

Best Practice Guidance

Completing S47 Enquiries



Updated October 2018
Review October 2020

This guidance is a mechanism to ensure we complete Strategy Discussions and Section 47 Enquiries to the highest standard. At the heart of all of our work in North Somerset are the relationships we develop; truly ethical family and social work promotes warmth and compassion and co-production.

We place great emphasis on reflective critical practice where we are all aware of what we do and why, being critically aware of the social context of people's lives, being curious and analytical about the behaviours and actions of people, being analytical and ethical about the way in which we provide services and interventions.

"Child protection is a multi-agency endeavour. Its effectiveness depends on information about children at risk and their families being clearly communicated between professionals. At every stage in the child protection process, the rules and responsibilities of all the agencies and professionals involved in a case must be well coordinated and planned". Harry Ferguson 2011.

Threshold for Section 47 Enquiries

Immediate Protection

A Strategy Discussion must be held where risk to a child or likelihood of serious significant harm has been identified. This applies to both cases that are currently open and to new referrals.

"Whenever there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm there should be a strategy discussion". Working Together 2018.

Purpose of a Strategy Discussion

The purpose of a Strategy Discussion is to decide whether a Section 47 Enquiry under the Children Act 1989 is required and, if so, to develop a plan of action.

Actions expected of the Social Worker

North Somerset are clear that all workers must inform their manager immediately when there is a worry, report or allegation of a child or young person experiencing significant harm.

When a 'Strategy Discussion' is agreed the Team Leader must consider who needs to be involved. It will include:

- North Somerset Social Worker;
- Police;
- Health Professional;
- School Representative.

The Strategy Discussion will be chaired by a suitably qualified Social Worker and used to:

- Share information;
- Agree any action if a criminal investigation is deemed necessary;
- Decide whether enquiries under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 should be undertaken and plan this enquiry considering the need for a medical assessment or Achieving Best Evidence interview.

The Strategy Discussion will identify further actions in relation to:

- Agreeing how the child/children and family will be supported during this process;
- What further information is required and how additional information will be obtained;
- What information is shared with the family;
- If any immediate safety is required and which agency will action the agreed next steps such as seeking legal advice;
- Agree the need for on-going information sharing and if any further follow-up strategies are necessary.

Outcomes of the Strategy Discussion

- The Strategy Discussion will determine whether Section 47 Enquiries are required and whether this is carried out by a single agency or jointly between social care, health and police;
- The Strategy Discussion may conclude that a criminal investigation is required or not. If not, the possibility of police involvement at a later stage should always be considered;
- The social work Team Leader will determine if legal action is required and if so request an urgent Legal Planning Meeting;
- A Single Assessment is triggered by the Strategy Discussion. This is expected to be completed within 45 working days from this point;
- The purpose of this assessment is to clearly document the alleged risk of significant harm and actions following the outcome of the Strategy Discussion providing clear evidence of risk or analysis of factors which alleviate risk. This assessment is how the Section 47 Enquiries are recorded by Children's Social Care. This assessment will make a recommendation from that analysis as to the appropriate cause of action to support the needs of the child.

If there is insufficient evidence to initiate a Section 47 enquiry, consideration must be given to offering services under Child in Need or Early Help.

What is expected within a Section 47 Enquiry

'The Local Authority social worker has a statutory duty to lead assessments under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989'. Working Together 2018.

Actions expected of the Social Worker

The Social Worker, in conducting a Section 47 Enquiry is completing an assessment of **the likelihood that the child has suffered or likely to suffer significant harm.** In order to complete this enquiry, it is essential that:

