comes into contact with them has a role to play in identifying concerns, sharing information and taking prompt action.
- In order that organisations, agencies and practitioners collaborate effectively, it is vital that everyone working with children and families, including those who work with parents/carers, understands the role they should play and the role of other practitioners. They should be aware of, and comply with, the published arrangements set out by the local safeguarding partners.

Paragraph 16 and 17 Working Together 2018

# Legislation and Guidance

- [Children Act 1989, 2004, Children and Social Work Act 2017](#)
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018](#)
- [South West Child Protection Procedures](#)
- [Swindon Safeguarding Partnership Policies and Procedures](#)



# Expected Standards of a Child Centred Approach

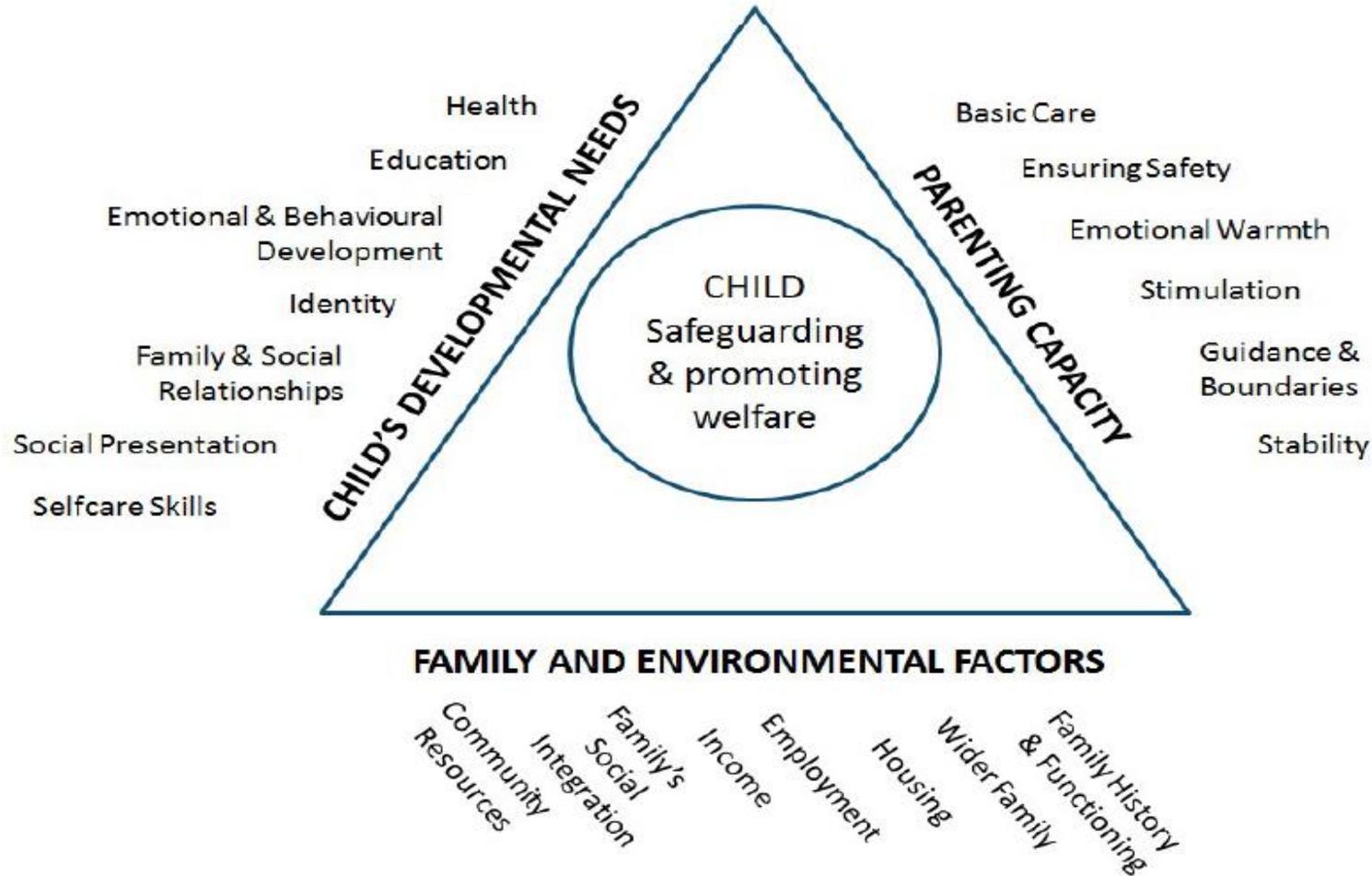
- a) The needs of the child are at the centre of all safeguarding processes
- b) Children should be seen alone and where possible sufficient time taken to develop their trust
- c) A 'Think Family' approach is necessary, but analysis should focus on the impact of the behaviour of the adults on the lived experiences of the child
- d) Consideration should be given to who is the best placed professional to work with the child in each situation
- e) The focus of all activity should be securing the best outcomes for the child, not the completion of processes

## Assessment Framework

Consider what parts of the assessment framework you can contribute to.

