



**Inter-Agency Referral Discussions (IRD)
Aberdeenshire Multi-Agency Guidance**

As defined in the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2021, an inter-agency referral discussion (IRD) is the start of the formal process of information sharing, assessment, analysis and decision-making following reported concern about abuse or neglect of a child or young person up to the age of 18 years, in relation to familial and non-familial concerns, and of siblings or other children within the same context. This includes an unborn baby that may be exposed to current or future risk.

Where information is received by social work, police or health that a child may have been abused or neglected and/or is suffering or likely to [suffer significant harm](#), there must be consideration of the need for an IRD. Where there is a concern a child is at risk of, or has experienced exploitation and /or trafficking, an IRD should be held. If there is a decision not to conduct an IRD e.g. because the threshold for significant harm has not been met, this must be recorded in writing.

If it is agreed that an IRD is required, it must be convened without undue delay. The decision to convene an IRD can be made by police, social work or health, but a request to consider an IRD can be made by any agency. Within the North East, education are viewed as a core agency and should be in attendance in all IRDs (where child is of school or nursery age)

IRDs are required to ensure a co-ordinated inter-agency child protection process up until the point that the child protection investigation has concluded / reached a point that a multi-agency decision can be made regarding the need for further action, including whether a Child Protection Planning Meeting (CPPM) is required.

Once the need has been identified, a time/date will be agreed for the IRD to take place over a Teams meeting. This will involve all relevant agencies. We aim to hold IRDs “without undue delay” and aspire to a target of within two hours of the decision to proceed to IRD. It is usually the role of the social worker to inform partners of the date/time.

At this stage each professional invited to the IRD will be expected to research their own systems in order to bring relevant information to the enquiry to share at the IRD. Please see last page for details of what information your agency is expected to research/provide.

The IRD process may have to begin out with core hours, with a focus on immediate protective actions and interim safety planning. A comprehensive IRD must be completed “without undue delay” as soon as practical. This should normally be on the next working day.

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The initial stage of an IRD

An IRD consists of two separate components. It begins with a joint process that Social Work, Police, Health and Education (where applicable) staff must follow when they are responding to a child protection referral. All relevant information is shared and analysed which provides a strategic basis for the next stage of the process. As such an IRD will give priority consideration to:

- the safety needs of the child/children involved
- level of risk faced by the child/children and by others in this context
- evidence that a crime or offence may have been committed or may be committed against a child or any other child within the same context.
- whether emergency legal measures may be necessary
- Whether there are legal orders in place that may have implications for any interim safety plans (i.e., contact order or family time stipulated in ICSS/CSO or court order).

In all investigations, decisions and plans, the additional support needs for each child must be taken into account, including:

- health concerns
 - emotional distress
 - speech and language
 - translation requirements
 - risk of self-harm
 - additional supports relating to disabilities and all protected characteristics
- Supporting resources regarding children with disabilities can be found in the [GIRFEC Aberdeenshire website](#)
- The chairing and minuting of the meeting will be carried out jointly by police and social work. All the professionals on the IRD call, are asked to email a written account of the agency information they share to the minute taker.

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Following consideration of the above, the IRD will reach agreement of the next stage of the process as detailed below:

- what decisions must be taken about the immediate safety and wellbeing of this child and/or other children involved?
- is an inter-agency child protection investigation required?
- is a single-agency investigation and follow-up preferred and why?
- if no further investigation is required, what are the reasons for this?
- is a joint investigative interview (JII) required and, if so, what are the arrangements for this? (Including who will carry it out, location of interview and in what timescales.)
- is a medical examination required? If so, should this be a comprehensive medical examination, a specialist paediatric forensic examination or Joint Paediatric Forensic Examination for cases of potential non-accidental injury or suspected sexual abuse?
- In some situations there may be sufficient evidence, to conclude that the child is at risk of significant harm prior to the child protection investigation (joint interview/medicals/discussion with family) taking place. In these situations, there may be an agreement that an ICPPM is required. The child protection investigation will continue regardless of this decision.
- Consideration can also be given to the need as to whether the child needs to be referred to the Children's Reporter. Such a decision would need to be based on evidence that attempts to work with the family have not been successful and the level of concerns meet the [grounds for a referral](#) to the children's reporter

The agreed actions must be clearly documented in the IRD record, stating who is responsible for each task. Clear rationale for the decisions should also be provided.

