



# Escalation Process

## Introduction

When working in the arena of safeguarding children and young people, it is inevitable that at times there will be professional disagreement between agencies. Whilst this is accepted, it is vital that such disagreements are not allowed to adversely affect the outcomes for children and young people. Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if it is not resolved in a constructive and timely way. This protocol therefore, provides a process for resolving professional disagreements between agencies.

Disagreements can arise in a number of areas of multi-agency working, as well as within single-agency working, but are most commonly seen in relation to:

- Criteria for referrals;
- Outcomes of assessments;
- Roles and responsibilities of workers;
- Service provision; and
- Information sharing and communication.

Disagreements can relate both to decisions about individual children or specific processes. This protocol focuses on disagreements between agencies in relation to individual children and is applicable to all agencies, including the Voluntary, Community and Faith (VCF) sectors.

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## 2. Principles of Resolving Professional Disagreements

- The safety and wellbeing of individual children / young people must remain the paramount consideration in any professional disagreement. Professional disagreements which obscure focus on the child / young person must be avoided;
- Professional disagreement should not always be viewed negatively; it can improve outcomes for children and young people in a timely and sensitive manner, and provide important learning for the practitioners / agencies involved;
- All professionals should take responsibility for their own cases, and their actions in relation to such case work;
- When there are disagreements between agencies, this should be recognised as an opportunity for healthy debate. The purpose of this protocol is to facilitate the resolution of

operational disagreements where an agency considers that, without such action, there would be a negative impact on a child's well-being;

- Difficulties at practitioner / fieldworker level between agencies should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible between the practitioners concerned. If this is unsuccessful, the challenging agency should formally communicate that this protocol will be implemented, and details escalated to the challenging agency's Safeguarding Lead and/ or the practitioner's Line Manager to agree and record;
- All practitioners should respect the views of others, whatever their level of experience. They should also be mindful of the difficulties that challenging more senior or experienced practitioners may present to others;
- Working together effectively depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies. It also depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies, with a genuine commitment to partnership;
- Attempts at problem resolution may leave one worker / agency believing that the child / young person remains at risk of Significant Harm. This person / agency is responsible for communicating any such concerns through their line management and/or the Safeguard Leads for the organisations involved;
- Disagreements can be resolved at any stage however it is the responsibility of all the agencies involved to achieve the best outcome for the child;
- To avoid delay, it is expected that disagreements will be resolved quickly at the lowest level and, if escalated, each step in this process should not exceed 5 working days.

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### 3. Process of Resolving Professional Disagreements

The following stages are likely to be involved:

- Recognition that there is a disagreement over a significant issue in relation to the safety and wellbeing of a child / young person;
- Identification of the problem;
- Discussion of the possible cause of the problem; and
- Agreement on what needs to be achieved in order for it to be resolved.

#### Step 1

The process of resolving professional disagreements should initially involve workers consulting co-workers, to clarify their thinking and practice in the first instance, for example, via a Professional's Meeting, discussion with the Safeguarding Lead or other meeting which

promotes reflection, using an appropriate practice tool where available, such as the local



A framework for  
making safeguarding

Framework for Decision making in Kirklees. Link:

In some Voluntary, Community or Faith sector organisations, the role of a Senior Manager, may be undertaken by a member of the management committee.

## **Step 2**

The following should be considered as part of the process of resolving professional disagreements:

- a. Initial attempts to resolve the problem should normally be made between the professionals / agencies who have the original disagreement, at the time the dispute is identified, unless the child / young person is at immediate or significant risk;
- b. Both agencies should give clear reason(s) for their safeguarding concerns and approach, which should be put in writing and, where required, clearly recorded as a formal challenge, as per guidance from their Line Manager and/or Safeguarding Lead;
- c. It should be recognised that differences in status and / or experience may affect the confidence of some workers in resolving differences, and some may need support from their Managers and/or Safeguarding Lead.

## **Step 3**

If unresolved, the problem / disagreement should be referred to the worker's own Line Manager or agency Safeguarding Lead (challenging agency), who will discuss the situation with their equivalent colleague in the other agency.

## **Step 4**

If the problem remains unresolved, the Line Manager or agency Safeguarding Lead of the challenging agency will liaise with the relevant Service Manager or refer up their agency line management structure. This may be the management committee if in a VCF sector organisation or Designated Safeguarding Lead who will liaise with the relevant Service Manager.

## **Step 5**

If the issue is not resolved and professional differences remain, the matter must be referred to the Heads of Service (or most appropriate management committee member, commissioner or funding body [1]) for each agency involved.

## **Step 6**

In the unlikely event that the issue remains unresolved by following the steps described above and/or the discussions raise significant policy issues, the matter should be referred

urgently to the Kirklees Safeguarding Children Board (KSCB) Manager who will determine a course of action including reporting to the KSCB Chair for resolution.

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At all stages, a clear record of the progress of the disagreement should be kept by all parties on each agency's child's file. This must include written confirmation between the parties in relation to the agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued. Where applicable records of any learning from the disagreement should be shared with the KSCB, and then collated and considered to aid wider learning and improvement.

It is imperative that this process should fit within the child's timescale. Timely action is paramount if there are concerns that a child or young person is at risk.