



**Multi-agency Escalation Policy:
Resolution of professional
disagreements in work relating to the
safety of children.
April 2020 - 2023**

Purpose of agreement	To provide an agreed way for escalating disputes between professionals in safeguarding children in Merton
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Document Sponsor	Policy Subgroup and Head of PPP
Document Manager	Policy and Partnership Manager
Developed in consultation with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • John Walsh Principle Social Worker LBM • Frankie Campbell Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children SW London and St George's MH NHS Trust • Lin Graham-Ray Senior Designated Nurse Looked After Children (Merton and Wandsworth) NHS South West London CCG • DS Siân Hutchings Jigsaw – Merton Safeguarding Hub SW • Policy Subgroup members • Keith Shipman Education
To be read in conjunction with	This policy should be read in line with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merton Threshold of Need and Wellbeing Model • London Child Protection Procedures
Intranet Location	
Website location	https://www.mertonscp.org.uk/guidance-policies-procedures/mscp-multi-agency-strategies-protocols-guidance-documents/

Amendment Summary

Date	Page	Subject	Approved

Review Log: Include details of when the document was last reviewed:

Version	Review Date	Lead	Ratification	Note
V1	020320	Jacob Lawrence/Joanna Georgiades		
V2	09 June 2020	Policy subgroup	Agreed subject to inclusion of flow diagram and inclusion of joint supervision in pre escalation phase	Amended by JG

1. Introduction

1.1. What is escalation?

Escalation is a process of challenging a decision made by another professional or organisation. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children. This policy recognises that professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.

1.2 However, disagreements can negatively impact on positive working relationships and consequently on the ability to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and families. Professional disagreements always require resolution.

1.3 Differences of professional opinion arise on a safeguarding case when professionals deem decisions not to be in the best interests children. These professional differences are most likely to occur around:

- Levels of need and intervention-differing opinions about thresholds
- Lack of understanding about roles and responsibilities
- Disagreement regarding decision making and action to be taken e.g. At a strategy meeting, at a Child Protection Conference or any other professional meeting
- Concern about the non-action of another professional in relation to a child or family member
- The need for action and communication
- Concern there is a drift or unreasonable delay in progressing a case.
- Disagreement over the provision of services
- Challenge of subject matter experts and independent report writers.

1.4 Inter-professional communication and decision making is a key theme from learning from case reviews.

Key Messages

- **The safety of individual children is the paramount** consideration in any professional difference /disagreement and any unresolved issues should be addressed with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the child.
- All members of the team should feel able to challenge decision-making and to see this as their professional right and responsibility in order to safeguard the child and to promote effective multi-agency safeguarding practice.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 The aims of this policy are to provide a clear and transparent way for professionals to resolve disputes between agencies quickly and effectively. Effective working is dependent on an open approach and respectful relationship between partners. Challenge is a healthy part of problem resolution and professional co-operation provides assurance to the process.

2.2 The Escalation Policy does not override professional/clinical, or subject matter expertise and decision making. **If there are significant concerns for the child**

well-being at any stage of this process and there is potentially no resolution, then the MSCP Executives must be informed immediately.

2.3 Key Principles

- Keep the focus on what is in the child'/rens best interests at all times.
- Professionals must share the key information and their interpretation and assessment appropriately and what may be the likely impact on the child/ren
- Professionals must seek to resolve the issue in a timely way between them in the first instance.
- Avoid professional disagreement which may place children at further risk by obscuring the focus on the child or which may delay decision making. If this cannot be avoided or resolved
- Liaise with the lead professionals and safeguarding or child protection designates in the respective organisations at the earliest opportunity. Clarity is expected from all agencies in respect of designated roles and responsibilities.
- Ensure that at each stage of the escalation process that there is accurate record made of the agreed actions of each agency.
- Joint supervision and discussion is advisory to help resolve disputes.

