South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (SGSCB)

Child Protection Procedures and Enquiries

Information for Parents and Carers

If you need this information in another format or language please contact 01454 868009

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Department for Children, Adults and Health
South Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board (SGSCB)

Information for parents and carers - Child Protection Procedures and Enquiries

This leaflet explains the use of the Child Protection Procedures, and what agencies will do when they are concerned about your child(ren).

Why are child protection procedures being used for my family?

The Child Protection Procedures are used when there are allegations or suspicions that indicate your child/ren may have been abused, or is at risk of abuse. The Children Acts 1989 and 2004 say that the Local Authority, that is, the Children’s Social Care Services, must make enquiries about a child's circumstances whenever they are made aware of such situations. The purpose of the enquiries will be to be clear about whether your child/ren is in any risk of danger of abuse or neglect - what the law refers to as 'significant harm'. Such findings be evidenced based. Enquiries take the form of a multi-agency assessment, carried out within government guidelines called 'The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families'.

The child protection procedures cover the way in which Children’s Social Care Services should go carry out the assessment and set out the roles of other agencies who will be involved.

How do Children’s Social Care Services get to hear of concerns about my child?

Concerns about children come to the notice of the Children’s Social Care Services in many different ways:

Professionals, such as teachers, doctors, health visitors, community nurses, hospital and day nursery staff, are bound by the procedures to tell Children’s Social Care Services about any concerns they have about possible abuse of children. They may have noticed something in your child's/ren's behaviour, or an injury which has worried them, or your child/ren may have said or done something to alert them. Where possible they will inform you before contacting Children’s Social Care Services. However, in some circumstances this is not possible. In any case, the social worker who visits you should explain very clearly exactly what the concern or allegation is, and where it has come from.

However, members of the public, neighbours, or family friends or relatives may let a professional know that they are worried about a child. They may ask that their name is not given to you, that is, that their information is confidential. This will be respected, and the nature of the allegation will be shared with you, but not the identity of the person who made it.

You yourself may have approached an agency for help.
Whatever the route, the Children’s Social Care Services will have to respond within the child protection procedures to assess the situation and take whatever action is needed to ensure that your child/ren are safe.

**When Child Protection enquiries take place, what is being looked for?**

Child Protection enquiries are made to decide whether a child is being abused or is at risk of abuse. Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment of a child. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or community setting by those that are known to them or more rarely, by a stranger. They may be abused by an adult or adults or another child or children.

The Government has provided [Statutory Guidance](https://www.gov.uk) for agencies in the definition of child abuse, and has advised that there are four main categories:

**Physical abuse**
Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm to a child. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces, illness in a child.

**Emotional abuse**
Emotional abuse is the persistent emotional maltreatment of a child such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects on the child’s emotional development. It may involve conveying to children that they are worthless or unloved, inadequate, or valued only insofar as they meet the needs of another person. It may feature age or developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed on children. These may include interactions that are beyond the child’s developmental capability, as well as overprotection and limitation of exploration and learning, or preventing the child participating in normal social interaction. It may involve seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of others. It may involve serious bullying, causing children frequently to feel frightened or in danger, or the exploitation or corruption of children. Some level of emotional abuse is involved in all types of maltreatment of a child, though it may occur alone.

**Sexual abuse**
Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Neglect**
Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child’s basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child’s health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once
a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to:

- provide adequate food, clothing and shelter (including exclusion from home or abandonment)
- protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- ensure adequate supervision (including the use of inadequate care-givers)
- ensure access to appropriate medical care or treatment.

It may also include neglect of, or unresponsiveness to, a child’s basic emotional needs.

The investigation will try to find out whether any of this is happening, or is likely to happen, to your child/ren.

**What do Child Protection enquiries involve?**

Children’s Social Care will have to make confidential enquiries about your family, to try to get a picture of your situation to help decide what needs to happen. This will include checking the Local Authority’s records and seeking information from other professionals, including your GP, health visitor if you have one, the school, the police, and any other agency who is in contact with you. The agencies who are approached will only share information that is essential, and will have to do so under the child protection procedures. Where possible your permission will be sought before such information is shared, unless agencies are concerned that the risk to your child/ren is immediate. If you refuse to give permission or to cooperate they will take legal advice. This may mean we share the information without your consent.

There will then usually be a discussion, called a Strategy Discussion, between Children’s Social Care and relevant child protection agencies e.g. the Police Public Protection Unit, a representative from the health service and/or school. At this discussion information is shared to decide if the concerns are warranted and if so what needs to happen next and by whom. Further enquiries will be planned, including who will be dealing with your case, whether the police will need to be involved, and whether your child/ren will need to be offered a medical examination.

Where the concern is about child sexual abuse, or a serious injury to, or neglect of, a child or young person, an investigation will usually be carried out jointly between the police and Children’s Social Care Services.

The social worker who visits you will explain in detail the nature of the concerns, and will want to hear your views. They will also want to talk to your child/ren, usually without you present, and will need to see the arrangements you have in your home for providing care for your child/ren, including where they sleep. Your child/ren may need to be medically examined, and you and any other people caring for your child/ren may need to be interviewed by the police. All of this, and the reasons for it, will be explained to you.
What happens next?

Following this, Children’s Social Care will decide how much further information is needed about your circumstances, in order to decide what needs to happen. They may start an ‘Assessment’; an assessment is completed to help understand your family circumstances. This will be completed within 40 working days.

During the Assessment, one of three things can happen

- No concerns are raised and it is agreed that the assessment process can be ended, and the case closed.

- Children’s Social Care Services identify with you that there ongoing difficulties and you agree to the assessment being completed to help decide what services would be best to help you with these.

