



# Child Protection Enquiries

Information for Parents, Carers and Children



**Central  
Bedfordshire  
Council**

# Child Protection Enquiry

## Why is your child having a Child Protection Enquiry?

A child protection enquiry, often called a Section 47 enquiry, is carried out when Children's Services have reasonable cause to suspect that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. This is a legal duty under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989.

## What is Significant Harm?

Significant harm is the legal threshold that allows us to act to protect a child. It covers situations where a child's health or development is seriously affected, including:

- Physical Abuse such as hitting or causing pain.
- Neglect – where a child's day-to-day needs are not being met.
- Emotional Abuse such as witnessing domestic abuse or wilfully treating a child differently.
- Sexual Abuse including risk from adults who pose a risk to children.
- Risk outside the home, such as being exploited to sell drugs.

## Will my children be taken away?

It is important to know that most children who receive an assessment or support, including a child protection enquiry, do not go into care. Children can only be placed in care when professionals believe they are at serious risk of harm at home. This leaflet explains the child protection enquiry process, what happens, and what comes next. We will work hard with you, your child, and your family and community to understand your situation and, wherever possible, put support in place to help keep your child safe.

# The process of a Child Protection Enquiry

## What happens first?

The first step in any enquiry is to gather information. Professionals need to understand the situation clearly and make sure your child is safe. In most situations, unless there is an urgent or serious worry, you will be contacted early on and asked to share what you know about what has happened.

## What is a strategy meeting?

A strategy meeting is a meeting held with other agencies when there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or is at risk of significant harm. It must always include a children's social worker, the police and health professionals and other professionals who know you or your child or can make decisions about safeguarding your child.

During the Strategy Meeting the professionals will assess:

- Identify what information needs to be gathered and analysed;
- If a child protection enquiry needs to be started;
- Identify immediate and short-term actions to keep children safe.

Family members do not attend the strategy meeting, but decisions will be shared with appropriate family members afterwards.

## What is a Child Protection Enquiry?

Under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, the Local Authority has a legal duty to investigate whenever there are concerns that a child may have been harmed or may be at risk of significant harm. Our aim is always to make sure children are safe and well supported and to understand what has happened and what your child or family might need.

## **Who carries out the enquiry?**

The enquiry will usually be led by a social worker, sometimes alongside a police officer. The approach taken will depend on the type of concern and how serious it is. If your child already has a named worker supporting your family, they will stay involved throughout.

## **How is harm assessed?**

A qualified social worker leads the enquiry to understand what is happening in your family and whether your child is safe. There is no fixed definition of “significant harm”; professionals consider the seriousness, frequency and impact of harm on the child’s health or development, and how this compares to what is expected for a similar child. Significant harm may be caused due action or inaction (commissioned vis passive acts

## **How long will it take?**

Child Protection Enquiries should be completed within 15 days of the strategy meeting but often take less time than this. We will always complete or update a Child and Family Assessment, where the findings will be shared with you. Once this assessment is written, the social worker or family practitioner will go through it with you. If you disagree with any part of it, you will be able to add your views.

## **What if I do not want to take part?**

We always want to work with you; your views and experiences are important in helping us understand your child's situation and your social worker will explain the process in a clear and supportive way. However, if you decide not to take part, the enquiry will continue and we may need to speak with others, including your child. You will be kept informed throughout and receive a written summary.

## **Speaking and observing children**

As part of this enquiry, social workers may need to speak with your child alone or observe them if they are too young to speak. If your child uses alternative methods of communication, we will plan carefully for this. This helps us understand their experiences and ensures they can speak freely. In very serious situations, we may need to speak with your child before speaking to you, and if this happens, we will explain why straight away.

## **Talking to parents and carers**

We understand you want the best for your children. The purpose of a Child Protection Enquiry is to understand what is working well, what the concerns are, and what needs to happen to ensure your child is safe. In some situations, the concerns may be serious or urgent. Where this is the case, we will be clear about the risks and support you to understand what needs to happen.

## **Talking to friends and family**

Working with families and support networks is central to our practice. We want to know who supports you and your child and who plays an important role in your lives. We know families often have important strengths and support within their own networks and aim to work in partnership with you to find solutions that keep children safe.

## **Family Group Decision Making Meetings**

A Family Group Decision Making Meeting (sometimes called a Family Group Conference) brings together your family, friends and professionals to discuss concerns and agree a plan to keep your child safe. You and your family are given private time to create your own plan. At Central Bedfordshire Council, we offer this at the earliest possible time to help prevent situations escalating.

## Advocacy

You or your child may be offered an independent advocate. This is someone who meets with them, explains what is happening in a way they can understand, and helps make sure their views are heard during any enquiries.

Your child's social worker can make a referral for you or a child to have their own advocate. The role of the advocate is to support you or your child's wishes, feelings and views to be represented within meetings or support engagement with decisions.

There is also an advocacy service for parents which can be accessed here:

<https://www.voiceability.org/support-and-help/services-by-location/bedfordshire-borough>

## What are the possible outcomes of a Section 47 Enquiry?

### Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC)

If the concerns are found to be supported by evidence, and we are still worried about your child's safety, we will recommend holding a Child Protection Conference to agree a plan.

### Continue Child and Family assessment / ongoing support

If we feel that some extra help would be useful, we will carry on working with you to understand your family's needs and find the right support for you and your child.

### No further involvement from Children's Services

If we find that your child is not at risk and no extra support is needed, we will complete our assessment and share the outcome with you.

## Confidentiality and information sharing

A Child Protection enquiry can be completed without your consent, depending on the level of risk and the need to ensure your child's safety. If we must proceed without your agreement due to serious concerns, we will explain why we are doing this and what your rights are. Your information will be kept confidential and shared only with those that need to know to support you or your child.

## What do you do with my information?

Central Bedfordshire Council and partners work together to provide you with public services; to do this, we may need to share information. We will do this in a way that protects your privacy and confidentiality. You can find out more information about how to contact us or find out more information about your rights at: <https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/privacy>

Information about your rights is also available from the Information Commissioner's Office website: <https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/getting-copies-of-your-information-subject-access-request/>

## Complaints and Compliments

We try our hardest to get things right for you. There may, however, be times when things go wrong. If this happens, we want to hear about it so that we can put things right. You can do this by emailing:

[customer.relations@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:customer.relations@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

or for more information visiting our website

[https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about\\_your\\_council/237/customer\\_feedback](https://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/info/27/about_your_council/237/customer_feedback)



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