

# Protecting children: What should I do if I am worried about a child?

## – Information for parents



It can sometimes be difficult to know what to do for the best. If you find out a child is being harmed, you may be thinking that perhaps the child is really alright. You don't want to provoke someone and make matters worse for the child. Perhaps you're concerned the family might be broken up and the children put in care (although this actually rarely happens). You may think the problem will resolve itself. And you may not know where to go for help.

**It may seem the easiest thing to do is to do nothing. But please don't. Trust your own judgement. It is important that you act.**

If you are worried that a child or young person is at risk of abuse or neglect, please contact Children's Social Care straight away. You should always report your concerns, even if the person you suspect is abusing or neglecting a child is your partner, a member of your own family or someone you know well. Abuse can take different forms. Common types are:

- **Physical abuse** – including hitting, punching, burning, poisoning, attempted drowning and smothering.
- **Emotional abuse** – can mean repeatedly rejecting a child, constantly threatening or putting a child or young person down so that they feel unloved and worthless.
- **Sexual abuse** – forcing or persuading a child or young person to take part in any kind of sexual activity. It can include inappropriate touching, kissing or sexual intercourse. It can also involve causing a child to look at, or being involved in pornographic material or videos.
- **Neglect** – the persistent lack of essential care for a child including enough love, stimulation, safety, food, clothing, shelter, medical care or education. It can also mean leaving a child alone and at risk.

A child may experience more than one type of abuse or neglect.

## What will happen if I contact Children's Social Care?

The council has a duty to look into a child's circumstances when somebody suspects abuse or neglect is occurring. A social worker usually does this job for us. The social worker will need you to give them relevant information so they can plan the best way of checking the child is safe and, if necessary, draw up plans for further action.

## **Will the child's parent be told who contacted a social worker?**

You don't have to give your name. It does, however, make it easier for everyone involved if you give us your contact details so we can get back to you for more information. We will tell the parent or carer if the person concerned about a child is a professional person, like a doctor or a teacher.

## **What happens next?**

A social worker will go and talk to the parent or carer to find out if the information you gave us is true, and whether the family needs any help or support. They will also want to see the child and talk to the child alone (if they are old enough to understand). If the social worker thinks the child is at risk they will discuss with the parents what will need to happen to make them safe. If the social worker decides that the child is at risk of abuse or neglect, they will organise a Child Protection Conference to draw up a plan of how to protect the child. The plan will involve the professionals who know the child, the child's parents, and often their immediate family.

Our aim is to keep families together and we nearly always succeed in doing this. A very small number of children each year need to be separated from their parents to ensure they are kept safe. Usually these children return home once their care and safety can be guaranteed.

## **Will the police and other agencies be involved?**

If a crime has been committed against a child, the police will also be involved. They will work with the social worker so together they can decide the best way to keep the child safe from harm. Children's Social Care staff work closely with other agencies that work with children and their families. We believe it is very important to work together to protect children from harm and all these partner agencies work to the same procedures and guidelines, and keep in close contact.

## **Will I be told what happens to the child and family?**

It is very unlikely that you will be given any information about the action taken and what happens to the child and their family. It is important to respect everyone's right to privacy. However, the social worker will reassure you that your comments have been taken seriously and that action will be taken.

## **What should I do if I am worried that I might harm my own child?**

Many parents find it hard to cope at times. If you ever feel that you may harm your own child you should talk to someone about it. You can contact Children's Social Care and speak to a social worker, or speak to a health visitor, your family doctor or any

professional that you know. They will try to help you to resolve the problem. Remember, you won't be the first person to feel this way and talking to someone can really help.

**Some key tips about safe parenting:**

- Try to understand the seriousness and consequences of child abuse.
- Learn about healthy child development and safe parenting.
- Listen to children – try to understand what they're saying and doing, and why.
- Know what goes on in your child's world (such as their school, nursery, and youth club) and how issues such as bullying are dealt with.
- Find someone to turn to if you're under stress.
- Don't cross the line and hurt your child. Take alternative actions – for example, "count to ten and think again".

**Useful advice for parents:**

**Parentline** (0808 800 2222) provides free confidential advice seven days a week, 24 hours a day, and is staffed by trained volunteers, all of whom have parenting experience. They also have a website with lots of useful information and advice on issues facing parents.

[www.parentlineplus.org.uk](http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk)

**If you are worried that a child is at risk of being abused or neglected you should contact:**

First Response Team: (01983) 814374

Or outside of normal office hours: (01983) 821105

**In an emergency contact the police by dialling 0845 0454545 or 999 in an emergency**