



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT is child abuse?

Child abuse of all forms occurs in all cultures and social groups and can involve boys and girls of all ages from babies to teenagers. Children with disabilities are more vulnerable to abuse as they are more dependent on adults for their personal care needs; they may also be less able to communicate what has happened.

Perpetrators of child abuse can be male or female and from any social class.

Abuse is defined under the following headings:

Physical abuse: This includes deliberate injuries to the child and the failure to protect a child from injury; it can include poisoning, suffocation, shaking, burning and food deprivation. The child might have bruises, fractures, and scars, bite marks or burns; although children often have bruises caused by accidental falls or knocks, in abused children they can be in unusual places. Explanations about how the child was hurt may not be consistent with the injury.

Emotional abuse: This can involve telling children they are worthless, unloved or unvalued. Emotionally abused children frequently feel frightened or in danger. Some level of emotional damage is present in all types of abuse, but emotional abuse may occur on its own.

A child who has suffered emotional abuse will have low self-esteem, may appear uncared for and may have difficulty in making and keeping friends. The child could be withdrawn or aggressive or seek attention in negative ways. Domestic violence, adult mental ill-health, substance misuse and instances of scapegoating may be features in families where children are exposed to such abuse.

Neglect: This is the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical, emotional and psychological needs with the result that his/her health and development is seriously threatened. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance misuse and/or failure to attend regular antenatal appointments. Afterwards it can include failing to provide adequate food, shelter and clothing; failing to protect the child from physical or emotional harm or danger; or failure to access appropriate medical care or treatment. The latter is particularly relevant for disabled children who may need to attend a higher number of health related appointments.

Sexual abuse: This can involve inappropriate touching, penetrative sex including buggery, or oral sex. It also includes making children watch sexual activities or participate in making pornographic material, prostitution and under age sexual activity. Grooming children for sexual gains is also sexual abuse

There can be physical signs such as injuries or soreness in the genital area, sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy. Children who have been sexually abused may exhibit sexualised or promiscuous behaviour or display more knowledge of sex than is usual in a child of a comparable age. They may masturbate excessively, self-harm or have difficulty in sleeping. There may be indications that the child has blocked off physical sensations leading to wetting, soiling or deliberately holding back when there is a need to go to the toilet. Drug use, self-harming, overeating or anorexia is other ways in which painful memories and feelings can be controlled.

Children who have been sexually abused may avoid physical affection or be indiscriminately affectionate, even towards strangers. They may not understand the difference between a kiss or a hug which is sexual in nature and one that is not, or they may have a strange reaction to presents because in the past they have been associated with sexual activity. A baby may cry and stiffen excessively during nappy changing or bathing.

Other types of abuse and neglect:

Some members of our communities hold beliefs that may be common with particular cultures but which are against the safeguarding children laws in the UK. However, no faith or traditional custom should condone practices that are harmful to children or against the law of this land.

Examples of particular practices are:

Under age Marriage

In England a young person cannot legally marry or have a sexual relationship until they are 16 years old or more

Forced Marriage

No one can be forced to marry without their consent. Forced marriage should not be confused with arranged marriages between consenting adults

Abuse linked to belief

Some faiths believe that spirits and demons can possess adults and children. The use of any physical, emotional and sexual abuse and /or neglect to get rid of the possessing spirits is against the UK laws on child welfare. People can be prosecuted even or when their intention is to help the child. Abuses linked to belief can be particularly connected with children experiencing mental health problems, learning difficulties or have a disability.

Female Genital Mutilation (also known as Female Genital Circumcision or Cutting) FGM

Some communities consider the female genital circumcision as a religious act and a cultural norm. Performing the female cuttings to girls in the UK or abroad is against the law of the land. It is also illegal to arrange for a child to go abroad with the intention of having her cut. FGM is treated as a serious physical and emotional abuse. The Police will take action to prevent a female child from being circumcised.

Child trafficking

Any recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purposes of exploitation shall be considered 'trafficking in persons' and it considered a serious crime in the UK.

