



Child and Family Engagement Guidance

Principles and guidance for secondary and tertiary health care when a child is not brought or misses an appointment

Dr Simon Jones with Safeguarding Children Team

West Hampshire CCG

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Child and Family Engagement Guidance (Secondary and tertiary care)

What to do when a child is not brought or misses an appointment

1. The purpose of this guidance is to promote better engagement of children and families with health services by encouraging a common standard across all providers.
2. Non-attendance or apparent non-engagement can be an indicator of neglect, as well as a specific instance in which a child's health needs are not being met. Also over engagement can sometimes be an indicator of fabricated or induced illness by a carer.
3. It is important to know who has parental responsibility (see Appendix A)
4. Referrers should ensure their records of the family's contact details are up to date.
5. Following a child not brought for an appointment the responsibility for any assessment of the situation rests with the professional with whom the child had the appointment, in conjunction with the referrer (Laming 2003, CEMACH 2006).
6. If a child has failed or continues to fail to attend a scheduled appointment the responsible professional should consider the importance of the appointment and if the child's health needs are being neglected. This also applies to health visitor no access visits and missed antenatal appointments. Professionals should always ask '**what is the impact on the child of this missed appointment?**'
7. Attempts should be made to contact the family to confirm up to date contact details, ascertain why the appointment was missed, and reschedule an appointment if needed. Be mindful of the literacy of parents and carers, and whether or not English is their first language.
8. If there is any doubt concerning action to take or any other difficulties, **seek advice** from the named nurse or doctor for child safeguarding for your organisation. For most missed appointments these professionals will not need to be contacted or copied in to letters etc.
9. Professional judgement informed by an assessment based on the child's development, welfare and current family situation, must be made in order to **establish whether a referral to children's social care is required**. Referrals should be made as soon as possible in writing using the Inter-Agency Referral Form and then discussed by phone to clarify the concerns.

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Level of concern	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Ask: “What is the impact on the child of the missed appointment?”			
Concerns	Missed 1 or 2 appointments, health visitor access visits, or antenatal appointments or no opt in to make appointment	Missed or cancelled 2 or more consecutive appointments or visits	Persistent pattern of non-attendance or non-engagement
	No known safeguarding concerns	On-going medical, or mental health condition	On-going medical, or mental health condition
		Known safeguarding concerns or alerts	Known parental mental ill health, drug or alcohol misuse or domestic abuse or known looked after child or subject to child in need (CIN) or child protection (CP) plan
Action	Consider the impact of missed appointment on child’s welfare	Consider discussion with named child safeguarding leads	Discuss with named child safeguarding leads
	Discharge and write to GP and parents with permission to re-book or Contact the family to confirm contact details, clarify the importance of attending appointments and send another appointment	Consider phoning the family Write to GP and family Send another appointment Discuss with health visitor, school nurse, or other professionals eg midwife, CCN or CAMHS or other acute or community health providers known to be involved	Phone the family Write to GP and family Send another appointment Discuss with health visitor, school nurse, or other professionals (eg midwife, CCN or CAMHS) Consider whether a home visit is appropriate to help engage the family
		Consider making enquiries of children’s social care and accessing the <i>Child Protection Information System</i> Refer to children’s social care for <i>Early Help</i> , and copy health visitor or school nurse	Inform children’s social care if looked after child or subject to CIN/CP Plan. Consider referral in writing using the inter-agency referral form to children’s social care for assessment and notify GP and health visitor or school
Intended Outcome	Plan communicated with GP, family and other professionals involved	Family receive support to continue engagement with health	Multi-agency discussion and support to meet child’s needs agreed with family and professionals

Appendix A

Parental Responsibility

Parental responsibility means the rights and responsibilities that parents have in law for their child, including the right to consent to medical treatment for them, up to the age of 18 in England.

Mothers and married fathers have parental responsibility. So do unmarried fathers of children, since 1 December 2003 in England and Wales, as long as the father is named on the child's birth certificate.

Unmarried fathers whose children's births were registered before these dates, or afterwards if they are not named on the child's birth certificate, do not automatically have parental responsibility. They can acquire parental responsibility by way of a Parental Responsibility Agreement with the child's mother or by getting a Parental Responsibility Order from the courts. Married step-parents and registered civil partners can acquire parental responsibility in the same ways. Parents do not lose parental responsibility if they divorce. If a child is taken into local authority care by way of a court order parents share parental responsibility with the local authority. If the child comes into local authority care with parental consent the local authority gains no parental responsibility – this remains fully with those who had parental responsibility prior to the child coming into care. Parents lose parental responsibility if a child is adopted. Parental responsibility can be restricted by court order.