In your role/agency/service what do you see on a daily basis/interaction that will contribute to this assessment?

How can you express the voice of the child?



# Your Questions



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**Strategy Discussions are held whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.**

# Attendees at Strategy Discussions

**Representatives from the following agencies must attend a Strategy Discussion**

- ✓ Children's Social Care
- ✓ Health professional
- ✓ Wiltshire Police

Other attendees:

- ✓ relevant to the child's needs and situation
- ✓ Education if a child is of statutory school age

# The purpose of a strategy discussion

- **Not to be used solely for the sharing of information.**
- Decide whether there are grounds for a Section 47 Enquiry and determine the child's welfare/plan.
- Professionals participating must have
  - all their agency's information relating to the child/family available
  - to be able to contribute to the discussion/meeting, and
  - must be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their agencies.
- Agree the conduct and timing of any criminal investigation
- Consider a referral to LADO if appropriate (do not need a strategy discussion to refer to LADO)

Source: [Multi-agency standards for safeguarding children - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

South West Child Protection Procedures [Child Protection Enquiries - Section 47 Children Act 1989 \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

# Decisions should be made as to...

- What further information is needed and how it will be obtained.
- What immediate short-term action is required to protect the child. Also the needs of other children who may be at risk.
- Whether legal action is required
- What information should be shared with the child/family (*information will be shared unless this may jeopardise a police investigation or place the child at risk of significant harm*)
- Consider when the child will be seen alone, and method to record the child's wishes and feelings to inform decision making
- Consider race, ethnicity, beliefs and culture of the child/family and how these should be taken into account and if an interpreter will be required.
- Agree what further action is required - who will do what, and by when?



Source: [Multi-agency standards for safeguarding children - Swindon Safeguarding Partnership](#)

South West Child Protection Procedures [Child Protection Enquiries - Section 47 Children Act 1989 \(proceduresonline.com\)](#)

# Outcomes

## **Possible outcomes from the Strategy Discussion**

- ✓ Undertake joint Section 47 enquiries with Police.
- ✓ Undertake a police investigation - single agency.
- ✓ Undertake an appropriate assessment - single or multi-agency e.g. Section 47/Section 17/Early Help Assessment/health assessment.

## **Potential outcomes of a section 47 Enquiry**

- ✓ Concerns are substantiated and the threshold of significant harm is met.
- ✓ Concerns are not substantiated, no further action required.
- ✓ Concerns not substantiated, but the child may receive services under section 17 Child in Need, or under the local early help provision.

# Professionals roles and responsibilities

**The purpose of all professionals attendance is to share information and contribute to the discussion, assessment and plan of action**

# Social Workers will:

With their manager's agreement, SW's must convene the strategy discussion and make sure it:

- Considers the child's welfare and safety, and identifies the level of risk faced by the child.
- Makes a plan for the child to be seen and spoken to.
- Develops a family plan to immediately safeguard the child(ren).
- Records agreed decisions in accordance with local recording procedures.
- Follows up actions to make sure that what was agreed is done.

# Police will:

- Discuss the basis for any criminal investigation and any relevant processes that other agencies might need to know about, including the timing and methods of evidence gathering; and
- Lead the criminal investigation (local authority children's social care have the lead for the section 47 enquiries and assessment of the child's welfare) where joint enquiries take place.

# Health Practitioners will:

- Advise where possible about the appropriateness or otherwise of medical assessments, and explain the benefits that arise from assessing previously unmanaged health matters that may be further evidence of neglect or maltreatment.
- Secure additional expert advice and support from named and/or designated professionals within health providers for more complex cases or when the health professional attending has not been able to advise on the point above.

# Other professionals

Others participating in the strategy discussion will depend on the nature of the individual case but may include:

- The practitioner or agency which made the referral.
- The child's school or nursery.
- Any health or care services the child or family members are receiving.

