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|  **Child Protection Case Conferences** |  |

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**1.** **Child Protection Case Conferences**

The Child Protection Case Conference (Case Conference) is central to the Child Protection Process. It is a multidisciplinary/multiagency meeting that brings together the family and professionals in relation to child protection concerns regarding a child/young person and family situation and provides them with an opportunity to exchange information and plan together.

With the exception of decisions on registration and de-registration, it is not an executive body. The results of the discussion are recommendations to individual agencies for action. The decision to implement the recommendations must rest with the individual agency concerned. Nevertheless, it is expected that individual agencies attending Case Conferences would commit themselves to a course of action which is within their authority. Any deviation from the recommendations should not be made, except in an emergency, without informing the other agencies involved, through the Chairperson.

 **2.** **Criteria for Convening an Initial Child Protection Case Conference**

An Initial Child Protection Case Conference will be convened in the following circumstances:

* Where the concerns are substantiated after a child protection investigation and the child/young person is assessed to be at continuing risk of significant harm;
* Following information that a child/young person is in regular contact with an adult who has been convicted of a Schedule One [1] offence against children/young people and who is considered to be a risk;
* Following information that a child/young person is in regular contact with an adult who has been suspected of previous incidents of child abuse and it is deemed that the child/young person may be at risk of significant harm;
* Where a young person has abused another child/young person and there is evidence that the young person committing the abuse is at risk of significant harm or has been abused;
* When a child/young person moves into, or is born into, a household where a child/young person's name is currently on the Child Protection Register, or has died or has been seriously injured as a result of suspected abuse;
* When consideration is being given to a child/young person's return to the community from a ‘Looked After’ placement or period in hospital and their name was on the Register immediately prior to be being looked after or admitted to hospital;
* Where a woman is pregnant and there is a need to consider serious potential risk to the unborn child and plan protective action prior to the birth of the child. If a decision is made to register the unborn child, this will come into effect at the birth of the child;
* When a child/young person from another Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) or authority's Child Protection Register moves into the HSCT's area.

[1] Schedule One of the Children and Young Persons Act (NI) 1968 details a range of sexual and non -sexual offences committed against children.

 **3.** **Convening of a Case Conference**

A Case Conference should be convened by the HSCT, or the NSPCC if they have responsibility for the case, when it is clear either during or following an investigation that a decision has to be made on whether or not to place the child/young person's name on the Child Protection Register.

Senior managers of HSCT staff (Family and Child Care Programme) are designated to act as conveners and Chairpersons of Child Protection Case Conferences as social services have a lead role in the protection of children/young people and manage the Child Protection Register.

Any agency may request an initial Case Conference by contacting the appropriate Assistant Principal/Principal Social Worker, who will normally comply with such a request where the circumstances of the case appear to meet the criteria for convening an Initial Child Protection Case Conference. Should the Assistant Principal/Principal Social Worker decide not to arrange a Case Conference he/she should respond in writing to the Agency concerned stating the reasons. The person who has requested a Case Conference may refer to the Escaltion Policy (Click here).

 **4.** **Functions of an Initial Child Protection Case Conference**

The Initial Child Protection Case Conference brings together the family members and professionals from the agencies that work with children/young people and have child protection responsibilities to:

* Share and evaluate the information gathered during the investigation;
* Assess whether the child/young person is at risk of significant harm using the UNOCINI Assessment Framework;
* Agree an inter-agency child protection plan for the future needs of the child/young person if the child/young person's name is placed on the Child Protection Register. This should include supportive services to the child/young person and the family;
* Agree a review date within 3 months if the child/young person's name is placed on the Child Protection Register;
* Agree the arrangements for the completion of a UNOCINI Child Protection Pathway assessment;
* Consider the provision of family support services if the child/young person's name is not placed on the Child Protection Register.

 **5.** **Risk Assessment**

The purpose of a risk assessment is to inform multiagency decision making. It is designed to help clarify the issues in relation to the protection of the child/young person, to address the key questions in decision-making in situations where risk is present including what is the problem and how serious is it. Its use should allow the range of staff and those caring for the child/young person to have a clearer understanding regarding the presenting child protection concerns and whether there are significant concerns that the abuse or neglect will continue or reoccur (the risk assessment is part of the UNOCINI ChildPprotection Pathway Assessment).

 **6.** **Timing**

The Initial Child Protection Case Conferences should take place within 15 working days from the commencement of the Article 66 Investigation. If this is not possible, the reason for the delay should be recorded on the child/young person's case file and in the minutes of the Case Conference.

 **7.** **Pre-birth Child Protection Case Conference**

A pre-birth Child Protection Case Conference should be requested as soon as it is apparent that an unborn child may be at risk of significant harm (but not before the 24th week of the pregnancy) if:

* The expectant mother is living with, or in contact with, a person who is known to have abused or neglected children;
* The expectant mother has abused or neglected children;
* The lifestyle of the expectant mother or other potential carer is such that the child may be at risk following the birth;
* There are concerns about potential parenting capacity.
* The purpose is to plan co-ordinated action and services for the protection of the child at the time of birth based on the UNOCINI pre-birth risk assessment. [**Guidance for the Safeguarding Process Prior To and Immediately After The Birth Of A Baby Where There May Be Risks of Significant Harm**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/chapters/docs_library.html#core_procedures);

The father of the child should be involved in the process.

The Case Conference can decide to place the child's name on the Child Protection Register when born and formulate a Child Protection Plan without a further Case Conference. A review Case Conference should be held within 3 months of the Initial Pre-birth Child Protection Case Conference.

The Pre-birth Child Protection Case Conference will be conducted in the same way as the Initial Child Protection Case Conference. In addition to membership of the Case Conference as identified in Paragraph 6.19, midwives (hospital and community), the obstetrician and the health visitor should also be invited.

The Chair of Case Conference should ensure that all those invited to the Pre-birth Child Protection Case Conference are notified of the birth and addition of the child’s name to the Child Protection Register.

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 **8.** **Venues for Case Conferences**

The convenor of the Case Conference should arrange the date, time and venue of the Case Conference for the convenience of the majority of the participants, but pay particular attention to accessibility for the parent and/or child/young person and staff for example due to isses of disability. They may need to take account of those with dependents for example in relation to school pick up times. Where any participant has a disability or other special needs, particular consideration will have to be given to the suitability of the venue in terms of physical access and the availability of any necessary supports.

