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# **Sefton Children’s Social Care Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**

# **Information for Professionals Working in Partnership to Safeguard Children in Sefton**

**What to do if you are concerned about a child:**

Sefton MASH offer a consultation service for professionals or members of the public with concerns for the safety and wellbeing of children. A Duty Social Worker is available on a daily basis to provide information, advice and guidance about safeguarding process and to direct individuals to the most appropriate service to support the family and child they are concerned about.

**Level of Need:**

Anyone wishing to make a referral should consult the LSCB Level of Need Guidance. This highlights important factors to consider when requesting advice, support or when making a referral. This highlights examples of issues which would warrant support and intervention from Early Help or Social Care (Level 3 or 4). This also highlights key examples of escalating need. Professionals should highlight the identified Level of Need when completing referrals to MASH.

**How to make a referral:**

Referrals should be made via the word document/online referral form available on Sefton Council’s website under the heading ‘I want to report concerns about a child’. Prior to making a referral, professionals need to make parents or carers (with parental responsibility for the child) aware of the identified concerns and should inform them that a referral will be made to Children Social Care (unless this would place the child at increased risk). The referrer should also gain consent from the parent or carer for their information to be shared between agencies.

**Early Help or Social Care?**

The MASH team will consider whether the referral meets the threshold for Early Help or Social Care intervention. There is a dedicated Social Worker within the team who oversees all referrals identified for Early Help Support. Professionals can refer directly to Early Help by contacting their Local Family Wellbeing Centre and this is why it is very important for individuals to consider the Level of Need Guidance, to ensure that Social Care Records are not created for children unless this is necessary to safeguard and protect them.

**MASH Process:**

All referrals progressed to the MASH Team are subject to time constraints with decisions having to be made within twenty-four hours on all contacts. Contacts are ranked as being **Green, Amber or Red** based on the level of concern. MASH enquiries are then sent out on cases which meet the following criteria: cases in which there are concerns re **Physical, Emotional and Sexual Harm or Neglect**. Cases in which there have been issues of **Domestic Violence. Re-referrals within 12 months**. Cases in which there are **Child Exploitation Concerns**. Cases in which **children have been missing for longer than 72 hours** or have been **missing 3 times within one calendar month**. MASH enquiries are sent to a number of different agencies to allow them to share information they hold about the child and their family. The referrer should seek consent from the parents to share this information at the point of referral. The Duty Social Worker will also seek consent from the parents when contacting them to discuss concerns. MASH enquiries are also subject to timescales based on the level of concern. Green enquiries are returned within 24 hours, Amber enquiries within 6 hours and Red Enquiries within 2 hours. This enables for prompt decision making and safety planning for the child. Not every contact is subject to a MASH enquiry. A MASH enquiry is completed when concerns are significant enough to warrant the gathering of information from partnership agencies. Therefore, only those cases which meet the criteria highlighted above will be subject to a formal MASH enquiry. Those that do not meet these criteria remain subject to enquiry, however, this is not a multi-agency enquiry. For those cases, not subject to MASH enquiries, the Duty Social Worker will contact the parents and referrer to discuss the concerns, will complete a Social Care and Early Help Chronology and will highlight risk and protective factors via the Signs of Safety Model to inform decision making.

**Strategy Meetings:**

In cases in which there is evidence that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, an Amber or Red MASH enquiry will be completed and a Strategy Meeting will be arranged. This is a multi-agency meeting and is always attended by Social Care, Police, Early Help (representing Education) and Health as a minimum. Other agencies will be invited when required. The MASH enquiry process allows information to be gathered from Social Care, Health, Police, Early Help, Education, Probation, Drug and Alcohol Services, Mental Health Services and Domestic Violence Services. Professionals from these services are encouraged to attend these meetings, however, their information will already have been received via the MASH enquiry process and as such it is not essential that professionals from these agencies attend in person. These meetings have been referred to as ‘Case Discussions’. These are Strategy Meetings and allow decisions to be made regarding the most appropriate intervention to safeguard the child and support the family. Outcomes from these meetings may be for the case to close with no further action, for the family to be referred to Early Help, for a Children and Families Assessment to be carried out by Social Care, for a Section 47 Child Protection Investigation to be completed or for emergency legal action to be implemented.

**The Role of the MASH Social Workers:**

There are four Social Workers based in MASH. One of these Social Workers oversees all cases identified as needing Early Help Support to ensure that this is the most appropriate intervention for the child. MASH Social Workers are available on a daily basis for consultation with professionals who wish to discuss any concerns they may have for children. MASH Social Workers will carry out duty visits to see children who have been identified as being at immediate risk of significant harm to ensure that Safety Planning is implemented and that children are appropriately safeguarded. MASH Social Workers hold all new cases subject to Section 47 Investigations or emergency legal action.

**Useful information:**

The MASH team operates between 9.00am and 5.30pm Monday to Thursday and 9.00am to 4pm on a Friday. The team can be contacted on 0151 9344013. If advice, guidance or support is needed outside of these times then contact should be made with Sefton EDT on 0151 9343555.

The Early Help Front Door Service sits within St Peter’s House each morning.

Professionals can access Early Help directly by contacting their Local Family Wellbeing Centre (details on Sefton Council Website – ‘Find my Local Family Wellbeing Centre’).

