

## APPENDIX 5

### Framework for Children's Protection and Planning Officers: Attendance and contribution of supporters/advocates for children, young people, parents and main carers

#### 1. Purpose of Guidance

- a. To further improve the involvement, contribution and understanding of family members participating in child protection conferences whilst ensuring the child's needs remain paramount.
- b. To provide a clear basis on which Chairs of Conferences can make decisions regarding the attendance of supporters and advocates at child protection conferences.
- c. To identify principles of best practice, whilst recognising practical constraints.
- d. To clarify the respective roles of supporter and advocate, and the differences between them.
- e. To provide a clear framework within which advocates can make their contributions to conferences.
- g. To establish boundaries to the roles of supporter and advocate and the grounds for exclusion.

#### 2. Role of Supporter

- a. To support a young person/parent/carer - enabling them to attend the meeting with someone who is safe and familiar. To help the supported person if they are, or become upset and/or angry.
- b. A supporter has a passive role in relation to the business of the meeting. They will not speak on behalf of the person they are supporting but they will help the person to speak for themselves if they need/ want to. They will help the supported person to think about what they want to say or whether they want to write anything down or read anything out. They will assist the supported person to understand the conference process and outcome.
- c. Examples of people who might act as supporters are family members, friends and volunteers working with families (e.g. from Homestart or from Community based Domestic Violence Projects or members of Carers of Sexually Abused Children -

COSAC). Supporters may also be from advocacy services in circumstances where there is no advocacy role. Solicitors may also act as supporters.

- d. People who are not able to be supporters include:
- Convicted offenders against children - Schedule One or registered Sex Offenders
  - People implicated in the concerns about the care of the children.

### **3. Role of Advocate**

- a. Advocates can speak on behalf of the person they represent. Advocates should have access to the documentation made available to the Chair and the family prior to the meeting.
- b. It is appropriate for an Advocate to be involved in circumstances where:
- A parent, main carer or young person has particular learning difficulties.
  - There are race and cultural issues which the conference needs to address.
  - A young person has a mentor or relationship with a worker from other relevant mentoring agencies.
  - Legal proceedings are imminent or before the Court.
- c. In such cases the role of the Advocate will be to accompany the family member to the pre-meeting with the Chair and agree their contribution to the conference based on:
- The necessity of explaining the context to members of conference who may have limited understanding of cultural, mental health, learning difficulty or other relevant issues involved.
  - Providing a summary of the views of the person they are advocating for which relates both to the tasks and agenda of the Conference and is agreed in advance with the Chair at the pre-meeting.
  - Consultation with the person they are advocating for at an agreed point within the meeting to check whether there are any further comments/questions the person may have which they would like to see addressed.
  - Offer any factual corrections to the meeting.
  - Offer their client's views on the allegations or facts put to the meeting.

- d. Generally, only carers with direct parental responsibility will be expected to bring either Advocates or Supporters. Wider family members can do so at the discretion of the Chair i.e. where the welfare of the child would be better served.
- e. This is likely to be the case where other family members:
  - Have substantial or current care of the child/young person who is the subject to the Conference.
  - Where a child or young person has specifically requested their attendance against the wishes of the parent/main carer.
- f. Generally, it is not expected that legal representatives of estranged parents will be permitted to attend if it appears that evidence gathering is an aim.

#### **4. Rotherham Area Child Protection Committee**

##### **Expectations of Advocates and Supporters**

- a. Advocates/supporters are required to accept and understand that:
  - The meeting is conducted under A.C.P.C. procedures.
  - The welfare of the child is paramount.
  - The involvement of supporters/advocates should not compromise this.
  - Advocates/supporters will be expected to comply with A.C.P.C. Procedures regarding the conduct of meetings.
- b. The number of attendees should be kept as small as possible in order to progress business consistent with the welfare of the child. (Working Together requirements).
- c. Advocates/supporters are not expected to comment on the registration decision or the recommendations of the conference.
- d. Advocates/supporters should have met the family member(s) before the conference and should actively support them during the meeting. This will include sitting next to them.
- e. They should not distract or disrupt the focus of the meeting, either verbally or non verbally. To do so will constitute grounds for exclusion.
- f. Advocates should recognise their presence may be intimidating to other participants and should conduct themselves with sensitivity to the needs of Conference participants. They should not provide comment/information beyond that which is directly pertinent to the safety and well being of the child or young person in question.

- g. Advocates/supporters should be aware that there may be a point in the conference when they and the family member(s) are asked to leave while the local authority and other representatives formulate a view of the evidence/information presented. This is not a time when new evidence will be introduced.

## **5. Limits to the Role of Advocate and Supporter**

- a. Supporters and Advocates are not formal members of Conferences as they are unable to make a formal contribution to the decisions/recommendations made. They are not normally eligible to receive minutes or notification of conferences, although their clients are.
- b. It is not acceptable for Advocates to take notes continuously during the meeting and to neglect the immediate needs of the person they represent. Some note taking is acceptable in line with what other participants find necessary, consistent with active participation in the meeting.
- c. Advocates and supporters can, at the discretion of the Chair, be involved in debriefing but should also be aware that this is an appropriate and important role for those involved in implementing any care plan or child protection plan agreed.

## **6. Statutory and Voluntary Sector Workers**

- a. Statutory and Voluntary sector workers invited to conferences as part of their work with a family cannot act as either supporters or advocates. They will be expected to contribute evidence of parental capacity, resilience, strengths/ weaknesses to the conference, along with any concerns, to form part of the risk assessment and recommendations for any child protection plan.

## **7. Advice for parents main carers/young people on choosing an Advocate /Supporter**

- a. Social workers are expected to raise the issue with the family and provide the A.C.P.C. information leaflet which offers appropriate advice/guidance.

## **8. A.C.P.C. expectations of the Chair in relation to the attendance of Supporters and Advocates**

- a. Since Chairs are independent, the A.C.P.C. expects them to exercise judgement/discretion in deciding whether or not a supporter or advocate should attend by giving consideration to and applying the principles outlined in this document.

The guiding principle will be that key family members are entitled to have a Supporter/Advocate of their choice to assist them to participate and contribute effectively. Only in exceptional circumstances should a decision to exclude be made.

- b.** A decision to exclude supporters and advocates must be taken on the basis of, and justified in relation to these principles.
- c.** Any complaints about exclusion should be based on this guidance. Complaints can only be made to A.C.P.C. about Chairs' conduct and not about any other participant. Complaints about other conference participants must be made to the agency concerned.
- d.** The Chair of A.C.P.C.'s Case Review Sub Committee will assess the grounds for complaint and, in consultation with the Chair of the A.C.P.C. and the manager of the Children's Protection and Planning Officers, will decide:
  - whether the complaint should be upheld; and/or
  - whether the conference should be reconvened.
- e.** Conferences will only be reconvened where there is clear evidence that an Advocate/supporter has been excluded in breach of this guidance.
- f.** Conference Chairs (Children's Protection and Planning Officers) are able to refer concerns they have regarding Advocates, individually or collectively, to A.C.P.C. Again, this must relate to breach of the principles outlined in this guidance. A.C.P.C. will then decide on the most appropriate means of pursuing these concerns, using the process outlined at 9d above.