# Formulate a clear SMART action plan

- Actions will include:
  - timescales,
  - agency and individual responsibilities,
  - including the timing of police investigations and relevant methods of evidence gathering.
- Decide whether enquires under section 47 of the Children Act 1989 must be undertaken.
- The mechanism and date for reviewing the completion of agreed actions.
- Identify professionals to contribute to the assessment within 7 days.
- Identify professionals to collect information about the lived experience of the child or young person and their family.

# Recording the strategy discussion

- Children's Social Care will produce and distribute minutes which clearly record the decisions reached and actions agreed.
- Actions from the strategy discussion will be disseminated within 1 working day of the meeting.
- Minutes from the strategy discussion will be circulated within 5 working day of the meeting via secure email to all invitees.
- Each professional will take responsibility for their actions as agreed in the Strategy Discussion.

# Your Questions



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# Child Protection Conferences

# Criteria

When one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- Harm is caused by a person with whom the child lives or has significant contact
- Harm is due to failure to protect on the part of the parent/ carer
- Risks of significant harm to an unborn child
- Where a person posing a risk of significant harm to children has joined or plans to join the family
- Where an application for a court order has been refused, but agencies consider that the risk of harm remains
- Where a child already subject to a child protection plan moves into the local authority
- Where a child protection plan was not made or ended due to an agreed plan to protect the child, but circumstances have significantly changed
- A child has died as a consequence of parenting/care received and there are other children in the household/family
- The child should not already be in the care of the local authority

# Child Protection Conferences

Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) will be held whenever a child is judged to suffer, or be likely to suffer, significant harm (informed by the outcome of a Section 47).

Bringing together family members (including the child, where appropriate), supporters/ advocates and those professionals involved with the child/family to plan and review how best to reduce the risk to the child.

ICPC takes place within 15 working days of:

- The Strategy Discussion meeting
- Notification from another authority that a child has moved to Swindon (transfer in)

First review conference takes place within three months of the ICPC. Subsequent reviews are held at intervals of not more than six months (unless a pre-birth conference) or where there is a newborn for the family where other children are on a plan.

Where an [unborn child](#) is made the subject of a protection plan, the Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) will take place within four weeks of their birth.

# Membership and Quoracy

- ✓ Membership is appropriate to the child.
- ✓ As a minimum the conference should be attended by Children's Social Care and at least two other professional groups or agencies, which have direct contact with the child or family.
- ✓ Attendees may also include those whose contribution relates to their professional expertise.
- ✓ In exceptional circumstances inquorate Conferences may proceed.
- ✓ The voice, wishes and feelings of children/young people will be an integral part of the Conference process.



# Reports

## ➤ **ICPC's;**

- Reports will be shared with family **at least 2 working days prior** to their attending the Conference ,
- Reports by professionals will be **submitted no later than 3 working days to the SQA admin team** prior to the Conference.

## ➤ **RCPC's**

- For Review Conference's professionals reports will be shared at the core group meeting immediately prior to the conference and emailed to SQA at **least 5 working days** prior to the conference.
- Reports will be shared with family **at least 5 working days** prior to the conference
- Reports will be written in a standard format on the agreed SSP template. Further information is included in the [SSP Child Protection Conference Induction Pack](#)

# Your Questions



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# The Conference

# Agenda for Conference

This will allow the Conference to:

- Understand the reasons why the conference is being convened and what threshold of significant harm means
- Have a summary of the risks identified and the impact of these on the child
- Consider all available evidence obtained through Section 47 Enquiries and other assessments
- Take into account written contributions from agencies and family members
- Hear the views of all agencies represented at conference
- Hear the views of the child and family members
- Formulate a plan and make a decision about what level of intervention the plan should be – Child Protection (CP)/Child In Need (CIN)/Early Help (EH)
- If agreed, draft a Child Protection plan and establish a core group to oversee the plan
- Agree a mid-point review by the CP Chair so they can assess the progress on the plan

# During conference

Chairs will be trained to ask more open questions and will empower parents and be more inclusive in the meeting. The focus of the conference will be;

- a) What are the risks that need to be addressed? (Risks)
- b) What has been the impact on the child(ren)? (Impact on Child)
- c) What does the child feel / say about this? (Child's Voice)
- d) What positive factors affect the impact? (Strengths)
- e) The plan will be produced live in the conference and will be prior to the decision regarding significant harm being made.
- f) Parents will be empowered to produce the plan – ultimately it is their plan.
- g) All professionals will participate fully in producing the plan and will make suggestions for what they can provide for the family.
- h) The contingency plan will be family led.
- i) Once the plan is produced all professionals will give their view regarding the threshold for significant harm and whether this it is met or not.
- J) All professionals will give their view as to which is the most relevant category of abuse.
- k) There will be no danger statement. There will be no scaling.
- l) If the actions listed are more about the child's well-being or access to resources then the conclusion might be that the threshold for significant harm is not met and the child should be made subject to a child in need plan.

