

Core Groups – Information for Professionals

This information sheet is also available in Welsh.

Introduction

A Core Group is a group of all relevant practitioners and family members who work together to create, implement and review a Care and Support Protection plan. Each member of the core group has a responsibility for monitoring the plan to make sure it meets the needs of the child. When core groups work well they can bring about great changes for children and their families.

Why am I a member of the Core Group?

Significant harm is when something is happening to you that is preventing you from living your life to the full and could present serious risks to your health and development.

My work is with the adults in the family, who do I need to be in a Core Group?

Your main focus of work may be with the adults in the family – as in the case of adult mental health, substance misuse, probation and domestic violence workers, for example. You will have an important role in the assessment of parental capacity and parental support needs. You will also have relevant information and a role in working with the family that could be crucial to the protection of the child.

When and where will the Core Group meet?

A date, time and venue for the first core group meeting will have been agreed at the end of the initial conference. Make sure you share your contact details with other core group members at the outset of the first core group meeting.

Child Protection procedures state that the core group should first meet within 10 working days of the initial case conference. Dates should be set for future meetings and the core group should continue to meet at least monthly but at no more than 6 weekly intervals up to the date of the first review conference.

Core groups should be held in premises that are comfortable, accessible to all and that allow for privacy.

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What is the first thing I need to do as a Core Group member?

Note the date of the first review conference as the core group will need to report back on progress with the care and support protection plan on that date.

Inform your Line Manager that you are now a core group member and that priority will need to be given to attending core group meetings.

What will happen at the first Core Group meeting?

- By the first core group meeting you should have received a copy of the initial conference recommendations, which should include the outline care and support protection plan. You need to have read these.
- At the first core group meeting you need to introduce yourself and be clear about your professional role and responsibilities, what you do and what your role is likely to be with the child and family.
- At the first core group the outline protection plan must be developed into a detailed care and support protection plan.
- The core group needs to be chaired effectively and this can be done by any professional member of the core group. Within the core group, a chair and minute taker will be identified. The minute taker must be someone other than the person chairing the meeting.
- The primary aim of the first core group is to develop the outline care and support protection plan into a detailed protection plan and ensure that all members of the core group have a clear sense of purpose and tasks. In addition to carrying out the core assessment and sharing information, there also needs to be a focus on desired outcomes and the actions needed to achieve these.
- By the end of the first meeting you should be clear about the tasks you are responsible for. All of the core group members, especially the family, should also be clear about your tasks and theirs.
- A copy of the detailed care and support protection plan should be recorded and distributed to all core group members. A copy must be sent to the chair of the conference.

What other responsibilities do I have as a member of the Core Group?

Attendance at core groups is crucial. If you cannot attend you should send a representative from your agency or send a written report. You should let the social worker know if you cannot attend and ensure you get the date of the next meeting. For child protection planning to work it is vital that all core group members participate fully and demonstrate their commitment to the protection of the child. If there is an occasion when the social worker cannot attend but other Yes, if you would like to. core group members can, the meeting should go ahead with the of practice leader chairing the meeting. Meetings should only be cancelled as a last resort.

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Participation – your contribution may be in the form of assessment, including completing the core assessment. You may also provide information or work directly with the child and family. You will also have an active role to play in the care and support protection plan.

Information Sharing – your own agency will have rules about confidentiality of information and you will be familiar with working within the boundaries of those rules.

Care and Support Protection Plan – all core group members are responsible for the child protection plan. The plan should include desired outcomes for the child and actions needed to achieve those outcomes. You must ensure that the plan is SMART, i.e.

Specific – clear in its objectives

Measurable – clear, measurable targets

Achievable – tasks that family members and other can achieve

Realistic – recognising that change may be gradual

Timely – has to be in timescale for the child

In reviewing progress on the care and protection plan core group members should ensure they are not just measuring work done (activity) but are also measuring outcomes (results) for the child.

You should refer to the core group protocol for further information about your responsibilities as a core group member.

Signs of Safety?

Denbighshire's Child Protection Conferences takes on a Signs of Safety approach. The heart of the Signs of Safety process is a risk assessment and case planning format that is meaningful for professionals as well as the parents and children. One of the greatest challenges in child protection practice is that assessment and planning processes privilege the professional voice and erase the perspectives of children, parents and other family members.

The Signs of Safety risk assessment process integrates professional knowledge with local family and cultural knowledge, and balances a rigorous exploration of danger/harm alongside indicators of strengths and safety. The Signs of Safety format offers a simple yet rigorous assessment format that the practitioner can use to elicit, in common language, the professional's and family members' views regarding concerns or dangers, existing strengths, safety and envisioned safety. The Signs of Safety framework integrates risk assessment with case planning and risk management by incorporating a future focus within the assessment. This format deepens and balances the usual problem saturation of most risk assessments.

The following key areas contribute to the summary and analysis of risk when using the signs of safety:-

1. Key dangers/harm factors
2. Protective factors/strength

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3. Grey Area

4. Complicating factors.

You will then use these to contribute to the Care and Support Protection Plan/Recommendations.

What do I have to do in preparation for a review conference?

Each core group member has to write a report for the review conference covering progress made in their area of involvement. A recommendation about continuing registration needs to be made by core group members, not only by the social worker.

How can I ensure the child and family are involved?

Involvement is about more than just attending the core group. As a core group member you will have contact with the child and possibly their family. You will have a responsibility to explain to family members your role in the core group and to consult them about their views. Research says that the child protection planning works best when we work in partnership with children and families. This means seeking their views, giving feedback and explaining the process.

You should consider whether the child should attend the core group and if not, how their wishes and feelings can be represented – for example, a letter from them or a report or advocate on their behalf. Written feedback can also be given to children and is often appreciated by them.

It is more likely that parents, carers, children and young people will stay involved if they feel they are being listened to and that their views are given respect, even if it is not always possible to agree.

What do I do if I am concerned that the care and support protection plan is not working and the child is at increasing risk of harm?

You should discuss this directly with the social worker and/or your line manager and evidence your concern. Aim to reach agreement on the next steps to address your concern.

If you cannot reach agreement about a way forward then you need to involve your line managers and contact the conference chair. Any core group member can request that a conference be reconvened if they think the care and support protection plan is not working.

Where can I go for more information?

For further guidance please refer to the All Wales Child Protection Procedures.

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Complaints

If you want to make a suggestion, compliment or complaint about any of the services provided by Education & Children's Services you can contact the Complaints Officer in any of the following ways:-

Freephone number: 0800 032 1099

Email: ssdcomments@denbighshire.gov.uk

Write to:- The Complaints Officer, Russell House, Churton Road, Rhyl, Denbighshire, LL18 3DP

Web: www.denbighshire.gov.uk/yourvoice

This Information Sheet can be made available in alternative formats; large braille, audit tape or disk.