

Dear [Parent and/or full name(s) of all people with parental responsibility]

Commented [EP1]: I prefer this to be the parent(s) FIRST name, not first and surname, nor Mrs Smith, for example. Immediately makes the letter feel more personal. We should be on first name terms by now

Re: [Name of LA] Children's Services Concerns about [insert name(s) of child(ren)]
– LETTER BEFORE PROCEEDINGS

HOW TO AVOID GOING TO COURT

Commented [EP2]: Capitals are unnecessary. This title needs removing. It's a bit like a bailiff's letter. There doesn't need to be a title like this!

I am writing to let you know how concerned Children's Services have become about your care of your Child/ren. I am writing to tell you that [name of the Local Authority] is thinking about starting Care Proceedings in respect of [name(s) of child(ren)]. This means that we may apply to Court and [name(s) of child(ren)] could, if the Court decides that this is best for him/her/them, be taken into care.

Commented [EP3]: This should be written by the social worker ie
I'm writing to let you know how worried I am about the care of Jimmy and Jane. I've shared my worries with my manager, and they're also worried.

Commented [EP4]: Should ideally read:
I'm writing to see how we can work together to avoid Jimmy and Jane being taken into foster care. If things don't get better for Jimmy and Jane at home, I will have to think about applying to the Court so that a Judge can help decide what is best for the children.

We are so worried about your child(ren) that we will go to Court unless you are able to improve things. There are things you can do which could stop this happening. We have set out in this letter the concerns that we have about [name(s) of child(ren)] and the things that have been done to try to help your family.

Commented [EP5]: This bit is really "blaming" – "things that have been done to help your family". This whole paragraph needs reframing. It puts all the onus on the parents to demonstrate change, but help is needed to do that. It's not exactly "partnership working". The power feels all in the LAs favour here. It should read (following on from the previous paragraph):
These are some of our worries X X X – we want to help you to improve things.

AN IMPORTANT MEETING ABOUT WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

Please come to a meeting with us to talk about these concerns on [date and time] at the [insert name of office]. The address is [address] and there is a map with this letter to help you find it. Please contact your Social Worker on [tele no] to tell us if you will come to the meeting.

Commented [EP6]: Should read:
I'd like to invite you to a meeting where we can talk about our worries for Jimmy and Jane and how we can work together to help your family. We always want children to stay with their families where it is safe to, and that's what we'd like to do here. To make it safe for Jimmy and Jane to stay with you, we need to help you to make some changes.

At the meeting we will discuss with you and tell you what you will need to do to make your child safe. We will also talk to you about how we will support you to do this. We will also make clear what steps we will take if we continue to be worried about [name(s) of child(ren)].

Commented [EP7]: "If you cannot attend the meeting on this time and date, please let me know and we'll try to work together to find a day and time that suits us all."

PLEASE BRING A SOLICITOR TO THE MEETING ON [insert date]

Commented [EP8]: DON'T USE CAPITALS YOU DON'T NEED TO SHOUT
Also, it's not a good idea to frighten parents like this. Just remove it altogether.

Take this letter to a Solicitor and ask him or her to come to the meeting with you. The Solicitor will advise you about getting legal aid (free legal advice). We have sent with this letter a list of local Solicitors who work with children and families. They are all separate from Children's Services. You do not have to bring a solicitor to the meeting, but it will be helpful if you do.

Commented [EP9]: Doesn't need to be in bold!

Commented [EP10]: This reads like an instruction "take this letter to a solicitor". Again, the power dynamic in play. Instead: "It will be really helpful for you to have some free legal advice. You can take this letter to a solicitor and they can attend the meeting with you...".

Commented [EP11]: Possibly also add in that the parents can also bring a member of their family, a close friend, or a support worker to the meeting. However, it needs to be clear that there will be some sensitive things talked about at the meeting so the parents need to be clear that the person they bring will hear that information too.

Information your Solicitor will need is:

Local Authority Legal Contact: insert name and e mail address

Address: Legal Services,

Telephone: [insert extension number]

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DO NOTHING

If you do nothing we will have to go to Court. If you do not answer this letter or come to the meeting, we will go to Court as soon as we can to make sure [name(s) of child(ren)] are safe.

Commented [EP12]: NO HEADER NEEDED ESPECIALLY IN CAPITALS

Commented [EP13]: People don't "answer letters" these days.
Instead: I'd really like you to come to the meeting, but if you don't, or you don't contact me, I will have to apply to court to help me to make sure that Jimmy and Jane are safe. Better nearer the end of the letter.

YOUR WIDER FAMILY

Our concerns about [name(s) of child(ren)] are very serious. If we do have to go to Court and the Court decides you cannot care for your child(ren), we will first try to find a placement with one of your relatives, if it is best for your child to do this. At the meeting we will want to talk to you and your Solicitor about who might look after your child(ren) if the Court decides that it is no longer safe for you to do so.

Commented [EP14]: ARGH these headings do not help anyone want to read the letter. .And this whole section would be better higher up in the letter

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting with your Solicitor on [date]. If you do not understand any part of this letter, please contact your Social Worker [name] on [tele no:]. Please tell your Social Worker if you need any help with child care or transport arrangements in order to come to the meeting, and we will try to help.

Commented [EP15]: This could be worded better. Yes, it's good forward planning, but it's not exactly going to help in the way it is put. I think the addition of "it would help Jimmy and Jane, if you could have a think about who might support you look after the children, or might be able to look after them if we get to the stage where the Court does decide they can't stay at home ,and we can discuss this at the meeting "

Commented [EP16]: "Look forward", is not convincing, it is professional language -who's going to look forward to a meeting like this?!

Instead: "I know this will be a difficult letter to read and I know that this meeting will feel frightening. I really would like to see you there and will support you to attend however I can. If you need some help with childcare, or transport to the meeting, do let me know and I'll try to help.

Yours sincerely

NAME
Team Manager

Commented [EP17]: From the social worker please – NOT the manager. I don't know the manager. Personalise it.

CC: Social Worker [name]
Legal Services

Commented [EP18]: No need to add in the CC when it's going to parents. It's just frightening.