

Working with a social worker



There are different ways children's services may become involved with children and families. As a first step, it may be helpful to read our [Children's services](#) page which explains more about this. However children's services are involved, the relationship between a parent and their child's social worker is an important one. But sometimes parents can feel worried or scared about working with a social worker. They may find it hard if they:

- Have been in care themselves.
- Have had a child re moved in the past.
- Don't feel listened to or understood.
- Feel judged because of their age or background, their race or their culture rather than their parenting ability.
- Have had lots of different social workers working with their child.



Four tips for working with a social worker

Whatever the precise situation, the four tips below may be helpful. If things are already difficult, then these tips may help improve the situation. This information may be especially helpful if children's services are involved because of concerns that a child has suffered harm, or that they are likely to suffer [significant harm](#) and:

- A child protection enquiry is being carried out.
- The child is on a [child protection plan](#).
- A [pre-proceedings](#) process is underway.
- Or [care proceedings](#) have started, or are about to start.

These are the tips:

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1

Get organised

Being organised can help make things go better. Getting all the information and paperwork in good order and thinking about what you hope to get out of meetings, is a good idea. It is helpful, whether meetings are going to be in person, by phone or by video call.

Let the social worker know how they can best communicate with you

Explain what you prefer. Let the social worker know if you will have difficulty being part of particular types of meeting. It might be that you are worried you do not have the right equipment to take part in a virtual meeting. For example, if you don't have access to internet data, Wi-Fi or a computer or tablet. Ask the social worker what help is going to be made available to make sure you can participate fully in meetings however they are held.

You might not feel clear and confident about how exactly to join the meeting. If you need some more support with understanding how to join these types of meetings, explain this to the social worker. Mentioning this to them early on it is a good idea so that they can work through what help you may need.

If you are worried there is no quiet, private space to take part in the meeting talk this through with the social worker. And if there are times or days when you know you usually will not be able to meet, or speak, let the social worker know this and explain why. Information about your working hours, college times, times you are doing the school run might all be useful to share.

Keep important information together

Keep all the paperwork, emails and information about your child and children's services in one place. It may be helpful:

- To have a file to keep these in, or
- If documents are coming to you by email, to keep these saved together on your computer or tablet. It is a good idea to save the documents with the date on which you received them.
- To keep a note of the dates and times of all calls, visits and meetings. You can write them down in a diary or keep them as a note on your phone or as a voice note.

You may find it useful to keep a written note of conversations with the social worker and other practitioners involved with your child and family. Or you could use your phone to make a voice note or a text note instead if this is easier. Read over, or listen back to, these notes to remember what you have talked about and agreed to. If formal notes of a meeting (minutes) are later shared with you, having your own notes can still be helpful. They can help check what is in the minutes is accurate and clear.

Make a note of what you want to talk about, and after meetings a note of what has been discussed

Try and find some time to write down the things you want to talk about with the social worker. There may be questions that you want to ask. Noting them down will help make sure you don't forget to ask important questions. Or there may be things you want to remember to tell the social worker. Try and write them down whenever you think of them, so you don't forget. Keep a list in the folder with your other paperwork. You might prefer to keep a note on your phone or to make a voice note.

Talk things over with a trusted friend or supporter

Talking things through with someone you trust is always likely to help. It may help you work out what questions you want to ask the social worker. And if you don't find it easy to write things down, a friend might be able to help you do this. Or, you can record it as a voice note.

Think about what changes could make things easier for you

You might want to ask the social worker to change the time they call, text or meet with you. This might be so that calls, messages and meetings don't clash with other things such as your work, study, your child's nap time or the school run. Or if you're worried about money, make sure you ask the social worker how you can be helped with the costs of taking part in meetings (or contact with your child). This might be help with transport costs, it may be help with the cost of credit for your phone. Or to buy internet data to join telephone meetings and video meetings. If taking part in meetings will be difficult for



you without help with these costs, make sure the social worker knows this. If you don't feel confident speaking or reading English, tell the social worker as soon as you can. You can ask:

- For letters and other paperwork to be translated.
- For an interpreter to help you read and understand things.
- To have an interpreter help you at meetings. If you would prefer that person to be a woman or a man, make sure you tell the social worker.

