



Child protection conference practice during COVID-19

Online survey questions (rapid consultation September–October 2020)



About the survey

Child protection conferences are a key stage of the child protection system in England and Wales, where families and professionals come together to identify and address serious concerns. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures, professionals and families have had to rapidly adapt to remote or socially distanced conferences. The Nuffield Family Justice Observatory commissioned research to investigate what these changes have meant in practice. These survey questions form part of the research process, which took place between September and October 2020.

The research findings and Welsh translation are available from: www.nuffieldfjo.org.uk/resource/child-protection-conference-practice-covid-19

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the individuals and agencies that provided support at the development stage and supported dissemination of the survey. In particular:

ATD Fourth World; Family Rights Group; Home-Start Sutton; National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO); National Independent Reviewing Officers Managers Partnership; New Beginnings; Dr Sam Clutton; Sally Ann Jenkins; Annie Raff; Karen Squillino; Pam Miller; Dan Jones; Andy Bilson; and Tracey Fox.

We would also like to thank everyone who took part in the survey and interviews who we are not able to identify for reasons of confidentiality.

About the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory

Nuffield Family Justice Observatory (Nuffield FJO) aims to support the best possible decisions for children by improving the use of data and research evidence in the family justice system in England and Wales. Covering both public and private law, Nuffield FJO provides accessible analysis and research for professionals working in the family courts.

Nuffield FJO was established by the Nuffield Foundation, an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. The Foundation funds research that informs social policy, primarily in education, welfare, and justice. It also funds student programmes for young people to develop skills and confidence in quantitative and scientific methods. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Ada Lovelace Institute and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics.

Nuffield FJO has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of Nuffield FJO or the Foundation.

December 2020.

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Survey questions

All professionals

From the start of the COVID-19 restrictions on 23 March:

1. Have you attended a child protection conference since lockdown restrictions have been in place (from 23 March 2020)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No¹
 - c. No because child protection conferences were suspended¹
2. Please say how many child protection conferences you have attended?
 - a. 0–3
 - b. 4–6
 - c. 7–10
 - d. 10–20
 - e. 20+
3. In which local authority did you attend a child protection conference, or in which have you attended most conferences?
We do not intend to identify any local authorities in the report. This is an optional question to allow us to understand the extent to which the survey has achieved national coverage.
4. Please indicate if child protection conferences were:
 - a. All held face-to-face
 - b. All held by video
 - c. All held by telephone
 - d. Mixture of some face-to-face and some by video/telephone
 - e. Hybrid – with some participants in the same room and other participants joining by video and/or telephone
 - f. Other – give details
5. In your experience, were the arrangements the same for:
 - a. Review child protection conferences
 - b. Core groups
6. If arrangements differed, please provide details.
7. Were/are there any advantages to you in terms of the way conferences were/are still being held? (YES/NO)
8. Please provide further details.

¹ If the respondent answered no they did not complete the rest of the survey. Respondents were given the opportunity to comment on any issues relevant to child protection conference practice during COVID-19.

9. In your opinion, were/are there any advantages for parents/family members in terms of the way conferences were/are still being held? (YES/NO)
10. Please provide further details.
11. Were/are there any disadvantages for you in terms of the way conferences were/are still being held? (YES/NO)
12. Please provide further details.
13. In your opinion, were/are there any disadvantages for parents/family members in terms of the way conferences were/are still being held? (YES/NO)
14. Please provide further details.
15. Were any specific arrangements made to support parents to be able to join conferences that were held by video or telephone? (YES/NO)
16. Please provide further details of these arrangements and views on how they operated.
17. How, if at all, were any language needs of parents and family members met?
18. How, if at all, were the needs of parents or family members with disabilities, including learning disabilities, met?
19. Were arrangements made for the child to be involved or for their views to be considered at the conference? (YES/NO)
20. *If YES:* What were these arrangements?
21. Did you notice any differences in attendance by professionals compared with child protection conferences before COVID-19 restrictions were in place? (YES/NO)
22. *If YES:* Please provide further details.
23. In your opinion have child protection plans been affected in any way during the COVID-19 period? (YES/NO)
24. *If YES:* Please provide further details.
25. On balance, do you think any new ways of operating are making conferences better or worse than before COVID-19 restrictions? Please explain your answer.
26. Please share any additional information or comments about your experience of child protection conferences during COVID-19.
27. Which of the following options best describes your ethnicity?
Categories and descriptions are based on the 2011 England Census. If you do not wish to disclose your ethnicity, please select 'Prefer not to say'.
28. Would you define yourself as having a disability?

