

Voluntary Care is when you ask or agree that Tusla will care for your child. If you have agreed for your child to come into care on a voluntary basis you will be asked to sign a form consenting to this. The social worker will explain the form to you. If you are not sure about something in the form ask the social worker to explain. The social worker should give you a copy of the form.

Court Orders: in a small number of cases, where no safe arrangement can be agreed, Tusla may consider applying to court for an order to make suitable arrangements for your child's care.

A Supervision Order is when the court decides that the best interests of your child is met by allowing various professionals to visit you and your child.

Statutory Care is where Tusla may consider applying to the courts for an order to place your child in care. This means that Tusla will decide who will look after your child.

A social worker cannot remove a child from your care without your consent or a court order. There are three types of court order that place a child in the care of Tusla

(a) an Emergency Care Order - lasts up to eight days;

(b) an Interim Care Order - lasts up to 28 days but can be renewed; or

(c) a Full Care Order - can last up to the child's 18th birthday.

If your child is in the care of the Child and Family Agency you can seek a direction from the court about the care of your child and about your contact (often called access) with your child.

* Child Protection Conference

Sometimes it is necessary to have a formal meeting of people who are working with you and your family to keep your child safe. This meeting is called a Child Protection Conference. During the meeting a plan will be drawn up that outlines the actions that professionals, agencies or your family need to take in order to ensure your child's protection and wellbeing.

You will be included in the meetings and you are entitled to bring a support person to this meeting (unless doing so would not be in your child's best interests). Your child may be involved depending on his or her age and level of understanding.

The name of the social worker that has contacted you is:

Their phone number is :

If you need to speak to someone urgently please contact:

Useful Links:

www.tusla.ie

www.oco.ie

www.ombudsman.gov.ie

www.dcyu.ie

As a parent you have the right to

- Be heard
- Be kept informed and involved
- Participate in the thinking and planning to address the concerns
- Seek legal advice
- Ask for and be given explanations
- Be supported
- Access your child's records
- Have access to an interpreter if you require one
- Have your religious and cultural background taken into account.
- If you are not satisfied with the service, access the Tusla complaints process at www.tusla.ie or you can get a complaints leaflet from your social worker or local health centre.

TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

Social Work Assessment of Child Protection and Welfare Concerns

Information for Parents

TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

The information in this leaflet is to let you know what Tusla - Child and Family Agency does. You have been given this leaflet because a concern about your child has been reported to Tusla. Your child's wellbeing is important to us and we are committed to working in partnership with you to ensure your child's safety.

The role of Social Workers

Social workers work with families when there is a concern about the welfare, protection or safety of a child or there is a concern that the child has been the victim of abuse or neglect. Social workers follow the Child Protection and Welfare Practice Handbook www.tusla.ie

A concern about your child has been expressed by you or someone else within or outside the family. If someone else reported the concern, the social worker will have spoken with that person and will have as much information as possible about the concern from that person. They will also have checked if your child is known to the child protection service.

All concerns are dealt with in accordance with *Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. This includes notifying An Garda Síochána where there is a child protection concern.

What happens when a concern has been expressed?

The social worker will carry out an initial assessment of the concerns. The initial assessment takes account of your child's health, education, development, identity, family and social relations, social presentation and self care skills. It will also take into account your ability to provide basic care, safety, emotional warmth, stimulation, guidance, boundaries and stability for your child.

The social worker is trying to get a picture of what life is like for your child and will need your help to do this. The social worker will have a role in assessing if a particular adult poses a risk to your child.

Please remember!

If you are not sure about anything the social worker has told you ask the social worker to explain it again.

If there is something that you meant to ask or tell the social worker, write it down and ask or tell them next time you are in contact with the social worker.

The Initial Assessment

The social worker will:

- Talk to you about your concerns and seek your views;
- Talk to other people about the concerns with your consent;
- Talk to you about your home, who lives in the household, including lodgers or temporary visitors, about their relationship and involvement with you and your children, about your child minding arrangements, baby sitters etc.;
- Want to see your child and talk with them;
- Want to see where your child lives;
- Keep a written record of meetings with you;
- Try to complete this initial assessment in less than 20 working days.

The social worker will want to know that your child is safe and that you can keep your child safe. If your child has been hurt or injured in any way, the social worker will ask you how this occurred and may ask that you have your child examined by a doctor.

The social worker will also talk to various people and professionals who are involved with you and your child e.g. G.P., teacher, public health nurse, other family members. The social worker will seek your permission to talk to these people (these are called network checks). If you do not consent, the social worker may proceed with these checks if they believe that your child is at risk. The social worker will tell you **what is likely to happen next**.

If at any stage during the assessment, the social worker is concerned that your child is at serious and immediate risk they may seek a court order or ask the Gardaí to intervene to ensure the safety of your child.

If there is a concern during the assessment that you cannot ensure the safety of your child, the social work department will explore with you other ways of keeping your child safe. This may include your child being cared for by someone else - a family member/relative or friends - or might involve your child coming into care on a voluntary basis.

Keeping you informed

The social worker will keep you informed about the progress of the assessment and provide you with information at significant stages during the process. This is normally done by talking with you. Sometimes social workers will write to you about the assessment. Written communication can help clarify matters.

Sometimes it may not be possible to share all information with you for example if the sharing of this information could prejudice a Garda Investigation, the social worker will tell you if this is the case.

Throughout the assessment the social workers should check that you understand the concerns and what is happening about them. The social worker will:

- Use clear language in a respectful and sensitive manner when speaking to you;
- Be clear with you as to what may need to change and what will be expected from you or your family to ensure that your child will be safe;
- Be punctual and responsive, for example, in returning telephone calls and attending appointments;
- Tell you if information is being shared with other professionals/agencies.

The Outcome of the Assessment

The social worker will tell you the outcome of the assessment. The outcome of the assessment may be that:

1. there is no risk to your child and the case will be closed;
2. there is a welfare concern and family support services will be offered;
3. there is an on going child protection concern and there will be a need for a child protection conference* which will draw up a child protection plan;
4. there is a need for further assessment.