

A child protection enquiry occurs when there is cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm.

### What is significant harm and how is it determined?

'Harm is the "ill treatment or the impairment of the health or development of the child". It is determined "significant" by "comparing a child's health and development with what might be reasonably expected of a similar child".

Concerns regarding significant harm can be raised following a referral or at any other point in time. This may occur as the outcome of assessments or following new information being received.

### Why is it important?

Child Protection enquiries allow the local authority to investigate concerns for a child. All professionals must consider what steps need to be taken to ensure the child/ren's immediate and long-term safety. Within this process it is possible for professionals to share information without the consent of families, however this must be achieved as soon as it is safe to do so.

### How do we do it?

**Strategy discussion:** In Working Together 2018 - "Local authority children's social care should convene a strategy discussion to determine the child's welfare and plan rapid future action if there is reasonable cause to suspect the child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm" p38.

Child Protection enquiries begin with a Strategy discussion involving the **multi-agency group** who are working with a child and family. They may take the form of a meeting or a conference call and one or more discussion may take place. The discussion provides a forum for professionals to share information to determine the welfare of the child/ren. If it is felt further enquiries are required the meeting will decide upon actions to be taken to support the child's immediate safety, what information should be shared with the family and how the investigation should be conducted. This will create the plan for the enquiry which is distributed amongst the network alongside minutes within a 24 hours timeframe

**Strategy Meeting attendance:** A local authority social worker, health practitioners and a police representative should, as a minimum, be involved in the strategy discussion. Other relevant practitioners will depend on the nature of the individual care but may include:

- The practitioner or agency which made the referral
- The child's school or nursery
- Any health or care services the child or family members are receiving.

All attendees should be sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of their organisations and agencies.

**Enquiries:** Enquiries are led by Children's Social Care with the support of other agencies. The following actions may be undertaken as a part of enquiries:

- The child will be seen alone to ascertain their views, wishes and feelings
- When a joint enquiry with the police has been agreed an 'Achieving Best Evidence' interview may be conducted as part of any criminal investigation. In exceptional cases, the police can interview a child without informing his or her parents. This is likely where a child does not yet wish his or her parents to know about the allegations, or there is a risk that the parents will threaten the child or otherwise coerce the child into silence.
- A medical assessment of the child by a Child Paediatrician should always be considered when there is a suspicion of, or a disclosure of, child abuse and/or neglect involving injury, suspected sexual abuse or serious neglect. This is often referred to as a Child Protection medical or Section 47 medical.



One Minute Guide  
**Child Protection Enquiries under Section 47,  
Children Act 1989**



- An interview with parents/carers to discuss the concerns. Where this involves a criminal investigation this should be undertaken by the Police.
- The need to talk about at conclusion of enquiry.

**For more information:**

[Working Together to Safeguard Children - A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, 2018](#)