See the following, found in the Documents Library section of this manual:

* [**Guidance for the Safeguarding Process Prior To and Immediately After The Birth Of A Baby Where There May Be Risks of Significant Harm**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/chapters/docs_library.html#core_procedures);
* [**Referral for Expectant Mothers to Children's Services**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/chapters/docs_library.html#core_procedures);
* [**Guide To Completing The Expectant Mother Referral Form**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/chapters/docs_library.html#core_procedures).

 **9.** **Chairing Child Protection Case Conferences**

A Case Conference must be chaired by a Social Work Manager (Assistant Principal/Principal Social Worker (Family and Child Care) equivalent or above), or the NSPCC where appropriate. The Chairperson should have knowledge and expertise in child protection, and skills in chairing Case Conferences.

The main responsibilities of the Chairperson are to ensure that:

* The Case Conference maintains a focus on the child/young person, whose interests are paramount;
* The purpose of the Case Conference is clear;
* Members of the Case Conference understand the confidential nature of the information being discussed;
* All relevant people, including parent or child/young person, are present and are encouraged/facilitated to contribute to the Case Conference, The Chair should ensure that approriate arrangements have been made for those with communication needs and any issues to to capacity of indivuals to understand have been made. For example Interpreter/signer, that written is available in appropriate formats, supports have been put in place.
* Written reports are considered by the Case Conference;
* The Case Conference takes the necessary decisions;
* Parents and the child/young person, be made aware of the decisions to place a child/young person's name on the Child Protection Register and the purpose of the Register. The method of communicating needs to be appropriate to the age and capacity of the child/young person and parent;
* Membership of the Core Group is identified;
* A written minute is taken of the Case Conference which records those participating, apologies, absentees, brief details of the discussion, the decision and recommendations, and its circulation agreed;
* The decision to place a child/young person's name on the Child Protection Register is recorded on the child/young person's file and the Child Protection Register within 24 hours of the Case Conference.

 **10.** **Attendance at a Case Conference**

The Case Conference should consist of the relevant number of people conducive to achieving its purpose but must be quorate. Those attending Case Conferences should be there because they have a significant contribution to make, arising from professional expertise and/or knowledge of the child/young person and family. There should be sufficient information and expertise available, through personal representation and written reports, to enable the Case Conference to make an informed decision about what action is needed to safeguard the child/young person and promote his/her welfare and to make realistic and workable proposals for taking that action forward.

A Case Conference may be large in the early stages of work when a number of agencies may be contributing to the investigation, the assessment or case planning. Once a long-term plan has been formulated a smaller group of key workers from the agencies involved in the child protection plan, including the Case Co-ordinator, should be identified as the Core Group who will work together to implement and review the plan.

Attendance at Case Conferences for such purposes as maintaining an overview of child protection work or supervising, managing or monitoring an agency's subsequent input into the case should be discouraged. However, supervisors may need to accompany inexperienced workers.

The following persons should always be invited to the Initial Case Conference, as appropriate:

* Parents;
* Child/young person;
* Interpreters/sign language interpreters, support person for a person with a disability;
* Social Worker, Family and Child Care;
* Senior Social Worker/Team Leader, Family and Child Care Team Relevant Police Officer from Public Protection Unit;
* Health visitor/Family Nurse and/or School Nurse;
* Safeguarding Children Nurse Specialist;
* General Practitioner (GP);
* Named Paediatrician for Child Protection;
* School Principal/Designated Teacher and/or class teacher in the case of a school-age child/young person;
* Education Welfare Officer in the case of a child/young person of school age.

Other personnel may need to be invited, as appropriate, e.g:

* Social Workers from other programmes of care;
* Trust Lead for Public Protection;
* Trust Legal Advisor;
* Consultant Psychiatrist;
* Forensic Medical Officer;
* Hospital Medical, Nursing and Social Work Staff;
* Adult Mental Health, Medical, Nursing and Allied Health Professional staff;
* Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Medical, Nursing and Social Work staff;
* Probation Officer and/or Prison Officer;
* Juvenile Justice Staff;
* Representative from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
* Representative of the Armed Services in cases where there is a service connection;
* Relevant voluntary organisations;
* Relevant foster carers;
* Guardian ad Litem.

Those attending the Case Conference should aim to arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the Case Conference to allow time for any papers to be read and to avoid delay.

An agency wishing an observer to attend must contact the chair of the Case Conference at least 3 working days prior to the Case Conference. There will not be more than one observer in attendance at any one Case Conference. The social worker will be responsible for asking the parent/child/young person to give their permission for an observer to attend in advance of the Case Conference and their response given to the Chair.

An observer will be permitted to attend a Case Conference if they are a student on placement with agencies which have involvement in Child Protection.

 **11.** **Quorum**

Whilst it is inappropriate to fix a number for attendance at Case Conferences, it is important that those attending are able to contribute from their knowledge of the child/young person and family. Decisions to register/de-register the child/young person should not be taken where the main professional referrer or his representative is not present. Ideally, substitutes should not be used except in exceptional circumstances.

To be a valid Case Conference there should be, in addition to the Chairperson, representation from social services and at least two other agencies or disciplines with knowledge of or direct contact with the child/young person. Those not able to attend must provide reports that outline their assessment of the family situation.

This quorum may be breached if; under exceptional circumstances an agency representative is unable to attend but has submitted a written report. The chair of the Case Conference will be responsible for deciding, in the best interest of the child/young person, to proceed with a Case Conference if the quorum is not met. This should be recorded in the minutes.

If the Case Conference cannot proceed, those present must agree interim safeguarding arrangements to ensure that the child/young person is protected. Another date for the Case Conference must be arranged within 10 working days. The decision and reason not to proceed along with interim safeguarding arrangements must be recorded in the child/young person's case file and in the minutes of the reconvened Case Conference. A decision to place a child/young person's name on the Child Protection Register cannot be made in these situations.

 **12.** **Involvement of Family and Child in the Case Conference**

There is an underlying principle that parents should be involved in all of the discussions and decision making about their child/young person. This accords with Article 6 (Right to a Fair Trial) and Article 8 (Right to Private and Family Life) of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Separate attendance should be considered, where conflict between family members would severely disrupt the Case Conference and prevent it from focusing on the protection of the child/young person.

The social worker should advise the family that they will be invited to attend all or part of the Case Conference, subject to the Chairperson’s decision about whether this might prejudice the interest of the child/young person.

Whether or not they attend, the family should be encouraged and supported by the Social Worker, to record their contribution in writing, or by other means, for the Case Conference. For example for those with communication needs this could be by letter, digital recording or representation on their behalf by a social worker or other professional or other appropriate format.

