

Child protection

“Social work has changed a lot. In the past our approach to child protection wasn't very flexible. Now we work more in partnership with families where there are concerns to make sure they get support before things reach a crisis.”

- Parents are responsible for their children's safety
- Social Services become involved once concern is shared
- Decisions about abuse need careful assessment
- Children are best cared for by their own families
- Professionals want to work in partnership with families
- Very few children are removed from home following abuse

Myths and realities

Very few adults harm children deliberately and most often, when harm does happen, families need support, not punishment or the removal of their children.

Bradford social workers and other professionals get involved when parents may be unable to protect their child from harm and need some help. In some cases Bradford's Police Child Protection Unit will investigate with social workers to help protect children and decide whether an offence has been committed against a child.

There have been lots of negative reports in the media about social workers and what happens when concerns about child abuse are reported.

Many myths exist, so for the record:

1. Child abuse is not easy to recognise, prevent or stop.

It is rarely possible to definitely say that a child has been abused or by whom. A careful assessment is needed in order to find out what has happened and what support and protection will best help the family. As a result it can be difficult to avoid some intrusion into family life. A social worker will ask questions about the family circumstances, consider the frequency and the seriousness of the incident and the effect on the child. All of these factors will help to decide what should happen next to support and protect the child and family.

Social workers and the Police have a duty (they have no choice about this) under The Children Act 1989 to investigate concerns of child abuse.

2. Professionals are not solely responsible for protecting children.

Traditionally, social workers have been expected to make sure that children are safe. In order to do this well, they rely on information from parents, family, other professionals and the local community who all play an important part in identifying concerns about those close to them. This helps to ensure that they are offered support before the situation becomes far worse.

3. Reporting child abuse rarely results in the child being removed from home.

This is not the main aim of child protection investigations and rarely happens. Social workers can only remove children from home with a court order, having demonstrated that there is serious and immediate risk. In emergency situations the Police have power to remove a child for 72 hours.

WARNING SIGNS

Social workers will get involved when they believe that physical injury, neglect, sexual or emotional abuse has occurred. Make sure you know what child abuse is - contact the helplines in the Contacts column for more information.

ACTION

A social worker (and sometimes a police officer) will meet with the family when abuse is reported. They will also talk with other professionals in order to make decisions about how to help.

WHAT TO SAY

If you are worried about your own or someone else's treatment of a child, seek advice about what practical and emotional support is available.

PREVENTION

It is important that children know what to do when they feel unsafe. Do they know who to talk to and how to get to a safe place or person?

CONTACTS

- Social Services
Children's Advice Team
01274 437500
- Social Services
Emergency Duty Team
(after Hours)
01274 530434
- West Yorkshire Police
(24 hrs) 0845 60 60 606
Emergency 999

*Check the Bradford ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:
www.bradford-acpc.com*