

Information about the Child Protection Process



Introduction

This leaflet provides information about Child Protection Investigations:

- Why people would be concerned
- What is likely to happen during an investigation
- What happens after the investigation
- Where families 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 are normally reported to:

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

Why would people be concerned about a child?

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

- Physical injury (being hit, kicked, punched)
- Physical neglect (not being properly fed, clothed, washed, supervised)
- Sexual abuse (inappropriate sexual behaviour, language, assault, exposure to pornography)
- 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 assist) which suggest that a child has been abused or is at risk of abuse.

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

- Speak to the child
- Speak to the parents/carers
- 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 the child to have a medical examination.

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

- They understand what is happening
- Parents' views and the child's views are listened to

Usually Police and Social Work will seek parental consent prior to interviewing the child. However, in some circumstances this might not be possible. In such circumstances the reason why the child was interviewed or other action taken without parents' knowledge or consent will be explained to them at a later stage. Where parents refuse to give consent other legal measures may be considered. The child will be interviewed by specially trained Social Workers and Police Officers. Usually Social Workers and the Police will seek the child's consent to be interviewed or medically examined (this will depend on the child's age and level of understanding.)

Where possible parents will be kept informed of what is happening. If they feel they have been treated unfairly they will be advised of their rights and the name of the person they can raise concerns with.

What happens at a medical examination?

If it is agreed that a medical examination is necessary the 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. In some cases there may be a Police Doctor present 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 is required.

What will happen after the investigation?

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

- No further action
- Support or advice offered to the family
- An Initial Child Protection Case Conference is arranged to consider the risks to the child and make a plan to protect him/her.
- Voluntary arrangements may be made for the child to live with a family member, friend or foster parent
- Further legal action may be taken to protect the 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 homes and continue to live with their own families with help and support as required.

Legal advice

Families can get legal advice from:

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

What happens at a Child Protection Case Conference?

A Child Protection Case Conference is arranged after an investigation. The meeting is chaired by an independent Chairperson on behalf of West Lothian's Child Protection Committee. People who know the family and the child, or who were involved in the investigation are invited to attend the Case Conference e.g. health visitor, teacher, doctor, police officer, social worker etc.

Parents will be invited to attend the Case Conference and in some cases the child may also wish to attend. There may be part of the Case Conference which families will not be able to attend if

professionals have to discuss matters they cannot share with them e.g. the Police may have information about someone else which they cannot share with families. The Chairperson meets the family before the Case Conference. Families' views will be listened to.

If families do not attend the Chairperson will want to make sure that the Case Conference is aware of their views. Families can send written information or ask their Social Worker to present their views. The Social Worker will see families as soon as possible after the meeting to tell them the decisions. Families also receive a copy of the minutes.

People at the Case Conference:

- Share information about the matters causing concern
- Review any decisions or action taken so far
- Decide whether the child is at risk and whether their name should be placed on the Child Protection Register
- Record why people are concerned
- Agree a Child Protection Plan
- Agree a Core Group (the people who will support the family and the child)
- Agree a date for a Review Case Conference (within 3 months & every 6 months after that). This meeting will consider whether the child is still at risk and whether registration should continue.
- Decide whether to refer the child to the Reporter

After a Case Conference

After a Case Conference the Core Group meets regularly to make sure everyone is working together to reduce the risks to the child. Parents are usually part of the core group. The need for any additional support will be discussed at these meetings.

Useful telephone numbers:

Bathgate Social Work Centre - 01506 284000

Broxburn Social Work Centres - 01506 284440 (option 2)

Livingston Social Work Centre - 01506 282252

Out of office hours if you need to speak to someone urgently please phone the Social Care Emergency Team (Social Work) on **01506 281028/9**

Police - 101 (Emergency - 999)

Children's Reporter - 0131 244 3130

Domestic Abuse & Sexual Assault Team - 01506 281055