At all stages of the IRD, robust consideration **MUST** also be given to the need for an interim safety plan for the child and any other children, such as their brothers and sisters who may also be at risk of harm.

If the interim safety plan is likely to impact on family time (contact) that is stipulated through a court order or ICSSO/CSO, SW to seek advice from Legal & People

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At this stage in the process a plan must be agreed on how the outcome from any further action that has been agreed will be shared among all participants of the IRD to inform further decision making.

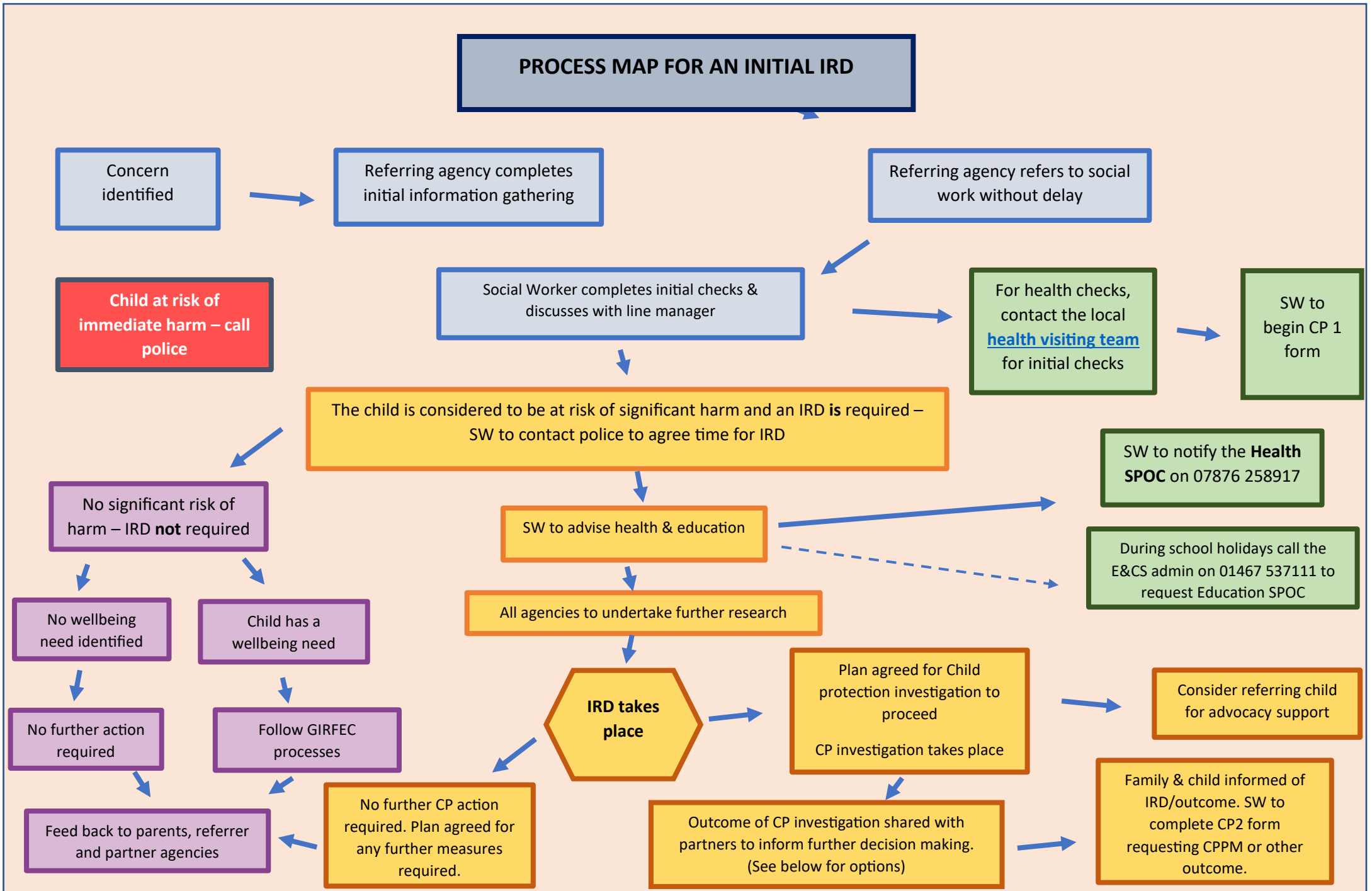
Where there is a plan for further investigation to take place, the most effective route by which to reach an informed decision about the need for further action/measures, including the need for a Child Protection Planning Meeting, is by scheduling a **reconvened IRD**.