- The Social Worker conducts the enquiry in a way that is respectful and professional, holding the social work value of non-judgement;
- Consideration must be given to how the child, young person and family will be involved in the Section 47 Assessment/Enquiries, including what methods will be used to gather information;
- Visits to the child or young person will be made immediately, unless the Strategy Discussion determines a different timeframe;
- It is expected that you will see the child on their own or with a safe trusted adult;
- The Social Worker must gain consent from the parent to see the child alone unless the Strategy Discussion had significant cause to believe that this would increase the risk to the child;
- During the meeting with the child, the Social Worker will use open questions and warm language that are not leading and explore the child's perception and understanding of the situation. The discussion must allow the child to provide information to the social worker;
- If the child makes a clear disclosure of significant harm, the Social Worker's role is to clearly record that disclosure, cease further questions and this information will be provided to the police via the Team Leader;
- There needs to be a face to face discussion with the parents in gathering the information about the alleged risk to the child, unless determined in the Strategy Discussion that it will place the child at further risk;
- Guidance for Achieving Best Evidence interviews can be found [here](#);
- The Social Worker will gain consent of the parent to support the child to attend a medical assessment. The expectation is that the parent attends with the child unless the Strategy Discussion agreed that this could increase the risk to the child. In this case the family may identify a safe trusted adult to attend;
- The Social Worker will analyse the findings of the Section 47 Enquiries and this will determine the evidence of whether the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm in the future.

During the Section 47 Enquiries, the Social Worker and the Team Leader must be mindful of the statutory timeframe for this process. The Social Worker is given 15 working days from the Strategy Discussion to complete the Section 47 Enquiry. The Social Worker will need to consider as soon as possible the likelihood of needing an initial Child Protection Conference as this must be held within 15 days of the Strategy Discussion.

If no further action is agreed following the Section 47 Enquiry, then this conference can be cancelled.

Signs of Safety

The Signs of Safety Framework will be used in all Strategy Discussions and safety planning.

Child protection practice must be dynamic, agile and ethical. Practice that is linear formulaic is unhelpful in supporting families create safety for children. Signs of Safety requires practitioners to be as committed to identifying what is working well - and identifying the strengths demonstrated as safety, the 'signs of safety' - as being clear about the worries.

The principles and disciplines of signs of safety practice involve identifying:

- Harm and Danger Statements;
- Complicating factors;
- Existing strengths, safety goals and next steps;
- Mapping the worries and plan with the family and in time with their network of extended family, friends and professional agencies with whom the family is engaged and who share a concern for the children;
- By using simple language, the practitioner can narrow the key factors and conclusions into succinct and clear statements of past harm and future danger;
- Making a judgment about how safe the children are and building a safety plan from safety goals and actions that address the danger statements;
- The safety plan drawing on a safety network comprising particularly extended family and friends, and also professionals. Engaging the children, both bringing their voice into the assessment and parents explaining to them what is happening;
- Relationships must be forged and maintained in the face of the authoritative nature of child protection, biases towards pre-judgment of families and different perspectives of professionals. Stance of critical inquiry – Child Protection Investigations need to take a questioning approach and remain open minded. They cannot be the formulation of a hypothesis and fitting the evidence to support that hypothesis.

What is a safety plan, how do we increase safety?

- What are we worried about? (Past, current and future harm and danger);
- What's working well? (Strengths and safety);
- How worried are we? (Safety and Wellbeing scale);
- What needs to happen? (Safety/Wellbeing goals);

Outcomes of Section 47 Enquiry

1. Initial Child Protection Conference. As soon as it is evidenced that there is a risk of **ongoing** significant harm, the social worker must:

- Book an initial Child Protection Conference;
- Discuss the outcome of the Section 47 with the child, where appropriate, parents, carers and inform agency partners who are supporting the family;
- Consider any additional services which could be offered to the family to address identified need/s;
- Prepare, in conjunction with the family, a pre-meeting report. This is a Signs of Safety report which identifies Safety Plans and Danger Plans;
- Ensure that the family and the child understand the purpose of the Initial Child Protection Conference and are prepared for the meeting;

Ensure that the child's voice is heard either by attendance at the Initial Child Protection Conference or through written/drawn representation of their views.

2. Criminal Investigation – When a clear need for a police investigation is identified the Police Investigation Team will lead and the Social Worker will support the child and their family within this process. This can be done as part of the Section 47 Enquiry or as a single agency investigation.

3. No further action – If the decision is no further action the Team Leader and the Social Worker must clearly record what information was received during the Strategy Discussion to ensure that the risks identified to trigger the Strategy Discussion were inaccurate.

4. Concluding the Investigation – the Social Worker must make recommendations for intervention based on their assessment of the child's needs and level of risk of harm to the child.