Trafficked children are vulnerable to abuse and neglect because:

- * Physical abuse maybe used to control the child's movements and injuries may not be treated
- * Trafficked children may be subject to sexual abuse as many trafficked children are exploited in the sex industry of domestic servitude
- *Trafficked children will experience emotional abuse
- * Trafficked children suffer neglect because of the quality of care they may receive and because the adults controlling them will keep them away from basic services such as health and education

Violence in the name of Honour (Honour Based Violence)

Any violence is against the law. If the person facing the violence, whether it is physical or verbal/emotional abuse in the name of honour is under the age of 18 this is seen as child abuse.

Sex outside marriage: e.g. losing of virginity, adultery
Pregnancy
Homosexuality
Seeking divorce
Having a boyfriend or unacceptable marriage
Inappropriate dress code, make up, going out and even smoking
Fleeing home/domestic situation

Physical chastisement of pupils

Some children may attend informal classes at faith, weekends, vocational and tutorial settings. Physical chastisement of pupils is against the law. Physically harmful action/inflicted directly to a child/young person constitutes an abuse and it is illegal. This could involve forcing a child to kneel on hard objects like the floor, forcing the child to hold an uncomfortable position or hitting her/him with a ruler.

What is a child protection enquiry?

Safeguarding and Social Care have a legal duty to make sure that all children in the borough are safe and protected. This means carrying out a child protection enquiry to look into any claims that a child is being harmed or neglected. When the enquiry is finished, a decision is made about whether or not the child needs a protection plan to help keep them safe from harm.

What is harm?

Harm to a child can include:

- Neglect – not caring for a child by providing adequate food, clothing etc.
- Physical abuse – physical punishment that causes injury
- Sexual abuse – involving a child in sexual activities
- Emotional abuse – not providing warmth and love
- Harmful traditional practices enlisted above

All these forms of harm can affect children's development and stop them from doing well in later life.

Who carries out the child protection enquiry?

The child protection enquiry is carried out by a social worker, but they will need to get information from other professionals who know you and your family, such as your health visitor, your GP and your child's teacher. These are called network

checks. Permission is sought before talking to other professionals, unless this would place a child at more risk.

What happens during the enquiry?

A social worker will visit you at home to talk to you about the concerns, and ask you and your family questions.

The social worker will also need to see your child, and may ask to speak to them alone, if they are old enough. Normally, we would ask your permission to do this, but if your child is at serious risk of harm, we may need to speak to them alone without your permission.

If someone has committed a crime against your child, for example an assault, a police officer may be involved in the enquiry, and we may ask for your permission to interview your child on video. This is to allow the police to get evidence for court. You may go with your child to the interview, but you won't be able to sit with them while they are being interviewed.

Sometimes, we may ask you to agree to your child being examined by a doctor so we can find out if your child has any injuries, and how the injuries happened. We will always ask for your permission first, but if you don't agree, we may have to take legal advice.

During the enquiry, your social worker will always keep you informed about how things are progressing and what will happen next.

What happens after the enquiry?

When the social worker has gathered all the information, they will discuss the findings with their manager and decide what action to take next. The investigation may show that your child is not being harmed or neglected, and Safeguarding and Social Care will take no further action. However, if you feel you need extra support to care for your child, we may be able to provide help.

If the investigation shows that your child may be being harmed or neglected, or is at risk of harm, Safeguarding and Social Care may decide to hold a formal meeting called a child protection case conference.

What if my child isn't safe at home?

The vast majority of children who are referred to Safeguarding and Social Care because of child protection concerns will remain at home with their parents. Very rarely, if Safeguarding and Social Care are really worried about a child being at risk at home, we may have to take further action to protect them.

If we think it is not safe for your child at home, your social worker will talk to you about what options there are to keep them safe. This may involve:

- someone who is living in your home moving out because it is thought they are a risk to your child
- a friend or relative moving into your home to help you to look after your child
- your child going to stay with family or friends
- if there is no-one that your child can stay with, your child can go to live with a Camden foster carer.