If it is agreed that an informed decision on the outcome of the enquiry/investigation can be reached without the need for a reconvened IRD, this must be stated in the record of IRD with details of how this will be communicated between all the partners.

There may be circumstances when the Police require to capture evidence of a crime from a child/young person and there are no child protection concerns, therefore an IRD would not be necessary. In such circumstances, Police Scotland may request a JII is conducted in order to progress their investigation. However, prior to progressing to JII, Social Work are required to check their records to ensure there is no other information which may change this initial assessment. If the child/young person is known to Social Work and the circumstances of the enquiry add sufficient concerns that it may meet the threshold for an IRD, they may request that an IRD is held prior to JII.

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Agreeing the best outcome for the Child

The National Guidance for CP in Scotland requires that decisions regarding the outcome of CP investigations are made on a multi-agency basis. These must be based on an analysis of all the available information.

This stage of the IRD entails the partners from the original meeting coming back together to consider the findings from any investigations and further actions that were agreed at the initial IRD. There may be times when it is appropriate to invite other professionals to the meeting, such as specialist health professionals.

The need for a reconvened IRD may be agreed where there is likely to be a need to re-group to review the outcome of the Child Protection Investigation, review the safety plan and reach an informed decision on further measures based on an analysis of all the information.

If it is agreed that decisions can be reached without the need for a reconvened IRD, the agreed process must be recorded on the record detailing who will make contact with who.

If, however information comes to light that requires further discussion, a reconvened IRD can be arranged.

On considering the information shared at this point, all partners need to agree on the most appropriate outcome for the child(ren).

Consideration will be given to the following options;

- Single agency response (including situations where social work advice family that no further intervention is required)
- Multi-agency planning process, where concerns are assessed to relate to a wellbeing need.
- Child protection planning meeting, where it is assessed that the child(ren) is at significant risk of harm.
- Referral to the Children's Reporter, where it is assessed that voluntary measures of working with the child and family are not sufficient.
- Child Protection Order where it is assessed that the child(ren) is at imminent risk of harm.
- Other legal measures such as an Assessment Order.

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AGENCY CHECKS

Social Work

- CareFirst database with reference to adult as well as children's services
- Child Protection Register – registration history (plus registration history if child has been on another local authority CPR)
- Child's legal status history
- Legal orders stipulating contact between the child and parent/family member
- Looked After Child and placement history
- Child Protection and Looked After history for brothers and sisters (including step and half siblings)
- Child's personal network
- Allocated worker
- Professional network

Police

- PNC
- CHS
- VPD
- Criminal Intelligence
- UNIFI
- Legacy files, i.e. Historical files pre- VPD
- STORM

Health

- Child health record (initial checks)

If progressing IRD

- Check GP records
- Discuss GP information with GP Practice – as per local guidelines
- Consider any disabilities and how these impact on the child i.e. communication, developmental age and stage
- Consider protective factors / risk factors
- Check TrakCare / BadgerNet (midwives)

Education

- Check PPR records for child protection and CPM history
- Risk factors / protective factors
- Disability and additional support needs
- Communication issues/ requirements – current methods used
- Risky behaviours
- Family circumstances – risks and supports
- Health issues
- Circumstances of other significant family members, i.e. siblings
- Evidence in relation to the current enquiry which becomes relevant
- Attendance
- Developmental stage

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Glossary of terms/ abbreviations used in the context of an IRD.

Age of criminal responsibility- (ACR) - The age of criminal responsibility in Scotland is 12 years old. This means a child under the age of 12 cannot be arrested, charged or prosecuted for a crime. A child under 12 cannot be held criminally responsible for harmful behaviours.