For some parents who suffer from significant mental health difficulties it may be the opinion of their mental health professional that it is inadvisable for them to participate in the Case Conference because they are too ill. In these exceptional circumstances a decision may therefore be taken to exclude the parent from the case conference. In all cases the opinion of a mental health professional must be sought in relation to the making of this decision. A child/young person should be permitted to attend depending on their age, understanding and level of maturity. The child/young person may bring a friend or someone to support them if desired. Any child/young person who chooses to attend should be prepared by the social worker. The use of appropriate literature is recommended. If a child/young person does not wish to attend, the social worker should enable him/her to submit their views in writing or by other means to the Case Conference.

If the family encounter difficulties, for example with child care, travel or finding a support person, every possible assistance, should be given in order to facilitate their attendance.

Where difficulties arise, e.g. because of physical disability or sensory impairments, arrangements to facilitate attendance at the Case Conference should be made. Consideration should be given to the appropriate means of communication, e.g. interpreters/signers/intermediaries..

The family should be invited to arrive at the Case Conference venue at least fifteen minutes before the start to allow the Chairperson to advise them of the Case Conference process, who will be present and their right to appeal against the decision of the Case Conference. The Chairperson will take responsibility for introductions between the family and members of the Case Conference ensuring that the family are made aware of the professional roles of all participants and of the reason for their attendance.

Family members should have the opportunity to say whether or not they agree that there is a concern. This can be done in a variety of ways, e.g. verbally by them or by a support person, a social worker on their behalf or by the Chairperson reading aloud their written contribution or by a combination of these.

While this policy will be appropriate in the majority of cases, it may have to be modified on occasions where this is required by particular circumstances, e.g. criminal investigations.

The Chairperson of the Case Conference will ensure that the family is advised of its outcome in writing within 14 working days. This will include the key elements of the Child Protection Plan if a decision has been made to place the child/young person's name on the Child Protection Register. Appropriate formats should be used for those who have a disability or specific communication need..

 **13.** **Involvement of Alleged Abusers**

In the interests of natural justice, the alleged abuser must be informed about the allegation and they and/or their representative given the opportunity either to attend the Case Conference in its entirety or part, or make representation in writing.

In R v Norfolk County Council Judge Wade held that a Case Conference had acted unfairly and in breach of natural justice by denying the alleged abuser the opportunity of being heard (Norfolk County Council ex parte M (1989) 3WLR 502) - refer to Co-operating to Safeguard Children for further information.

The Case Conference focus is on the child/young person and a decision to invite an alleged abuser to it must take into account, the wishes and feelings of the child/young person, among other things, having regard to age and understanding.

Each case must be considered on its own merit and social work staff must balance their statutory duty to protect a child/young person from abuse against their duty of fairness to the alleged abuser.

Where there is conflict or disagreement in interests, the interests of the child/young person must remain paramount.

The outcome of the Case Conference should be shared in writing with the alleged abuser in so far as it relates to them.

 **14.** **Exclusion from Child Protection Case Conferences**

Parents and children/young people, where appropriate, should be invited to attend the whole of the Case Conference. It is recognised, however, that there may be occasions when partial or total exclusion from the Case Conference is necessary. The decision to exclude a parent or child/young person from a Case Conference rests with the Chairperson. Where a professional member of a Case Conference has concerns about sharing confidential information or discussing sensitive issues with parents present, this should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson prior to the Case Conference.

Those parents who are excluded should be advised that they have the right to make representation to the Case Conference by other methods, e.g. by letter, digital recording or representation on their behalf by a social worker or other professional.

The Chairperson will ensure that the parent is informed in writing of the exclusion and the reason. They will also ensure that the decision is recorded in the child/young person's case file and the Case Conference minutes.

The attendance of parents and children is to facilitate openness, partnership and co-operation. It must be noted that their presence should not prevent or seriously disrupt the Case Conference from carrying out its primary task. If the Case Conference is being seriously disrupted, it is the responsibility of the Chairperson to take any necessary action. This may include temporarily suspending it or even postponement to a later date.

Where the family is not invited or not permitted to stay for the whole Case Conference, they will be seen afterwards in order to be informed of the conclusions, decisions and recommendations by the Chairperson and other appropriate members of the Case Conference. Where members of the family are excluded from all or part of the Case Conference, the reasons should be recorded in the minutes of the Case Conference and the child/young person's file.

1. Partial Exclusion

Partial exclusion may occur at the discretion of the Chairperson in order to allow the Case Conference to:
	* Receive confidential information about a third party;
	* Hear the views of one parent separately from the other parent;
	* Enable the child/young person to express their views separately from a parent(s);
	* Enable professionals to discuss the issue of registration where third party information is being used to make this decision;
	* Allow the Police to share information about a current criminal investigation.
2. Total Exclusion

In a minority of cases it may be necessary to exclude a parent from all of the Case Conference. This is a significant deviation from established principles and should apply only in exceptional circumstances when one of the following criteria applies:
	* Where there is evidence that the Case Conference will be seriously disrupted by the presence of a parent(s) to the extent that the meeting will not be effective;
	* Where parental presence will create difficulties with Police investigations or criminal proceedings;
	* Where conflict between parents, or parent(s) and child/young person, makes it impossible for all to attend;
	* Where a parent(s) is believed to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs;
	* Where a parent(s) suffers from mental health difficulties which in the opinion of a mental health professional make it inadvisable for them to participate in the Case Conference.

 **15.** **Attendance of Friends or Supporters**

A parent and child/young person must each be advised of their right to have a friend or supporter present at a Case Conference in order to assist them with full participation – See [**Practice Guidance Regarding the Role of Support Persons at Child Protection Case Conferences, Looked After Reviews and Family Support Planning Meetings, CSIB, October 2014.**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/files/prac_guidance_supp.pdf). A child/young person/parent/carer with a disability may benefit from the attendance of a Advocate/friend or supporter.

The role of the friend or supporter is to speak on behalf of the parent or child/young person, having ascertained their view in advance of the meeting. The friend or supporter is not there to promote their own view. The Chairperson of the Case Conference must be informed prior to the Case Conference of the intention of the parent to bring a friend or supporter. Please see [**The Role of Support at Child Protection Conferences, Looked Afted Children Reviews and Family Support Planning Meetings Leaflet (May 2013)**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/files/support_role_supp.pdf).

