

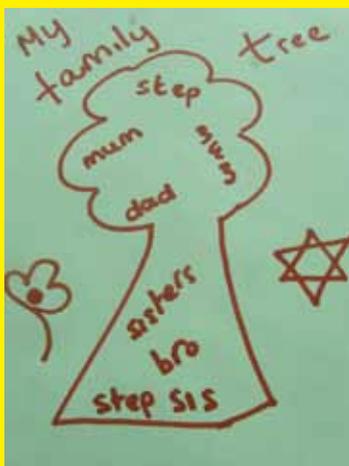
Joint Parent/Carer, Children and Young People's Sounding Board December 2011

What did we do, and why?

The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board and Social Care Team wanted to ask about the experiences of parents/carers, children and young people (CYP) who had attended Child Protection Conferences (CPCs).

The Engagement Team spoke with nine young people and 17 parents and carers who had experiences of CPCs from across Oxfordshire. Many of the families were involved in child protection plans, due to their children being at risk of neglect and harm. We asked them what their experiences were, and how we could help them to feel more involved and take ownership of their child protection plans.

We met with senior managers from the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board, Health and Social Care, to agree how we could learn from the CYP and parent/carer feedback.



Emerging themes: parents/carers

1. Language and literacy barriers

Many parents said they didn't understand the language used in CPCs – they wanted an advocate with them to translate for them and support them with preparing for the meetings. Some parents found they couldn't read the white board quickly enough, and the language was *“very sophisticated”*, they needed it *“in normal speak”*.

“When you are in that room with all these professionals talking about you, you feel so alone and judged, as if you are the worst parent in the world.”

“I don't understand the reports I'm not good with my reading and writing.” Parent

“I felt too scared to ask for any extra help at the conferences because I just wanted to get out of there.” Parent

“I didn't understand much of the meeting, you are in shock and I just felt numb.”
Parent

“It was hard for me to understand what was going on, I didn't understand the words they used.” YP

2. Fear

Parents often found aspects of the CPCs made them feel afraid and intimidated, as if they weren't really involved in the meeting – just 'done to'. Some didn't understand the content, and found the paperwork long and hard to read, but were afraid to say they found it difficult, in case it was construed as another reason why they couldn't look after their children. Some found the fear affected their ability to remember what had been said at the CPC. They felt afraid to say that they wanted help around other issues, in case this became a reason to *"take your kids off you altogether"*.

"I never spoke in the meetings, I was too frightened." YP

However, some people have had good experiences and ideas about how things could improve:

"My social worker was brilliant he used to prepare me for the meeting really well and check I understood what they were saying."

Parent

"I like my family conference meeting, we had cakes and they were really friendly and welcoming." YP

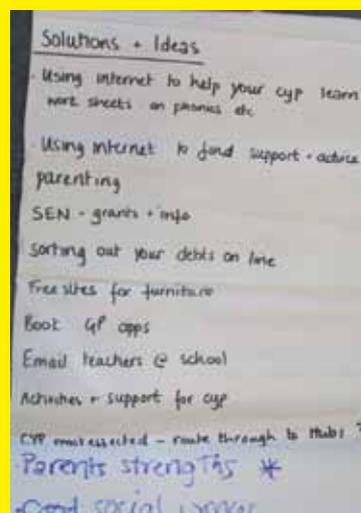
"It really helps if you are well prepared for the meeting and know who will be there and get to meet them informally first." Parent

"It would be good if you could record the meetings because then you could listen back to it and take time to understand what was said, I never took it all in, you could also play it back to your kids if they couldn't go." Parent

"It would be good if they were more young-people-friendly and had chill out / time out areas, and also if we could have a leaflet or something designed for young people that we can take away to try and understand it better" YP

"It would be good if they could be more interactive and could use more ICT – maybe us kids could type our own version of the meeting on a mini computer lap top." YP

"A family tree or some sort of timeline like on facebook would be good for young people because we could look back and see what has happened, real facts to help us understand." YP



3. Domestic abuse

Many of the families' problems with domestic abuse tended to arise at evenings and weekends – when alcohol was used and children were not in school.

There was a perceived need for a cultural shift towards greater recognition that men were also victims of domestic abuse, not just women.

“As a dad I always felt they took the mums' side and never mine, I had to really prove that I could look after my kids, whereas they kept giving their mum second chances. They are with me now but it took too long, and the kids got hurt.” Father

4. Rural isolation

Some parents living in rural areas said they felt relieved to come off a Child Protection Plan, but that they still needed *“some form of aftercare”*: covering how to rebuild relationships with their children, manage finances, find out what support is available to them with parenting or mentoring. They found it particularly difficult to get ongoing support due to living in rural areas.

Ideas for action

Before a CPC

1. **Offer to record the meeting** so parents can listen back on it and let their children listen to it, and/or their advocate.

2. **A diagram or photograph** showing the purpose of the meeting, who is there, and why.
3. **An ‘ice-breaking’ moment** before going into the conference, where everyone can shake hands, break down some barriers, feel welcome.
4. **Name places at the tables** which parents can read, to make things a bit less formal.

During a CPC

5. **Take time to interact with the parents** early on in the meeting to see what it is they feel they need help with and what could help them out (for example a skip to clear their garden).
6. **Use simple language** like “what do we want to see happen”, “what do we want to see change”.
7. **Communicate a clear rationale** for why decisions have been made.
8. **Chairs should hold agencies to account** for what they have said they would do, and if they didn't, why – just as they do the parents.

After a CPC

9. **An information leaflet** written with parents including a helpline or number to text, enabling them to ask questions once they have had time to take in all the information from a CPC. The leaflet should feature: a time line, a glossary of words, an offer of advocate

support, and information on how to get it.

