



# Core Group Practice Professionals Briefing

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### 1. Definition

The core group is the Interagency Forum for achieving the outcomes of a child protection plan. It is comprised of the professionals responsible for delivering particular aspects of the plan, and is attended by parents and children, where appropriate.

The membership of the core group is agreed at an initial child protection conference, although this may be amended to include all relevant individuals jointly responsible for delivering the child protection plan.

### 2. Effective Practice

The core group will hold its first meeting within 10 working days of the Initial Child Protection Conference. Its first task will be to develop a detailed child protection plan based on the outline child protection plan agreed at the Child Protection Conference.

The detailed plan should be outcome focused; this means that tasks and requirements that constitute the plan are clearly, unambiguously and quantifiably expressed, that the purpose of the task is apparent, the measurement of success or lack of progress, is transparent and the perceived difference it will make to the welfare of the children is described. It should;

- Clearly describe the identified developmental needs of the child and what services are required to meet these needs. It is important that the plan is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed);
- Smart actions developed as part of the plan will have a name professional, parent or child attached with a realistic time frame for this action to be completed.
- Include strategies that are realistic and decisions should be informed by an evaluation of how the family have previously engaged with similar services. This is not to say that where a family has failed to engage no further attempts to offer this form of support

should be made. It is however important that the Core Group is clear about how successful a particular approach or action may be and that Core Group members, including parents, understand how compliance will be monitored, what action will be taken if there is no compliance and the timescale for this;

- Set out when and in what situations the child will be seen by the lead Social Worker, both alone and with other family members or caregivers present;
- Clearly identify and set out roles and responsibilities of family members and professionals including those with routine contact with the child (for example, Health Visitors, GP's and Teachers) and the nature and frequency of contact by these professionals with the child and family members;
- Include a contingency plan to be followed if circumstances change significantly and require prompt action (including initiating family court proceedings to safeguard and promote the child's welfare);
- Lay down points at which progress will be reviewed and the means by which progress will be judged;
- Describe how the child or young person will participate in the implementation and review of the plan.

The detailed Child Protection Plan should be updated as necessary. If there is to be a fundamental change to the detailed plan, e.g. the child to be cared for by another relative, all Core Group members should be informed and the Team Manager should liaise with the Child Protection Co-ordinator (County) or Independent Reviewing Officer (City) to consider bringing forward the RCPC.

If the child and family's first language is not English, consideration should be given to providing the plan in their preferred language to aid understanding.

Most importantly, the expectations on parents/carers should be explicit and plainly described. This should also include the possible consequences of a failure to comply or opt out of the core group process.

The first core group must include the key professionals involved with the child and family or someone who can speak on their behalf. At the end of the first core group, arrangements for the time, venue and other details of the subsequent meetings should be agreed. At a minimum, this should be at least once every 6 weeks.

The use of written agreements with parents and carers could be considered; they can be a useful clarification of the expectations on the family, and equally on professionals. They may also be helpful in cases where there is a change of worker in ensuring that information on the expectations of the family are transferred between workers. It is good practice that parents have their own copy of any written agreement if one is developed.

If there are difficulties implementing any aspect of the Child Protection Plan, the Core Group has an important role in identifying this and agreeing what action needs to be taken. The social worker will lead on the assessment of what action to take in discussion with their Team Manager, but the Core Group should be fully involved in these discussions. The only exception to this would be when information comes to light that highlights a concern that is so serious it requires an immediate response, and even then Core Group members should be informed about the issue and action taken as soon as practicable.

If the difficulties impact on the safety of the child (ren) then line managers and supervisors must be informed. There may be a need for immediate legal action, a further Section 47 enquiry and/or for the date of the Review Child Protection Conference (RCPC) to be brought forward.

If the difficulties are arising from disagreement amongst workers or from failure by a Core Group member to carry out their responsibilities, then this can be addressed by;

- Discussion with the Core Group members;
- Using the escalation procedures.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate for there to be a professionals discussion without parents present in order to assist analysis of the circumstances – the reasons for this should always be recorded.

Core Group Meetings are to be chaired using Signs of Safety, this uses an appreciative enquiry line of questions and a strengths-based approach. Key questions and considerations are:

### **What's going well?**

Making use of follow-on questions to highlight and amplify strengths, resilience factors, skills, and abilities within each instance of success.

### **What do we continue to want to be better & what we are worried about?**

Inviting descriptions of what that improvement would look like, presence of something instead of the absence of something/a behaviour, what would tell the family this concern had lessened.

### **Complicating factors:**

Discussion relating to how we would know these factors were not having as great an impact or how the family are managing this factor in a way that works best for them.

### **Key Considerations:**

- Amplify and celebrate what is already working and working well.
- Amplify and strengthen family resilience factors.
- Create adapt a fluid plan based on description of preferred outcomes.
- Bring together the professional network around the family to contribute towards outcomes on the plan.
- Hold conversations about areas of concern and how those concerns would be lessened and what would life look like if they did.

### **Scaling:**

As part of this discussion the family and professionals should scale the current progress of the plan using the Scaling Question set in the Child Protection Conference, this should also be recorded as part of the meeting, this helps the family & network measure the progress or increase in risk. If there is a stark contrast in professional scores, the team manager will arrange a professionals meeting to ensure the purpose and understanding of scaling is clear and rational for scores are set out clearly.

