

# Concerns about abuse and neglect

## – a guide for parents



**London Borough of Waltham Forest  
Children and Families' Service**



We have contacted you because we have received information that your child may have been harmed or may be at risk of harm, and we are concerned about the safety and wellbeing of your child.

The law says that we have to look into situations where a child may be harmed (The Children Act 1989). We must respond to this urgently and make sure that your child is safe.

We will make enquiries and then decide what needs to happen to keep your child safe. As far as possible, we want to work with you to make sure that we come to the right decision for your child.

## What is child abuse and neglect?

Child abuse is when a child suffers significant harm as a result of physical cruelty, emotional cruelty, sexual abuse or neglect by an adult.

Children should never be physically hurt on purpose. Hitting, biting, kicking or bullying can all be physical abuse.

Children should be shown love and affection by the adults caring for them. If they are shouted at and threatened a lot of the time and are made to feel small and bad about themselves, this can be emotional abuse.

Children should never be made to witness or take part in sexual activities or shown sexual pictures or videos. This is sexual abuse.

Children should be cared for properly, taken to the doctor when needed and protected from danger. If young children are left alone or go without food to eat, clothes to wear, warmth or shelter, this is neglect.

Children should be cared for by an adult who can respond to their emotional needs. If you are unable to do this, perhaps because you are misusing drugs or alcohol or are mentally ill, this can also be considered neglect.

# What will Children's Social Care do now?

We will talk to professionals who know you and your child. This may include schools, hospitals and doctors, police or the probation service. We will decide if we need to investigate and how this will happen.

# Will we take your child away from home?

In most child protection cases, your child will stay at home while we carry out our enquiries. In some cases, you may agree with us that it is best that your child lives away from home while enquiries are going on. Most often, this will be with relatives or close friends, though it could also be with a foster carer or in a children's home.

If we think that your child may be at risk of immediate and significant harm, we can ask a court for permission to take the child somewhere safe. We may do this even if you do not agree. If this is the case, there are many professionals, such as solicitors and advocates, who can go with you to court. Their names and contact details are usually listed in the telephone directory. The police also have the power to remove a child from the home for their protection. If it has been alleged that someone living in your home is responsible for harming your child, that person may be asked to leave while we carry out our investigation.

# Will we talk to you about the allegations?

Yes. We would really like you to work with us as we make enquiries. However, if we have heard that a child is at risk we cannot ignore it, so even if you do not talk to us we shall continue to make enquiries anyway. It is better for you to make sure that we know your views about what, if anything, is happening. However, we may not be able to tell you who has made the allegation.

# Will we talk to your child?

Unless your child is very young, we will talk to them alone. If you do not allow us to do this, we can ask the court to step in to make this happen. We may want to talk to their brothers and sisters. We may also ask you to let a doctor examine your child.

# What will happen next?

We will complete our first enquiries within seven days, and more quickly if serious allegations have been made. What happens next depends on what our enquiries bring to light:

- If we decide your child is safe, we will take no further action
- If we decide your child is safe but that your family would benefit from some help and support, we may ask you to agree to further enquiries called a Core Assessment
- If we decide your child is at risk, we will make further enquiries and arrange a Child Protection Conference. This must take place within 15 days.

# What is a Core Assessment?

A core assessment is a long and detailed report about your child's needs. A social worker will spend a lot of time talking to you and finding out about you and your family. He or she will use this information as well as information from other professionals who know you, for example your doctor, health visitor or your child's teacher, to write the report.

The core assessment covers your skills as a parent and what it is like for a child to live in your family. It will also report on how the family home, lifestyle or area you live in could affect your child's wellbeing.

When the core assessment is completed, you will be involved in a plan to keep your child safe and well.

# What is a Child Protection Conference?

A child protection conference is a meeting organised by Children's Social Care while is attended by the family and all the professionals already involved with your child. Other professionals may also be present. Professionals could include social workers, doctor, health visitor, teacher and police. The conference will have a chairperson, who will always be an experienced social worker who has not been involved in the investigation. This is to make sure that everything is run fairly.

## Can you go to the child protection conference?

Yes, normally you will be invited and we will expect you to attend. The social worker may want to talk to you about inviting other family members who are closely involved. However, if there is a lot of conflict between certain family members, the chairperson may ask one or more of you to leave so that each family member gets a fair chance to take part. Your child may also come to part of the meeting.

The chairperson will meet you before the meeting and will make sure that you understand what the conference is for and what will happen there.

Before the conference, we will give you a written report of the information we have found out from our enquiries. You can bring a friend or someone else to support you at the conference. It will probably help you to write down what you want to tell the meeting.

## What is the conference for?

If your child has suffered and/or is likely to suffer physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect, the conference will decide that your child needs a child protection plan.

# What happens if your child requires a child protection plan?

If your child requires a child protection plan, the chairperson will write this down. You will receive the actions of the plan within 48 hours, and full notes of the meeting within ten working days. This says what needs to change to keep your child safe, and what support you will get. It sets out what action must be taken, when, and who is responsible. A key worker will be responsible for making sure that the plan is put into practice. They will make sure that you understand the plan, and are willing to carry it out. If the plan is not carried out and your child continues to be at risk, we may have to take further steps to protect your child including consideration of legal proceedings.

## If you are unhappy with your child's arrangements

There may be times when you are unhappy with the arrangements that have been made for your child. The Family Rights Group is one organisation which helps families involved with Children's Social Care, who may be able to offer assistance:

The Family Rights Group  
The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL

Tel: 0808 801 0366 [www.frg.org.uk](http://www.frg.org.uk)

## Complaints

We always try to provide good quality services for children but we know that sometimes we get things wrong, and we try to resolve any problems as soon as they arrive.

If you are unhappy with the service that you have received, you can write to:

Complaints Team  
Waltham Forest Town Hall, Forest Road, Walthamstow London E17 4JF

Tel: 020 8496 3000 Email: [complaints@walthamforest.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@walthamforest.gov.uk)  
[www.walthamforest.gov.uk/complain](http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/complain)