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# Tips on working with Child Protection for parents and primary carers

Child Protection involvement with your family can be distressing. Sometimes it is hard for parents to understand what is going on and to feel like you have a say in what happens to you and your family.

This sheet offers tips about working with Child Protection, from advocates and parents who have experience of Child Protection involvement with their family in the past.

It has been prepared by Independent Family Advocacy and Support (IFAS) and members of Shared Experience and Support (SEaS), a lived experience group which is part of IFAS. IFAS is a non-legal advocacy service run by Victoria Legal Aid that supports parents and primary carers to understand the child protection system and their rights and responsibilities.

## Child Protection are involved with my family – what should I do?

* **Ask for information** –you can ask Child Protection for information about why they are involved with your family and what their concerns are. You can ask for this information in writing. You can also ask to see any related documents, such as case plans developed by Child Protection for your children.
* **Acknowledge the report** –get all the information in relation to the report even if you agree or disagree with what has been reported.
* **Communicate** –the way you communicate with Child Protection and other services can affect what decisions they make. Try to stay calm when speaking with them. We know this can be difficult and you have the right to ask for support to help you communicate with Child Protection.
* **Address concerns** –try to address the concerns that Child Protection have raised. This may include providing evidence of support services you work with, courses you have attended, and assessments completed. You can also ask services that you are working with or have worked with to write support letters for you to provide to Child Protection as evidence. If you don’t agree with the concerns Child Protection have raised, get legal advice.
* **Work together** –you do not have to agree with Child Protection, but it is important to work with them so you are involved in the process.
* **Get support** –if you or your children are facing difficulties, it is important you get the help you need. Think about what support might be useful to you and your children and ask for help to contact these services if you need to. Child Protection may also ask you to engage with specific support services such as parenting support, counselling, and alcohol or other drug assessments.
* **Get legal advice** – if Child Protection ask you to sign an agreement or another document, it is a good idea to check with a lawyer before you sign. A lawyer can also give you advice about what information that agreement should include, such as an end date or arrangements for seeing your children if they are not living with you.

## I have a meeting with child protection – any tips?

* **Make a plan** –make sure you plan what you want to say and what you want to ask. You may write these things down using the *IFAS self-advocacy plan.*
* **Ask questions** – sometimes you need information on Child Protection’s concerns, the options available to you, and/or your rights and responsibilities to help you make decisions about what to do next. So, prepare questions that you have for Child Protection. It is reasonable to expect Child Protection to answer your questions but they cannot tell you who made the report.
* **Bring a support person** – you may want to bring a family member, friend, support worker or advocate to support you at the meeting.
* **Participate in meeting** –stay calm when communicating with Child Protection. You are in control of the way that you express yourself. You can ask for a break in the meeting at any time, this can allow you to think about what you want to say before returning to the meeting and may help you to focus on what is being talked about when you are feeling stressed. If you do not understand what people are saying it is ok to ask them to explain this to you.
* **Record of meeting** – you can ask to be provided with the notes from meetings that you attend with Child Protection and/or other services. It is important that you understand what was discussed at the meeting, what plans were made, what was agreed to and by when. You and/or your support person can take your own notes in the meeting. You should not record the meeting on your phone or other device unless you have permission from everyone in the meeting.

## More information

Visit [www.vla.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/child-protection](http://www.vla.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/child-protection) to download these fact sheets:

* **Child Protection involvement with your family** – **what you can do** – answers common questions about child protection involvement, how to get help and what you can do if you’re unhappy with a Child Protection decision.
* **Information for parents and primary carers with a child protection court case** – answers some common questions about the child protection court process and how to get help.

Where to get help

### Independent Family Advocacy and Support

IFAS provides non-legal advocacy and support to parents and primary carers with Child Protection involvement. The type of service IFAS can provide will be discussed with you when you call.

* Visit the website [www.vla.vic.gov.au/ifas](http://www.vla.vic.gov.au/ifas) or send an email to [ifascontact@vla.vic.gov.au](mailto:ifascontact@vla.vic.gov.au)
* Call the IFAS phone line on 1800 849 200 which is staffed by IFAS Advocates on Mondays from 9am to 12pm, Wednesdays from 1pm to 4pm and Fridays from 9am to 12pm (except public holidays). You can leave a message with your name and number at any time and an advocate will call you back.
* Ask a child protection worker, carer or other support person to help you contact IFAS.

### Victoria Legal Aid

Call Victoria Legal Aid for free legal help with child protection issues.

* Call 1300 792 387, 8:00 am to 6:00 pm, Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays
* Visit the website: [www.legalaid.vic.gov.au](http://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au)

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