## **Post conference;**

- ✓ You will receive the plan within one working day of the conference (whilst Covid restrictions are in place plan received within 3 working days).
- ✓ You will receive the notes of the conference within 20 working days of the conference.

# What is my contribution as a professional attending a Child Protection Conference?

You will be invited to participate in a child protection conference if the family have identified you as having a key role in their life such as supporting a parent or teaching a child.

You will be expected to attend having prepared for the conference and be clear about how you can provide high support and high challenge to the family and to other professionals in order to progress the plan.

At the conference you will be expected to support the family to explore:

- What has happened, and any harm that has been experienced or the risk of harm that is perceived.
- The impact this has had or is having on the child/ren.
- How the family feel about what has happened or is happening.
- How the family want to make things better and keep their child/ren safe.

The important element of the conference is that discussion is facilitated in a non-judgemental and non-blaming way, and that professionals hang on to the aspiration that the family can, with the right support, make things better.

This means that professionals have a responsibility to be mindful about their language and their behaviour so as to be able to work with the family to repair the harm identified.

# Professionals roles and responsibilities

- Invitees should have sufficient professional expertise and/or knowledge of the child/family to contribute effectively to the discussion and be part of the decision making and planning.
- Attendance at the conference should be prioritised. Any professional unable to attend should have an appropriate well-briefed representative to attend on their behalf, e.g. manager/supervisor/safeguarding lead.
- All professionals invited to a conference must submit a written report (as per report standards) irrespective of whether a professional is attending or not.
- All professionals will be given the opportunity to state whether they consider that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm and whether a Child Protection Plan should be made and, if so, under what category. A single category should be used, taking account of the primary concern relating to the child.
- Emotional abuse may be present in other categories but will only be the primary concern if there is evidence that it is severe and persistent.
- Where the Conference is in respect of more than one child, a separate decision should be made in respect of each child.
- In circumstances where a clear consensus cannot be reached the Chair will determine the action to be taken and provide a clear rationale for their decision.
- The majority view of the conference will ordinarily prevail, although in exceptional circumstances the Chair does have the right to overrule the decision of the conference.
- In this situation all professionals will be asked if they wish to formally dissent from the Chair.

# Formulating the plan

- An outcome focused plan is created live in Conference which addresses the risks identified.
- Attendees will actively participate and engage in developing and contributing to the plan.
- The Conference should decide what outline plan would be most appropriate to meet the needs of the child while providing the required safeguards. This outline plan should focus on addressing the risk indicators present within the family that are impacting on the child.
- The contents of the outline plan should be clearly explained to the parents/ carers if they are not in attendance. The expectation is that the social worker will update them within 24 hours.
- The plan should have specific actions to address the risk; make clear timescales for the action; identify who is responsible for the action; and who in the professional and family network will monitor the action.

## 6. Guide to a good plan

**You are an important part of this conference and need to identify risk and contribute to producing this Plan.**

**The risks in the assessments and reports for this conference need to be addressed by this plan.**

**Are the Risks clearly described and specific?**

**When you read / see the Risks do you immediately understand why this child is subject to this Plan?**

**Are all of the Risks addressed in the Outcomes?**

**Are the Outcomes child focused?**

**Are the actions directly related to the Outcome they are under?**

**Does every action have a clear date?**

**Does every action have a professional and / or family member who is responsible for this?**

### Contingency plan

**Is the Contingency Plan family led? Does it explore the use of extended family and friends?**

**Is the Contingency Plan specific to each child?**

**Does the Contingency Plan identify a proportionate response to the risks?**

**In every core group the Plan must be reviewed and progressed, including making relevant changes to the actions.**

**There is an expectation at the next Conference this Plan will have been developed**

# Chairs responsibility in conference

# Threshold not met

- When the threshold for a Child Protection Plan is not met Conferences will consider what plans may be necessary to support the child.
- The need for a Child in Need or Early Help plan must be considered and, if agreed, the contents of outline plans and meeting dates agreed.
- Informed parental consent will be necessary for a child in need plan. Good practice would be for parents to also consent to CP Plan.
- **QUOTE FROM FIONA over-ruling**

# Learning from audits: Repeat Child Protection Plans

This audit identified learning points for all partners and Child Protection Conference Chairs.

