

Children and Families
“Working together to safeguard children”

A Guide for Parents and Carers

Child Protection Enquiries

What happens when someone is worried about the safety or welfare of your child?



All children have the right to be kept safe and looked after and it is everyone’s job to make sure this happens. This guide explains that happens if someone reports that they are worried about your child.

Produced by Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board

Why has a child protection enquiry been started?

A child protection enquiry has been started because someone is worried that your child is suffering or is at risk of suffering significant harm. In such situations, the local authority has a duty to investigate any claims and take appropriate action to safeguard any of your children who may be at risk. If the concerns are unfounded and/or untrue no action will be taken.

Where the concerns are founded and your child is at risk; we discuss with you, your child and professionals from other agencies to determine the best course of action to protect your child.

This leaflet explains how child protection enquiries are carried out and answers some of the questions you may have. This is a brief guide and you can also take independent advice from a Family Solicitor, The Citizens Advice Bureau or a Family Rights Group.

What happens next?

If the concerns are not of a serious nature, the social worker will contact you and ask your permission to discuss the issues raised with other professionals such as your child's health visitor, teacher, and doctor. It is necessary to do this to establish the facts as quickly as possible. If we are satisfied that the concerns about your child are not founded, or any injuries were accidental, no further action will be taken.

Where there is the suggestion of immediate danger to your child, or the concerns are more serious, a strategy discussion will be held. This brings together social services, the police and other professionals who know you and your child. The purpose of this discussion is to plan what action to take and you will usually be contacted very soon afterwards.

It is usual for the social worker, and the police if they are involved, to see your child as soon as possible to help find out whether the concerns are true.

Can I be there when my child is asked questions?

It depends on the circumstances. It is often better for the child to talk without their parent(s) present and you may agree to not be there. If you don't want anyone talking to your child without you being present, you must say so and explain your reasons. In such circumstances, the local authority may take legal advice.

Will anyone ask me for my side of the story?

Yes, the social worker, and police if they are involved, will be keen to find out your view of the situation. What concerns you have about your child, what actions you and others could take to help deal with the situation.

Your views and comments will also be taken at the Initial Child Protection Conference and Core Group Meeting (see separate leaflet on Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Plans).

Will my child be medically examined?

It may be necessary for your child to have a medical examination to find out what has happened or to treat any injuries. Such examinations are carried out by a qualified medical practitioner.

Younger children can only be examined with your permission, unless they need emergency treatment. If you do not agree to a medical examination, then the local authority may apply to the court for permission. If this happens you may wish to take legal advice.

Older children can agree to be examined if the doctor feels that are old enough to make this decision on their own.

What happens after the strategy discussion?

If your child is thought not to be suffering from significant harm or at risk of suffering significant harm, then social services will take no further action. They will assess if you and your family need any support services. If support is required, a "Child in Need" plan will be made to show the support you will receive.

Where there are ongoing concerns for your child, an Initial Child Protection Conference will be held within 15 days of the strategy discussion (see separate leaflet on Child Protection Conferences and Child Protection Plans).

Where can I get help or advice?

The outcome of child protection enquiries may have a big impact on children and families. It can be in your interest to seek appropriate help or advice and you may wish to contact any of the following organisations:

- Family Law Solicitor
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Family Rights Group

What if I am not happy with the outcome or the way things have been handled?

If you are not happy with the decision or the way the case has been dealt with you can contact your social worker or the independent chair person and let them know the details. This gives them the opportunity to put things right and/or explain the decisions made.

If you are not satisfied with their reply you can make a complaint to the Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board; which the social worker or chairperson can advise you about.