10. Built-in after care - a package for families, which could include easy access to Early Intervention Service provision, with a web based tool kit.

11. Support for parents to build their own support networks, and guidance on who needs to be in that network.

Training

12. Advocate training for parents who have been through CPCs, so they could contribute to helping other parents through theirs.

13. Training and awareness raising for professionals around male victims of domestic violence. Training for professionals including GPs on working with dads and male partners. Fathers to be involved in this training.

Unplanned visits/out of hours service

14. New working contracts to include weekend and evening service.

Future improvements

15. Build a section into CPCs on basic finance and housing issues.

Acknowledge the delay in changing benefits from your old partner if you have custody of the children, and work together with parents to do this.

16. Devise a web based tool kit for preparing for a CPC (Oxfordshire Family Information Service).

Professional Behaviours

17. Be clear, honest, and direct, using simple language.

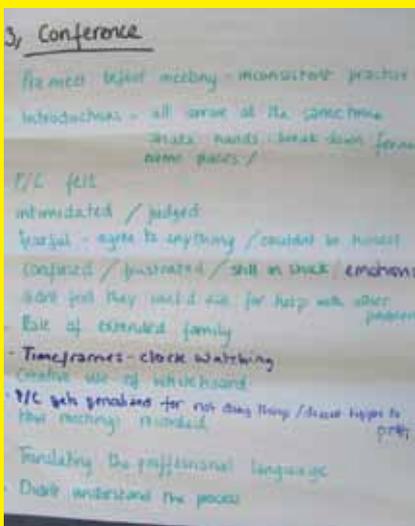
18. Be available out of hours or offer some form of support line if parents are feeling on the edge - or a tool kit if there is no support available.

19. Be knowledgeable of, and able to signpost to, the extra support parents can get such as Oxfordshire Family Information Service (OFIS) or Special Educational Needs (SEN) groups for children.

Children and young people's feedback

We spoke to nine young people (YP). They fed back that if you weren't at the CPCs or core groups it was important to get something that explained what happened.

Many YP felt they didn't get a chance to



talk at meetings – they felt intimidated, isolated, and very confused.

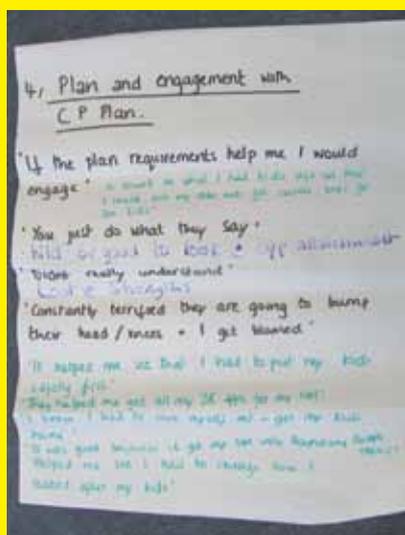
They said that at the CPC meetings:

- they didn't understand the language
- there was too much talking
- they got bored
- they didn't feel involved.

“No one tells me nothing.”

“Some meetings I didn't know about until teachers came back from the meetings and told me about it. I wasn't allowed to know what happened. I would like to be involved in all the meetings, I had no chance to feed into that one at all. I am never allowed to go until I complain. I wanted to be asked, so I had a choice whether to go or not.”

“Nobody was listening to me when I was giving feedback - just listening to my dad.”
“The Chair was nice, asking if I was ok and if I wanted to leave the room and if I had anything to say.”



“It would have been better for me if they didn't talk amongst themselves about me, but asked me to join in the conversation.”

“Nothing has changed from the meeting. But it did change with the relationship between my brother sister and dad. We all had a family meeting, but we were allowed to sit on our own, we made the plan, instead of them, and it worked.”

“I wouldn't mind someone to talk to still. The Chair person said it's best to live on my own, with help, but the help has gone.”

Ideas for action

Making meetings more interactive with CYP

1. **Ask direct questions** in a way CYP can understand.
2. **Have an area for chill out/time out/reading.**
3. **Have food.**
4. **Look at options to use ICT more:**
“the white board was really good, maybe we could type up the notes on a notebook computer so we can record it our own way.” CYP could then go through their own version with their trusted person.
5. **Make meetings flexible** so they don't always happen in school time
“because you have to miss school and everyone knows where you are going”, or hold the meetings in school so CYP can get to them easily.

6. Produce an information leaflet for CYP to explain:

- what CPCs are
- how long the process lasts
- what it will mean – ie core groups, if they can talk in meetings, advice line / text line.

7. Give CYP time to think in the meetings or prepare beforehand.

Give time for them to identify who they trust and could go to with feelings about their situation, or if things are going wrong at home.

8. Use a family tree to help CYP understand the changes that are going to take place, and why.

9. Use Peer Mentoring: *“It would really help to talk to a young person who has been through it”* (CYP)

10. Allow social workers to take a camera so CYP could have photos of their contact time with parents – for memories when they are older. This could become a family tree.

Helping CYP with wider issues

Going through the process of a CPC, and everything that happens through it, is a life changing experience. CYP said they couldn't remember all of it or why certain things happened. Suggestions discussed with senior managers included:

11. Produce a ‘family tree memory’

which CYP could return to when they are older to understand and remember events correctly. They said that parents sometimes told a different version.

12. Raise awareness with the CYP’s school to support them.

“It would really help if someone explained that you as a young person may behave differently and get into trouble at school or be withdrawn so they could understand that this was happening because of outside influences – not because now you are a bad or different kid”.

This is an Engagement Team publication. For more information about the Parent/Carer (P/C) and Children and Young People’s (CYP) Sounding Boards contact:

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