It is not the place of the friend or supporter to attend the Case Conference in place of the parent or child/young person, but in exceptional circumstances, e.g, ill-health, emergency situation, the Chair may permit a support person to attend and take part in the Conference in the absence of a parent but only with the agreement of the child/young person (if of appropriate age and understanding).

In exceptional circumstances the Chairperson may prevent a friend or supporter from attending a Case Conference, e.g. where a person has a conviction, or has been cautioned for certain Schedule One offences. A supporter may also be required to leave the Case Conference if the Chairperson deems their presence to be disruptive.

The friend or supporter will not receive a copy of the Case Conference minutes. However all solicitors will have access to these upon request.

 **16.** **Information for the Case Conference**

The investigating social worker must prepare a written report for the Case Conference using the UNOCINI Assessment Framework. The report should be factual, concise and provide all relevant information.

The report must include

* Factual detail about the family, e.g. names, dates of births, address(es), schools, GP, legal status, a genogram of the family, extended family and the household;
* A chronology of recent and historically significant events, agency and professional contact with the child/young person and family;
* Details of the concerns that have led to consideration of the need for a child protection plan;
* Information on the child/young person's current and past state of health and development. (including any disability or communication needs)
* Relevant information with regards to child/young person’s ethnicity and religion, sexual orientation, gender identity issues whilst ensuring respect for the child/young person’s privacy;
* Information on the capacity of the parents and other family members to ensure the child/young person's safety from harm;
* The expressed views, wishes and feelings of the child/young person, parents, and other family members;
* Analysis of the implications of the information obtained and any risks for the child/young person's future safety;
* Recommendations for the Child Protection Plan.

The social worker must provide a parent and child/young person where relevant, with a copy of the report at least two working days prior to the Case Conference. The report should be explained and discussed with the family in advance of the Conference. The parent’s and child/young person’s agreement or disagreement should be recorded in the minutes. Appropriate methods of communication should be used for parents and children/young people who have communication/language difficulties.

Other professionals invited to attend the Case Conference must provide a written report summarising the details of their involvement with the family and relevant information at least two working days prior to the Case Conference. Consideration should be given to the following areas were appropriate:

* The child/young person's health and development, and developmental needs;
* The child/young person's educational development needs;
* Family and environmental factors;
* The capacity of the parents to safeguard the child/young person.

All agencies should endeavour to share the contents of the reports with all members, including parents, prior to the Case Conference. If an agency has concerns about the confidential nature of the reports or believes that information in them could prejudice continuing criminal investigations this should be discussed with the Chairperson and agreement reached about what may be shared.

All those providing information must take care to distinguish among fact, observation, allegation and opinion. Reports should highlight strengths as well as concerns and avoid jargon and unnecessary detail. Opinions and interpretations are important but must be evidenced.

Reports should be with the Chairperson and if possible with other professionals who are attending, two working days in advance of the Case Conference.

There is an expectation of strict confidentiality and the Chairperson must emphasise to participants that information exchanged at the Case Conference should not be disclosed or discussed outside the Case Conference unless it is necessary in the interests of the child/young person. Any information received at the Case Conference for the purpose of child protection should not be used for any other purpose. The exception to this is in relation to the police if information becomes available that suggests the possible commission of a crime. Information should not be removed without the prior permission of the author.

 **17.** **Case Conference Agenda**

The Chairperson is responsible for ensuring a systematic and ordered approach to the Case Conference. The Case Conference should be conducted in the following stages:

* Introductions;
* Explanation of the Case Conference process;
* Sharing of information relevant to the function of the conference;
* Analysis of the information shared;
* Conclusion;
* Decisions;
* Recommendations and action plan.

 **18.** **Decisions and Actions of the Case Conference**

The Case Conference should consider if the child/young person is at continuing risk of significant harm. (The test to be applied is whether future significant harm is likely). This decision should be based on all available evidence obtained through existing records, the initial assessment and from Inquiries and research. It should take into account the views of all agencies attending the Case Conference and any written contributions.

Every effort should be made to reach mutually agreed decisions, recommendations and action. **All professionals in attendance must consider and analyse the information presented and cast a vote**. Where there is a lack of consensus a majority decision should be taken with the Chair having the casting vote. The decision of the Case Conference and the reasons for it must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

It is recognised that each agency must retain the right to act independently within its own agency policy. Dissenting views on the Child Protection Plan should be recorded in the minutes. Once decisions have been made each Agency is expected to support and carry out the Child Protection Plan. Every effort should be made to establish the Child Protection Plan as a formal contract involving professionals, the family and the child/young person.

The Case Conference must decide that either:

* The child/young person is not at continuing risk and therefore the child/young person's name will not be placed on the Child Protection Register. In these circumstances consideration must be given to the development of a family support plan;
* The child/young person is at continuing risk and therefore their name should be placed on the Child Protection Register. The act of registration itself confers no protection on a child/young person and must be accompanied by a Child Protection Plan. The Case Conference should determine under which category or categories of abuse the child/young person's name must be registered. The category used in registration will indicate to those consulting the register the primary presenting concerns at the time of registration.

It is the responsibility of the Case Conference to consider and make recommendation on how agencies, staff and family should work together to ensure that the child/young person will be safeguarded from future harm. This should enable staff and the family to understand exactly what is expected of them and what they can expect of others. Specific tasks will include the following:

* Appoint a Case Co-ordinator;
* Establish the key elements of the Child Protection Plan and timescales for completion;
* Identify the membership of the Core Group and agree the date of its first meeting which must be held within 10 working days of the Case Conference;
* Establish if, and how, the child/young person, parents and wider family members should be involved in the process; consider the need to convene a family group conference.
* Identify what further specialist assessments of the child/young person and family are required;
* Consider the need for a contingency plan if circumstances change quickly;
* Consider the circumstances in which it might be necessary to call a review Case Conference before the next review date;
* Agree a review date within 3 months;
* Agree who should be informed that the child/young person's name has been placed on the Child Protection Register.

 **19.** **Keeping Parents and the Child/Young Person Informed**

When a child/young person's name is placed on the Child Protection Register the Chairperson of the Case Conference and the social worker should ensure that the parents and the child/young person, are informed and , understand:

* The reason for the decision;
* How registration and the Child Protection Plan are linked;
* The procedure for de-registration;
* Where responsibility for decision-making lies;
* The appeals process and the complaints procedure;
* The procedure with regard to regular review of the child's progress and assessed risk.

The decision not to place a child/young person's name on the Register must be confirmed in writing to the parents and the child/young person, if they are old enough, by the Chairperson within 14 working days of the Case Conference. The method of communicating needs to be appropriate to the age, capacity and needs of the child/young person and parent.