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 appropriate intra-agency concerns and disagreements about a child's well-being.
- 3.3. Any worker who feels that a professional decision is not safe or is inappropriate should initially consult their Safeguarding lead or line manager to –
- Clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem
 - Be specific as to what the concern is about; and what they aim to achieve
 - Evidence the nature and source of their concerns and keep a record of all discussions

Assist with the next stage of the process (detailed in section 4)

It may be useful for individuals to de-brief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.

4.0 Lines of escalation – four stages

- 4.1 Initial resolution should be sought at the practitioner / team manager level between agencies. If professional agreement cannot be reached, then the concern should be escalated using this staged approach:
- 4.2 Stage 1, 2, 3 & 4 are all formal stages of the escalation process

- **Stage One:** Line Manager/ HoS/ Safeguarding Lead or Deputy/Designated Professional within 5 working days.
- **Stage Two:** Senior Leader to Senior Leader 5 working days.
- **Stage Three:** Refer to MSCP Executive (copied to MSCP) 5 working days
- **Stage Four:** Refer to MSCP Independent Chair 5 working days

4.2.1 Initial attempts to resolve the problem should normally be between the people who disagree, **unless the child is at immediate risk** (2 Working days).

4.2.2 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 as outlined in this policy.

4.3 **First line of escalation (Line Managers)**

4.3.1 Where any worker who feels that a decision is not safe or is inappropriate they should initially consult their supervisor/manager or Head of Service to clarify their thinking. They should be able to evidence the nature and source of the concerns and should to keep a record of all discussions.

4.3.2 It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue this unsupported.

4.3.3 If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the first line manager/Head of Service within a **further working week, or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less)**, the issue **must be referred**, without delay, through the line manager/Head of Service to the second line of escalation:

4.4 **Second line of escalation (Senior Leaders)**

4.4.1 If the problem is not resolved at stage one the managers must, without delay, report to their relevant senior manager or Safeguarding Partnership agency representative. The two senior managers or Partnership representatives must together attempt to resolve the concern within 5 working days or less if there is deemed to be a risk to the child.

4.4.2 Where a resolution is reached the receiving senior manager will confirm the outcome which must be documented in writing to their counterpart who raised the issue within a further 5 working days.

4.4.3 The organisations' Safeguarding Partnership representative or relevant senior manager must send a copy of the completed escalation pro-forma (Appendix 1) to the Safeguarding Partnership Business Team.

4.4.4 N.B. For all escalations in respect of Local Authority Children's Services, it is expected that if resolution is not agreed then before going to Stage 3 the CSC Assistant Director for Children Families and Schools is notified.

4.4.5 There is a requirement for the record of any escalation to be placed on a child's record.

4.5 **Stage Three (MSCP Executive)**

4.5.1 If the concern remains unresolved between senior leaders the matter must be referred to the Executive Leads for the Partnership, within 5 working days. The Executives must together attempt to resolve the concern within 5 working days or less if there is deemed to be a risk to the child.

4.5.2 Where a resolution is reached the receiving executive manager will confirm the outcome which must be documented in writing to their counterpart who raised the issue within a further 5 working days.

The organisations' Safeguarding Partnership representative or relevant senior manager must send a copy of the completed escalation pro-forma (Appendix 1) to the Safeguarding Partnership Business Team to ensure that learning from disputes is shared and reflected in business priorities.

4.6 **Stage Four – Independent Person**

If it has not been possible to resolve the professional differences between the agencies concerned the matter must be referred to the Safeguarding Partnership Independent Person, within 5 working days, who may either seek to resolve the issue direct, or to convene a Resolution Panel within a timescale that protects the child from harm.

The panel will consist of Safeguarding Partnership Executive representatives from three agencies (including the agencies concerned in the professional differences, where possible).

Disagreements should be resolved at the lowest possible stage.

5.0 **Recording**

5.1 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. Interagency conversations and outcomes should be included in the child's record.

5.2 When the issue is resolved, any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the MSCP for consideration by the relevant MSCP Sub-Group to inform future learning and possible changes to existing policies and procedures.