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Keep up to date

Social workers should involve children and their families whenever they carry out an assessment. If an assessment is being carried out, think about whether there is any new or extra information you feel the social worker should know about. This might be information about you, it might be information about your child. Whatever it is, it may help make sure the assessment is as up to date as possible.

Making sure everyone is kept up to date can also help avoid confusion or delay. Here are five ways to help you make sure that you and your child's social worker keep up to date.

Tell the social worker about any changes in your contact details

If you move, change your phone number or email address, make sure you tell the social worker your new details right away. Think about whether it will be helpful to let the social worker know where you are, even if you go to stay with someone for just a short time. This information can help to make sure that you always get letters and other paperwork on time. It will also help to make sure that you are kept up to date about meetings and about plans being made.

Make sure the social worker also knows the best way to leave you a message. For example, if you can't easily pick up voicemail messages, you can ask to be sent text or WhatsApp messages or emails instead.

Always let the social worker know if you can't keep an appointment

It is very important to keep appointments with your child's social worker. If there is a good reason why you can't, let the social worker know as soon as possible and explain the reasons.

It's a good idea to keep a note of all of your appointments in a diary or on your phone. This will help you to keep track. If you are invited to a meeting and it goes ahead without you being there, make sure you ask the social worker what has happened. Ask for a copy of any notes (sometimes called 'minutes') of the meeting to be sent to you. Ask the social worker why the meeting took place without you. You can ask what steps they will take to make sure this doesn't happen again.



If you have something important to tell your child's social worker, don't wait until your next meeting

Tell the social worker about any important changes affecting you or your child's situation. Don't wait. Tell the social worker as soon as possible.

If you're not sure what kind of information is important to share, talk to the social worker. Ask the social worker to give you examples of the kind of new information they would expect you to share. And ask them why those things are important to share.

If your child's social worker asks you to provide some information that you feel you should not have to share (for example, because you feel it is too personal or it does not seem relevant) then you can ask the social worker to explain more fully why they need this information. You can ask the social worker to put the request in writing, in a letter or email and explain why this information is needed.

If you're worried things aren't moving forward as they should be, say so

Let the social worker know if you are worried that something isn't moving forward in the way agreed. For example, you might be concerned that there has been a delay to an assessment starting or being completed. You may be worried that contact arrangements are not taking place as agreed in your child's plan. Or you may be expecting a meeting to take place and the date keeps being delayed.

Try to remain calm and listen

During meetings with the social worker, sometimes you may be asked to discuss things that are upsetting. Sometimes what the social worker is telling you, may be something you don't want to hear. There may also be times when you strongly disagree with what the social worker is telling you. If this happens, it's very important that you still try hard to listen to what is said. This is important so that you keep up to date and know:

- What the social worker is doing.
- What they're planning.
- What their concerns are.

If during a meeting you feel upset and unable to continue talking, tell the social worker. Or tell someone else in the meeting, such as the person chairing it. You can explain that you need a few minutes to gather your thoughts. You can still do this even if the meeting is on the phone or by video.

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Build your confidence

If you can find ways to feel more confident about talking to the social worker, this may help you work better with them. It can help you to fully take part in the meetings with social workers and with other practitioners.

Planning what questions to ask and taking your time can really help. Here are some examples of things you can do to help you feel more confident.



Ask questions early on so that you know what each meeting will be like

Whenever you're asked to attend a meeting, ask the social worker beforehand to explain:

- What the meeting will be about.
- Who will be there (and why).
- What could be decided at the meeting.
- How long the meeting will last.

You can also ask them to send an agenda for the meeting. This should set out what is likely to be discussed.

Ask if you can get someone to support you at the meeting

Once you know what the meeting is about and who will be there, think about whether you would like to take an advocate or supporter with you.

