



Core Groups:

**Best Practice Guidance for
all practitioners in
Sandwell who attend core
groups**

*Created by practitioners from partner
agencies in Sandwell*

The work of the SCSP

Sandwell Children's Safeguarding Partnership (SCSP) undertakes the work of the former Sandwell Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB) with the aim to ensure all children in Sandwell are safe, happy, healthy and achieving.

The revised Statutory Guidance Working Together to Safeguarding Children (2018), brings together SMBC with Sandwell Children's Trust delivering services on their behalf, Sandwell CCG and West Midlands Police as the key statutory safeguarding partners who have equal responsibility for Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements in Sandwell.

This 'Statutory SCSP' will agree on ways to co-ordinate the safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership in supporting and engaging others; implement local and national learning including serious child safeguarding incidents, improve local safeguarding arrangements and hold each other to account as to how they are keeping children safe.

The SCSP has 3 key priority areas, underpinned by subthemes which are as follows:

- 1) Neglect
- 2) Exploitation
- 3) Early Help

Subthemes

- A) Pre birth work
- B) Work with under 1s
- C) Engaging with fathers/significant males
- D) Culture and diversity

The need for this guidance was a direct action from a multi agency case file audit of the effectiveness of core groups. Multi agency audits are one way in which the SCSP tests the effectiveness of local multi agency safeguarding arrangements and are based on key themes.

The SCSP offers a range of multi agency training to support with your role as a core group member!

For the full training catalogue, including dates/times, and to book a space, please visit www.sandwellcsp.org.uk/learning-development



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Please note the SCSP are currently working from home

What do I do if I have a concern?

Occasionally situations arise where workers in one agency feel that the actions, inactions or decisions of another agency do not adequately safeguard a child. Disagreement can be healthy however always requires a resolution.

The child's safety and wellbeing must always be the paramount consideration at all times and professional differences must not detract from timely and clear decision making.

Sandwell has a [Resolution and Escalation policy](#) as part of the Regional Child Protection Procedures for the West Midlands: this guidance can be found by clicking on the hyperlink above.



TIP—Remember if a referral is made within 3 months of the case closure, it will be assigned to the previous case worker who knows the case well. You can ask your fellow core group members for advice and support even after the core group has ended if you need to.

1. What is the purpose and function of a core group?

A core group will be formed if a decision is made at an Initial Child Protection conference that a Child Protection (CP) plan is required. The first core group must meet **within 10 working days** of the ICPC and further develop the Child Protection plan, as stated in Working Together 2018.

The core group is a place where professionals, parents/carers, children and young people come together to decide how best to make positive changes for the child by:

- Making sure the child is safe from harm
- Enabling and promoting the voice of the child
- Improving outcomes by driving change through clear actions
- Identifying strengths and areas to improve
- Including parents/carers and other relevant family members
- Involving all professionals involved in supporting the family, including where adults have support services
- Having a clear exit plan to support the family to sustain changes



TIP—'Scaling' is a more positive expression than 'scoring'

2. Using Signs of Safety

Signs of Safety **must** be used in all statutory meetings and:

- Capture strengths, worries and next steps
- Must always consider and review past harm to assess risk
- Must always include scaling which should be explained to parents to avoid distress
- Must always be a multi agency discussion which is documented in the core group record

The first core group

This must be used to discuss the CP plan in detail. The plan will have set out what each member is expected to do and what work will take place, including visits to the home and further assessments where necessary. Timescales for completing the actions should be set.

The social worker will always be the Lead Professional, however responsibility for chairing and minuting meetings can be shared between core group members. This should be agreed at the first meeting so everyone is clear of the expectations.



TIP—Start an email group for all professionals from the core group so everyone can be kept up to date on progress

Make sure all professionals AND parents/carers are clear what the purpose of the plan is, why the plan is in place and what is expected to improve outcomes for the child.

Setting actions and future planning

Actions must be SMART and impact based—why is the action important? What difference will it make? Ask yourself—**“So what?”**

Action owners and timescales must be clear. The core group must hold members accountable for completion of actions and agree who is best to feedback to the child or young person after the meeting.

The end of the plan is crucial and should be carefully planned, ensuring the family have identified professionals/agencies who they can turn to in times of need e.g. the school, health visitor. The end of the plan **must** be a multi agency decision.

Consider—how can family, friends and the community support the family in their next independent steps?

Core Group Checklist

Before the meeting

- I have confirmed I can attend the meeting —if I can't attend, I have sent a report or nominated an appropriate person to attend in my absence
- I know the meeting date, time and venue
- I have discussed my feedback with the child/young person and parents so there are no surprises in the meeting
- I have minutes from the ICPC or from the last core group meeting

At the first meeting

- Obtain contact details and roles of all core group members
- Agree who will set up the email group for professionals to share updates
- Agree a rota for chairing/minuting of the meetings
- Use the CP plan to develop the core group action plan, with clear timescales and action owners

At all core group meetings

- Share what is working well and the child/family's strengths
- Share areas to improve on for the benefit of the child/young person and how I/my agency will work together with the family to achieve this
- Signs of Safety has been used, including reviewing the danger statement and past harm
- I know what my actions are and when these need to be completed by
- The date, time and venue of the next meeting has been agreed by all
- If I have a concern, e.g. about the progress of the plan or the actions of another agency, I will discuss this with them first before discussing use of the Resolution and Escalation process with my line manager

4. Including the child and family

Where appropriate, the best placed professional should discuss the meeting beforehand with the child, and if possible support them to attend all or part of the meeting



Whether the child attends or not, their voice needs to be clearly evidenced in plans and decision making

Consider equality and diversity, e.g. ensuring there is a translator or that the room is accessible

Remember to ensure meetings accommodate both parents/carers where possible

Avoid jargon!

Clearly set expectations and explain processes for parents/carers in the first meeting

Ensure parents take ownership—the plan is about their child



TIP: Avoid making assumptions—e.g. asking a family to ensure home conditions are good. What does good look like?

3. Roles and Responsibilities of Professionals

P—Partnership

A—Advise

Implement and review the CP plan, and carefully monitor progress

S—Share

S—Support

Shared understanding of the role of each person present

Be inclusive and respectful



Respectful challenge of each other when needed

Send apologies if unable to attend and make sure a written report is sent to the Chair before the meeting

Attending core groups is a priority

What does it say to families if professionals don't attend, especially if no apologies have been sent?

Create a supportive, open and child focused environment

Where possible discuss planned feedback with the family before the meeting