

What to expect if your doctor is worried about your child's safety

If a doctor is concerned that a child or young person is at risk of abuse or neglect, they must take steps to make sure the child or young person is protected. It can be very upsetting and stressful for families when this happens and parents often have questions about what their doctor may or may not do. This leaflet will help to answer those questions.

You may have other questions that are not covered here, so we have suggested other sources of guidance and support at the end of this leaflet.

What will the doctor do if they think my child's safety is at risk?

The steps they take will depend on the situation. Where possible, your doctor must work with you to make sure your child gets the care and support they need.

If the doctor isn't sure whether to raise their concerns with a child protection agency, they will ask an experienced colleague (such as another doctor or nurse) for help and advice. If possible, they will do this without identifying you or your child.

Where a doctor is concerned that a child is at risk of, or is suffering, abuse or neglect, they must tell an agency that is responsible for protecting children, such as the local authority children's services or the NSPCC.

Will the doctor talk to me before they do anything?

Your doctor will normally tell you if they are concerned about your child's safety and will talk to you about what they will do to address these

concerns. The only reason they wouldn't tell you is if they thought that doing so would increase the risk of harm to your child.

You should be given the opportunity to ask questions and your questions should be answered openly and honestly. The doctor must listen and keep an open mind about the possible cause of an injury or other sign that may indicate abuse or neglect.

Will the doctor talk to my child about their concerns?

Your doctor should talk directly to your child and listen to them, taking into account their age and maturity. They should always take your child's views into account when they are making decisions. Your child may speak to the doctor without you present if this may help the child to talk about any problems they have.

Does the doctor need my consent to tell anyone else about their concerns?

The doctor will normally need consent to share information about you and your child with anyone outside their healthcare team. They will ask for this unless there is a strong reason for not doing so – for example, because the doctor thinks that doing this would increase the risk to your child. In situations like this, the doctor can share information without asking for your consent first.

Your child can give consent for the doctor to share information about them if they have the maturity and understanding to make the decision. If not, you will be asked to give consent for both you and your child.

When asking for consent, your doctor should explain what information they want to share, who they want to share it with and why, and how the information will be used.

What if my child or I refuse to give consent?

The doctor will consider the reasons why consent has been refused. The doctor will also think about the possible harm that could be caused to your child through not sharing the information.

If your doctor thinks your child is at risk of significant harm, they will usually share the information with someone who is responsible for protecting children and will normally explain to you why they have done so.

Don't doctors have to respect confidentiality?

Children and young people and their families have a right to receive confidential medical care and advice. But sometimes doctors have to share information with others to protect children and young people from abuse or neglect.

Where can I go for further help and advice?

The **NSPCC** is a national charity campaigning on behalf of children and young people. The NSPCC

has helplines that children and adults can ring for advice and support. Children and young people can call ChildLine on 0800 111. Adults can call 0808 800 5000 for help and advice. www.nspcc.org.uk

The **Family Rights Group** (FRG) provides free confidential advice and support to families whose children are involved with local authority children's services. Families can call its advice service free on 0808 801 0366 or send an email to advice@frg.org.uk. FRG also has a range of free advice sheets on its website. www.frg.org.uk

The **Coram Children's Legal Centre** (CCLC) provides free legal information, advice and representation to children, young people, and their families, and to carers and professionals. Families can call its advice service free on 08088 020 008 for legal advice on child law, family law and education law. www.childrenslegalcentre.com

Citizens Advice is an independent organisation providing free, confidential and impartial advice on all subjects to anyone. There is also advice and information on its website. www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Family Lives is a national charity providing help and support on all aspects of family life. It has a confidential service called Parentline (0808 800 2222), which parents can call for free from landlines and most mobiles for information, advice, guidance and support on any aspect of parenting and family life. www.familylives.org.uk

Home-Start UK is a nationwide charity supporting children and families through a network of volunteers. www.home-start.org.uk

Family Action is a charity providing practical, emotional and financial support to disadvantaged and socially isolated families. www.family-action.org.uk

The **Victoria Climbié Foundation** provides free independent advice and specialist support to children, young people and families involved with children's social care, particularly around aspects of culture and faith. www.vcf-uk.org