

Spotlight on...

Unborn Baby Safeguarding Protocol



This protocol is for all professionals that may come into contact with families with unborn/new born babies. The focus of this protocol is the importance of the early assessment of vulnerable families where risks have been identified. The protocol offers clear guidance on processes between health agencies, children's social care and other agencies that may be working with the mother, father and their family on the planning/assessment and actions required to safeguard the unborn/new born.

The protocol draws on learning from Serious Case Reviews both locally and nationally. The following updates have been made:

There is a strengthened section on concealed pregnancy requiring referral to Children's Social Care for assessment if pregnancy is concealed until the third trimester or delivery.

Babies are particularly vulnerable to abuse. An in depth assessment undertaken in the antenatal period can significantly reduce this risk and safeguards can be put in place to prevent harm. There is a useful new list of indicators relating to associated risks and where they would sit in the tiers of need. These are aligned with our thresholds documents making it clearer when a referral is required to MASH and what outcome a professional should expect from this. It also outlines the different outcomes you might receive in response to this referral (e.g. early help/S47 etc.) It also covers when a re-referral is required.

The section on Pre-Birth Multi- Agency Plans has been strengthened with much clearer timescales stated for completing certain processes; who this plan should be shared with and when.

The protocol includes a list of different professionals roles in safeguarding unborn/newborn babies to help newer colleagues understand who may be involved and why. Midwives have a significant role in identifying risk factors which may affect the unborn/new born baby. The relationship they foster with the pregnant woman and potentially the father provides an opportunity to observe attitudes towards the developing baby and identify potential problems during pregnancy/birth and the early days postnatally.

The protocol reminds all professionals that hospitals are not secure settings and so, whilst observation can be arranged, there is no guaranteed way to stop a mother leaving a unit. It also outlines when Police Protection Arrangements should be considered.

There is a useful section on managing emotionally charged situations

All professional involved with unborn and newborn infants including health professionals, Social Workers, Early Years staff and police are required to have read and embedded the protocol into their practice. Practitioners should be able to evidence to their managers that they have understood how the protocol guides their practice and what their role is in identifying risk.

Questions for practitioners to ask themselves:

- How do I go about assessing all the risk factors mentioned in this protocol?
- How do I analyse how these risks may affect the unborn/new born baby?