Care Experienced Child – this term replaces the old terminology of ‘Looked after Child’ and refers to children who are under the care of the local authority. This includes children who are not able to live at home and are cared for in alternative care arrangements such as foster care, kinship care and residential settings. It can also refer to children who are on an order through the Children’s Hearing system, but live at home. Please see section on CSO & ICSO for more details. Children and young people are who have experience of having been in care, but are no longer on a legal order are also referred to as ‘care experienced’.

Care and Risk Management (CARM): Processes which are applied when a child between the ages of 12 and 17 has been involved in behaviours which could cause serious harm to others. This includes sexual or violent behaviour which may cause serious harm. CARM processes are also applicable when an escalation of behaviours suggests that an incident of a seriously harmful nature may be imminent

Child criminal exploitation – (CCE) - takes a variety of forms but ultimately it is the grooming and exploitation of children into criminal activity.

Child sexual exploitation – (CSE) is a type of [sexual abuse](#). When a child or young person is exploited they're given things, like gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities. Children and young people are often tricked into believing they're in a loving and consensual relationship. This is called [grooming](#). They may trust their abuser and not understand that they're being abused.

Child Protection Planning Meeting (CPPM): A multi-disciplinary meeting, formerly termed a Child Protection Case Conference. Involvement of child and relevant family members should be supported. The purpose of the meeting is to consider and agree an assessment of risk and form a plan of required action to protect a child or young person. Participants are those persons essential to the Child Protection Plan.

Child’s Planning Meeting (CPM) Child/Young Person’s Plan GIRFEC introduced a single-planning process known as The Child’s Plan. A Child/Young Person’s Plan is put in place when it is agreed coordination of one or more targeted supports is required to meet a child/young person’s wellbeing needs. A Child’s Plan can be single or Multi-Agency and will address the wellbeing needs identified through assessment. A Child’s Plan will also reference support being provided to parents/carers by adult or Community-based Services. A Child’s Plan can be agreed at different meeting forums, such as CPPM, LAC Review, or Single/Multi-Agency Child’s Plan Meetings.

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Child Protection Order – (CPO) an emergency protection order that can be applied for if a child is deemed to be suffering significant harm or is likely to suffer significant harm; access to the child is being unreasonable denied and there is reasonable cause to believe that access is required as a matter of urgency. CPOs are usually applied for by the Local Authority, but anyone can apply.

Child Assessment Order (CAO) - as above, this is an emergency order that can be applied for via the Sheriff Court where there are concerns that a child is at risk of significant harm and access to the child is being unreasonable denied.

Compulsory Supervision Order – (CSO) - the child becomes 'looked after/care experienced' and responsibility for their care, protection and control is assumed by their local authority (usually enacted by social work departments).

Interim Compulsory Supervision Order – (ICSO) - An ICSO lasts for 22 days but can be renewed lasting up to a total of 66. ICSOs are an interim measure that are used prior to full compulsory supervision order being granted.

Interagency Referral Discussion – (IRD) See introduction on page 1 of this guidance.

Joint Investigative Interview (JII) The investigative interview is a formal, planned interview with a child, carried out by trained police and social work practitioners, for the purposes of eliciting the child's account of events (if any) which require investigation.

Looked after child/ Looked after and accommodated child – (LAC or LAAC) - Please see above section for Care Experienced Child.

Scottish Child Interview Model (SCIM) – this is a trauma informed, best practice model for joint investigative interviews which seeks to secure best evidence for court processes, and to inform assessment of risk to the child and other children. There is a specific SCIM team and a SCIM worker might attend an IRD.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) - The Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA) is a national body focused on children and young people most at risk. SCRA facilitates the work of the Children's Reporter. Any reference to making a referral to SCRA refers to a referral being submitted to the Children's Reporter who decides whether there are sufficient grounds to convene a Children's Hearing.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking child – (UASC) - unaccompanied asylum-seeking child refers to who is or appears to be under that age of 18 and is applying for asylum in his or her own right and has no relative or guardian in the United Kingdom.

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United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – (UNCRC) - is an international [human rights treaty](#) which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. The UNCRC consists of **54 articles** that set out children's rights and how governments should work together to make them **available to all children**.

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