

**For leaflet “Social Assessment for Child Protection and
Multi-disciplinary Case Conference
for the Protection of Child with Suspected Maltreatment
Notes to Parents”**

Further information on Multi-disciplinary Case Conference is as follows.

Members of the conference

The multi-disciplinary case conference is usually convened by a social worker. Members attending the conference include professionals who take part in the investigation/assessment of the case, who have knowledge on the child and his/her family or who may follow up on the case in future, namely:

- social workers
- medical staff
- school personnel
- police officers
- clinical psychologists
- professionals currently providing services to the child concerned or his/her family
- other professionals who are required to provide information or may handle the case in future

How is the conference conducted

Professionals attending the conference usually start by reporting to other members the information obtained from the investigation/assessment and their knowledge of the family. The following items are then discussed at the conference:

- consider the nature of incident from the perspective of protecting child's safety
- assess the current/future risk level of maltreatment to the child(ren) concerned as well as other children in the family and their needs
- conclude the category of case (whether it is a child protection case)
- based on the outcome of the above discussions, make recommendation and arrangement in relation to the follow-up plan of the child concerned and his/her family to protect the safety of the child or safeguard his/her best interests, including child care arrangement and whether statutory action is

needed for the child

- determine the unit and social worker being responsible for following up the case, delineate the roles and responsibilities of other professionals in the implementation of the follow-up plan, and form a core group to follow up on the case as appropriate and decide membership of the core group
- determine whether to register the information of the child concerned and/or his/her sibling(s) in Child Protection Registry
- if criminal offence may have been committed, to discuss the need to report the incident to the Police if it has not been done so before the conference. Please note that the focus of the conference is to safeguard the interests of the child and his/her family. The decision of the conference has no binding effect on the decision of the police on whether or not to prosecute the alleged perpetrator(s)

What are included in the Follow-up Plan

The main objectives of the follow-up plan are to reduce or eradicate the risk of harm to the child and to enhance the family's functions and their capability in childcare and parenting so that they can assume full responsibility in protecting the safety of the child.

Depending on the situation and needs of the child being harmed/maltreated and his/her family, the follow-up plan may include:

- counselling service for the child and his/her family
- clinical psychological and/or medical assessment and treatment for the child and his/her family
- day or residential child care service for the child and/or his/her sibling(s) in order to protect their safety or provide parents with temporary relief from care or supervision of their child(ren)
- application to the Court for an order for the care and/or supervision of the child and/or his/her sibling(s) in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance, Cap 213
- special services for family member(s) on coping with emotional problems, stress, gambling, alcoholism, drug abuse, etc.
- parent education or parent-child activities or courses
- learning support and extra-curricular activities for the child
- financial or employment assistance for the family
- refuge centre, temporary residential service or respite care service, etc. for

- other family members at risk
- other community support services

In the course of following up the case, the social worker will make contact with the child and his/her family and keep contact with related professionals as and when necessary so as to review the situation of the child and his/her family regularly and provide appropriate assistance. If residential child care service is arranged, the social worker will discuss arrangements for visits, going out, home leave, etc. with the parents and the child, and assist the family in handling their problems of care and parenting so that the child can re-unite with the family as early as possible.

If a child is suspected to have been maltreated, can the parents or the child attend the conference

The conference consists of two parts. The first part is for discussion among members. The second part is for the members to discuss with parents. Under normal circumstances, parents of the child suspected to have been maltreated will be invited to attend the second part of the conference. In some cases, the child may also be invited if he/she would benefit from attending the conference.

The purposes of inviting the parents and/or the child to attend the conference are to discuss with them the issues which the conference concerns. Apart from informing them of the views/recommendations/decisions of the conference, their opinions will also be considered, especially on the follow-up plan recommended in the conference, in order to enhance the parents' understanding of the way in co-operating with the professionals in the implementation of the follow-up plan.

However, parent(s) may not be invited if his/her/their attendance is considered inappropriate by members (e.g. his/her/their presence may seriously prejudice the best interests of the child or interfere with the process of the conference, or the health, mental and emotional conditions will make him/her/them unable to join the discussion effectively).

If the parents or the child are not attending the conference, they may, before the conference, express their views on the incident and follow-up plan to the assessing worker or other members for their consideration at the conference. The Chairperson or assessing worker (together with certain members as needed) will explain to parents or the child, after the conference, the decisions and

recommendations made at the conference. The parents may still express their views on the recommendations. The assessing worker will pass their views to other members, if necessary.

Can parents bring their relatives or other people along to the conference

Subject to the consent of members of the conference, significant family members and relatives who have sound knowledge of the child and will contribute to the formulation or implementation of the follow-up plan can also be invited as necessary. However, the parents who cannot attend the conference need not send a representative to attend because that individual cannot participate in the discussions or make decisions on behalf of the parents. After the conference, the Chairperson or assessing worker (together with certain members as needed) will explain to the parents the decisions and recommendations made at the conference.

How can parents participate in the conference

Before the conference, the Chairperson or the social worker conducting social assessment for child protection will brief the parents on the objectives, membership and proceedings of the conference, etc. During the conference, the parents may supplement the background information of the family, participate in discussions as well as give views on the risk and need assessment, formulation and/ implementation of the follow-up plan. Parents may also seek clarification from the Chairperson or members on the issues discussed at the conference.

What should parents do after the conference

The conference will determine the social worker of which unit and what professionals shall follow up on the case in future. Parents are advised to keep contact with the key worker and other professionals following up the cases, and to ensure the safety of the child and the welfare of the family as far as possible. Co-operation and active participation of the parents are very important.

If parents disagree with the decision of the conference

Parents attending the conference may express their views at the conference. However, regardless of whether the parents have attended the conference or not,

they may express their views to the Chairperson and/or the responsible social worker after the conference, if necessary.

If parents disagree to the nature of incident as determined by the conference, the Chairperson or the assessing worker will explain to the parents the reasons for the decision. We hope that parents can understand that the nature of incident is determined from the perspective of safeguarding the child's physical and psychological safety based on the professional advice given by members of the conference. Although parents' views on and interpretation of the nature of incident may be slightly different from those of members, what matters most is for a consensus to be reached on the problems concerned in order to alleviate these problems in future by means of counselling or other support services.

If parents disagree to certain arrangement(s) of the follow-up plan as recommended by the conference which are related to the safety and/or care of the child, social worker of the Social Welfare Department or the Police may need to apply to the Court for a Care or Protection Order in respect of the child in accordance with Section 34(2) of the Protection of Children and Juveniles Ordinance, Cap 213. The parents may express their views at the hearing. The Court will then make a decision on relevant arrangements. Even if the parents disagree to the follow-up plan and lodge a complaint to the organisation concerned, the responsible social worker and related professionals will still carry out the follow-up plan recommended by the conference as far as practicable.

If the parents are dissatisfied with the handling of a particular member of the conference

Professionals responsible for handling the suspected child maltreatment case will try their best to explain to the parents the actions to be/have been taken and the reasons behind, hoping that the parents can understand and co-operate. Parents who are dissatisfied with the approaches taken by a particular member of the conference may lodge complaint with respective organisation of that member and the complaint will then be handled in accordance with its complaint mechanism.