

# Tips for getting ready for a child protection conference

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Make sure you know who is likely to attend the conference (ask your child's social worker to explain who will be there).

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Ask your social worker to provide you with a copy of their written report about your child, well before the conference.

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Ask the social worker questions about the report if you need to. You can also ask them to include your views in the report and ask for any factual mistakes in the report to be corrected.

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Ask the social worker to let you have a copy of the written reports for the conference prepared by other professionals (this is not always possible and the conference Chair and police must agree to these reports being shared with you before the conference).

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Try to understand what worries the professionals have about your child or your family situation and why.

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Write down notes of the main points you want to make at the conference as a reminder.

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You can to prepare your own brief written notes to share at the conference. These should ideally focus on:

- your views about the social worker's concerns about your child;
- information you think is important about the concerns, for example, the support you could receive from family, friends, community;
- main areas of disagreement and why you disagree; and
- specific support that you feel would help your child.

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Arrive early to meet the Chair before the conference starts. Ask to be shown the conference room and to choose where you feel comfortable sitting. You can ask for water, tissues, pen and paper to be made available to you.

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If you are worried that you may need a break during the conference (for example, to use the toilet, to calm down, collect your thoughts or because you may become upset,) discuss with the Chair having a short break. If at any point during the conference you need a break ask for this. Ask the Chair to confirm that if you leave the room others will not continue discussions.

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Discuss with the social worker and Chair before the conference if you have concerns about any particularly sensitive information being shared at the conference.

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Let the social worker know before the conference if you are worried that you might be at risk of domestic violence or intimidation if a (former) partner or particular family member is at the conference. The social worker should talk to the Chair about how best to manage this.

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Be prepared to listen to other people's views as well as expressing your own.

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Try to respond to other people's contributions and thoughts in a respectful way.

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Focus on your child and what might help them; keep in mind what the professionals are concerned about.

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Be willing to cooperate with the professionals to draw up plans that will best meet your child's needs now and in the future.

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You or your advocate, friend or supporter can make a note of any significant points made by others at the conference. This will help you to remember afterwards what was said and agreed.

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You could ask for a **family group conference** (FGC) to allow your whole family to come together to decide how they can help support you and your child.

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Once the conference makes a decision about whether or not a child protection plan is needed, you can ask for:

- help you would like for your child/yourself to be included in the plan (whether this is a child protection or a child in need plan)
- information about responsibilities and who will be responsible for carrying out actions and when this will happen. This should also be fully addressed in a core group meeting.

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If you are unhappy about any part of the child protection process, you can make a **complaint**.

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Even if you make a complaint about the conference still continue to work with professionals and put your child's needs first. Children's Services are very likely to seek legal advice if parents stop cooperating.