 **20.** **Case Conference Minutes**

HSCTsare responsible for ensuring that all Case Conferences they have convened have a dedicated person trained to take notes and produce minutes of the Case Conference for approval by the Chairperson. The Case Conference minutes will include:

* A list of those present, apologies and those who did not attend;
* The family composition;
* The legal status of children/young people (if appropriate);
* A record of any delay in convening the Case Conference and the reasons;
* A record of whether the parents were excluded, either totally or partially, and the reasons;
* A record of written reports submitted to the Case Conference;
* The essential facts of the case with information about each child/young person;
* A summary of the discussion;
* Identification of the family's strengths;
* A summary of the assessment of risk and needs of each child;
* The decision on registration and the reasons for the decision;
* The name(s) and designation(s) of anyone dissenting from the decision regarding registration and the reasons why;
* The outline Child Protection Plan;
* The names of the Case Co-ordinator and the Core Group;
* If the child/young person's name is placed on the Child Protection Register, the category for registration and the date of the Review Case Conference.

The Case Conference minutes are provided to each person invited to attend the Case Conference, except where they have stated that they have no current or planned involvement with the family.

The minutes will be distributed within 14 working days by the Chairperson. Recipients are required within 7 working days to confirm receipt of the minutes through returning the tear-off slip provided. The minutes will be considered to be an accurate record of the meeting, unless objections are received by the Chairperson within 7 working days of receipt of the minutes.

The minutes of the Case Conference are confidential and should not be shared with a third party without the consent of the Chairperson. In cases of criminal proceedings, however, the Police are empowered to reveal the existence of these minutes to the Director of Public Prosecutions (Public Prosecution Service).

Agencies must ensure that they have arrangements to keep the records secure and that only those with a "need to know" have access to them.

One copy of the minutes will be sent to parents and, where appropriate, the child/young person, unless there are particular circumstances where to do so would be detrimental to a member of the family.

The responsibility of the parents regarding the confidentiality of the minutes should be emphasised by the Chairperson.

The family friend or supporter will not receive a copy of the minutes. However, all Solicitors will have access to these upon request.

**Complaints/Appeals in Relation to Child Protection Case Conference**

This procedure relates to the rights of parents/carers and children/young people (if of sufficient age and understanding) to complain about the process of Child Protection Case Conferences or appeal against a Conference decision. Any complaint about individual agencies should be investigated through the Agency’s complaints procedure. This is separate from the Children Order Representation and Complaints Procedure.

Each complaint needs to be taken seriously and the Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) believes that there should be a clear procedure which enables complaints to be dealt with sensitively, thoroughly and without delay.

**Eligibility to Use This Procedure**

Parents/carers and children/young people (with sufficient understanding) may have concerns about which they wish to complain or appeal, in respect of one or more of the following aspects of the functioning of Child Protection Case Conferences:

* The process of the Case Conference;
* The outcome, in terms of the fact of and/or the category of primary concern at the time the child/young person became the subject of a Child Protection Plan;
* A decision for the child/young person to become, or not to become, the subject of a Child Protection Plan or a decision to continue a Child Protection Plan.

All parties must be made aware that this complaints process cannot itself change a Child Protection Case Conference decision and that during the course of a complaint/appeal’s consideration, the decision made by the Case Conference stands.

At all stages of this complaint/appeals process, the complainant/appellant may bring an advocate or friend to support them. Particular consideration must be given to children/young people who may not be as articulate or able to fully understand the process, and may need an advocate.

**NB** Complaints about individual agencies/professionals, their performance and provision (or non-provision) of services will not be dealt with under this procedure and should be responded to in accordance with the relevant agency’s complaints handling process.

**Grounds for Appeal Against a Case Conference Decision**

The grounds for appealing against a Case Conference decision may be that the:

* Criteria for the decision that the child/young person should have a Child Protection Plan were not met:
* Criteria for the decision that the child/young person should continue to have a Child Protection Plan were not met;
* Criteria for the decision that the Child Protection Plan should be discontinued were not met; and/or
* Information on which the Case Conference decision was based proved substantially incorrect.

**Stage One - Informal Stage**

Who will be involved? - Social Work Line Manager (8a/b) and Child Protection Case Conference Chair.

Complaints about aspects of Child Protection Case Conference should in the first instance be sent in writing to the Child Protection Case Conference chair within 10 working days of the Child Protection Case Conference. If required, assistance will be given to service user to enable them to do this.

The HSC Trust Complaints Officer should be informed of the complaint and where there are issues which fall outside of this procedure these should be discussed and directed through the appropriate complaints process (e.g. Children Order Complaints/Trust Complaints).

The complaint should be acknowledged in writing by the Child Protection Case Conference Chair within 3 working days and a meeting offered to attempt resolution within 10 working days.

This is a problem-solving stage in which the social work line manager and Case Conference chair with the complainant will aim to seek an early resolution.

Following the meeting the line manager will confirm in writing the points of complaint and any actions agreed to resolve them. The letter should also advise the complainant of their right to move to Stage 2 of the process within 28 days, if resolution was not achieved and they remain dissatisfied.

The HSC Trust Complaints Officer and the Assistant Director of Safeguarding should be informed of the outcome of Stage 1 and also receive a copy of this letter.

**Stage Two - Formal Stage – Complaint Meeting**

Personnel involved in this meeting will be the Social Work Line Manager (8a/b), Chair of Child Protection Case Conference and a Head of Service (8b) –with no previous involvement in the case, who will chair the meeting

The HSC Trust Complaints Officer should be kept informed of the progress of this complaint.

A Complaint Meeting at Stage 2 should be arranged and held within 28 days to attempt to resolve the areas of concern.

The Complaint Meeting should have access to and will consider:

* Minutes of the Child Protection Case Conference;
* Reports to the Child Protection Conference;
* Correspondence re complaint at Stage 1.

The meeting should still aim to address areas of dissatisfaction and to resolve matters. Following the meeting the complainant should receive a letter from the Chair of the meeting to confirm what was agreed and to advise the complainant of their right to move to Stage 3 within 28 days, if resolution was not achieved and they remain dissatisfied.

The HSC Trust Complaints Officer and the Assistant Director of Safeguarding should be informed of the outcome of Stage 2 and receive a copy of this letter. The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) should also be informed if the complainant wishes to progress to an Appeal Panel.

**Stage Three - The Complaint and Appeal Panel**

**When will the Panel meet**: The Panel will be convened within 15 working days of receipt of written notification from Stage 2.

