

Rough Guide to Making Referrals to Children's Social Care

This guide supports practitioners working with children, young people and families across Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees. It provides practical guidance on how to make effective referrals to Children's Social Care, ensuring that the right children receive the right help at the right time. It does not replace legislation, statutory guidance or local procedures.

Making Effective Referrals

Most children's needs are met through universal services. Some children have additional needs requiring early help, specialist input or Children's Social Care involvement. Referral decisions must be based on robust assessment and clear evidence.

Children should be referred to Children's Social Care where there are concerns about abuse or neglect, or where the child requires services only the local authority can provide.

Thresholds and Appropriate Referrals

Children's Social Care operates within a strict legal framework which determines thresholds for intervention. Inappropriate referrals can result in unnecessary intrusion for families, delay support for those in need, and overwhelm limited resources. Practitioners should aim to get referrals right first time.

What Social Care Needs to Know

To make decisions, Children's Social Care needs clear information about:

- The reason for referral and nature of concerns
- How the situation has arisen
- The child's needs and circumstances – including their family support network
- What you are worried about (harm / danger) and what is working well (strengths and safety)
- Whether abuse or neglect is suspected
- Whether urgent action is required
- Potential impact on the child and on their health and wellbeing
- What support the referring agency and other multi-agency professionals has already offered, where relevant

What to Include in a Referral

Referrals should be accurate, concise and child-focused and include:

- ✓ Child and family details
- ✓ Confirmation of consent
- ✓ Child and family views
- ✓ Clear reason for referral and desired outcomes
- ✓ Previous actions taken
- ✓ Other agency involvement
- ✓ Any relevant risk information
- ✓ If an Early Help assessment has been completed, this should be attached to the referral.

Immediate Safeguarding Concerns

Where a child is at immediate risk, practitioners should contact Children's Social Care by telephone without delay, followed by written confirmation.

Consent and Information Sharing

Good practice is to discuss concerns openly with families and seek consent before referral, unless doing so would place the child at greater risk. Advice should be sought if unsure.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- ✓ Vague or unclear information
- ✓ Referring 'just in case' without evidence
- ✓ Exaggerating concerns to meet thresholds
- ✓ Do not use jargon and acronyms - use clear, simple language and explanations
- ✓ Clear, balanced and factual referrals support timely decisions and better outcomes for children.