Specifically an over optimism by partners agencies and professionals that change made by families is sustainable in the long term especially when their vulnerabilities are long term domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse.

It found that this optimism resulted in children being removed from plans at the first review without full consideration of historic issues which may still be current. It also did not consider the sustainability of changes that had been made, and whether it was possible for these to be maintained in the longer term.

In addition to this, there was an element of professionals being risk averse which resulted in some children being made subject to a CP plan who should not have been, as the issues could have been managed at lower level and which became apparent at the first review, hence leading to them being removed.

**No child should be removed from a CP Plan without full assessment of the risks.**

The 3-month period between initial and first review conference is a short space of time to make decisions, and it is difficult to understand how the plan can be stepped down unless there has been a significant event.

# Your Questions



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# Core Groups

# Core Groups

- Conferences will agree core group members and the dates of subsequent meetings.
- The first Core Group meeting should take place within 10 working days of the ICPC and be chaired by a Social Work Manager and subsequent core group meetings will be held at no more than four weekly intervals.
- A children's social care Social Worker will be the lead professional and carry statutory responsibility for the child's welfare.
- Core Group membership should include all professionals who have responsibility for the completion of the detailed child protection plan which should be fully discussed and developed at the first core group meeting.
- GPs will be invited to the core group at an ICPC if they have a significant role. The GP will always receive a copy of the core group minutes even if they are not an invitee or attendee of the core group.
- First core group will focus on looking at the risk indicators identified at the ICPC and formulating agreed actions to reduce this risk. This should say what the impact on the child(ren) will look like if risk is reduced.
- Parents need to be clear about what the risk indicators are, and why these are the most worrying factors within the family and why.
- The dates for all future core groups and confirmation of the Review Conference will be agreed at the first core group.

# What is my contribution as a professional and the role of the Core Group?

The professionals identified by the family and conference to support them making things better and make the child/ren safe will, together with the family, form the core group of people working on the child protection plan.

This core group will meet within 10 days of the ICPC and then every 4 weeks subsequently to talk about the plan and review its progress:

- How the plan is being implemented for the family and how well they are progressing with it.
- Whether the risk and harm for child/ren is/has reduced.
- Whether there are any barriers for professionals to implement the plan. Where this has been identified, the CP chair or any professional should address this issue through the [SSP Escalation Policy](#).

If you are part of the identified core group, it is essential that you attend core group meetings and child protection conferences. If you are unable to attend the core group meeting or child protection conference, you **must** ensure another member of your agency attends to represent you and that you fully brief them.

The role of the professionals within the core group is to work with the family to achieve the outcomes laid out in the plan by completing the actions agreed at the child protection conference. The progress made by the family will be reported back to the review child protection conference. The professionals in the core group will be expected to provide high support and high challenge to each other for the benefit of the child/ren and family.

# What is my contribution as a professional attending the Review Child Protection Conference?

The first review conference will be facilitated 3 months after the initial child protection conference and then every 6 months thereafter. (If there is a baby born while its siblings are on a plan a conference will take place within a month of its birth).

The purpose of the review conference is to consider the progress the family and professionals are making to implement the plan.

Those attending the conference will need to consider whether there have been any further risks, or not, and how the family are progressing with their plan to make things better.

The family will be at the centre of this meeting, supported by their core group of professionals, to talk about the things that are going well and any things they are finding difficult.

When the core group are confident that the family have reduced the risks and made things better, the protection plan can be ceased at the review conference or 'stepped down' to a child in need plan if the family require further support to meet the identified needs of the children.

# Your Questions



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# Learning outcomes

1. Examine professional roles and responsibilities when participating in strategy discussions, Child Protection conference and Core Groups to safeguard children. (e.g. purpose of meetings, professional availability, knowledge child/family)
2. To demonstrate knowledge of S47 Investigations, Child Protection Conference, Core Groups and Care Proceedings and how they are configured locally
3. To demonstrate knowledge and use of appropriate SSP policies, procedures and guidance (including SWCPP) when making decisions and assessing risk (*including the child subject of the referral and siblings/others at risk, e.g. children/parents at another home*)
4. To be able to demonstrate an understanding of the issues on information sharing, consent and capacity when participating in strategy discussion, Child Protection conferences and core groups



Safeguarding is everyone's business and everyone's responsibility as safeguarding partners to participate in meetings, share information, develop and own plans.

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