

# Leeds Area Child Protection Committee

## CHILDREN AT RISK

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

#### Information for Parents and Carers

#### Introduction

The 1989 Children Act places a duty on the Social Services Department to make enquiries following concerns and/or allegations being raised regarding children and young people in their area.

The Leeds Area Child Protection Committee is a formal multi agency body responsible for monitoring child protection in the city. Different agencies such as Health, Education, Police and Social Services work together in order to protect children but the enquiry about your child/children will be led by staff from the Social Services Department.

#### Who is this leaflet for?

- This leaflet is for anyone responsible for a child whether you are a parent or maybe a relative or another carer looking after them, when it has been decided that child protection enquiries are to take place.
- It is a brief guide only - you may also wish to seek legal advice from a solicitor

#### When does a Child Protection Enquiry begin?

A Child Protection enquiry starts because someone has concerns that a child may be:-

- being physically injured
- being neglected
- being emotionally harmed
- being sexually harmed

#### This concern may come from:-

- The Police, Social Services Department or National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC).
- A parent who has injured a child; it could be a neighbour, or a teacher at a child's school or nursery; a health visitor or another health worker
- From hospitals when a child has been taken to the casualty department or admitted to hospital
- Some concerns are made anonymously. Some turn out to be malicious. However, some turn out to be correct and because of this every concern is treated seriously.

### **What happens next?**

- Any concern or allegation will be looked into as soon as possible. In the very early stages Social Services will make enquires about your family with other agencies such as schools, nursery, G.P., Police and Health Services.
- If it appears necessary you and the child will then be seen by a Social Worker and/or Police Officer to discuss the allegations. This will usually be within 24 hours of the allegation being reported to Social Services.
- After these initial enquiries have been completed a decision will be made whether to pursue the matter further. If no further action is to be taken you will be informed of this as soon as possible.

### **Where the allegation came from**

- The workers will try to give you as much information as they can, as long as it does not put anyone else at risk or make the enquiries more difficult.

- If the concerns came from a member of the public you will not normally be told who it was.
- If the concerns came from a school, nursery, hospital or similar place, you will usually be told.

### **Can I be there when my child is asked questions?**

- Usually yes - sometimes you may be asked not to be there as some children find it less embarrassing to talk without their carer present.
- If the allegation or concern suggests you are responsible for the abuse, the workers will usually want to talk to your child alone. They should ask your permission for this, unless they feel it would put the child at more risk.
- Sometimes young people may ask or want to speak to a Social Worker before contact is made with the parent. This will happen, if appropriate, because workers have to act in the best interests of your child and have a duty to take account of their wishes and feelings.
- With a young child, if you don't want the workers to talk to them at this stage, you should say so and explain why not. In situations like this the Social Services may seek legal advice.
- You should be able to explain your view of the situation, to say whether you have any concerns about your child and to say what actions you and others could take to address the concerns.

## **Medical examination**

- It is often necessary for your child to be seen by a doctor, this will be:
  - a) to help find out what has happened
  - b) because there may be injuries that need treatment
  - c) to consider again the explanation for the injuries or concerns.
- The social worker, police officer or your family doctor will probably refer your child to a Paediatrician. This is a doctor who is specially trained to deal with children and who has a lot of experience in judging how injuries could have been caused.
- Younger children can only be examined with your permission, unless they need emergency treatment. If you don't agree, Social Workers may apply to the Court for permission to have your child medically examined. If this happens you may wish to seek legal advice.
- Older children may agree to be examined themselves, if the doctor feels they are old enough to make the decision on their own. It will depend on how well the child understands as well as on their age.

## **What does the examination involve?**

- Whether the concern involves physical, sexual, emotional harm or neglect it is likely that the doctor will conduct a full examination of your child.
- This means the doctor will not just look at the part that has been hurt. The child will be weighed and measured and their ears, eyes and chest will be checked.
- The doctor may also want to check other parts of your child's body including their private parts. If your child has come with a bump

- or a bruise for example, this may seem strange. However, it is important that the doctor has a full understanding of your child's health and development.
- If any treatment is needed this will be given. In some situations the doctor may want to collect samples or take photographs because it will help in understanding the injuries. The doctor will ask your permission for this.
- If you are unhappy about any part of the examination you should discuss it with the doctor when he/she asks your permission to carry this out.
- An examination can help to reassure both of you that the child will recover.
- It is important to remember that this examination is only one part of the overall enquiry. It may not answer all the concerns especially if they happened some time ago or have been going on for some time.

## **Can I be present when my child is examined?**

- You will usually be invited to be present at the examination and the social worker will accompany you. Older children may prefer a man or woman doctor and where possible will be given one. They may also say if they would rather not have you present during the examination.

## **What happens next?**

- If the Social Workers are satisfied that the concerns about your child are not true, or that any injuries were accidental, things may go no further.

- If it is likely that the child has suffered significant harm, the enquiries will carry on.
- Further enquiries regarding other children and family members may be made dependent on the nature of the concerns. It will sometimes be important to have other children in the family medically examined to ensure that no harm has happened to them.
- Social Services and the Police may decide together to interview your child formally on video. This is because the Police in some situations may decide to pursue Criminal Proceedings and video evidence can assist in this. If this is necessary the Social Workers and Police, who are trained in these procedures, will explain fully to you and your child what is taking place.
- If someone is suspected of causing harm to your child they may be questioned by the Police.
- In some circumstances it may be necessary for Social Services to apply to court for authority to safeguard your child's protection and welfare. If this involves removal from your care other family members can, when appropriate, be asked to help.
- Social Services may call a Child Protection Conference if it is likely your child has suffered significant harm. You will be invited to this conference unless there is a strong reason for you not to be there. You will be given further information at the time.

### **What are my responsibilities and rights?**

- Social Workers, Police Officers, Doctors and others will want to work with you to protect your child. Your child's welfare comes first.

- You do have the right to seek legal advice; the right to give or refuse permission for your child to have a medical examination and the right not to co-operate with the Social Workers or Police investigating the concerns. However, it is important for your child that we work together to put your child's welfare and protection first.
- If you decide not to co-operate or refuse permission for a medical examination, then it is likely the Social Workers will seek legal advice about going to Court.
- You have the right to make a formal complaint to the employer of any of the workers involved, if you feel they have not acted properly.
- If English is not your first language you should ask for an interpreter to be present so that everything can be properly and clearly explained to you.

### **Your child**

All children regardless of their background, culture and religious beliefs should be entitled to care which protects their welfare and keeps them safe.

All children have:

- the right to be protected from abuse and neglect
- the right to consent to or refuse permission for a medical examination, if they are old enough to do this responsibly
- the right to be separately represented in any Court hearings
- the right to make a formal complaint to the employer of any workers involved if she/he feels they have not acted properly.