Social workers and conference chairs

From the start of the COVID-19 restrictions on 23 March:

29. How many days in advance of the conference did professionals share reports with each other? *If you attended multiple conferences during this period please estimate an average.*
- 1 day
 - 2 days
 - 3–7 days
 - 8–13 days
 - 14+ days
 - Don't know
30. How many days in advance of the conference were reports shared with parents? *If you attended multiple conferences during this period please estimate an average.*
- 1 day
 - 2 days
 - 3–7 days
 - 8–13 days
 - 14+ days
 - Don't know
31. How were reports shared with parents? *Please select all that apply.*
- By post
 - By email
 - Delivered by hand
 - Other – give details
32. Were there arrangements in place for the chair to meet with the family prior to the conference to ensure that they are clear about the purpose and process of the conference and their role in it?
33. Were there arrangements to agree attendance and participation of family members, including exclusions where necessary?
34. In your opinion, has it been possible to maintain the same level of parental involvement in child protection conferences as before COVID-19 restrictions? (YES/NO)
35. *If NO:* Please describe any consequences of this, including any impact on decision-making and planning.
36. Were any arrangements made for childcare so that parent/carers could take part? (YES/NO)
37. *If YES:* Please provide further details of these arrangements.

38. Have there been circumstances at a child protection conference since COVID-19 lockdown restrictions have been in place where there was insufficient information to make decisions about a plan?
39. In general, have child protection plans been affected by availability of services during COVID-19?
40. Please provide further details about how child protection plans have been affected, if applicable.

Parents and family members

41. Since the start of the restrictions as a result of COVID-19 have you attended:
- a. An initial child protection conference (the first conference where it is decided whether a child should have a child protection plan)
 - b. A review child protection conference (a follow up conference to check progress on the child protection plan)
 - c. Both
 - d. Not sure what type of conference it was
42. Was this as a:
- a. Mother
 - b. Father
 - c. Grandparent
 - d. Other – give details
43. In which local authority did the conference take place?
44. Did you have the opportunity to speak with any of the following people to help you prepare for the conference? *Please select all that apply.*
- a. The social worker for the child/children
 - b. The child protection conference chair
 - c. Advocate
 - d. I didn't speak with anyone
 - e. Other – give details
45. Is there anything more that you would like to say about this?
46. Did you receive a copy of the social worker's report before attending the conference? (YES/NO)

Questions 47 and 48 for those who answered YES to receiving a copy of the report only

47. How was the report delivered to you?
- a. By hand
 - b. By post
 - c. By email
 - d. Other – give details

48. Did you have an opportunity to read through the report and/or discuss it with the social worker before the conference? (YES/NO)

49. How was the conference held?

- a. Face-to-face with everyone present in a room
- b. You and everyone else were linked by video
- c. Other participants were linked by video and you were on a telephone
- d. Everyone joined by telephone
- e. You were in a room with a social worker and all others joined by video/telephone
- f. You were in a room with the conference chair and all others joined by video/telephone
- g. Other – give details

50. Did you feel that you were able to understand what was happening at the conference? (YES/NO)

51. Were you given the opportunity to have your say? (YES/NO)

52. Was the social worker that attended the conference the same social worker that you had been working with before? (YES/NO)

53. Overall, did the way you took part in the conference (e.g. by video, telephone) affect how you were able to participate? (YES/NO)

54. Is there anything more that you would like to say about this?

55. Did the child or children the conference was about join the conference? (YES/NO)

56. Were the child(ren)'s views written down and shared by the conference chair? (YES/NO)

57. Was it made clear to you what would happen next? (YES/NO)

58. Is the child(ren) the subject of a child protection plan? (YES/NO)

Questions 59–61 apply only to those whose child is the subject of a plan. All other respondents directed to Q62.

59. Did you receive a copy of the child protection plan following the initial conference that confirmed what was supposed to happen to keep the child(ren) safe? (YES/NO)

60. Since the start of the child protection plan have you received any services related to the plan from your local authority (children's social care)? (YES/NO)

61. How have these services been delivered to or used by your family?

62. Please share any additional information or comments about your experience of child protection conferences during COVID-19.

63. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity.

Categories and descriptions are based on the 2011 England Census. If you do not wish to disclose your ethnicity, please select 'Prefer not to say'.

64. Would you define yourself as having a disability?