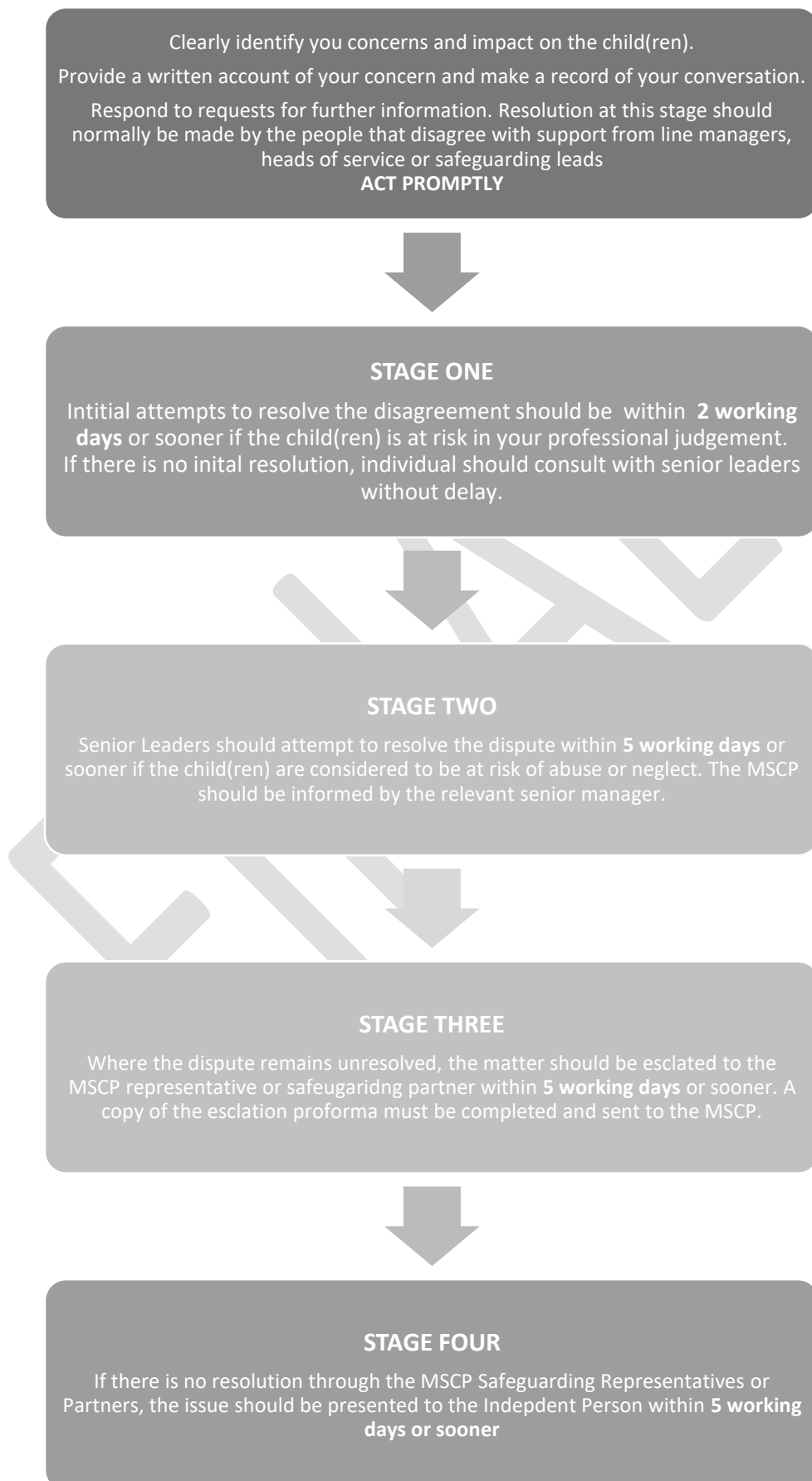
5.3 At each stage it is important that the person who originally raised the concern is given feedback on what action has been taken in response. It is the responsibility of the person to whom the issue is referred to ensure that clear and timely feedback is provided.

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).

