



EVERYONE HAS A ROLE  
TO PLAY IN PROTECTING  
**CHILDREN**

## We've been referred to Children's Services – What to expect...

Hillingdon Children's services support children and family members who have additional needs beyond what health, education or community services can help with. They also have a duty to safeguard children who may be at risk of harm, whether from family members or others. Levels of support can vary and although the law defines what their duties are they also have their own 'thresholds' as to when they will provide a service. To view the threshold document for Hillingdon, please [click here](#).

### What are children's services?

Children's services have a statutory obligation to safeguard and promote the welfare of vulnerable children and can provide a wide range of services to children and their parents, usually within the own home environment and co-ordinated by a social worker. If there are concerns that a child may be suffering, or is at risk of harm, the work with the family will be led by a social worker from the children's services department (sometimes referred to as Children's Social Care).

### Will children's services take my child away?

Families often feel anxious at the prospect of children's services' involvement because of experiences they may have heard from others, or just because they are frightened that social workers will remove their children from the family home. These fears are natural but please rest assured, a child will only be removed if there is very clear evidence that they are at risk of significant harm, and there is a court order in place too. In rare circumstances, if they consider that your child is in immediate danger, the police can take a child into 'police protection', but they have to return your child to your care within the next 48 hours unless the court makes an Emergency Protection Order (EPO).

### Why have children's services become involved

#### A referral is made to children's services

Referrals to Hillingdon Children's Services can happen in a number of ways. You can request help yourself by calling the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) on 01895 556633.

Referrals can be made by other professionals who are working with your family or children, including schools, GPs, health visitors, and more. If there are concerns that a child is being abused or neglected, professionals, family members or anyone else who is concerned can approach children's services, the police or [contact the NSPCC](#) directly for advice.

If Hillingdon Children's Services consider you or your child are in need of additional help or your child may have been abused or neglected, they have a duty to talk with you and professionals and sometimes close relatives who know your child well, and to assess what actions should be taken to improve things for the family and protect your child from harm. There are many ways in which children's services and their partner agencies can help you and your children so it is important to try and work alongside them and cooperate as best you can.

If they have been in touch to let you know that they are conducting a 'safeguarding' or a 'child protection' inquiry it is important not to panic. It is natural to feel anxious and frightened in this situation but you should be informed by children's services what the process involves and be given leaflets about what you can do. Unless there are particular circumstances preventing them, they may call or write to you and let you know they are conducting an assessment of your child's needs and any risks to their health or development. They should give you an idea of how long this assessment is likely to take, and if they don't, make sure you ask them. In most cases these assessments result in them providing support and other services, with your agreement, in the family home.

### What is a children's services Section 47 enquiry?

If there are concerns about the safety or welfare of a child or children, they may decide that a child protection investigation is needed and they will conduct what is called a Section 47 enquiry. This means they will carry out a full investigation because there is reasonable cause to believe that a child or children living in that home has been abused or neglected or is likely to be abused or neglected in the future unless steps are taken to safeguard the child's welfare. (The legal term they will use is 'significant harm').

If you have heard that they are going to carry out a Section 47 enquiry, then again, please do not panic. This is to determine the child's needs are being met. They will also use this enquiry to decide whether further action may be needed to safeguard and promote the child's welfare. You will be interviewed by a social worker, and, if there is an allegation that a child has been abused or seriously neglected, by a specialist police officer and the child will be seen, and depending on the age and circumstances may be formally interviewed on their own. They are likely to ask you and an older child to agree to a medical examination by the GP.

Hillingdon Children's Services must seek your views and consider the child's wishes and feelings when deciding what action should be taken in the Section 47 enquiry. Other information might be gathered from schools, GPs, or other professionals who know you and your child well. If there is someone you think they should talk to, to get a better understanding of your family you should tell them.

Once the child protection enquiry has been carried out, children's services will be in touch about the outcome. If they decide that there has been no cause for concern then no further action will be taken, although they should check with you whether the family still needs help. If they consider the child has probably been abused or neglected or is likely to be unless changes are made, then a child protection case conference will be arranged. This may be because they think you or someone else in your family has done something to harm the child, or because of something you

haven't done, such as getting necessary medical treatment, or making sure your child is properly supervised.

## About the child protection case conference

The child protection case conference is a meeting to help everyone involved in this investigation to assess all the information and plan how to safeguard the child and promote his or her welfare. In most cases, parents and carers are encouraged to attend and entitled to take someone for support or have a legal representative to accompany them too.

