

WHAT CHILDREN CAN EXPECT

Services should work together

Help should be given to children who need it as soon as possible. This is called “early help”. All services working with children must look out for any signs of harm. Working Together says that services must be able to provide early help and make things better for children and their families.

Professionals working with children need to:

- find out which children and families need early help;
- share information with each other;
- decide who will be working with the child and family; and
- get help quickly to children and families.

They should share any concerns that they have with others working in children’s social care. They should also explain to you when they are doing this.

The law says what has to happen if someone reports a child as being at risk of harm.

What happens when there are concerns about a child?

When a person reports concerns about a child, social workers must first talk with the person who has made the ‘referral’ so that they are clear about what their concerns are. A social worker, with help from their manager, must decide within a day what happens next.

This may be:

- no further involvement;
- the police being told about the concerns;
- finding out more about whether children are safe or being cared for properly (this is called an ‘assessment’); or
- the local authority taking emergency action to remove a child.

What is an assessment?

The purpose of an assessment is to find out information to help social workers make the right plan to do **what is best for children**. Assessment helps social workers to get a better understanding of what is happening within a family. It means social workers and other professionals finding out all the information that they need to be able to come up with a plan to keep you safe from harm.

A social worker does an assessment (it is also known as a 'statutory assessment' because it is backed by the law) by:

- speaking to other professionals, like teachers, health visitors, doctors or the police;
- talking to the child and their family, listening to what they have to say; and
- agreeing with them what needs to be done to help sort out problems.

How long an assessment takes will be different for each child. Sometimes, this will need to be done very quickly indeed, because the child is in immediate danger. The maximum time an assessment should take is no longer than 45 working days (or nine weeks) to complete. The social worker should be clear with you and your family about how the assessment will be carried out. They should be able to answer any questions you and your family may have about this and listen to your concerns. Your own views must be taken into account and in order to be able to take those into account you should be offered assistance to communicate your views. Social workers should always give you the chance to speak to them on your own and in private. Social workers must decide what action will best meet your needs to be kept safe from harm and so be in your interests. Your safety must always be their priority, when deciding what should happen next.

What happens next?

The social worker visits your family. They will give you a chance to meet with them away from your parents (or carers). They will work with your family to get a better understanding of what help you and your parents (or carers) need.

What can I expect?

You can expect that a social worker may come to see you fairly quickly, as soon as they can. They will want to talk to you about things that may be worrying you in your life, including any worries you have for yourself or for others in your family. They should help you to talk about what you think is good in your life as well as about anything that troubles you.

Do I have to talk to the social worker?

No, you don't have to talk to the social worker, if you don't want to, but you really should. **The social worker can only help keep you and other children safe if you tell them what is troubling you.** They should listen seriously to what you tell them, and act immediately to keep you and other children safe. **They should not tell other people what you have said,** unless you say they can or if telling other people will help keep you or other children safe.

Social workers try very hard to work with families so that families can get the support they need and children can stay at home if this is safe for them. Social workers must think about how best to help children be safe from harm. They will always look at if it is possible for a child to live safely with their family, but if the assessment shows that the child will not be kept safe from harm then they may have to take action to protect the child. Unless parents agree, children can only be removed from their families if the police or a court gives social workers permission for this to happen.

If you need help talking to social workers or other professionals about things that are worrying you, or which you find it hard to talk about, they can ask someone to help you. That person is called an 'advocate'. **An advocate's job is to provide you with information, advice and support to ensure your views are heard, understood and taken seriously by people making decisions. They can help you say all the things you want to say** when, sometimes, you are not sure how you want to say them.

Here is a list of the things children's social care should do when there are concerns about your safety:

- visit you quickly, and **check for themselves that you are safe** (not just take other people's word for it that you are alright);
- **see you on your own**;
- listen to you, including about any worries you have about what will happen to you, or your family
- **be honest with you when explaining what will and won't be happening**;
- **share concerns** they have about you with other professionals that may be working with you and your family;
- **share information with other professionals about what is going on**, including any early help to be given;
- **share assessments they've done with other professionals** so everyone knows what your needs are;
- **take urgent action**, when necessary, to make sure that you are safe;
- **not judge you**, if you are being harmed they should protect you;
- **work with other agencies** to make sure you and your family are getting the right help;
- **share decisions** that have to be made about your life; and
- make sure that they **respond in a balanced way** that helps keep you safe; but without making it worse (like removing you from your family, friends or school without a really strong clear reason).

What can I expect?

You can expect that you will be taken seriously if you ever need to tell adults working with you that you are being harmed in some way. You can expect that your safety will be their immediate concern. People working with you will pass on any concerns to social workers and/or the police, and will work with them to help make sure that you and other children, where necessary, are safe.

You can expect to be asked for your views on what you want to happen on important decisions in your life - like where you should live and who you are able to see. You can expect to see different professionals working well together to do what is best for you. You can also expect that your life will not be made any worse because you had the courage to come forward and speak out against your abuse.

A 'child in need plan'

If an assessment shows that you are in need of services the social worker will work with you, your family and other professionals to draw up a **child in need plan**. It should say what support is being provided to help parents or carers meet your needs. It should also say who is providing this help and for how long. The child in need plan should make clear what parents and carers are expected to do to keep you safe. There should be a timetable for checking on what progress is being made.

What can I expect?

If you are getting services from children's social care then you may have a child in need plan that looks at the individual needs of you and your family. The Working Together guidance says that children should be listened to so that the child in need plan takes into account what they want. You can also expect that a child in need plan will say something about meeting all of your needs. It's not just about protecting you from harm.

A 'Child Protection Conference'

Whenever there is reason to think that you are at risk of harm an urgent discussion should take place between local authority social workers, the police, health and other agencies involved to decide about your welfare; and to take any rapid action needed to protect you. They should hold a meeting, called a Child Protection Conference, within **15 working days** (or 3 weeks) of this discussion. The aim of this meeting is to agree a plan to support your needs and keep you safe. This plan is called a **child protection plan**. The Working Together guidance says that children should be listened to so that the child protection plan takes account of what they want.

What can I expect?

If you are at risk of harm you can expect that services concerned about your welfare will hold a meeting, called a 'child protection conference' to draw up a child protection plan for you. They should ask your views so that you can have your say on what should or should not be in the child protection plan. Remember, you can ask for an advocate to help you do this, if you want.

The 'Review Meeting'

Where social workers remain involved with you and your family, they will hold regular meetings with your family, other professionals and, where appropriate, with you. The meetings will look at your plan to ensure that it remains focussed on providing appropriate support. The review meeting will also consider whether your plan should continue, be changed and or stopped. Your views are important and should always be considered.

What can I expect?

You can expect to be fully involved in all decisions and planning for keeping you and others you care about safe. Working Together guidance is very clear that children and young people should continue to have their say in what happens to them.

Click here to read [A Young Persons Guide to Working Together](#) for more information.