These are all temporary arrangements to make sure your child is protected while Safeguarding and Social Care work with you to make sure it is safe for your child to live at home.

THE INITIAL CONFERENCE

What is a child protection case conference?

The conference is a formal meeting where parents, the social worker and other professionals who know the family get together to discuss the concerns and decide what can be done to keep the child safe from harm.

Who will be at the conference?

The conference is arranged by Safeguarding and Social Care and is chaired by an independent person. Your social worker and their manager will be there, and so will other professionals who know your family, such as your health visitor or a school nurse, and your child's teacher.

The police attend all initial conferences if they have been involved in the child protection enquiry, and any professionals who are working with parents or carers will also be invited. A council solicitor will attend any initial conferences where the child is less than 12 years old, in case the chair needs to take legal advice.

Are parents/carers invited?

Parents and carers are always invited to case conferences and we strongly recommend that you attend so you can have your say and be involved in making plans to keep your child safe.

You can bring a friend or your solicitor to support you and help you put your views across if you want. If English is not your first language, we will arrange for an interpreter to be present to help you take part in the discussion.

If you prefer not to attend, you can talk to your social worker about other ways of making your views known, for example, writing a statement for the conference that your social worker can read out.

If you want to attend the conference, but find it difficult because of the time it will be held, because you have children to look after or collect from school, you can ask your social worker about re-arranging the meeting or getting help with child-care.

Very occasionally, a parent may not be allowed to attend the conference if it is thought that their presence may prevent the child's needs from being discussed or if their behaviour may be a risk to the safety of family members or professionals.

Are children invited?

Usually, children who are over the age of 12 are invited to attend conferences unless it is thought that this is not in their best interests. All children's views can be presented to the conference by their social worker if they are not able to attend.

What happens at the conference?

Your social worker will write a report for the conference that explains what has happened and what changes need to be made to make sure your child is safe. You should get a chance to read this at least 2 days before the conference.

Before the conference starts, the chair will meet with you to talk about what will happen, how the conference will proceed and how parents can contribute to the discussion. At the start of the conference, the chair will ask everyone to introduce themselves.

Everyone will have an opportunity to comment on the report and share information. The conference will discuss whether your child is at risk of harm and what can be done to make them safe.

Any information shared at the conference will remain confidential, and will only be passed on to other professionals if it is necessary to protect your child from harm.

What the conference can do?:

The conference can decide whether or not your child is at risk of harm and make a plan called a child protection plan that helps you to keep your child safe.

The conference will also look at whether other children in the family need to be protected from harm.

Even if your child doesn't need a child protection plan, the conference may recommend that you get extra support to care for your child from Safeguarding and Social Care and other agencies.

What the conference can't do:

The conference cannot remove your child from your care; only a Court can do this.

What is a child protection plan?

If the conference decides that your child is at risk of harm, they will make a child protection plan, which contains all the things that have to happen to make sure your child is kept safe.

The conference will decide which professionals should work closely with you to make sure the plan is carried out. Normally, your social worker, health visitor and a teacher would be in this group, which is called the core group.

What happens after the conference?

At least 10 days after the initial conference, the core group will meet with you for the first time, and will continue to meet with you regularly to support you and help you to keep your child safe.

The core group will plan what work needs to be carried out to make the changes needed to make sure your child is safe and work towards discharging the child protection plan.

To do this, the core group will draw up an agreement with you that sets out exactly what everyone needs to do to bring about the changes required. It is important that you attend

What is review conference?

Any decision that was made at the initial conference has to be reviewed after 3 months and then 6 months after that. The review conference is the same as the initial conference; you will be invited to attend and the social worker will prepare a report for everyone to discuss. The police will only attend a review conference if they were involved in the child protection enquiry.

During the review conference, everyone will look at:

- what progress has been made
- whether the child protection plan has been carried out
- whether your child is still at risk of harm.

The conference may decide that your child is no longer at risk and that a child protection plan is not needed, but Safeguarding and Social Care and other agencies can still offer services to support you and your family if you need them.

