

Escalation Protocol

Resolution of professional disagreements in work relating to the safety of children



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With thanks to colleagues in L.B Merton, R B Kingston & Swindon

Inter-agency Escalation Protocol

Resolution of professional disagreements in work relating to the safety of children

Introduction

Learning from reviews has highlighted the need for staff across all agencies to have a clear understanding about their responsibility for professional challenge and to know how to escalate concerns about decisions made where there are concerns about the welfare of a child.

This protocol has been updated with the aim of supporting positive resolution of professional difference between agencies working with children and families in Haringey. Whilst there is generally a good working relationship between agencies and professional difference can be a driving force in developing practice, occasionally disagreements may arise which requires timely resolution so as not to delay decision making.

This guidance is intended to complement the London Child Protection Procedures Section 18.5 Professional Conflict Resolution.

It is aimed at colleagues across all services and agencies working with children or adults who may be parents or carers. It relates specifically to inter agency disagreement and does not cover disagreement within single agencies which should be addressed by agencies own escalation policy.

Please note that this Protocol does not apply to cases where there may be concerns about the behaviour or conduct of another professional that may impact on a child's safety and well-being. In such cases, reference should be made to the agency's own Whistleblowing Policy.

Areas of possible dissent

Disagreements can arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around thresholds, roles and responsibilities, the need for action and communication. Some examples may include:

- The referral does not meet the eligibility criteria for assessment by children's social care
- Where one professional disagrees with another around a particular course of action, such as closing involvement with a child or family.
- Where one worker or agency considers that another worker or agency has not completed an agreed action for no acceptable or understood reason.
- Where one agency considers that the plan is inappropriate and that a child's needs are not being best met by the current plan. This could include a disagreement that a particular agency does not feel it needs to be involved, but another does.
- Where a member of staff or an agency considers that the child's safeguarding needs are better met by a Child Protection Plan and have requested that a Child Protection Conference be called and feel that this has been refused.

Key Principles

- The safety of the child is the paramount consideration in any professional disagreement and staff should be mindful of the risks in considering escalation and resolve difficulties quickly and openly
- Professional disagreement is reduced by clarity about roles and responsibilities and networking forums which enable problems to be shared and resolved through collaboration
- The best way of resolving difference is through discussion and where possible a face to face meeting between those concerned which will enable clear identification of the specific areas of difference and the desired outcomes for the child. E mail communication, whilst important, can be open to misinterpretation or make for a stilted exchange of views
- The Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is a multi-agency team that receives referrals about children and shares information as appropriate to inform risk assessment and interventions. Co-location of this service has enabled positive relationships to be established across partner agencies which will help to resolve issues at an early stage and indeed evidence has shown that decisions are being made more quickly as a result of MASH
- Disagreement should be resolved at the lowest possible stage between the people who disagree but any worker who feels that a decision is unsafe should consult their manager or designated safeguarding lead. It should be acknowledged that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue this unsupported

Escalation Process

Stage 1

If professionals are unable to reach agreement about the way forward in an individual case then their disagreement must be addressed by more senior staff. In most cases this will mean the first line manager in children's social care who will discuss with the following people in the other agency as follows

- A Detective Sergeant in the Child Abuse Investigation Team (CAIT)
- A senior Health Visitor/Nurse/GP/Named professional
- The Designated staff member for Child protection in schools
- Other relevant manager

Stage 2

If the concern continues then the line manager should without delay, refer to a Head of Service or equivalent and a discussion should take place with

- The Detective Inspector of CAIT
- The Designated Doctor or Nurse in health services

- The Head Teacher of the school
- Other relevant senior managers

Written records must be kept of all these discussions and these should be retained on the child's case file/agency database. It is important that timely feedback is given to the person who raised the concern as to what action has been taken in response.

It may also be useful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships and identify possible training needs.

Specific Examples

One agency believes a child protection conference should be held and Children's Social Care disagree

The procedure outlined above in stage 1 should be followed. If concerns remain after this, the agency may formally request that children's social care convene a child protection conference. Where one or more professionals supported by a senior manager or named or designated professional makes this request, Children's Social Care should convene a conference.

Complex High Risk Cases

In a small number of cases, there may be significant areas of disagreement between children's social care, police and health which may lead to polarised views. This can make it difficult to come to a common agreement and if acute health services are involved there is an added time pressure. In such cases, it is suggested that multi-agency oversight of the case involving senior staff is undertaken early on by convening a 'short notice response' round table discussion. This group would then propose actions to be communicated directly to the front line staff involved for including in case files and any further disagreement would be considered.

The Process highlights wider learning points or gaps in policies and procedures

Any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the HSCB for consideration by the Quality Assurance and Practice Review sub-group to inform future learning and possible changes to existing policies and procedures. Where this relates to a training need, then the Training, Learning and Development Sub-Group will give this consideration. If the process highlights gaps in policies and procedures this will be brought to the attention of the Independent Chair of the LSCB.

Local Safeguarding Children Board Inter-agency Escalation Procedure For Professionals with Child Protection or Child Welfare Concerns

