

The child protection system: the missing voice

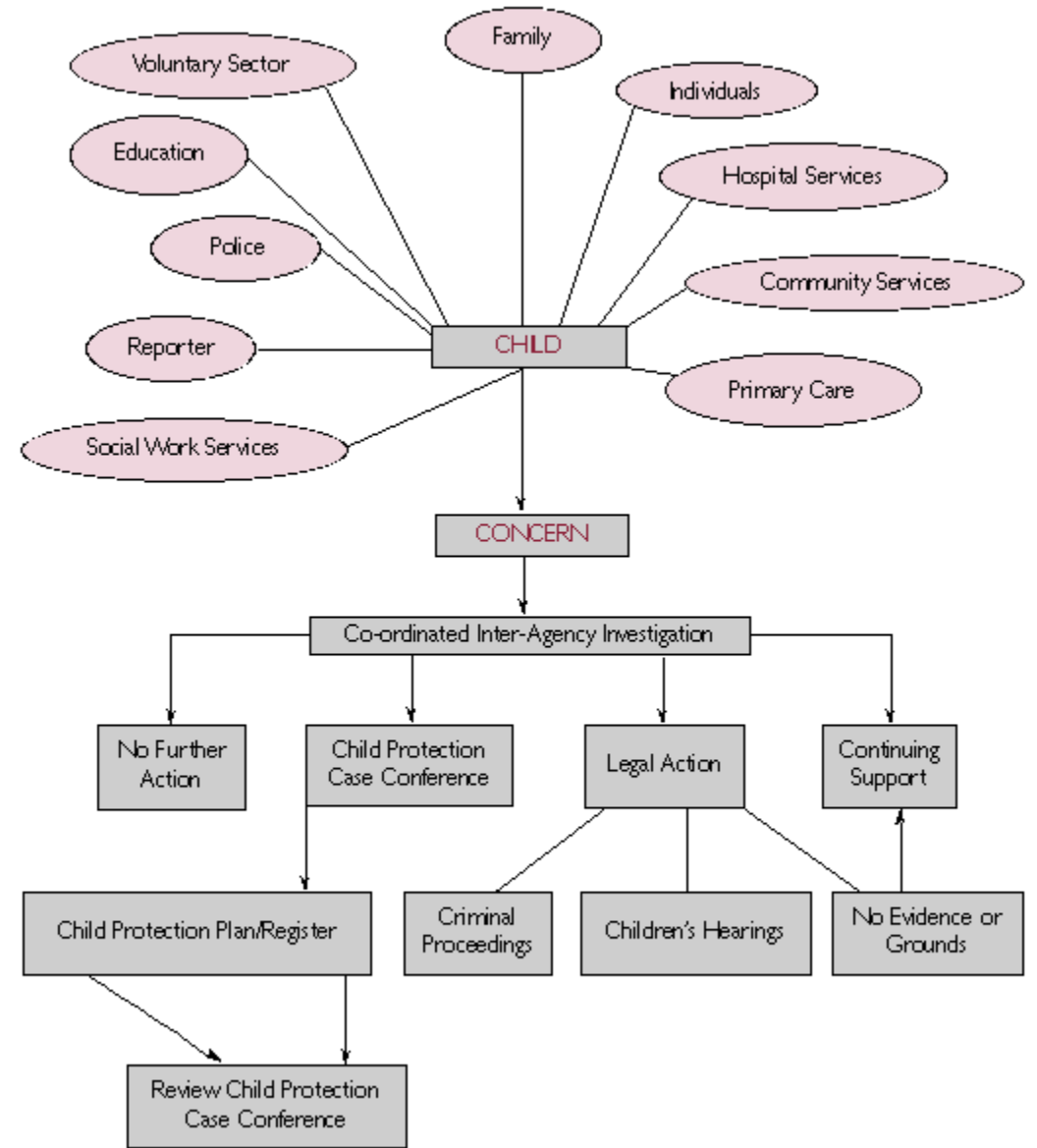
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The child protection system

- Child protection proceedings when a child at risk of significant harm
- Child becomes a 'child protection case': risk assessment, CP conference, CP plan, protection order, care proceedings
- Children should be meaningfully involved – but are they?



What happens to the child?

- Serious case reviews: the child's voice is missing

Research with children has found that they:

- are confused and don't understand what is happening
- are scared - *'am I going to be taken into care?'*
- blame themselves
- do not always trust social workers
- want to be empowered to make things better for their family



Involved by Right: giving children a voice



- Advocate to enable children to have an input into the CP conference in **Kensington and Chelsea**: more child-centred safeguarding practice=better outcomes for children
- Advocate provided by **Barnardo's**: evaluate their advocacy model and promote it more widely as a means of giving children a voice
- **National Children's Bureau** evaluated the advocacy service: is there sufficient evidence to lobby for advocacy to become a legal right for children in the child protection system?

The evaluation

Can advocacy help to:

1. Guarantee children's their right to be involved
child protection decisions?



2. Contribute to better outcomes for children?



The best thing about the advocate is having someone actually listen to you, rather than just saying what they think you would say

[Without the advocate]
They don't know what I would have said or what I think, and they wouldn't have any of my views, really know my decisions



Because I'm a little shy speaking in front of everybody, I say what I think and she tells it to the people in the meeting, and they see what I said

Sometimes if I didn't want to speak, she would say it for me. You know when you feel kind of worried to say something out loud

How the evaluation findings were used

- K&C continued the advocacy service with own funding
- Several local authorities thinking of setting up an advocacy service and some already introduced it
- K&C discussions with DfE on how local authorities can be encouraged and supported to provide advocacy in child protection
- An amendment to the Children and Families Bill to make advocacy in child protection a statutory right – it was defeated but helped to raise awareness



Report: Jellicic H, Gibb J and La Valle I (2013) *Involved by Right: the voice of the child in the child protection conference*. London: National Children's Bureau.
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