Talk to the social worker about this in advance of the meeting. If you're told you can't bring someone with you, ask the social worker to explain why not. Ask them to put the explanation in writing in a letter or email. You can agree with them a date by which this will be done.

Ask questions in the meeting – but take your time

When you get to the meeting, there may be people there you don't already know. If there are, ask them to say their name and to say what their job is. This will make sure you know why they're at the meeting. If you feel worried about asking these questions, ask the social worker if they can ask everyone to introduce themselves. You can ask for time to make a note of everyone's names and job roles.

If anyone uses a word or talks about something in a way that you don't understand, ask them to explain it or put it differently. No one should make you feel uncomfortable for asking this.

If you have made notes, make sure you have them with you. Take a few moments to look through your notes at different points during the meeting. This will help you make sure all the things you need to talk about have been covered. No one should criticise you for needing to look at your notes (practitioners need to do it too). And no one should try and hurry you.

People should also take it in turns to speak. No one should talk over you. If you feel someone isn't letting you speak or finish what you have to say, you can politely say something like:

- 'I haven't quite been able to finish what I wanted to say'.
- 'I would like the chance to finish speaking so I can be sure everyone understands my views and has all the information they need'.

In a formal meeting, there is likely to be a Chairperson. They should make sure everyone has the chance to speak. When it's your turn to speak, try to make sure you stay focused on the things that are relevant to the purpose of the meeting.

If you feel you need a bit of time outside the meeting to think about what is being said, then ask for a break. This is a reasonable thing to ask, even if the meeting is by phone or video.



Do ask things that will help you remember what has been agreed and decided

After a meeting is over, it can be hard to remember everything that has been said and agreed. You may have been asked to agree to do lots of different things.

So it is very important that you have a way of reminding yourself what happened and what you've agreed to do. Here are some ideas to help with that:

- If you agreed to do things, make a list to help you remember what you have to do (try and do this during the meeting).
- If there are things you haven't agreed with, make sure children's services have made a note of this. And have noted your reasons for not agreeing.
- Always ask what the dates or deadlines are for doing things. Try and make sure these are agreed at the meeting.
- Make sure your child's social worker (or the Chair of the meeting) sends you written notes (or 'minutes') of the meeting.
- Check the minutes clearly explain anything that it has been agreed will happen. For example, the minutes should include anything you are agreeing to do, any help or information that your child's social worker or other practitioner is agreeing to provide. Check this written record against your own notes of what was agreed.
- Make sure that you are clear what it has been agreed you will do.
- Make sure you know what it has been agreed your child's social worker and the others involved will do.

4

Understand your rights and options if things do not improve

If you don't have a good working relationship with your child's social worker, and things aren't improving, the next three questions look at your rights and options.

The child's social worker doesn't seem to be acting in a fair way. Can a different social worker take over?

You can ask for a different social worker, but you don't have the right to a change in social worker. If you feel the social worker has treated you unfairly, ask to speak to the social worker's manager. Tell them why you think the social worker is being unfair and explain why you want a different social worker.

How would a meeting with a social worker's manager go?

If you've tried your best to sort things out with your child's social worker and things are not improving, then you can ask to meet the social worker's manager.

If you've arranged to meet the social worker's manager, you'll need to think about whether it will help to have the social worker come to the meeting too.

Sometimes, having the social worker there can help get things sorted out. But you may think it will be easier to talk if they're not there.



Before you go to the meeting with the manager, try and be clear about:

- What the problem is.
- Why this is a problem for you and your child.
- What effect this is having on your child and your family.
- What would help to make things better.

Hopefully, the manager will be able to solve the problem or at least improve the situation.

What about making a complaint?

If things don't get better, you might want to think about making a formal complaint. Think carefully about whether this is going to help your child in the long run. Sometimes it can be harder to work with social workers after you've made a complaint, especially if your child still has the same social worker. But a complaint may help if:

- You or your child have been treated unfairly, and
- You have not been able to resolve this.

In this situation, a complaint may help to get children's services to take your concerns seriously.

See our [Complaints](#) page for more information.