

Simply being a sex worker and pregnant or a parent is – legally - enough of a reason for Social Services or the Police to have concerns about your child's welfare (Children and Young Persons Act 1963). If someone contacts them and says they are concerned about your unborn child or children, they must do an investigation, which can be as short and simple as coming to your house and speaking to you and your child.

Social workers should approach each case with an open mind and not leap to conclusions based on the fact that you are a sex worker, although some may not be as open-minded as others. If you do feel that the Social Worker isn't giving you a fair chance, there are other agencies that can help; these are listed at the end of the Pregnancy & Parenthood section. SCOT-PEP will also be happy to get involved in an advocacy role, particularly if sex work is being used as the primary justification.

Generally, the best thing you can do during the investigation is to cooperate as fully as possible and try to keep calm for your own sake and your child's. An initial investigation will usually involve:

- Talking to you
- Talking to your child (if old enough)
- Talking to significant adults in your child's life (your partner, family members, other adults who live there)
- Talking to other professionals involved with you or your child (teachers, nursery workers, health visitors, GPs)

Depending on the allegations, they may also arrange other interviews or examinations, for example a medical examination. Generally they will ask for your consent to speak to or examine your child, but if you refuse they can go to court to get this done against your wishes, and it will probably make them more suspicious of you. If you are worried about the effect of an examination on your child, try to discuss this with the social worker rather than just refuse. It will usually be possible for you or someone you trust to go with your child to reassure them.

Your child will be frightened by the process and by your reaction to it; if you can keep calm and make them feel that this is not something to worry about, it will make the whole thing easier on all of you.

You should be kept fully informed of what is going on, and you should be offered support and advice regardless of what decision is reached. There are a number of parenting and counselling agencies that can help you get through this – these are listed at the end of the section.

What happens next?

After the investigation has been completed one of three things may happen.

Social work will decide there is "no cause for concern". They may offer you advice on services if you or they feel there are areas you need support. You may be tempted to simply tell them to f**k off and get out of your life already, but you should hear them out – they may be able to give you something you actually want.

Social work will decide they have some concerns about the welfare of your child. They will work with you to draw up a 'Family Support Plan' which will be coordinated by a 'lead professional' – this could be a social worker, health visitor or midwife. The plan can include a lot of things, including help getting kids to school, advice, child care support and referrals for health-related needs. They will be monitoring how well you comply with this and there will usually be a follow-up meeting to review your progress.

Social Work may decide that your child is at risk and needs to be protected. Your child could be referred to the Children's Reporter or Child Protection services for assessment and support; this will almost always lead to a Child Protection Case Conference. Depending on the concerns, you may be asked to agree to have your child stay with a family member, friend or foster carer while the investigation is carried out. Arrangements are often flexible and unless the concerns are very serious you will have regular access.

There are a number of possible outcomes from a CPCC, including 'no cause for concern'. If you haven't already, you should get an advocate from SCOT-PEP and/or another agency to attend with you and help you fight your corner. You will find it extremely stressful and emotional and you deserve to have someone in the room whose prime concern is your wellbeing.