

Resolving Professional Differences

Professionals working within all agencies including Children's Safeguarding, Education, Health, Police, Probation, Housing Providers and Voluntary Organisations may, from time to time, experience disagreements over the handling of concerns relating to children and families and the views of one person may not always accord with those of a professional colleague. This can occur when a representative from one agency expresses concerns about decisions taken, or the handling of a particular case, or there may exist conflicting views on how the case should be dealt with.

Having different professional perspectives within safeguarding practice is a sign of a healthy and well-functioning partnership and effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between professionals. These differences of opinion are usually resolved by discussion and negotiation between the professionals concerned.

Differences could arise in a number of areas of multi-agency working as well as within single agency working. Differences are most likely to arise in relation to

- Criteria for referrals and levels of need
- Outcomes of assessments
- The need for action
- Roles and responsibilities of workers
- Service provision
- Timeliness of interventions
- Information sharing and communication

It is essential that where differences of opinion arise they do not adversely affect the outcomes for children and young people, and are resolved in a constructive and timely manner.

Where professional concerns or suspicions around the child's safety and wellbeing remains, and there are concerns that the management around this is inadequate to protect the child, professionals are urged to initiate [Pan-Sussex Safeguarding Procedures: Resolution of Professional Disagreements](#)

The escalation process is a formal professional mechanism to improve the way professionals work together to collectively improve outcomes for children. Anyone working with children, young people and their families should feel confident to challenge decision-making.

Different agencies focus on different areas of the child's life, and therefore may sometimes have a difference of perspective and priority. These should always be discussed with other professionals and result in a plan that is accepted by all. Many serious case reviews have identified an apparent reluctance to challenge interagency decision making.

A recent local Serious Case Review ([Child A](#), Brighton & Hove LSCB, 2017) highlighted that there was a significantly different perspective between professionals responsible for a looked after child's care as he approached his 18th birthday. An independent reviewer who examined the case noted that the therapeutic approach of the residential unit in which he lived was concerned with his "inner world", with Brighton & Hove City Council, as the Corporate Parent, more focused on the need to prepare him for the realities of independence, or the "outer world". The author talks throughout the review of a 'philosophical difference of approach'. The review concluded that whilst both these narratives were legitimate, there was a continued failure to wholly resolve differing expectations. With hindsight, the differences of perspective / philosophy and risk assessments required more rigorous debate and potentially escalation.



Professional Challenge

Professionals in all agencies have a responsibility to act without delay to safeguard the child (e.g. by calling for a case to be allocated or for a strategy meeting / discussion, for a core group meeting or for a child protection conference or review conference).

If you have difference of opinion with another professional, remember:

- Professional challenge is an integral and critical feature of safeguarding – the fundamental challenge to parents/ carers to change their parenting – it is also inevitable that there will be degrees of disagreement and conflict between practitioners and between parents and practitioners.
- Respectful challenge can be a catalyst for change.
- Challenge is a key feature of advocacy for a child/young person. Children and young people often cannot effectively challenge and need practitioners who will do so
- All professionals are responsible for their own cases, and their actions in relation to case work
- You will need to decide What, When & How to Challenge (In a way that remains child – focused) – talk with your manager
- All practitioners should respect the views of others whatever the level of experience. Remember that challenging more senior or experienced practitioners can be hard.
- Aim to be confident, assertive, focused, calm, clear, evidence based, persistent, determined, child focused, boundaried, grounded, respectful, tactful, honest, balanced, It helps if some common ground can be established.
- Challenge need not be destructive – it can be motivational and based upon concern
- Differences and disagreements should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible, in the first instance by individual practitioners and /or their line managers. However if a child is thought to be at risk of immediate harm, discretion should be used as to which stage (overleaf) is initiated.

LSCB Training

The LSCB's core safeguarding training explores the roles and responsibilities of all agencies in reference to child protection, to promote better working together to keep children safe. Day one, [Developing A Core Understanding](#), looks at the different forms of child abuse, signs and vulnerabilities. Day Two, [Assessment, Referral & Investigation](#), helps professionals better understand the child safeguarding system, levels of need and thresholds for intervention, including how the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub makes decisions about action. Day three, [Child Protection Conferences and Core Groups](#), more fully explores how professionals work together to safety plan and improve outcomes for the child.

How to escalate concerns

At any of the following stages advice should be sought from designated/named/lead officer/ child protection adviser or other designated professional such as the designated doctor or nurse.

Stage 1:

Professional to Professional

Any professional who is unhappy about a decision/action should contact the professional who made the decision/took the action to express their views and concern and discuss/explore the basis of that decision. Be specific and evidence based as to what the difference of opinion is about and how this effects the outcomes for the child.

Records of discussions must be maintained by all the agencies involved.

Stage 2:

Manager to Manager

If you are unable to resolve differences through discussion and/or meeting within a time scale, which is acceptable to all parties, your disagreement must be addressed by more experienced / more senior staff

Raising the issue with your line manager can be done in written or verbal format but there must be a written record of the issue raised, the action taken and the outcome for the child.

Stage 3:

Senior Manager to Senior Manager

If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the 'first line' managers the issue must be referred without delay through the line management to the equivalent of Head of Service / detective inspector / head teacher / Named Doctor or Nurse.

These two managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion and focus on outcomes for child.

Stage 4:

Professional leads for Safeguarding

In the unlikely event that the issue is not resolved by the steps described above and serious professional disagreements remain unresolved /or the discussions raise significant policy issues, the matter should be raised with the professional leads for safeguarding and child protection within the agencies involved and include the senior child protection manager.

Records of challenges should be kept for statistical purposes by the LSCB. They should be reported to LSCB@brighton-hove.gov.uk

For more information on:

- Dissent with decision to call a Child Protection Conference
 - Professional Dissent at Child Protection Conference
- Dissent regarding the Implementation of the Child Protection Plan

See [Pan-Sussex Safeguarding Procedures: Resolution of Professional Disagreements](#)