The Single Assessment triggered by the Section 47 Enquiry is where this information and analysis is documented.

Section 47 forms are designed to record briefly all the actions completed as agreed within the strategy discussion and the outcomes of these and recommendations made.

The daily lived experience of the child(ren) and their main carer(s)

A criticism levelled at professionals and often highlighted by serious case reviews is that we can fail to gain insight into the daily lives of children. Practitioners often focus on

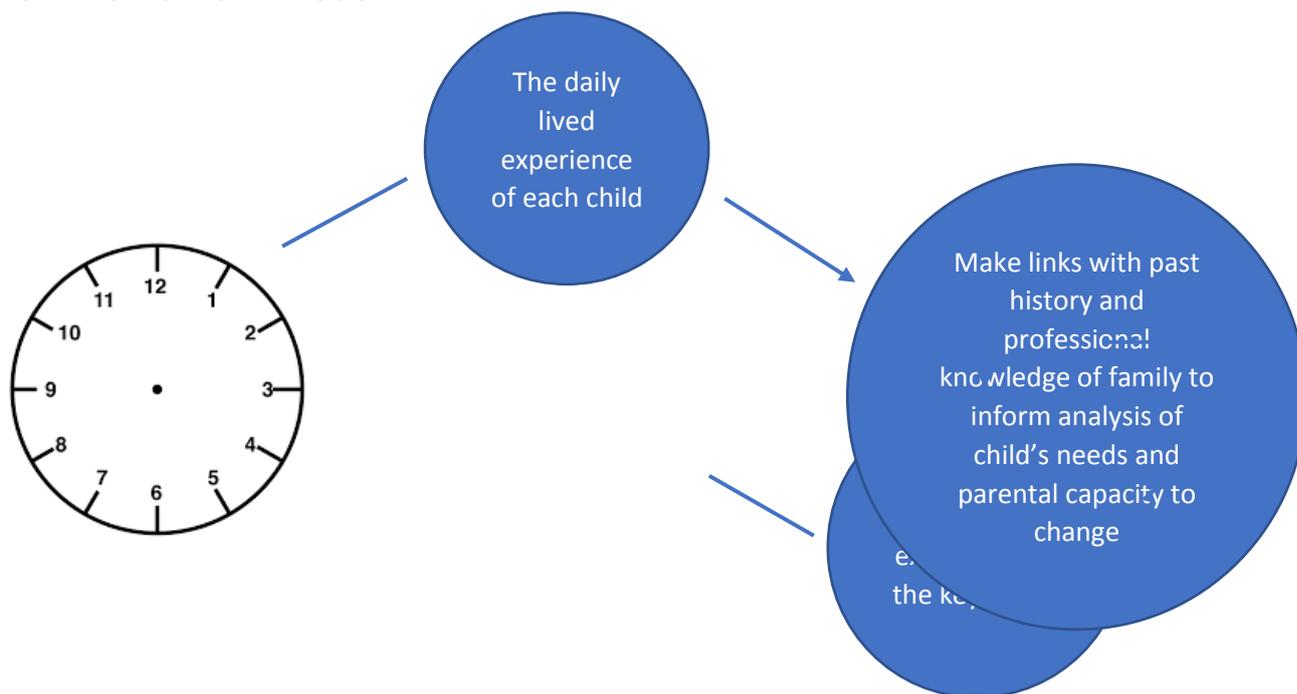
Best Practice Guide: [Completing S47 Enquiries](#)

parenting behaviours without considering why the parent behaves in a particular way and how the behaviour impacts on the lived experience of the child (Horwarth 2016; Horwarth and Tarr 2015). The Horwarth Model (figure below) has been developed with both practitioners and families to promote a meaningful focus on the lived experience of family members.

Howarth explains “the emphasis is on ‘experience’”. This is more than finding out about a day in the life of a family member: from getting up to sleeping at night. It is necessary to consider their feelings about their day and what they would like to change. It is also important to know how the day changes for them at weekends, holidays and when different people care for them”.

