

**Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire
Safeguarding Children Board
(SSSCB)**

**PROFESSIONAL
DISAGREEMENTS AND
ESCALATION POLICY**

**(RESOLVING MULTI AGENCY
DISAGREEMENTS)**

Professional disagreements escalation policy

Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationship between agencies and good communication.

Principles

1. Disagreements are most likely to arise in terms of differing views about thresholds, a lack of understanding about respective roles and the need for communication and action.
2. All partner agencies have a pivotal role in reviewing decision-making in achieving good outcomes for children. Concerns may arise regarding a possible failure to adhere to mutually agreed plans. In such cases, this must be addressed by all agencies involved with the child and their family.
3. Professionals providing services to children and their families should work co-operatively 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.
4. All agencies are responsible for ensuring that staff are competent and supported to challenge appropriately intra-agency and multi-agency concerns and disagreements about a child's wellbeing.
5. Concern or disagreement may arise over another professional's decisions, actions or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry.
6. Professionals should attempt to resolve differences through discussion following their internal processes.
7. Advice may be sought directly from the agency's nominated or designated safeguarding lead at any stage of the process.
8. If the professionals are unable to resolve differences within the required timescale, their disagreement must be escalated to more senior staff.
9. Every effort should be made to resolve disagreements as soon as possible and a record kept.
10. Where possible all efforts should be made to address disagreements as they happen rather than after the matter has been dealt with. However, this should only occur where there is an opportunity to raise issues without any detrimental impact on the child.
11. Most day-to-day inter-agency differences of opinion will require professionals to liaise with their first line manager equivalent and they should where required always seek advice from their agency's nominated or designated child protection adviser.

Procedure

Professional disagreement - Stage 1

1. In the first instance workers should raise the matter with their fellow professional, either verbally or in writing, within a maximum of 1 working day of the disagreement or on receipt of the disputed decision and they should provide clear evidence-based reasons for their disagreement. They should also make it clear that this is in line with this procedure.
2. The receiving professional must read and review the case file, speak to the professional who has raised the disagreement as soon as possible and attempt to find a mutually agreeable way forward via a meeting or discussion. They may need to seek their own management advice if needed. If agreement is reached, the receiving professional will advise the agency of the outcome within a maximum of **1 working day**¹ and confirm in writing.
3. The professionals involved in this resolution process must record each intra-agency and multi-agency discussion they have, approve and date the record and place a copy on the child's file together with any other written communications and information.

Stage 2

1. If the workers are unable to reach agreement about how to resolve the issue then the matter should be escalated to their line managers². The line manager should ascertain the specific circumstances of the disagreement and contact should occur between agencies within **1 working day**. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. Where necessary, this may involve a meeting between managers.

NB: It is worth noting that this process may vary depending on the management structure within an organisation. It is likely therefore that some stages may not be relevant. On this basis it is expected that professionals, as a minimum would have followed stage 1 and 2 before escalating to their Board representative. Any agreed plan arising from this contact should be fed back immediately to the operational staff involved, confirmed in writing between agencies and include a date for review if required.

2. Each agency will need to define, through their respective scheme of delegation, who their appropriate line management equivalents are eg:
 - A police detective sergeant
 - A named or designated health professional
 - A social work team manager / practice / principal manager / line manager
 - A designated teacher
 - A designated lead within early years
 - A designated lead within the voluntary sector

¹ Working day does not include weekends

² For some 3rd sector organisations who may not have a line manager, it would be advisable to escalate their concerns to their safeguarding contact within SCYVS/ VAST

3. It is acknowledged that some organisations, particularly in the third sector, may not have extended schemes of delegation. An appropriate person within this organisation must be identified to discuss and address the area of disagreement. In cases where there is confusion about thresholds and roles and responsibilities, peer support should be considered as a means of additional advice and support to the agency.
4. If agreement can be reached the responsible line manager will advise the agency of the outcome within a maximum of **1 working day** and confirm by letter.
5. As previously stated, the professionals involved in this resolution process must record each intra-agency and multi-agency discussion they have, approve and date the record and place a copy on the child's file together with any other written communications and information.

Formal Escalation - Stage 3 and 4

6. If this process does not achieve consensus between agencies, the line managers should refer the matter to their relevant senior managers, equivalent to service manager. An escalation form should be completed by the line manager raising the issue with their senior manager, outlining the area of disagreement and what efforts have been made to resolve the issue. This notification should be made within **1 working day**. This will result in a review of the case, including the circumstances leading to the disagreement, with a view to resolving the issue.
7. The senior manager will contact their agency equivalent within a maximum of **1 working day** and attempt to resolve the issue. If necessary, a meeting should take place within **2 working days** to resolve the issue.
8. Any decision making arising from this process should be communicated to relevant personnel in each agency without delay and in writing within **2 working days** of the matter being formally escalated and be subject to monitoring and reviewing processes as appropriate.

Stage 4

1. Where a resolution is still not agreed the senior manager will raise the disagreement with their Assistant Director, or equivalent level in the organisation, who will contact and meet their agency equivalent within five working days.
2. Where concerns arise particularly in the management of a case, for example where an agency has failed to meet the specific requirements of the inter-agency plan to safeguard a child, a senior manager can request that an agency's case record on the child is reviewed.
3. The respective agency representatives on the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board should be alerted that a disagreement has reached this stage
4. It will be unusual for many situations to reach this stage and for this reason there should be some consideration from the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board as to whether there are wider lessons to be learned including any procedural or policy matters.

5. Any issues which have been resolved through use of the escalation procedure must be documented on all relevant case files for the purpose of audit trail.

Stage 5

1. If it has not been possible to resolve the professional differences at stage four the matter should be referred to the nominated SCB representative for the agency. If the agency does not have a nominated representative the matter must be referred to the Safeguarding Children Board manager.
2. In all cases the LSCB 'Formal Escalation' form must be completed which should then be forwarded to the relevant LSCB manager. The escalation form will enable the LSCB to collate evidence of escalations and to offer assurances that they are being resolved at the right level and to gather information about the issues that need to be resolved.
3. At all stages of the process, actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel and include the professional who raised the initial concern. 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.
4. In each case the nominated representative and LSCB Manager will liaise with the Chair of the Board as a matter of urgency and, in discussion with the nominated LSCB representative of the agency with whom the dispute is being raised (where applicable) a final decision will be reached.
5. Where a dispute remains unresolved despite the above arrangements, it shall be referred to an independent professional adviser.

Appendix 1

FORMAL ESCALATION FORM (to be used at Stage 3 and 4 only)

Date:

Name of Child:	DOB:
NHS number:	
Practitioner:	Agency/Team:

Summary of Concerns, including the specific difference/s which has resulted in utilising the Escalation process:

(It is important that you provide information that details how you have made every effort to resolve this matter at a local level within Stages 1 & 2.)

Requested Action:

Response:

Date:

Resolution of Issues:

Date:

Actions Taken to Resolve the Professional Disagreement:

THIS DOCUMENT MUST BE SENT SECURELY

Professional Escalation/ Disagreement process