If the conference thinks that your child is still at risk, they will look at the child protection plan to see if it needs to be changed to help you and your child and set a date for the plan to be reviewed.

If you are not happy with the conference?

- 1. If you are not happy with the way Family Services and Social Work has carried out the child protection enquiry you can make a complaint through our complaints procedure; details about how to make a complaint can be found at the end of this leaflet.**
- 2. If you are not happy about the way the conference was run or the decision that was made...**

You can speak to the chair at the conference and they will try to sort it out immediately, or you can make a complaint through the Safeguarding Board complaints procedure:

- Write to the chair within 28 days after you receive the minutes from the conference. The chair should contact you within 7 days of receiving your letter to arrange a meeting. You can bring a friend or relative with you to the meeting to support you.
- At the meeting, the chair will talk to you about the reasons for your complaint, and what action can be taken to resolve things. There will be someone present who takes notes of this meeting, and you should receive a reply from the chair and a copy of the notes 7 days after the meeting.
- If you are not happy with the chair's response, you can write to Camden's complaints manager within 28 days, giving the reason why you do not accept the chair's decision.
- The complaints manager will arrange for the Safeguarding Children Board Complaints Panel to meet within 28 days of receiving your letter to look into the matter for you.
- The panel members who hear your complaint will not have been involved in your case. You will be invited to attend the panel hearing to give your views, but if you don't want to attend, you can write to the panel instead.
- The panel should send you their decision within 7 days of the panel hearing; the panel may decide that the conference wasn't run in the correct way, or that the decision made at the conference was wrong.

- If this is the case, the panel can ask for the conference to be held again, with a different chair, but it cannot overturn the decision made at the original conference.



Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT)

CAIT investigate child abuse together with Local Authorities and other appropriate agencies. Abuse can mean neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

[http://intranet.aware.mps/SC/Child Abuse Investigation Command/index.htm](http://intranet.aware.mps/SC/Child%20Abuse%20Investigation%20Command/index.htm)

What do the Child Abuse investigation Teams investigate?

- Intra-familial abuse - (within the family and extended family).
- Professional abuse and other carers who have some responsibility for the child at the time of the abuse- e.g. teachers, babysitters etc.
- Historical abuse - Where an adult was abused as a child by a family member, professional or other carer.
- Parental abduction.
- To investigate sudden and unexpected death in children under two years old.

Where is my nearest CAIT?

- Camden Child Abuse Investigation Team
Fourth Floor, Holborn Police Station
10 Lambs Conduit Street. London
WC1N 3NR

Tel 0208 733 6455

Can the police remove my child?

- Only in an emergency when any police officer believes the child is likely to suffer significant harm. A child cannot be kept in police protection for more than 72 hours, so the decision to remove a child from a parent or carer should be made by a court.

Do I have to give my permission for police to speak with my child?

- No, the child's safety is the most important thing. CAIT officers are specially trained to speak with children, so police can speak to your child without your permission.

How do the police interview my child?

- The police will usually visit your child with a social worker at home or at school for an informal chat. If an interview is necessary, the child will talk to a police officer, a social worker or both, in a room with cameras and microphones and this interview is recorded. This is called an ABE interview (Achieving Best Evidence). In Camden the interview suite is at Holborn police station.

What happens to the taped interview?

- The tape is only watched by the people involved in the case, e.g. police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the court etc. The tape is locked away securely.

Can I be present when police interview my child?

- The police will usually conduct an interview without a parent being present so that the child feels comfortable to speak about any issues without having to talk in front of their parents.

Do I have to give my permission for my child to have a medical examination?

- Yes. Your child will not be medically examined for a child abuse investigation matter without your consent.

How long does a police investigation take?

- It can take several months for a police investigation to be completed. Once police have gathered all of the evidence, it is then presented to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who reviews it and decides whether the case should proceed to court.

Single Point of Contact:

- DS Steve Meeke steve.meeke@met.police.uk 0208 733 6495
- DS Nadia Georgiou nadia.georgiou@met.police.uk 0208 733 6452