

Preparing families for a Children's Hearing

- a training resource for trainee/newly qualified social workers



SCOTTISH
CHILDREN'S REPORTER
ADMINISTRATION

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Introduction

Going to a Hearing can be a daunting experience for many children, young people and their families. SCRA's recent Children and Families survey showed the most common person they spoke to about a Hearing was a social worker.

A total of 30% of children, young people and adults spoke to a social worker before their Hearing and 94% of them found it helped at least a bit.

This e-book provides some information on what a trainee/newly qualified social worker can do to help prepare and empower children/young people and relevant persons coming to a Hearing, and make it less intimidating. It also includes links to the SCRA resources which are available and can assist.

For further copies of any of the materials please contact communications@scra.gsi.gov.uk

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Explain what happens at a Hearing and how it fits with other types of meetings:

Some key things to get across:

Who will be there (including the meaning of being a relevant person), what happens, respective roles, the independence of the panel, the focus on the child/young person and their best interests, a possible delay to the start of a Hearing.

The Children's Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 introduces more types of Hearings and terms which children/young people may not be aware of. Looked after children/young people may also be asked to attend other meetings separately to the Children's Hearing and the large number of meetings can become confusing.

Social workers can explain to children/young people what the different types of meetings are and their purpose. Terms connected to the Children's Hearings System, including new terms are under the 2011 Act are on the jargon buster section of SCRA's website.

Help them understand the Child's Plan

Best practice is for the social worker to go over their report with the child/young person and relevant persons in advance of the Hearing to ensure they understand the report and to obtain their views which are to be included in the Child's Plan. It is particularly important that they understand the recommendation and what decisions the Panel Members can make.

Further consideration should also be given to children who turn 12 when subject to a Compulsory Supervision Requirement and who may subsequently receive a full set of panel papers which may contain information previously unknown to them.

Reinforce their rights

It is important that young people are aware of their rights before the Hearing so that they can fully exercise these. The key points that a social worker can reinforce with a child/young person and their families are:

- That they can submit a report to be considered by the Panel Members at the Hearing. This should be sent to the Reporter 4 days before the Hearing if possible.
- That they can bring a representative with them to the Hearing. This can be someone they know and trust like a teacher, an advocacy worker or a lawyer.
- That they can complain if they are unhappy with how they have been treated and direct them to SCRA's website/member of SCRA staff.

Ensure they have their say at every stage:

How a child/young person expresses their views will vary, and social workers are often in a unique position to explore innovative ways to obtain the young person's views. This could include completing the 'All About Me' forms that are sent out with their notification, drawing a picture, writing a letter to the Panel Members, or producing a mind map of things that are important to them.

It is recognised that the social worker may not always be best placed to obtain the views of children/young people for a variety of reasons. In such circumstances, the social worker can signpost the child/young person to another agency or service. A social worker can explain to the child/young person that they can ask to speak to the Panel Members on their own.

Practicalities and linking up with the Reporter:

The social worker may be aware of significant people in the child or young person's life, or agencies working with them who could provide useful input to a Hearing who may not have been invited. While it is up to the chair of the panel to decide if someone without an obligation or duty to be present can attend, the social worker can advise the Reporter of these people so that they can be invited if appropriate.

Practical considerations that can be discussed with the Reporter may include, for example: security, potential conflict or anxiety, length/complexity of the Hearing, recent issues etc.

Some children/young people and their parents/carers, particularly those who are very anxious about coming to a Hearing, may benefit from a **pre-Hearing visit**. The Hearing notification letters sent to young people offer the opportunity to do this, but some children/young people may feel unable to ask directly for this themselves, and in such circumstances the social worker can arrange this with the Reporter.

Provide information and support after the Hearing

While the Panel Members will have told the child/young person and the relevant people what their decision is and their reasons for it, some may not fully understand what this means for them. Social workers can check their understanding of the decision, explain what will happen next and answer any questions they may have.

The most common outcome for a child/young person who attends a Children's Hearing is for a Compulsory Supervision Order to be made. It can also be continued, varied or terminated.

A child/young person and/or relevant person has the right to appeal the decision within 21 days of the Hearing and should seek legal advice if they wish to do so. They can also call a review at any time for a Hearing to take place three months after the last Hearing when a substantive decision was made.

Information materials ...

SCRA has a number of information materials for children and young people to help prepare them for going to a Hearing.

Here's what's available for young children...

All About Me form – this is aimed at children 11 years and under. They should receive a printed copy with their panel papers and an electronic version is also available on SCRA's website.

Leaflet for children - this leaflet is aimed at children aged 11 and under going to a Hearing.

Chloe and Billy storybook – This is aimed at children aged 4 to 7 years and tells the story of a sister and brother, Chloe and Billy, going to a Hearing.

Colouring in book – the storybook is also available in a colouring in book format.



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Here's what's available for young people...

All About Me form – this is aimed at children aged 12 years and over. This is also available in electronic format.

Leaflet for young people - This leaflet is for young people aged 12+ going to a Hearing.

Your Rights flyer - This provides information about children's rights, how to appeal etc.

All about Compulsory Supervision Orders - When a Compulsory Supervision Order has been made.

Secure Accommodation flyer - When a Hearing decides to place a child/young person in secure accommodation.

Going to Court flyer - When the statement of grounds are sent to court.



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Additional information...

SCRA's website has a dedicated section for children and one for young people. There is also a section for parents/carers. In addition, there is easy read information for parents/carers with learning disabilities.

Two DVDs for young people and their parents/carers are also available – Going to a Children's Hearing and Going to Court.

Complaints: Information about how to complain is available on SCRA's website.



What's new for the Children's Hearings Scotland Act 2011?

Your Views A4 sheet for Pre-Hearing Panels: This will be included with the Pre-Hearing Panel letter. It gives children and young people the chance to have their say. This is separate from the All About Me forms.

Changes to the law: information for children and young people: This A4 sheet provides information about changes as a result of The Act (new terminology etc). This will be sent out with letters for Hearings in the initial period after go live.

You can view all our materials on our website.

www.scra.gov.uk