



Escalation Policy: Resolution of Professional Disagreements

Introduction

When professionals are working together in the complex business of safeguarding children and adults with care and support needs there will inevitably be occasions when there are professional differences of opinion. Constructive challenge is an important component in positive partnership working, but where differences of opinion cannot be resolved quickly and easily practitioners have a duty to take action to address professional disagreements in a way that is appropriate, timely and proportionate.

Learning from Serious Case Reviews and Safeguarding Adult Reviews highlights the importance of resolving professional differences of opinion to ensure that children, young people and adults are not left at risk of harm. If sufficiently serious, and when disagreements are not able to be resolved, it is important that they are escalated formally and recorded..

This process sets out the steps to be taken to address professional differences of opinion when the issue relates to the safeguarding needs of a child, young person or adult. It should not be confused with the process to be followed for making a referral to Children's Social Care when there is a child protection concern or to Adult Safeguarding when there is an adult safeguarding concern. A single agency may choose to escalate a professional disagreement with another agency or, if appropriate, more than one agency may choose to jointly escalate an issue.

Examples of case specific professional disagreements include:

- When there is disagreement about a decision about a **referral** from one agency to another
- When there is disagreement about the outcome of an **assessment**
- When there is disagreement about a child's **plan or safeguarding plan** or its implementation
- When there is disagreement about an **intervention** to bring about the necessary changes
- When there is disagreement over the **sharing of information** in a particular case

It is important that practitioners and managers understand what action they need to take in order to address professional differences of opinion and the systems in place in their organisation to support this action. The flowchart on the next page sets out the process to be followed when seeking to resolve a professional difference of opinion.

It is important that professional disagreements are resolved at Stage 1 wherever possible, despite the fact that this may require challenging conversations with colleagues. This serves both to strengthen professional working relationships and to actively avoid unnecessary drift and delay in delivering positive outcomes for children and adults.

Additional useful links:

<https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/documents/guidance-for-someone-who-has-concern-about-an-adult-to-decide-if-this-needs-a-safeguarding-referral-or-other-actions/>

Checking back: Ask – Do – Share Model

<https://www.safeguardingworcestershire.org.uk/documents/fact-sheet-for-practitioners/>

Information sharing

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-practitioners-information-sharing-advice>

Structure Chart for Children's Social Care

http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/9726/childrens_social_work_structure.pdf



Stage 1

Practitioner seeks to resolve professional concern or disagreement through discussion and/or meeting within **1-3 days** (reflecting the level of risk to the child/adult).

Resolved →

- **Check back** to ensure there is shared understanding of the agreed actions
- **Record** agreed actions on child/adult's file
- Follow **agency procedure** for logging low level concerns or disagreements
- **Check back** to ensure agreed actions have been fully implemented within agreed time scale

↓
Unresolved

Stage 2

Practitioner reports the issue about which there is professional disagreement to his/her line manager. Respective managers liaise within **1-3 days** (reflecting the level of risk to the child/adult) to review available information and resolve if possible. Advice is sought from respective designated safeguarding leads if necessary.

Is there agreement?

Resolved →

- **Check back** to ensure there is shared understanding of the agreed actions
- Immediately **feedback** agreed actions to operational staff
- **Confirm actions in writing** between agencies and, where appropriate, include a date to review them
- If necessary invoke the process for reviewing the child/adult's Plan
- **Record** agreed actions on child/adult's file
- **Check back** to ensure agreed actions have been completed within agreed time scale

↓
Unresolved

Stage 3

The professional concern or disagreement is referred without delay through the line management structures of the respective agencies. Senior managers seek to resolve within **1-3 days** (reflecting the level of risk to the child/adult).

Is there agreement?

Resolved →

- Outcome of discussion and agreed actions to be **recorded in writing** and consideration given to where the record of the meeting is to be held
- Immediately **feedback** agreed actions to operational staff
- **Record** agreed actions on child/adult's file
- Senior managers consider the need to **review policies or procedures**, or to address any compliance or professional competence issues
- **Check back** to ensure agreed actions have been completed within agreed time scale

↓
Unresolved

Stage 4

WSCB members for the respective organisations are informed, who will refer to the WSCB/WSAB Manager for the convening of an independently chaired resolution

Resolved →



More general cumulative concerns about how another agency operates should be raised with your designated Safeguarding Lead in order for a decision to be made as to how this should be dealt with (as it may sit outside this procedure).

Concerns about the practice of colleagues within your own organisation

Each agency should have its own clear and accessible policy in respect of 'whistleblowing' which should be consulted when there are serious concerns about the practice of a colleague which have not yet been resolved by discussion with the relevant managers. If you have exhausted your organisation's whistleblowing process you should escalate outside the organisation. See link for details:

<https://www.gov.uk/whistleblowing>. Whilst it can be very difficult to raise issues about the professional practice of a colleague this should not be ignored where to do so might leave a child or an adult with care and support needs at risk of abuse or neglect.