FIRST LINE ESCALATION: Line Managers	
Merton Police	First escalation – Sergeant/ Detective Sergeant from the team dealing with situation (this is likely to be the SW Safeguarding team).
Education	Where it is believed that the response from a school does not meet the safeguarding requirements for a child, the appropriate person to escalate to is, in the first instance, the Head Teacher. In schools where the Head Teacher is also the Designated Safeguarding Lead, complaints should be directed to the Safeguarding Governor or Chair of Governors.
Family Services	For children accessing early help services, professionals should raise concerns at Team Around the Child meetings or other multi-agency planning meetings. For children subject to Child in Need, Child Protection or Child in Care Plans , concerns can be shared at the child's multi-agency review meetings or via the Independent Reviewing Officer or Conference Reviewing Officer. Professionals should always consider the impact of professional disagreements on families attending meetings. Open Cases: by contacting the allocated social worker or lead professional's Team Manager or Head of Service New Referrals: by contacting the Children and Families Hub Team Manager Out of Hours: by contacting the Emergency Duty Team (5pm – 9am Monday to Friday, weekends and Bank Holidays)
Health	Where there it is believed that the response from a health agency does not meet the safeguarding requirements for a child, the appropriate person to escalate to the individual health practitioner and their team leader, line manager, clinical lead or the GP practice safeguarding lead. If an acute safeguarding situation occurs, Out of Hours, which requires an immediate health assessment the Duty Paediatric team at the Hospital local to the child should be contacted through the hospital switchboard. These first line managers may seek advice from their agency's safeguarding children leads or named professionals.
Second Line of Escalation: Senior Leaders	
Merton Police,	Second Escalation – Inspector/Detective Inspector from the team dealing with situation (this is likely to be the SW Safeguarding team).
Schools	If concerns have still not been resolved, the school complaints/escalation procedure should be utilised. In cases where the matter is urgent or if the school is not responding in accordance with its policy contact the Head of School Improvement.
Family Services	Open Cases: by contacting the service area Head of Service New Referrals: by contacting the Children and Families Hub Head of Service All cases coming to second line of escalation should be communicated to the Assistant Director - Children's Social Care and Youth Inclusion, Children Schools & Families

Health	<p>If concerns have still not been resolved, the Named Professionals for NHS provider Trusts and GPs should be contacted. In an out of hours or urgent situation, each Trust will have a manager on call contactable via the Trust switchboard.</p> <p>In addition the Designated Professionals for Safeguarding at the Clinical Commissioning Group should be made aware.</p>
Third Line of Escalation: MSCP representatives	
Police	<p>Head of Safeguarding Public Protection, South West BCU Metropolitan Police Service</p> <p>Please refer to the MSCP website for up-to-date contact details</p>
Health	<p>Director of Quality South West London Clinical Commissioning Group</p> <p>Please refer to the MSCP website for up-to-date contact details</p>
Local Authority	<p>Director of Children, Schools and Families London Borough of Merton</p> <p>Please refer to the MSCP website for up-to-date contact details</p>
Fourth Line of Escalation: Independent Person	
All	<p>Independent Person MSCP Aileen Buckton MertonSCP@merton.gov.uk</p>

Escalation Flowchart



Merton Child Safeguarding Partnership

Escalation Stage One/Two Pro-forma
(Copy to be kept on service user file).

Name of child/young person:	
DOB:	
Address:	
Name, Role and Agency of person completing this form	
Name, Roles and Agency of others involved	
Brief details of the professional disagreement:	

Has the disagreement been resolved at Stage 1 or 2	Yes	No
If yes, what was agreed?		
How long did it take for the issue to be resolved from the date of initial escalation?		
If not, please state why and who has the escalation been raised to as Stage 2 or 3 of the pathway and what was the date the concern was raised.		
What is the learning for your agencies from this case?		
Is there learning for the wider safeguarding partnership?		
A requirement for staff training	Yes	No

Development of a new SSP Protocol	Yes	No
Further discussion at a particular SSP Sub Group	Yes	No
Other		

Please send the completed form via secure email to: MertonLSCB@merton.gov.uk

FINAL