- Concerns about possible child abuse remain and a decision is made to hold a Child Protection Conference. The social worker will keep you informed of decisions made and explain how they were reached.

Why and how are the police involved?

Where there are serious allegations, including allegations of sexual abuse, a criminal offence may have been committed, and the police have to investigate this. They will do this jointly with Children’s Social Care Services and will be involved in the assessment throughout.

If the police are involved, specially trained officers may wish to interview your child/ren and may record this on video, at an interview suite that has been designed with children in mind. If a video is made, it may then become evidence in a criminal prosecution and your views and those of your child/ren will be sought on this.

The police may also search your home, and may formally interview you or your partner. The police officers dealing with your case will explain this in more detail.

If your child/ren requires a medical examination, this will happen as soon as possible, it may be carried out by a police doctor, who is able to reassure your child/ren whilst collecting any evidence there might be of abuse.

What if I don't co-operate with the investigation?

Social Workers will usually seek permission to discuss your family with other agencies unless they have concerns about their children’s immediate safety. If you refuse to give permission or to co-operate with social workers they will take legal advice. This may mean that we share the information without your consent. Social Workers do not have the power to enter your home without your permission, but if they suspect that your child/ren is in immediate danger, they may:
• seek an Emergency Protection Order via a local Magistrate. This will allow them to remove your child/ren for up to 8 days and to carry out interviews and any necessary medical examination without your consent. If necessary, a warrant can be attached to empower the police to accompany a social worker and to enter your home to search for your child/ren without your permission. You can challenge the Order after 72 hours;

• ask the police to use their powers under Section 25 of the Children Act, to take your child/ren into police protection, removing them from your care for up to 72 hours whilst the Children's Social Care Services either negotiate further with you or seek an Emergency Protection Order or start Care Proceedings;

• convene a Child Protection Conference in order to share information about your child/ren and decide what to do next, including whether to start Court proceedings in order to gain access to your child/ren.

Whilst it is very rare for the agencies to use Court or police powers, they have no choice when parents refuse to co-operate, and will explain this to you should they become concerned about your response as the child's/ren's parent or carer. In these circumstances, you should seek immediate advice from a solicitor.

Will my child/ren be removed from me?

Although Children's Social Care and the police can remove children from home under certain circumstances, it is rare for them to do so. This will happen only in those situations where there is either a very serious allegation or evidence of harm or likely harm to the child/re and the parent is either not able or unwilling, to co-operate.

Where the initial investigation results in agencies feeling that your child/re is not safe at home, they will usually seek to keep the child/ren with a safe parent, carer or family member whilst they continue their assessment. This means that they will consider a number of options including:

• If the danger to your child/ren is thought to come from someone else living in your household such as a partner, then that person will be asked to leave so that your child/ren can stay with you. Children’s Social Care can provide some short term financial help so that this can happen and this would have to be with your agreement. If the person did not want to leave then a Court Order could be sought to make them do so, but again, this would need your consent. You would be asked to sign an agreement that you would not allow the person to return until it was deemed safe to do so by agencies involved;

• Children’s Social Care may ask that you agree to your child/ren being voluntarily accommodated by them, usually with foster carers, for a short period;
if your child/ren is in hospital, they may ask that they remain there, and that you sign an agreement that you will not try to remove them without the agencies approval.

The reasons for any of these options being suggested will be explained to you at the time, and you will be advised to take legal advice.

**What will happen when the investigation is finished?**

This will depend very much upon the findings and outcome of the assessment but will usually follow one of four options:

- It may be agreed that there is no need for further action because the concerns are unfounded. You will receive a letter confirming this and the case will be closed by Children’s Social Care;

- Child Protection procedures will stop and Children’s Social Care will with other agencies and yourself agree a Child in Need Plan to support your child/ren;

- A child protection conference will be called to consider whether your child/ren need a Child Protection plan and what action is needed to protect them.

- In exceptional circumstances the Local Authority will apply to the Court for an Order to ensure your child’s/ren’s welfare is secured.

**What are my rights as a parent?**

Agencies accept that most parents wish to act in their child's/ren’s best interests, and we will therefore try to work with you and will respect your views and your cultural, racial and religious background.

With this in mind, as a parent or carer, you have a right to:

- be kept informed throughout the process and to have your views heard and taken into consideration;

- if English is not your first language have an interpreter made available to you before the investigation proceeds. This will not be a member of your family or local community. Similarly, should you need a British Sign Language interpreter or an advocate, this will be arranged;

- have all information gathered about your family held in the strictest confidence. Agencies will not share information with other people without your permission unless it is necessary for the safety and welfare of your child/ren;

- seek legal advice if you wish to at any stage.
What if I am unhappy about the way the investigation has been carried out?

All of the agencies involved have their own procedures for dealing with complaints about the actions of their staff, and will provide you with a copy of these on request. If you consider that your complaint is about the way in which agencies have acted together under the Child Protection Procedures then you should write to the Strategic Safeguarding Services Manager who will ensure that your complaint is properly dealt with.

The Strategic Safeguarding Services Manager  
Department for Children, Adults and Health  
PO Box 298  
Civic Centre  
Kingswood  
Bristol  
BS15 0DQ  
Tel: 01454 868924

Working Together to Safeguard Children can be found on www.GOV.UK

Useful telephone numbers

Childline Helpline: 0800 1111

The Greenhouse: 0117 935 1707

NSPCC 24hr Helpline: 0800 800 5000

Police 101: for your local police station

First Point: 01454 866000 - out-of-hours this number transfers to the Emergency Duty Team

In an emergency dial 999 or contact your local Police Station.

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