

Professional Challenge & Resolving Professional Differences Guidance

Reviewed January 2025

This protocol should be read in conjunction with the Pan Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership [Complaints Procedure](#), [Resolving Professional Differences in the Child Protection Process](#) and [Dispute Resolution and Escalation Protocol](#).

Introduction

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 [Resolving Professional Differences in the Child Protection Process](#). 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

1. 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.

2. Process for Professional Resolution and Escalation of Concerns¹

It is recommended by the Safeguarding Children Partnerships that agencies seeking to resolve issues pertaining to child protection planning follow the Safeguarding Children Partnership six step process. At each stage the person escalating should clearly state the timeframe in which for a resolution should be reached before it is escalated to the next stage.

¹ In line with the Pan Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnerships' six stage process, line managers should seek advice from their agency's nominated / designated safeguarding lead.

Six Step Process: For Professional Resolution and Escalation of Concerns

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 affects 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 / Designated Doctor or Nurse.

Stage 5 Escalation to the Safeguarding Children Partnership (BHSCP, ESSCP, WSSCP)

In the unlikely event that the steps outlined above do not resolve the issue, and / or the discussions raise significant policy/procedure issues and / or a number of similar concerns or disagreements have been recorded, the matter should be referred to an Independent Scrutineer commissioned by the Safeguarding Children Partnership(s) to determine the appropriate process for resolution.

This will include raising the issue with the Directors / Chief Executives of the three Safeguarding Partners.

Stage 6 Escalation to the Secretary of State

If the Independent Scrutineer commissioned by the Safeguarding Children Partnership considers the leadership arrangements are weak or malfunctioning and all attempts at resolution have failed, legislation allows the Secretary of State to take enforcement action against any agency that is not meeting its statutory obligations as part of local safeguarding arrangements.

See [Resolving Professional Differences - Sussex Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures Manual \(7.2\)](#) for information on:

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