### 3. Roles within The Core Group

**Chairperson:** The first or second core group meeting should be chaired by the line manager of the allocated social worker. Other meetings will usually be chaired by the social worker although this can be negotiated, if there is a specific reason for another worker taking on this role. Chairing core groups can be a sensitive and complex task; the additional pressures of ensuring participation, minuting the meeting, dealing with dissent as well as providing key information may lead to a pragmatic decision of another member of the core group of sufficient seniority and experience taking over Chairing responsibilities.

The role of chair is to respectfully challenge and probe the feedback given in the core group. The chair needs to be particularly sensitive about the possibility of disguised compliance or collusion in the working relationship between agencies and the family.

The chair has the additional responsibility of guarding against drift in the plan. Whilst it may be appropriate to revise the plan in the light of changes to the family circumstances or new information coming to light, it is important that the overall objectives of safeguarding children of the family remain the focus of the plan.

The social worker should see the child, alone when appropriate, in accordance with the plan. They should develop a therapeutic relationship with the child, regularly ascertain the child's wishes and feelings and keep the child up to date with the Child Protection Plan and any developments or changes. They should record in the child's social care record when the child was seen and who else, if anyone, was present at the time of each visit and also the reasons for deciding (or not) to see the child alone.

**Professionals' responsibility:** workers attending the core group should be able to speak honestly about their assessment of progress in implementing the plan. Whilst a written report is not a requirement of the core group, it is important that specific information regarding frequency of contact with the family is shared and accurately recorded.

In preparation for each Core Group meeting, each member should:

- Check the record from the previous meeting (or the ICPC decisions and recommendations if it is the first Core Group meeting);
- Review the contact from the worker's own agency with the child(ren) and family; *Child perspective should be considered and their lived experience and the impact of harm.*
- Make any notes necessary to inform the meeting;
- Talk through any reports or information with parents and child(ren) as appropriate;
- Consider any questions to ask or that need answering.

Workers should be clear in their contributions to the core group about what has been achieved against what was expected to have been achieved, whether there are any blocks to progress that the core group can collectively address, and whether any additional assistance is needed to achieve the aims of the plan.

Any members of the core group who is unable to attend should provide a written note of their activities and any observations they want shared at the meeting.

**Parents/carers responsibility:** the full engagement of parents or carers is the goal of most core groups. In cases where this is not appropriate, or one parent needs to be deliberately excluded, the issue should be debated at the initial child protection conference. Alternative plans can then be made for keeping the parent informed and still enabling them to contribute to the plan where appropriate.

In cases where a decision has been made to exclude a parent from a core group, this decision must be included as part of the core group minutes for future reference.

Where parents are engaged in the core group, specific circumstances with regard to travel, child care arrangements and any other factors should be taken into account when arranging the time and venue of meetings to facilitate their participation. If any member of the core group is aware that there will be information shared at the core group meeting, which the parent will find difficult or distressing, they should discuss this with the chair and consider possible ways of giving the parent prior notice of the issue to be raised in the core group meeting.

Professional forums can be daunting for parents and it may be necessary for the core group to identify the individual with the most positive working relationship with the family to motivate and encourage them to attend.

For parents whose first language is not English, the use of an interpreter should be considered. It is not appropriate to use a child of the family as an interpreter. Families with other specialist communication or other needs should also be offered the services of an interpreter or translator. Whilst Parents would not usually be expected to attend the core group with an advocate or supporter, this should be considered if it enables a parent to participate in the meeting and improves their contribution to the overall plan.

**Child's attendance:** The voice of the child must be present throughout Core Group Meetings and Child Protection Plans. Depending on the age/level of understanding the child, it may be appropriate for them to be given the opportunity to attend the core group. This should be discussed with the child and those who know them well, who are able to make an assessment of the appropriateness of this decision. The potential impact on family relationships should also be considered and the views of parents should be taken into consideration. Where a child does not attend the core group, it is primarily the allocated social worker's responsibility to ascertain their view about the situation at home and whether there has been an improvement in the level of safeguarding.

A child's attendance may be facilitated by adjusting the time to fit around school commitments and the use of an advocate. Children's participation is an important issue; their views can be fed into the core group through a variety of ways, which may be more constructive than actual attendance at the meeting. The role and purpose of the core group should be explained to any child of sufficient understanding, along with the reasons why their opinion is so important.

**Minuting and administration:** The responsibility for producing minutes/action notes rests with the chair of the core group.

- A copy of the Core Group Meeting and Child Protection Plan should be provided to the parents and child (if old enough), and the agencies or other professionals involved in the provision of services under the Plan within 10 working days.
- Where it becomes necessary to adjust the plan and services provided, any changes to the plan must be made in consultation with the parents and the child (where appropriate) and key professionals from other agencies.

- The minutes of the Core Group should be an accurate reflection of the discussions held when **'what is working well'** and **'what are we worried about'** is asked of Core Group Members.
- The minutes of core group are an important record of progress and are reviewed in preparation for the Review Child Protection Conference