Practitioners need to gain an understanding of the lived experience of the child and each of the parents and/or carers. “Once practitioners have obtained information from key carers about their lived experience, they can begin to make links between parenting behaviour and the impact on the health and development of individual children in the family. In addition, they should begin to appreciate how adult-orientated difficulties, like drug misuse, and socio-economic factors, such as unemployment and poor housing, are affecting parenting capacity. Often by being specific about the consequences of their own daily experience on their child, parents begin to understand what needs to change” (Horwarth 2016).

Figure – The Horwarth Model



Underpinning values

Moving away from child protection investigation to enquiries, highlighting a model for safeguarding where we assess children’s needs, promoting the wellbeing of children, practice that “embraces the complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty that characterises human behaviour and people’s lives” – Gillian Ruch 2005.

Working to understand, develop relationships and welfare approach make changes as opposed to eliminating risk through procedural manuals - Reflective Practice in Contemporary Child-care Social Work: The Role of Containment - [Gillian Ruch](#) - *The British Journal of Social Work*, Volume 37, Issue 4, 1 June 2007, Pages 659–680, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bch277>.

Prompt	Reasonable Cause		Administrative Tasks
<p>What is the harm?</p> <p>How safe is the child now?</p>	<p>Need more information – SW to visit family to gather more information</p> <p>Clear harm or likelihood of harm</p>		
<p>Invite Police, Health (Community Paediatrician/NSPC/ Treating Practitioners) Referrer if a professional School or Nursery</p> <p>Phone call strategy or a sit-down meeting?</p>	<p>Request for Strategy</p> <p>Timescales: please do not mark all requests as 'urgent' please use a more specific marking approach e.g.</p> <p>IMMEDIATE: (Response within the hour) NB: should be followed up with a phone call in all cases</p> <p>URGENT: (Response on date of request)</p> <p>IMPORTANT: (Response within 2/3 working days)</p> <p>Requests should be sent securely to the following email address – please follow up your email with a phone call for immediate concerns.</p> <p>LSUDMSouth@avonandsomerset.pnn.police.uk 01278 644584 Duty DS Investigations: 01278 644047</p> <p>Decision Makers: DS Becky Maddison, Rebecca Jarvis, Kerry Clark</p>		<p>BS send invites to</p> <p>School Nurse:</p> <p>Nsomerset.schoolnurses@nhs.net – 01934 419339</p> <p>Health Visiting Teams</p> <p>South – Hv.westonsouth@nhs.net – 01934 881066</p> <p>Central – Hv.westoneast@nhs.net – 01275 885601</p> <p>North – Nscp.healthvisitingnorth@nhs.net – 01275 885566</p> <p>Community Paediatrician</p> <p>wnt-tr.ChildrensSafeguardingWAHT@nhs.net – 01934 881340</p>
	<p>STRATEGY DISCUSSION</p> <p>Share Information</p> <p>Police Investigation</p> <p>S47 Enquiries Agreed</p> <p>Safety Plan</p> <p>Medical Examination</p> <p>Urgent Legal Advice</p>		<p>BS to invite Team Leader to authorise minutes within 12 hours</p> <p>BS to distribute minutes within 24 hours to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police • Community Paediatricians • Child's General Practitioner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Any other attendees
<p>Social Worker to provide parents/carers with Child Protection leaflet, contact QA team to book CP conference within 15 working days from Strategy Discussion</p>	<p>S47 Enquiries – 15 working days</p> <p>Single Assessment – 45 working days</p>		<p>Following a Strategy Discussion Local Authority Partners are requested to securely email the minutes of the Strategy to all attendees using the addresses above. <u>These minutes should include details of other agencies that participated in the Strategy and all decisions made and actions considered but dismissed.</u></p> <p>BS to send minutes within 24 hours of the Strategy Discussion to all attendees, GP and Community Paediatrician</p>
<p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns not substantiated – continue with support plan, consider need for support plan under EH or CIN and record decision, cancel ICPC • Concerns substantiated but child not likely to suffer significant harm – agree whether CP conference necessary and record decision • Concerns substantiated and child likely to suffer significant harm – progress to ICPC, continue to monitor safety plan until ICPC • Attend Legal Planning Meeting 			