

## **CHILD PROTECTION CASE CONFERENCES INFORMATION FOR HEALTH STAFF**

Information on Case Conferences is contained in The Western Isles Child Protection Committee Inter-Agency Procedures and Guidelines (March 2006).

### **PURPOSE**

A Child Protection Case Conference is convened after an investigation into an incident of suspected child abuse, or when a child whose name is on the Child Protection Register of another local authority moves into the Authority's area. It is a formal meeting which brings together the parents and the professionals concerned with the child/children's care and protection. The Case Conference provides the opportunity to exchange information, to consider whether any of the children have suffered significant harm, to ascertain any ongoing risk and, jointly, decide what needs to happen to improve the safety and welfare of the child/children involved.

Children whose names are on the Child Protection Register will have this status reviewed at regular intervals or if significant changes in circumstances occur.

Health professionals with knowledge of the child and family should be invited to attend. Health Visitors/Public health Nurse and the GP will be invited to all Case Conferences. Allied Health Professionals, Midwives and Community Nurses are sometimes invited. The Senior Nurse Child Protection is notified of every Case Conference and may attend or accompany staff depending on the circumstances and following discussion.

If an invitation to a Case Conference is received and you are unable to attend arrangements should be made for a colleague to attend in your place if possible.

Trainee health professionals may attend a Child Protection Case Conference on an observational basis after prior arrangement with the chairperson.

### **PREPARATION**

A written report should be submitted to the Social Work Department team leader at least two days before the Case Conference date. Professional views and the evidence which leads to them should be expressed clearly and concisely in the report and staff should be prepared to speak to this at the Case conference where necessary. The confidential report forms with explanations (CP1 and CP11 ) are available to assist with preparation of this. It is good practice to share the content of your report with the parents/carers unless this places the child or others at increased risk. It is often useful to discuss the content of reports with a colleague, line manager or with the Senior Nurse Child Protection.

If no one is able to attend a written report must be submitted to the Chairperson to share at the Case Conference. It is vitally important to clearly indicate on a written

report submitted any contents which are RESTRICTED information. as everyone attending, including parents/carers has access to all the written information..

## ATTENDANCE

All professionals who are involved with the family and who have a contribution to make are invited to the Case Conference including Social worker, Police, Teachers, GP's, Medical and Nursing staff. The Case Conference is chaired by a member of staff who is not directly involved in the case and who has no direct line management responsibility for the Social Workers who are involved. A minute taker will also be present. Parents are invited and encouraged to attend and may bring a friend as support. Parents/carers may be accompanied by their legal advisor . Children are not routinely invited to attend Case Conferences in the Western Isles but are sometimes present.

As far as possible parents need to know the reasons for professional concerns; the powers and roles of agencies involved; and the changes in the family's situation which the agencies consider necessary and desirable in the interests of the child.

The Case Conference will only succeed in helping to protect children if it builds on relationships between professionals and families . Openness and honesty are therefore essential as a foundation of understanding and partnership between parents and professionals. This is the reason why it is good practice to share your professional views with parents prior to the Case Conference.

The chairperson may decide that special circumstances exist and protected time for professional discussion is required at the beginning of the Case Conference without the parents present This is when RESTRICTED information presented by health professionals would be discussed. The Chair of the Case Conference should be made aware of this in advance if possible.

## RESTRICTED INFORMATION

Legislation gives the parent (and a child able to make informed request) a right of access, subject to some restrictions, to personal information about him/herself that is held by Social Work, Health and Education. (This includes case Conference minutes and attached reports).

The legislation has exceptions, for example information that would :

- Disclose the identity of third parties
- Be likely to result in serious harm to the physical, mental or emotional health of any person
- Be likely to prejudice the apprehension or prosecution of offenders

This is what is meant by RESTRICTED information.

In legal proceedings a court may not always be constrained by these exceptions and may have the power to require disclosure. It should be remembered that the fundamental principle underlying the right of access provisions is that people should normally be able to know what is being said about them by the designated agencies.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

The protection of children from abuse or harm, and in particular at Child Protection Case Conferences relies on the professional staff concerned doing all they can to work collaboratively and share and exchange relevant information. Situations may arise when confidentiality has to be breached to ensure the safety of a child, but no confidential or restricted information should be disclosed FOR ANY OTHER PURPOSE without the consent of the person who provided it. ( Separate Child Protection information is available which deals with Confidentiality)

## WHAT TO EXPECT AT A CHILD PROTECTION CASE CONFERENCE

The Chairperson regulates the business of the Case Conference ensuring that the focus is on the child and their protection, and that the Western Isles Child Protection Committee Procedures and Guidelines are followed.

Each Case Conference has a broad agenda:-

- Restricted information is discussed if relevant
- Introductions
- Consideration of reports, which are circulated, and other fact gathering
- Interpretation and assessment
- Decisions about registration
- Conclusions-including agreeing a care plan and a core group

Case Conferences rarely take less than half an hour or more than two hours.

If you are unable to be present for the whole of the scheduled time it is still better to attend for part of the Conference, rather than not at all. The Chairperson should be contacted as arrangements could be made to enable your contribution to be heard within your time commitments.

A minute taker is always present and the full Case Conference minutes should be circulated to those who attended. The minutes are confidential and should not be passed to third parties without the consent of the Chairperson. Case Conference minutes should be kept securely stored. Comments on content or accuracy should be made to the Chairperson.

Children considered by the professionals at the Case Conference to be suffering, or likely to suffer, abuse or significant harm and for whom there needs to be a protection plan, will be registered. All professionals present will be expected to share in the decision by expressing their view on registration. Children for whom there are concerns but not sufficient to require a protection plan will not be registered though other, less formal, arrangements might still be agreed.

The final task of the Conference is to agree on a Child Protection Care Plan which will detail all the work to be done with the family. The professionals involved form a core group and are obliged to fulfil their commitments as set out in the Child Protection Care Plan. Health professionals need to ensure that they have agreed to any input that is documented.

## CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER

The function of the Child Protection Register is to provide a record of all children in Western Isles who are currently the subject of an Inter-Agency Child Protection Plan. Details of the keeper of the Register and how to access this information is detailed in the Western Isles Child Protection Committee Inter Agency Procedures and Guidelines.