

**Western Area  
Child Protection Committee**

**INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR PROFESSIONALS ON CHILD  
PROTECTION**

**WACPC  
1998**

## **A. THE AIMS OF CO-OPERATING TO PROTECT CHILDREN**

In 1996 the Department of Health and Social Services (NI) published a revised version of Co-Operating to Protect Children, Volume 6 in the Children (NI) Order Guidance & Regulations Series. The DHSS guidance forms the basis for the Western Area Child Protection Committee's Child Protection Policy and Procedures. The ultimate aim is to improve the standard of service to children who either have suffered significant harm or are likely to suffer significant harm. This aim is to be met through an improvement in:-

1. the working partnership with parents by open and honest communication and by providing information that will help parents make informed choices;
2. multi-disciplinary practice and communication;
3. investigative skills jointly of Police and Social Work personnel;
4. the co-ordination of Child Protection Plans which form a basis for practice and are subject to review and revision;
5. the potential of all professionals for child abuse detection.

Essentially the success of the WACPC's policy in relation to child protection rests with the professionals involved by ensuring that the practice carried out promotes the well-being and safety of children within our society.

## **B. MAJOR CHANGES SUMMARISED**

### **1. DETECTION**

Under Protocol Arrangements for Joint Investigations the Police and Social Services must inform one another of all alleged, suspected or actual cases of child abuse coming to their attention and a decision will be taken with regard to conducting either a joint or single agency investigation.

Training is currently provided for social workers and police officers to facilitate their joint working with child victims. The aim is to reduce the number of times a child is interviewed and to improve the investigation process.

### **2. CHILD PROTECTION REFERRAL**

All professionals who suspect abuse are, under their various codes of professional practice, required to make their concerns known to Social Services. **A standard referral procedure is in place to assist this process.** Following referral there will usually be a Strategy Discussion which can either be in the form of a meeting or through telephone contact with involved

participants to develop a plan on how to proceed with the investigation. At all times the focus must remain child-centred.

### **3. CASE CONFERENCES**

An Initial Case Conference must be convened within 15 working days of referral, the purpose of which is to share information, assess the level of risk, decide on registration and co-ordinate future intervention.

#### **(a) Professional Participation**

- (i) It is the responsibility of those invited to Case Conferences either to attend in person or contribute through a representative.
- (ii) All professionals attending Case Conferences should be adequately prepared. This will normally entail the provision of written reports detailing the professional's involvement with the child and family.
- (iii) It is good practice for professionals to discuss their contribution prior to the Case Conference with the child's parents/carers. Whenever possible, reports shared should be shown to the parents/carers in advance of the conference. Where appropriate, information should also be shared with the child.
- (iv) Professionals should be mindful of the fact that, unless otherwise indicated, reports will be shared with parents and children if of sufficient age and understanding. Consideration must therefore be given to the nature of the information shared in the Case Conference and any information which cannot be shared with the family should be brought to the attention of the Chairperson prior to the Conference.

#### **(b) Parental Participation**

Parents receive an information booklet which explains the WACPC's Child Protection Policy and Procedures particularly Child Protection Investigations, Child Protection Case Conferences and the Child Protection Register.

Parents are invited to attend Case Conferences and may do so with a friend. Parents are invited to attend the whole, or if appropriate, part of the Case Conference. They may also contribute in writing using the standard form which is included in the information booklet.

At all stages of the investigation parents will be given every opportunity to comment. They will also receive in writing the decisions of the Case Conference with details of the Child Protection Plan where relevant.

#### **(c) Participation of Children**

Children of sufficient understanding should also be encouraged to attend part or all of the Conference and, like their parents, have the right to:

- (i) be consulted and involved;
- (ii) express their wishes;
- (iii) participate in the planning process; and
- (iv) receive written confirmation of decision.

An Information Booklet/Child Protection Guide which outlines the child protection process is available for use by children.

**(d) Registration**

The following are the categories for Registration:

Neglect  
Physical Abuse  
Sexual Abuse  
Emotional Abuse

?? Page 15 of the WACPC's Child Protection Policy and Procedures Handbook defines each of the above categories.

**(e) Child Protection Plan**

If a Case Conference decides that a child's name should be placed on the Child Protection Register, it is then required to formulate a Child Protection Plan. This plan is the action which the Conference feels that agencies directly involved with the family need to take in order to ensure the child's continued protection and well-being.

Those in attendance need to think about the following areas when formulating a Child Protection Plan:

- (i) being specific about preferred visiting patterns;
- (ii) being specific about who will be visiting and with whom;
- (iii) being specific about the purpose of visiting; and
- (iv) being imaginative in the use of existing resources.

**(f) Core Group**

Those working from the various agencies carrying out tasks agreed in the Child Protection Plan are known as the 'Core Group. In general a Core Group should communicate on a regular basis to exchange information about a family's progress and ensure the safety and well-being of the child. In the first few months of registration, the work of the Core Group may be intensive because of the necessity to carry out

a **Comprehensive Assessment**, the purpose of which is to acquire a full understanding of the child and his/her family in order to provide a sound basis for decisions about future actions. There may be occasions when the Core Group needs to meet to discuss particular issues of immediate concern to one or more of its members which arise in the course of their work with a family.

**(g) Case Co-Ordinator**

The role of the Co-Ordinator is to provide a central channel for all information and liaison regarding a child/children. The responsibilities of the Case Co-Ordinator, who is always a Social Worker, include:

1. the agency's professional management of the case;
2. acting as a link and a channel for communication and co-ordinating the contribution of other agencies to the assessment, planning and review of the case; and
3. ensuring that a Comprehensive Assessment is completed.

**(h) Review Case Conferences**

The circumstances of children whose names are placed on the Trust's Child Protection Register require to be looked at by the various professionals involved with the child and his/her family. The Assessment Review Case Conference should take place three months after the Initial Case Conference and thereafter Review Case Conferences should take place at least every six months with a reassessment being carried out into the need for ongoing registration.

**(i) Minutes**

Every effort will be made to have Minutes circulated within 14 calendar days of the Case Conference to all professionals invited to the Case Conference.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

If you would like additional information, please feel free to contact the Family & Child Care Manager in your area;

Programme Manager,  
Riverview House  
Abercorn Road  
Londonderry.  
Tel: 01504 266111

Community Services Manager,  
Community Services Department,  
Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospital,  
Omagh.  
Tel: 01662 255033

Community Services Manager,  
Community Services Department,  
2 Coleshill Road,  
Enniskillen.  
Tel: 01365 344000