Social workers and other professionals who know the child well will give a report at the conference, and they should show you their report beforehand and check that it is accurate. If you disagree, the meeting chairperson should make sure you have a chance to put your point of view.

At this meeting, it will be decided whether or not the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm and whether there should be a formal child protection plan (CP Plan) put in place. If it is the case that a formal child protection plan is necessary. Here will be a record of the meeting and a detailed statement of the protection services to be provided will be given to the parents and the professionals.

If it is decided that a formal protection plan is not necessary, but there are concerns about a child's wellbeing, there may be agreement between the parents, older children and professionals that a 'family support plan' (sometimes called a 'child in need' plan should be in place to provide the support and services needed.

It is natural to worry that your children may be taken into care when there is a Child Protection Case Conference, but the aim of this meeting is to see how everyone can work together to address the concerns raised. Only a court can order that a child should no longer live with his or her parents and this would only be in very harmful situations.

If the members of the conference consider that a court order may be needed to protect your child the local authority will start a 'pre-proceedings' process and at that point you have a right to consult a solicitor, and you do not have to pay for this service. It is really important that you take legal advice if this happens.

## Parents and children at the child protection conference

As a parent, you should be consulted at all stages of the process and kept informed about the decision to hold a child protection conference. Parents will usually be encouraged to attend a child protection conference.

If there has been domestic abuse within the family home, parents may be invited to attend separately. Parents can bring a friend or supporter to a child protection conference although they can't usually speak on your behalf. However if you're a parent with a disability, the local authority has an obligation to make sure you can fully participate.

The professionals at the meeting have also got to take into account race, religion and language barriers and take steps to ensure the parent is able to be involved whether it be access to an interpreter or other support.

**There are some cases where the chair may say a parent cannot attend, this is in cases such as:**

- If there is a suspicion that you have seriously injured or assaulted your child and criminal proceedings are being considered
- You have a history of violence or could be violent to someone at the meeting or after
- Parent has severe mental health issues
- If you arrive under the influence of alcohol or drugs

If you have been told not to come to a meeting and you feel it is without merit, you can speak to your legal representative and hopefully address this in writing. You could also ask that your views are expressed at the conference if you are not able to attend in person. You do have the right to make a formal complaint if a decision is made to exclude you from meetings. However, it is important to seek legal advice about this.

At times, children are invited to come to the meeting but this depends on their level of understanding, their emotional health and their age. Social workers will only allow this to happen if they feel it is beneficial to the child or they have expressed a wish to attend. They will be given support before the meeting so they know what to expect. They may bring an advocate or supporter with them. If they do not attend, their views should still be expressed within the meeting.

## Children's services Child Protection Plan

If a formal Child Protection Plan is made, regular meetings called Core Groups will be held, and this is often the case if there is a family support plan. The aim of this is for a small group of people including parents and children, if appropriate, to go through the plan thoroughly and decide how everyone involved can work together. This group will meet regularly to decide if the details of the plan need to change.

The Child Protection Plan is a written record for parents, carers and professionals. It will set out the following:

- What type/s of abuse or neglect have occurred or are thought likely to occur if the protection plan is not successful
- Whether the local authority should consider making a court application for a care or supervision order and call a 'pre-proceedings meeting' to which parents and their solicitor will be invited
- Who is the key worker for the child/parent and sometimes there will be a different key worker for the parents
- Who are the members of the Core Group
- What work needs to be done by the parents and professionals to reduce the concern and safeguard the child
- What needs does the child have and how will they be met
- What are the parents' needs and what support and services are to be made available to them

- When the work should happen and the date that the plan will be reviewed to see if it is still necessary, or there can be a less formal family support plan to provide the help needed instead
- Who is responsible for each part of the plan

A record of the plan will be kept by the agencies who were invited to the meeting and the parents and older children. It is difficult to say exactly how long a formal protection plan will be needed. This is decided at child protection review meetings (held approximately every three to six months) which parents and older children usually attend to give their views about whether the plan is helping or needs to be changed. This is something that the social worker can talk to you about.

If you are concerned that a child may be abused or seriously neglected then you can contact Hillingdon Children's Services Department, the [NSPCC](#), the police, or a health professional or teacher can make a referral to *children's services* on your behalf.