

Child Protection Conferences Information for Parents

If the decision is that the child is not at risk of significant harm there may be discussion about providing some supports to the child and family and the meeting finishes.

If the decision is made that the child is at risk of ongoing significant harm, then a Child Protection Plan will be made and agreed. The child's name will be placed on the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS). The decision to make a Child Protection Plan and to list a child on the CPNS is a very serious one and is only taken where there are clear signs that a child is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect by one or both parents.

What is a Child Protection Plan?

The purpose of the plan is to provide support to the child and their parents in making sure that the child is kept safe from harm and that the risks to the child are lowered. This can happen in different ways, it might mean the parents have to attend parenting classes or some form of counselling service, or bring their child to appointments, or allow professionals to visit the child at home. Our aim is to involve parents and children in the decision making around the plan. A copy of the final plan will be sent to the parents after the conference and a social worker will be named as the Key Worker who will make sure that the plan is carried out.

What is the Child Protection Notification System (CPNS)?

The CPNS records the names of children who have Child Protection Plans agreed at a Child Protection Conference. The CPNS can only be accessed by a very small group of people, such as doctors or Gardai, who might need to make important decisions about the safety of the child.

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We control the CPNS very strictly and only allow access to those who have a very good reason to look for the information. A child's name will either be listed as Active or Inactive.

- Active means that there is a Child Protection Plan in place because it has been decided that the child is currently at risk of significant harm and needs support to be safe and well.
- Inactive means that the child was at risk of significant harm before and had a Child Protection Plan in the past. The child may need support to remain safe and well.
- A child's name is removed completely from the list as soon as they reach 18 years of age.

Parents will be given a letter to tell them that their child's name is on the CPNS. Where a child has a Child Protection Plan and is listed as active, a review meeting must take place within six months to make sure the plan is working. The review aims to find out if the risks to the child are decreasing or if further support is needed.

If it is decided at the review that a child is no longer at risk, then their status on the CPNS will be made inactive and the parents will be given a letter.

For further information contact:



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TÜSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

What does the Child and Family Agency do?

Tusla – Child and Family Agency, works with families to make sure that children are looked after and kept safe from harm. We understand that parents face lots of difficult challenges and that parenting is not always easy. We offer different types of support to parents who might be struggling to parent their child for whatever reason. We follow *Children First* – national guidance which tells us what we must do to help children who are at risk from harm. We also have guidelines about Child Protection Conferences.

What is a Child Protection Conference?

When we are worried about a child's safety, we will talk to their parents, teachers and other people involved in the child's life to find out more. If we consider a child may be at risk of significant harm, we may decide to set up a meeting called a Child Protection Conference. A Child Protection Conference helps everyone involved in the child's life to find out what the child's needs are and decide whether or not the child is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect. It also helps us to put a plan together to meet the child's needs and lower the risk of harm to them. Significant harm may be a single event (assault) or a series of events (neglect) that could interrupt, change or damage a child's development or wellbeing.

Who attends the conference?

The parents of the child normally attend the Child Protection Conference and the child is also invited to be involved either by attending (if suitable) or meeting with a social worker before the meeting. Some children write a letter to be read at the meeting.

Parents can also bring someone with them for support. As personal, private information is often discussed at these meetings, it is important that the support person can be trusted to respect what they hear at the meeting and to keep it confidential. Parents must let the social worker know if a support person is coming with them and give their name. The support person does not take part in any decision-making at the conference and cannot attend the conference instead of parents.

If a parent does not attend, their views will be shared as much as possible. Sometimes parents write a letter that can be read out at the conference.

The child's social worker, a social work manager and a note taker are usually there. A trained conference chairperson takes charge of the meeting. Usually, a teacher, a public health nurse, a family doctor, a Garda or people from other services who are working with the family, are asked to attend.

If a key person in a child's life cannot attend, they may be asked to send a report to the meeting. Parents receive copies of relevant reports on the day of the conference. The authors of reports are strongly advised to speak to the parents before the conference so that parents do not hear new information on the day.

What decisions can be made at the conference?

At the meeting, we will listen to the views of everyone involved in the child's life to help us find out if the child is safe and well cared for and if their needs are being met. We will also talk about any risks to the child. Parents know their children best so we try to help parents share their views in the easiest way possible. Some choose to do this through a letter as well as by attending the meeting. We also listen very carefully to the views of the child involved. The conference is conducted in an open, honest and respectful way.

After hearing all the reports and all the views of those at the conference, including parents, the professionals present will be asked if they believe the child is at risk of ongoing significant harm. All the views shared will be taken into account and the decision is usually based on professional agreement, where this is not possible the chairperson makes the final decision and all views or disagreements are noted.
