**Pointers for Practice: Translating the Agenda into a Child-Centred Conference Process**

The child protection conference follows a standardised agenda.
The following describes ‘what works’ when following the agenda.

**Agenda item/task:**

**1.** **The purpose or reasons for the conference and the tasks of conference members**

**Process:**

It is important that family members are given every opportunity to participate actively in the conference. This is most likely to be achieved if:

* family members are in the room when practitioners enter, and they have some say as to where practitioners should sit
* the family understand the reasons for the conference before the event
* the tasks and purpose are outlined in plain English/Welsh and practitioners avoid the use of jargon and anagrams throughout.

Many practitioners are not familiar with conferences and may well be nervous and this should be recognised.

**2.** **Introductions, apologies, confidentiality, agency roles with the family**

**Process:**

Family members often feel overwhelmed. Research has found the sooner the family speak then the more likely they are to actively participate. Approaches such as beginning a conference with a genogram or ecomap, introduced by the social worker and family, can be helpful in engaging the family.

**3. Circulation of reports**

**Process:**

Disproportionate time has traditionally been spent on information-sharing. Best practice would be to circulate reports before the conference and/or have reports available for members to read immediately before the conference.

The family should be familiar with report contents before the conference, so they receive no unexpected information during the conference.

Rather than going through each report in detail practitioners should be prepared to provide a brief summary.

**4. Details of the events leading up to the initial child protection conference**

**Process:**

This should be relevant and proportionate.

**5.** **Information from the Section 47 enquiries and the assessment to date**

**Process:**

In many cases assessments of care and support protection needs will not have been completed. It is important, therefore, that information-shared is put into context – the three ‘whats’:

* what we know
* what we suspect
* what we still need to establish.

**6. Background information from all agencies, including past and present involvement**

**Process:**

Members should recognise the aim is to provide an overview of the family’s past and current history and engagement with services in order to inform decision-making. Thus, information should focus on:

* concerns – new and ongoing
* parenting strengths – drawing on past history and current parenting
* capacity to change – drawing on past history and current situation
* what works in terms of interventions – evidence-based and knowledge of past services and family response.

**7. A summary by the chair of all the main information provided to the conference**

**Process:**

It is important that the family and practitioners are not overwhelmed by the information shared.

The summary should focus on:

* past and present concerns
* family strengths
* parenting capacity and impact of any adult-orientated issues
* socio-economic factors impacting on parenting and the family.

**8. The views of children and family members**

**Process:**

If too much information has been shared and discussed by this stage the child and their family may well feel overwhelmed. This sense of being overwhelmed is more likely to occur if practitioners use jargon and marginalise the family from the discussions.

If the first part of the conference has focused on relevant information shared simply, the family are far more likely to understand what has been shared and are more able to comment.

It is important to establish before the conference the ways in which the child and family wish to express their views.

**9. An analysis of the implications of all the information shared for the child’s future safety, health and development: that is, whether the child is at continuing risk of harm**

**Process:**

It is important that this analysis is done in a manner that is easy to understand.

The conference participants need to know, drawing on the lived experience of the family:

* what are we worried about?
* what is working well?
* what needs to change?

Visual aids such as using a white board to record the responses to the questions have been found to be really helpful to the family.

**10. Consideration of the risks of harm if the child remains at home, and explicit recommendations for how the risks can be managed**

**Process:**

Drawing on the information shared and analysed, the chair should facilitate a discussion of risks, needs and strengths to each child in the family. The aim is for practitioners to consider:

* the information gathered
* the individual assessments of risk of harm
* come to an agreement about the level of risk to each child in the family.

The following questions are designed to facilitate this discussion:

* according to the professionals what aspects of the lived experience of the child and that of the parents are putting this child at risk of danger and/or significant harm?
* what are our shared concerns?
* are there additional concerns identified by individual practitioners?
* can we reach agreement?
* what aspects of the lived experience of the child and that of the parents are affecting the health and development of the child, but as yet are not causing or likely to cause significant harm?
* what aspects of this child’s lived experience have been identified by all or individual practitioners as positive and demonstrate family strengths?
* can we reach agreement on these?
* what factors current and historic are impacting on the family’s ability to provide a quality lived experience for the child?
* what do we still need to know?
* what does the family think about the analysis made by practitioners of their family situation and the risk of harm and needs of the child? Are they in agreement with practitioners? If not, why not?

**11. Consideration of the need for legal advice**

**Process:**

Any discussion about legal action should involve the local authority legal department.

**12. Decision whether to place the child’s name on the child protection register and the category of risk**

**Process:**

When making this decision and determining category it is important that all practitioners contribute to the decision-making process.

Stating the category for registration can come as a shock to families particularly if practitioners have not named the concerns specifically previously. It is important, therefore, that in discussions before and during the conference practitioners set out their concerns, for example, “we are concerned your child is being neglected because...”.

**13. Outline of care and support protection plan, if required**

**Process:**

This is an essential part of the conference process. In the past, very limited time has been spent on planning. Therefore, both family members and practitioners are left unclear as to what is expected of them and why.

Conference discussions should lead logically to the content of the plan with both family members and practitioners understanding the rationale for the outline care and support protection plan.

**14. Summary of conference actions**

**Process:**

The chair must ensure that practitioners and family members understand:

* the action to be taken and the rationale
* their expected contribution – both that of family and practitioners
* the desired outcomes.

Details of core group membership, first core group meeting and review.

Adapted from Horwath and Wirral Safeguarding Children Board Supporting Families Enhancing Futures.