

Resolution and Escalation Protocol

Contents:

1. Purpose	3
2. The Role of Professionals & Agencies	5
3. Situations Where Disagreements May Arise	7
4. Process for Resolution & Escalation	8

Appendix: Process Flow Chart

1. Purpose

There may be occasions where situations arise when workers within one agency feel that the actions, inaction or decisions of another agency do not adequately safeguard a child or young person. The purpose of this protocol is to ensure that in such situations issues between agencies are resolved in a timely manner.

Professional disagreements will sometimes arise over another professional's decisions, actions or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry which are considered to be unsafe. Issues of drift and delay in progressing a child's plan can also result be a reason for professional disagreement. Disagreements can be healthy and foster creative ways of working with children and families and in partnership. However, disagreements always require resolution.

The child's safety and wellbeing must be the paramount consideration at all times and professional differences must not detract from timely and clear decision making.

All professionals working with children and families have a duty to act assertively and proactively to ensure the child's welfare is seen as a priority at all levels of professional activity.

It is also incumbent on the professionals involved to ensure that problems are resolved within the shortest timescale possible to protect the child. The time taken to resolve the action should reflect the level of professional concern regarding the child's safety and well-being. Some professional disagreements will need to be resolved immediately, others within 24 hours whilst some can be addressed over a longer period of time.

Key Principles:

Professionals should:

1. Share key information appropriately and often
2. Seek to resolve the issue quickly and at the practice rather than the management level
3. Avoid disputes which place children at further risk by obscuring the focus on the child or which delay decision making.
4. Recognise that a colleague is raising the issue because they hold a genuine professional concern, their opinion is valid and their view needs to be fully considered.
- 5 Liaise with lead professionals in safeguarding or child protection designates in their organisation at the earliest opportunity. Clarity is expected from all agencies in respect of designated roles and responsibilities.

- 6 Keep the focus on the child's safety and welfare at all times. 7. Familiarise themselves with the escalation routes **within their agency** for escalation and resolution.
8. Ensure that at all stages of the process accurate actions and decisions are recorded (on the child's file) and shared with relevant personnel (including the worker who raised the initial concern). This must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.
9. If the process highlights gaps in policies and procedures they must be brought to the attention of the Chair of Dudley Safeguarding Children Board (SSCB)
10. Stay proactively involved; safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

2. The Role of Professionals & Agencies

Professionals providing services to children and families should work co-operatively across all agencies. Effective partnership working relies on open and honest relationships and clear communication between staff from different agencies.

DSCB expects members of staff working directly with children and their families to share information appropriately in line with national and local guidance, and to work to plans agreed in all relevant forums (case discussions, meetings and conferences) to safeguard children and young people in the local area.

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is a responsibility shared by all agencies. Whilst the Local Authority is allocated a 'lead' role in co-ordinating responses to risk, or causes, of significant harm to children, effective intervention is dependent upon inter - agency information sharing, planning and multi-agency service responses.

Professional respect and problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children and young people. The DSCB expects all agencies to adopt a proactive approach towards problem solving which enables professional disagreements to be resolved as close to front line practice as possible.

All agencies are responsible for ensuring that their staff are competent and supported to escalate appropriately any inter-agency concerns and disagreements about a child or young person's safety or wellbeing.

The process of resolution, where difficulties or disagreements arise between agencies, should be kept as simple as possible. The aim, where possible, is to resolve difficulties quickly and **without delay** at a professional practitioner level.

Professionals' actions should always be based on a robust assessment of the risk of harm to the child(ren) and the impact of the given situation on the child's wellbeing. Decisions and actions should be commensurate with the risks posed to the child. Whilst this protocol sets out indicative timescales within which matters should be escalated where an inter-agency disagreement has arisen, these are a guide and do not replace the need for worker's to exercise professional judgement in deciding how sooner a resolution needs to be secured. In some situations it may be necessary to act sooner than the indicative timescales set out below in order to protect a child or children.

Each staff member is responsible for recording professional conversations and decision-making in line with the case recording protocols and procedures in each agency or setting. The professionals involved in the resolution process must accurately and

contemporaneously record each intra- and inter-agency discussion they have, approve and date the record.

Where the disagreement involves actions in relation to an individual child, a record of the intra - and inter - agency discussion and any other written communication should be placed on the child's record.

3. Situations Where Disagreement May Arise

Occasions may arise where one professional disagrees with the actions of another professional and therefore in such cases Dudley's Resolution and Escalation protocol should be followed. Some examples include the following (although the list is not exhaustive):

- Where one professional disagrees with the action of another in relation to 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 for a child is inappropriate and that a child's needs are not being best met.
- A disagreement as to whether a particular agency needs to be involved in the safeguarding process including how agency referral criteria or DSCB thresholds are being applied.
- Where a member of staff or an agency considers that the child's safeguarding needs should be considered via a strategy discussion and have requested that a strategy discussion is convened and feel that this has been refused.
-
- 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.
- Where a range of professionals have concerns about an agency's response to safeguarding concerns
- There is disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services

4. Process for Resolution & Escalation

Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within a timescale that protects the child from harm.

Stage No	Parties Involved	Process
1	Practitioners	Upon disagreement in relation to the safeguarding needs of a child or young person, in the first instance the professional from the other agency should raise the matter with the relevant practitioner verbally or in writing.
		The professional should provide clear evidence-based reasons for their disagreement. The receiving agency must read and review the particular case file. They must speak to the complainant practitioner and attempt to find a mutually agreeable way forward . Where a resolution is reached, the responsible worker in the receiving agency will advise the complainant agency of the outcome in writing.
2	Line/Team Managers	If the receiving agency practitioner and the complainant practitioner are unable to resolve the disagreement following exploration of the facts, each practitioner should raise their concerns with their respective line/team manager or named lead for safeguarding, who should attempt to resolve the differences. If agreement is reached, the receiving agency will write to the complainant agency confirming the outcome.
		NOTE: if one of the professionals is self-employed, the safeguarding lead will deal with this stage (as well as stage 3). If one of the agencies is a school, the Head teacher/Principal will deal with this stage (as well as stage 3).
3a	Service/Senior Managers	If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the line/team managers, the issue must be referred to the relevant service/senior manager (ie Children's Social Care Senior Manager for the locality, Detective Chief Inspector or other designated professional). The relevant managers should meet to resolve the issue.
		NOTE: Dudley MBC Head of Safeguarding should be copied into disagreements that have escalated to this level.
3b	Director/Assistant Directors	Where resolution is still not agreed after Stage 3a, the service/senior manager will raise the disagreement within their own agency (who will be expected to be a DSCB Board Member). The Director/Assistant Director will then write to the Director/Assistant Director of the agency that is the subject of

		the complaint and meet to achieve a final resolution.
		Exceptional Circumstances: Whilst it is a firm DSCB expectation that professional disagreements must be resolved within the 3 stage process set out above, in exceptional circumstances, where the matter remains unresolved, there is provision for it to be considered by the DSCB Independent Chair.

Following the use of the Resolution & Escalation Process:

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

Appendix: Process for Resolution & Escalation