**Chair of the Panel**: A member of the Safeguarding Panel with knowledge and experience of the Case Conference process.

**Membership of the Panel**: The Panel will be an inter-agency Panel made up of at least two senior officers from member agencies of the Safeguarding Panel other than that of the chair of the Appeals Panel (none of whom have previous or present direct line management responsibility for the case in question).  Panel members must have knowledge and experience of the Case Conference process. One member must be from Social Services.

The HSC Trust will provide a minute-taker.

**The Panel will:**

* Consider the written material;
* Meet with the parent (and child/young person, if appropriate) if necessary;
* Interview the Case Conference chairperson;
* Interview any other Case Conference members, as necessary;

**Advisor to Panel**: The Panel chair has the authority to co-opt other professionals where specialist advice is needed.

**Scope of Decision–Making**: The decision and recommendations of the Panel are final - the Panel may make one or more of the following decisions/recommendations based on a majority view:

* Child Protection Case Conference procedures were followed correctly;
* Child Protection Case Conference procedures were not followed correctly and a recommendation made as to how to remedy this;
* To support the original Child Protection Case Conference decision;
* Recommend Child Protection Conference is reconvened (within 15 working days from date of Appeals Panel) with a different Case Conference chair, to reconsider a recommendation regarding a decision that the child/young person should be or continue to be, subject to a Child Protection Plan and the category of Significant Harm/abuse on which such decision is based;
* To decide they have insufficient information to make a decision and set out a timescale for completing the task and set a date for a further Panel meeting;
* To decide whether there are any learning points for a specific agency;
* The Panel chair should ensure minutes are sent to the complainant / appellant and to all those who were sent minutes of Child Protection Case Conference and also to ensure any reconvened Child Protection Case Conference has full details of any recommendations made by the Panel;
* \* To communicate any specific concerns and recommendations relating to practice or procedure to the Chair of the Safeguarding Panel/SBNI.

**The Appeal Panel does not have the authority to reverse a Case Conference decision**.

Within 5 working days of the Panel, the Panel Chair will ensure that the written decision / finding and / or minutes of the Panel meeting are sent to the complainant/appellant, to all who were sent minutes of the Child Protection Case Conference and a copy of the minutes will be given to the chair for any reconvened Case Conference (not previously involved in any capacity with the case).

The HSC Trust Complaints Officer and Assistant Director of Safeguarding should be informed about the outcome of Stage 3 and receive a copy of the written decision and findings of the Panel.

All records relating to the Appeal must be placed in the child/young person’s and parents/carers file alongside other records relating to child protection – paper and electronic.

**Reconvened Conference** – to be held within 15 working days from the date of the Appeal Panel

The chair of a reconvened Child Protection Case Conference (not previously involved in any capacity with the case) must ensure that all those present have seen or are briefed at the start of the Case Conference about the decision and any recommendation(s) made by the Appeal Panel.

The decision of the reconvened Case Conference will be final and recorded in the Case Conference minute – these will be circulated to all parties involved. The minute record will be placed in the child/young person’s and parents/carers file – paper and electronic.

The Child Protection Register must be updated, as required, within one working day of the reconvened Case Conference. The reason for any changes to the Register must be noted on the electronic record.

**Further Challenge**

A complainant / appellant who continues to be dissatisfied with the outcome of the above process will be advised of their right to contact the Ombudsman, Commissioner for Children or seek legal advice.

 **21.** **After the Case Conference**

**The Core Group**

The Core Group carries out the interagency work outlined in the Child Protection Plan and includes the case coordinator and professional workers who have direct contact with the child/young person and family. Parents and the child/young person have an important role in contributing to the Child Protection Plan and should be invited to the Core Group meetings.

The members of the Core Group will:

* Co-operate with the Case Coordinator in the UNOCINI Child Protection Pathway assessment and Child Protection Plan;
* Plan and implement interagency work as agreed at the Child Protection Case Conference and outlined within the Child Protection Plan;
* Meet regularly to evaluate progress against the objectives of the Child Protection Plan and agree on-going actions required to progress the Plan.

Principles underpinning Core Group activity are as follows:

* The Core Group does not have a remit to change the Child Protection Plan;
* The purpose of the Core Group is to make sure that the Child Protection Plan is implemented and actions are effective in safeguarding the child/young person;
* Core Groups must be multi-disciplinary and multi-agency; and where appropriate, parents/carers, children/young people should be supported to participate in Core Groups;
* Core Group members identified at Case Conference should participate and contribute at Core Group meetings. If a Core Group member cannot attend they must provide the Case Co-ordinator (SW) in writing an update about their involvement and include information about progress made and any issues with implementation of the plan.

**Purpose of Core Groups**

The chair of the Case Conference will agree the date for the Core Group at the conclusion of the Case Conference. The Case Conference chair will outline the role of the Core Group as follows:

* To operationalise and review the progress of the Child Protection Plan developed by the Case Conference, adding necessary detail to the Child Protection Plan as required, including professional roles and responsibilities together with expectations of family members;
* To consider the implementation of the Child Protection Plan and the impact of changes which have occurred within the family situation; and if appropriate, respond to changes which indicate a change in the assessed level of risk;
* To share information and to assess the impact of the Child Protection Plan.

**Membership of the Core Group**

Membership is defined by the Child Protection Case Conference, SBNI Child Protection Policy and Procedures.

**Frequency of Core Group Meetings**

*In the 3 month period between the Initial Child Protection Case Conference and the first Review Child Protection Case Conference:*

* The first Core Group meeting must occur within 10 working days from the Initial Child Protection Case Conference;
* The second should occur 6 weeks after the Initial Child Protection Case Conference.

*In the 6 month period between Review Child Protection Case Conferences:*

* There should be a minimum of 2 Core Group meetings. The suggested intervals are at 2 and 4 months.

Whilst these are the minimum level of Core Group meetings required; more frequent meetings will be determined by need and professional judgment, for example:

* Pre-proceedings process or on-going court proceedings;
* If a professional has concerns about the level of parental cooperation;
* If the Initial Child Protection Case Conference / Review Child Protection Case Conference decides that the complexity of the case requires more frequent Core Group meetings.

**Recording of the Core Group Meeting**

The Core Group meeting must be recorded on the UNOCINI Core Group Meeting Record template and copies given to professionals, parents/carers and child/young person at the end of the meeting. A typed record will be distributed within 14 working days and a copy retained on the child/young person’s file.