Adoptive parents have parental responsibility, as do those appointed as a child's testamentary guardian, special guardian or those given a Residence Order or Child Arrangement Order. Local authorities have parental responsibility while a child is subject to a care order. You may need to get legal advice when in doubt about who has parental responsibility.

People without parental responsibility, but who have care of a child, may do what is reasonable in all the circumstances of the case to safeguard or promote the child's welfare. This may include step-parents, grandparents and child-minders. You can rely on their consent if they are authorised by the parents. But you should make sure that their decisions are in line with those of the parents, particularly in relation to contentious or important decisions.

Parental Responsibility Agreement [section 4, Children Act 1989]

This is a consensual arrangement made by the mother and the unmarried birth father acting together. It is a legal document and means that the parents have agreed to share parental responsibility. A step-parent married to a birth parent may obtain parental responsibility in this way if all those with parental responsibility give consent to the agreement.

Parental Responsibility Order [section 4, Children Act 1989]

This is a court order that specifies that a named person has parental responsibility for a child. Parental responsibility is then shared between the holder and any birth parent who already has parental responsibility. An unmarried birth father can apply for parental responsibility this way. A married step parent can also apply for parental responsibility this way if it has not been possible to get all parties to consent to a parental responsibility agreement (see above).

Residence Order [section 8, Children Act 1989]

This is a court order that specifies the name of the person or persons with whom a child is to live. The named persons automatically acquire parental responsibility for the child and this is shared with anyone else who has parental responsibility for the child (usually birth parents). The order lasts until the child reaches the age of 16 or 18 depending on the particular arrangement with the court.

Child Arrangements Order [Section 8 Children Act 1989 amended by Children and Families Act 2014]

This replaces the Residence Order and covers the same issues such as where and with whom a child should live and/or have contact with the person with parental responsibility. The local authority would not hold parental responsibility under a Residence Order or a Child Arrangements Order.

Emergency Protection Order [sections 44-45, Children Act 1989]

A local authority may apply to a court for an emergency protection order which lasts a maximum of 8 days if they feel a child is at risk of significant harm. This enables a local authority to share parental responsibility with anyone else who already has parental responsibility.

Special Guardianship Order [section 14, Children Act 1989]

This court order gives the holder a more permanent arrangement but it is not lifelong like an adoption order (see below). A carer secures parental responsibility for the child which enables them to make decisions for the child up to a child's 18th birthday. Birth parents who have parental responsibility retain residual parental responsibility so the family link is maintained. There may be several persons sharing special guardianship status (not necessarily all living in the household of the child).

Care Order [section 31 and section 38, Children Act 1989]

A local authority may apply to a court for a care order if they feel a child is at risk of significant harm. This enables a local authority to share parental responsibility with anyone else who already has parental responsibility. The local authority may make plans to provide accommodation for the child with alternative family carers or foster carers. Under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 a child can be looked after by the local authority with the consent of the parent, in which case the local authority does not hold parental responsibility.

Placement Order [section 21, Adoption and Children Act 2002]

If a local authority regards that a child needs to be placed permanently with an alternative family, they may apply to the court for a placement order which then gives the local authority permission to place a child for adoption.

Adoption Order [section 46, Adoption and Children Act 2002]

The carer secures a lifelong relationship with a child throughout their lives when a child is adopted. The family line is legally changed so the child belongs to another family. The adopters acquire parental responsibility. Birth parents (and any other person) lose parental responsibility.

Anyone considering the adoption of a specific child who has not been placed with them by an adoption agency for the purposes of adoption (including step-parent adoption), must notify their local authority in writing at least 3 months before they to apply to court: this enables the local authority to commence necessary checks and interviews with the significant family members and ensure the child is being cared for appropriately.

What is a guardian?

A guardian is someone who has been named by a parent as someone who could look after a child in the event of the death of a parent. The named guardian would only have parental responsibility if all other persons with parental responsibility were deceased.

Related policies and guidance

Children Act 2004

CQC Safeguarding Children 2009

GMC Protecting children and young people: the responsibilities of all doctors 2012

Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS) Local Safeguarding Children Partnerships procedures <http://hipsprocedures.org.uk/>

HMG Information Sharing - a practitioner's guide 2018

HMG Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018

NICE CG89 When to suspect Child Maltreatment 2009

NSF for Children and Young People 2004

Solent NHS Trust Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy 2016

CEMACH Why Children Die 2006

The Victoria Climbié Inquiry; Lord Laming 2003