



Merton
Safeguarding
Children Board

Escalation Policy and Procedure

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

Adapted from R B Kingston & Swindon LSCB policies 2011.

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Inter-agency Escalation Policy:

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

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.
- 1.2 Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.
- 1.3 Disagreements could 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:
 - Where one professional disagrees with the action of 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.

2. Aim and Objectives

- 2.1 It is important to:
 - avoid professional disputes that put children at risk, obscure the focus on the child, or delay decision making
 - resolve difficulties (within and) between agencies quickly and openly
 - identify problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and to promote resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures.
- 2.2 The safety of individual child/ren and focus on child/ren are the paramount considerations in any professional disagreement and any unresolved issues should be escalated with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the child.

3. Escalation Policy

- 3.1 Professionals providing services to children and their families should work cooperatively across all agencies, using their skills and experience to make a robust contribution to safeguarding children and promoting their welfare within the framework of discussions, meetings, conferences and case management.

- 3.2 All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent and supported to escalate appropriately intra-agency and inter-agency concerns and disagreements about a child's well-being.
- 3.3 Concern or disagreement may arise over another professional's decisions, action or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry.
- 3.4 Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion and/or meeting within a working week or a timescale that protects the children from harm (which ever is less).
- 3.5 Most day-to-day inter-agencies differences of opinion will require a LA social care manager to liaise with their (first line manager) equivalent in the relevant agencies e.g.
- A police detective sergeant
 - A designated safeguarding children health professional
 - Designated safeguarding children teacher.
- 3.6 The aim should be to resolve difficulties at practitioner / fieldworker level between agencies in a timely way, that is . Lessons from SCRs are that professional disagreements put children at risk significant harm if they are not resolved in a timely way.
- 3.7 Attempts at problem resolution may leave one worker/agency believing that the child/ren remain at risk of significant harm. This person/agency has responsibility for communicating such concerns through agreed channels.
- 3.8 The following stages are likely to be involved:
- recognition that there is a disagreement over a significant issue, which impacts on the safety and welfare of a child
 - identification of the problem, and clarity about the disagreement and what you aim to achieve.
- These two stages could involve consulting a colleague to clarify thinking.
- 3.9 Initial attempts should be made to resolve the problem. This should normally be between the people who disagree, unless the child is at immediate risk **(2 Working days)**
- 3.10 It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue this unsupported.
- 3.11 If unresolved, the problem should be referred to the worker's own line manager or Designated Safeguarding Lead, who will discuss with their opposite number in the partner agency. **(1 Working day)**.
- 3.12 If the problem remains unresolved, the line manager will refer 'up the line' (see flow chart).
- 3.13 If the matter is still unresolved, consideration will be given to referring the matter to the MSCB Quality Assurance Sub Group to offer mediation as soon as possible bearing in mind the impact on the child or young person. The Chair of the Quality Assurance Sub Group may decide to involve the MSCB Independent Chair if necessary.

- 3.14 Each agency will keep a record at all stages, by all parties. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.
- 3.15 At each stage it is important that the person who originally raised the concern is given feedback on what action has been taken in response. It is the responsibility of the person to whom the issue is referred to ensure that clear and timely feedback is provided.
- 3.16 When the issue is resolved, any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the MSCB for consideration by the relevant MSCB Sub-Group to inform future learning and possible changes to existing policies and procedures.
- 3.17 It may also be useful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to

Please note that this Policy 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 and the Local Authority's Designate Officer (LADO).

Appendix A: Local Safeguarding Children Board Inter-agency Escalation Procedure for Professionals with Child Protection or Child Welfare Concerns