**Role of the Case Co-ordinator**

The Case Co-ordinator is defined as a social work practitioner (Band 5, 6 or 7). The Case Co-ordinator must ensure:

* Child(ren)/young person(s) must be seen at a minimum of at least every 4 weeks during the period of Registration;
* That child protection visits are purposeful; Case Co-ordinator must undertake work with the child(ren)/young person(s) and parents/carers as outlined in the Child Protection Plan.

*If the case coordinator is an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) social worker:*

* The social work manager (band 7)/senior social work practitioner (band 7) must chair the Core Group.

**Role of the Social Work Manager**

The social work manager (band 7) or senior social work practitioner (band 7) will be available to provide consultation and advice to the Case Co-ordinator (the social work manager will provide monthly supervision of the Case Co-ordinator).

*The social work manager may decide to chair a Core Group meeting following discussion with the Case Co-ordinator. This decision will be based on, for example:*

* Complexity of the case and risk;
* Where there is concern about the level of parental cooperation and/or the level of professional agreement;
* Where there are concerns about the effectiveness of the Child Protection Plan;
* Cases where there are pre-proceedings or court processes on-going.

**Concerns about the Effectiveness of the Child Protection Plan**

If the Core Group is concerned about the effectiveness of the Child Protection Plan a number of options are available to the Core Group depending on the circumstances of the case:

* Request an urgent Review Child Protection Case Conference;
* Request Senior Management (Band 8a or above) responsible for the case to consider how to ensure the immediate protection of the child/young person;
* Where necessary all Core Group members should seek appropriate line management guidance.

**Dissent in Core Groups**

Where there are professional disagreements about the role and function of the Core Group in relation to a case:

* The Case Co-ordinator must notify their line manager and Case Conference chairperson and if resolution to the disagreement cannot be achieved by intervention of Core Group member’s line management, an urgent Case Conference must be convened;
* Other multi-agency/multi-disciplinary professionals must escalate concerns through their respective line management.

**Participation of Parents, Children/Young People in Core Groups**

In defining the membership of the Core Group the Case Conference will also establish if, and how, the child/young person, parents and wider family members should be involved in the process. Parents and the child/young person have an important role in contributing to the Child Protection Plan and should be invited to the Core Group meetings.

Parents should be invited to all Core Group meetings with the exception of those excluded from attending by the Child Protection Case Conference Group. The Case Co-ordinator should advise a parent that they can invite a support person to accompany them to assist with their full participation.

Parent’s views should be represented and recorded at the Core Group meetings. Interpreters should be provided when required. Exclusions from Child Protection Case Conferences are outlined in other sections of these policy and procedures. (See [**Section 14, Exclusion From Child Protection Case Conferences**](http://www.proceduresonline.com/sbni/chapters/p_ch_protection_conf.html#exclusion)).

Where a parent is unable, excluded, or chooses not to attend the Core Group meeting the case coordinator must consider alternate arrangements to ascertain and facilitate the views of the parent and the parents’ views must be recorded.

Where appropriate a child/young person, depending on age, understanding and level of maturity, should be facilitated to attend the Core Group meeting to enable the meeting to hear from the child/young person how they are experiencing the Child Protection Plan. Where a child/young person is attending the chair must ensure:

* The child/young person’s attendance is purposeful; and must consider if there is value in the child/young person attending all or part of the meeting;
* If the child/young person wishes, they can bring a friend or someone to support them.

When a child decides not to or cannot attend the Core Group meeting the case coordinator must ascertain the child/young person’s views on how the Child Protection Plan is working for them, (this can be done using a variety of methods, dependent on the child/young person’s age) and these should be included in the Core Group recording document. The child/young person’s views should always be represented and recorded at the Core Group meeting.

**UNOCINI Child Protection Pathway Assessment**

A multi-disciplinary pathway assessment must be undertaken whenever a child/young person's name is placed on the Child Protection Register. The pathway assessment should be completed before the first review Case Conference to enable the inter-agency protection plan to be agreed.

The pathway assessment fulfils the following functions:

* Provides an understanding of the child/young person's needs and family's situation;
* Establishes what has happened and the reason for the concerns;
* Assesses the risk of the child/young person suffering significant harm;
* Identifies what needs to change in order for the risk to the child/young person to be reduced.

The pathway assessment will provide information for the Child Protection Plan. It should include contributions from all relevant agencies to cover social, environmental, health, developmental and educational needs. It must be remembered that assessment is a continuing activity throughout the child protection process and adjusted according to the timescale for Case Conference reviews and/or of appearances at court.

As with all aspects of the Child Protection Process, involvement of parents and the child/young person is an essential element of an effective pathway assessment. The process of engaging them may take time and may delay the timetable for undertaking the assessment but their co-operation is essential.

**The Child Protection Plan**

All children/young people whose names are on the Child Protection Register must have an inter-agency Child Protection Plan and must be seen by the Case Co-ordinator, at least, within 4 weekly intervals and more regularly as determined by the child protection plan.

The multi-disciplinary assessment will lead to a written plan of intervention agreed between participating agencies and shared with parents and, if appropriate, the child/young person. The plan should include – areas of need; planned action for period under review; desired outcomes; persons responsible; and timescales for completion. The aim of the plan is to:

* Safeguard the child/young person from further harm;
* Promote their health and development;
* Help the parents achieve these objectives.

The Child Protection Plan should:

* Describe the needs of the child/young person, giving particular attention to his safety and well being;
* Identify the intended outcome for the child/young person;
* Identify the contribution to be made by parents and the help they need in order to safeguard the child/young person;
* Identify the means by which this help will be provided;
* Identify the part to be played by each professional in providing this help and in monitoring the child/young person's safety;
* Identify possible risks associated with the planned action and how these will be managed;
* Establish the pattern of contact with the family and visits to the child/young person. The child/young person should be spoken to by themselves where they are of sufficient age and understanding;
* Set dates on which progress will be reviewed.

Other areas that should be identified in the plan are dependent upon the individual needs of the child/young person. These may include:

* Where the child/young person should live if not at home;
* Recommendations with regard to contact between the child and parents if not living at home;
* The child/young person's contact with the alleged abusers, where these are family members;
* What needs to change in order for the child/young person to be considered safe within the family and how these changes will be facilitated.

If the abuser is in prison or living away from home the plan should state what will happen if they wish to return home.

Once the plan has been drawn up it will be the responsibility of individual agencies to implement the parts of the Plan relating to them and to communicate with the Case Co-ordinator and others as necessary. The Case Co-ordinator is responsible for co-ordinating the contributions of different agencies. The plan should not be changed without prior consultation with the Core Group members. Any changes should be confirmed in writing.

