

“Social Work has changed a lot. In the past our approach to child protection wasn't very flexible. Now we work more in partnership with families where there are concerns to make sure they get support before things reach a crisis.”

Myths and Realities:

Very few adults harm children deliberately and most often, when harm does happen, families need support, not punishment or the removal of their children. Bucks Social Workers and other professionals get involved when parents may be unable to protect their child from harm and need help.



In some cases Bucks Child Abuse Investigation Unit will investigate with social workers to help protect children, and to decide whether an offense against a child has been committed.

There have been lots of negative reports in the media about social workers and what happens when concerns about child abuse are reported. Many myths exist, so for clarification:

Child abuse is not easy to recognise, prevent or stop. It is rarely possible to definitely say that a child has been abused or by whom. A careful assessment is needed in order to find out what has happened and what support and protection will best help the family. As a result it can be difficult to avoid some intrusion into family life. A social worker will ask questions about the family circumstances, consider the frequency and the seriousness of the incident and the effect on the child. All of these factors will help professionals to decide on what should happen next. Social Workers and the Police have a duty (they have no choice about this) under The Children Act 1989 to investigate concerns of child abuse.

Professionals are not solely responsible for the protection of children. Traditionally social workers have been expected to make sure that children are safe. In order to do this well, they rely on information from parents, family, other professionals and the local community, who all play an important part in identifying concerns about those close to them. This helps to ensure that they are offered support before the situation becomes far worse.

Reporting child abuse rarely results in the child being removed from the home. This is not the main aim of social work enquiries and rarely happens. Social Workers can only remove children from home with a court order, having demonstrated that there is serious and immediate risk. In emergency situations, the police have the power to remove the child for 72 hours.



Warning Signs:

Social workers will get involved when they believe that neglect, physical injury, sexual or emotional abuse has occurred / is likely to occur. Make sure you know what child abuse is - contact the helplines for more info.



Action:

A social worker (and sometimes a police officer) will meet with a family when abuse is reported. They will talk with other professionals in order to make decisions about how to help.



What to say:

If you are worried about your own, or someone else's, treatment of a child, seek advice about what practical and emotional support is available.



Prevention:

It is important that children know what to do when they feel unsafe. Do they know who to talk to and how to get to a safe place or person? If you are worried about your child, seek help quickly.

Contacts:

Buckinghamshire County Council First Response Team: 0845 4600001

Out of Hours Emergency Social Work Team: 0800 999 7677

NSPCC: 0808 800 5000 www.nspcc.org.uk **Family Lives:** www.familylives.org.uk