The parents and child/young person (dependent on age) should be invited to comment on the Child Protection Plan, and be afforded the opportunity to sign the plan and be given a copy of the document. The Case Co-ordinator should ensure that the family understand the plan and are prepared to work within it.

All professionals working with children and/or families in accordance with a Child Protection Plan must be alert to indications that the plan may be failing to protect the child/young person. These include:

* Parents denying, or otherwise preventing, access to the child/young person;
* Parents not co-operating in carrying out the Child Protection Plan;
* Any agency failing to deliver its contribution to implementing the plan;
* Medical monitoring being frustrated and its purposes not being achieved;
* Medical monitoring raising a concern that the child/young person may be neglected or ill-treated;
* Any other information, professional observation or reported incident, which indicates that the level of risk of significant harm has become or remains unacceptable.

 **22.** **Child Protection Review Case Conference**

The first Review Child Protection Case Conference should be convened within three months of the initial Case Conference and thereafter at a minimum of six monthly intervals to ensure that the Child Protection Plan continues to provide protection for the child/young person.

The inter-agency Child Protection Plan requires regular review to ensure that it continues to provide protection for the child/young person, that their needs are being met and continuing safety can be achieved.

Any professional may request an early review Case Conference where they have cause for concern about a registered child/young person.

The review Case Conferences will be conducted in the same way as at the Initial Child Protection Case Conference:

* Membership of the Case Conference;
* Involvement of the parents and/or child/young person;
* Exclusion of parent;
* Attendance of friend or supporter;
* Conference format;
* Responsibilities of the Chairperson;
* Reports for the Case Conference;
* Conference minutes;
* Appeals against Case Conference decisions.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the Child Protection Review Case Conference is to:

* Ensure that the child/young person continues to be adequately safeguarded;
* Identify any significant or relevant changes in the child/young person's family since the previous Case Conference;
* Review the safety, health and development of the child/young person against the outcomes of the Child Protection Plan;
* Examine the current level of risk to the child/young person with reference to any assessments undertaken by agencies individually or collectively;
* Decide as to whether continued registration is necessary; and
* Consider whether a Child Protection Plan is still required, or should be changed.

**Timing of the Review Child Protection Case Conference**

The Chairperson of the Case Conference has discretion to delay a Review Case Conference in cases where the decision about the need for a Child Protection Plan and further risk to the child/young person may be affected by the outcome of imminent court proceedings.

Review Case Conferences should not be cancelled except in exceptional circumstances. The Case Co-ordinator must inform the Chair of the Case Conference if exceptional circumstances arise and cancellation needs to be considered. It is the Chairperson's decision whether the Case Conference is cancelled or delayed and the reasons recorded in the child/young person's case file and the minutes of any reconvened Case Conference.

All agencies have a responsibility to ensure that representatives attend review Case Conferences in order to avoid the need for postponement because a quorum is not available.

**Criteria for Convening an Unscheduled Review Case Conference**

Consideration should be given to convening an unscheduled review Case Conference in the following circumstances if:

* There is a significant deterioration in a child/young person's or family's circumstances;
* There is a departure from the Child Protection Plan by any agency;
* It is not possible to provide the level of support and/or monitoring required by the Child Protection Plan;
* A child/young person has been reported missing to a statutory agency;
* There is a breakdown in partnership and co-operation by parents;
* A known abuser joins, or is in regular contact with the family;
* Consideration is being given to a ‘Looked After Child’ returning home;
* The child's and family's circumstances have improved significantly and de-registration should be considered.

**Reports for a Review Case Conference**

Members of the Core Group must provide written reports for the Review Child Protection Case Conference. These should address the progress made in the implementation of the Child Protection Plan, on-going concern for the child/young person, the degree of continuing risk to the child/young person and recommendations for future work.

**Children Looked After by the Trust**

Separate "Looked After Child" review and child protection reviews must be held for children looked after whose names are also on the Child Protection Register. This is required in order to meet the statutory requirements under the Review of Children's Case Regulations (NI) 1996, and also to ensure that the different issues relevant to each process are fully considered. **Please note the revised guidance Protecting Looked After Children (which has not been signed off by the DHSSPS) will need to be incorporated into this section.**

**They may be held consecutively, however, they must be minuted separately.**

**Change in Registration Category**

A review Case Conference may consider that a change or addition, to the registration category is necessary to reflect changing assessment and concerns.

**De-registration**

At every Review Case Conference the criteria for de-registration should be considered. These are the:

* Pathway assessment has shown that a Child Protection Plan is not necessary;
* Child/young person remains at home but the risk of significant harm has been reduced significantly;
* Child/young person has been placed away from home and is no longer considered to be at risk;
* Child/young person no longer has contact with the abusing person;
* Child/young person has reached 18 years of age;
* Child/young person has married;
* Child/young person has died;
* Child/young person has moved to another area and that HSC Trust, or local authority, has accepted responsibility for the child/young person;
* Child/young person has moved permanently from the UK.

A child/young person's name should not be removed from the Child Protection Register by a Review Case Conference unless a quorum is present and a majority of members of the Case Conference agree with this decision. This quorum may be breached if, under exceptional circumstances, an agency representative is unable to attend but has submitted a written report with a view on deregistration.

The child/young person and parents should be notified in writing of the decision and provided with a copy of the minutes, where applicable.

All those informed of the decision to place the child/young person's name on the Child Protection Register should be notified of the removal of his name from the Register and amend their records accordingly.

De-registration should not lead to the automatic withdrawal of support services. The child/young person may still be assessed as a 'child in need' under Article 17 of the Children Order. Any future support required by the child/young person and family should be discussed at the Review Child Protection Case Conference and recorded in the minutes. Any family support plan agreed should be reviewed within 3 months. All agencies and professionals should accept their continuing responsibility for supporting a child/young person and the family once the child protection procedures cease to apply. The continuing provision of services may still require inter-agency collaboration.

**Case Closure**

Moving out of the child protection process does not indicate case closure. A case must not be closed at point of de-registration without discussion with the referrer, where appropriate, and any other agency that is offering support to a child/young person.

The decision to close the case must be made by a social work manager (APSW/PSW grade or above).

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| **Further Information**[**Empowering Families: Regional Guidance on the Provision of Family Group Conferences in HSC Trusts Children and Young People Services**](http://www.fgcni.org/cmsfiles/FGC-Empowering-Families-2013.pdf) |

**End.**