



## Escalation Policy

### **1. Introduction**

**What is this process?** This process outlines the steps to be taken when there are disagreements between practitioners from differing agencies in relation to concerns about the safety and welfare of a child or young person, and / or action being taken to safeguard a child or young person.

Within this process the term “family” is used to describe parent / carers and family members such as siblings as well as extended family members.

**Why do we need this process?** When working with practitioners from other agencies there will at times be differences of opinion with regards to how to respond to an identified concern about a child, young person or family. This process has been designed to guide practitioners in the steps that they should take when concerns arise.

**Who is this aimed at?** This process is aimed at practitioners working with families either regularly or occasionally. These practitioners will come from a wide range of agencies both statutory and non-statutory.

*Please note that dissent or concerns in relation to Child Protection Conferences should follow the process outlined within Appendix 1*

The key contact for comments about this policy is: [SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk)

### **2. Professional Disagreement**

When having conversations (and working) with practitioners from other agencies there will at times be differences of opinion with regards to how to respond to an identified concern about a child, young person or family.

Disagreements can be a sign of developing thinking, and the value of exchanging ideas from different perspectives should not be under-estimated. When there are disagreements between agencies, this should be recognised as potential for healthy debate. However, disagreements may disadvantage the child or family involved if they are not resolved constructively and in a timely manner.

In order to support and challenge a clear process needs to be in place to ensure that all practitioners involved in multi-agency work understand the steps they should take when these concerns arise. This process should however be measured in its approach to allow practitioners the opportunity to openly discuss their concerns with other practitioners. However some disagreements, if they can't be resolved, may need to be escalated up to first line managers (and beyond if appropriate) who should address any concerns.

Throughout our work the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is the primary concern, and professional disputes must not obstruct this. If you feel that a practitioner or an agency is not acting in the best interests of the child, young person or family, you have a responsibility to respectfully challenge the practitioner or agency. Should you have a concern that a child is at risk of, or is suffering significant harm, this should be responded to using your own agencies safeguarding procedures.

### **Examples of disagreement**

- Differences in the handling of referrals / requests for services between agencies
- Disagreement on attendance at multi-agency meetings (Early Help, Child in Need, Child Protection, Child Looked After)
- Differences in opinion with regards to a child's plan
- Concern about the action or inaction of another professional in relation to the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person
- Information sharing concerns
- Disagreement about the provision of services.

## **3. Principles of concerns resolution**

When trying to resolve disagreements practitioners should work within the following principles:

- The safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is paramount, and should they be considered to be at risk of significant harm Children's Advice and Duty service (CHAD) should be contacted or the child's social worker if they have one
- Keeping the child, young person and their family at the centre of all professional discussions
- Quality conversations about which approach should be undertaken
- Ensuring that the right conversations are had with the right people at the right time, taking place face to face where possible
- Every view is valid and important
- To resolve disagreement using a restorative approach which includes appropriate challenge
- Resolving disagreements in a timely manner
- Undertaking a solution focus approach
- Concerns, actions, responses and outcomes must be recorded and agreed.

The following **multi-agency working principles** should also be adhered to:

- **Be committed to developing trusted relationships** – this will rely on openness, honesty and high quality communication with each other and with the children, young people and families we work with
- **Aim to understand each other** – we will check out our understanding of each other’s language and meaning when necessary; this can be especially relevant due to use of jargon or service specific terminology. We will also challenge and rethink language that is oppressive, discriminatory or blaming; seeing language as dynamic rather than static
- **Adopt restorative and strengths based approaches** – as practitioners, we will give high support and high challenge to each other to enable strength based, solution focused and restorative approaches to working effectively with children, young people and their families
- **When it gets hard, we will try harder** – instead of withdrawing from each other when situations are complex and hard to navigate, as practitioners and agencies we will try even harder to find common ground, support each other and align ourselves for a coordinated approach
- **Share information about our own roles, agencies and statutory responsibilities** - we are committed to supporting others to understand our particular roles and statutory responsibilities
- **Do what we say we will do** – we will follow up on actions agreed in meetings and provide regular updates so that everyone knows what is going on to help with the coordination of the child’s care and support
- **Model the attitudes and behaviours we hope that children and families experience** - as practitioners, we adopt the principles of acceptance, curiosity and empathy.

## 4. Resolving Concerns

The following identify different ways in which practitioners can seek to resolve concerns in a restorative way (this is not an exhaustive list):

- Restorative conversation
- Facilitated restorative conversation
- Rethink Formulation
- Restorative conference
- Round table discussion
- Multi-agency supervision.

## 5. Concerns Resolution Process

The following process should be followed by practitioners when raising a concern. There may be times when concerns should be escalated straight to the Head of Service level dependent on the immediacy / seriousness of the issue, and therefore in some circumstances it is not always appropriate to apply this process in a linear way.

## **Stage 1: Practitioner to Practitioner**

Immediately discuss with colleagues and own agency designated lead for safeguarding to clarify thinking and practice. Confidentiality should be maintained as appropriate.

Attempt to resolve any disagreements with the practitioner face to face before initiating the full process. This could include using any of the identified ways listed above.

A clear written record should be kept and shared with everyone involved, this should include a clear evidence-based reason for the disagreement.

Should disagreements be in relation to processes whereby there is a Lead Professional / IRO / Chair of multi-agency meeting they should be informed in writing for information and monitoring.

Where a resolution is reached this should be clearly recorded and shared with everyone involved including the agreed points of resolution and any next steps.

Professionals involved should raise the matter with their fellow professional within a maximum of **one working day** of the disagreement or on receipt of the disputed decision.

## **Stage 2: Line Manager to Line Manager**

If following Stage 1 the disagreement remains, discuss with your designated lead for safeguarding and immediately refer this to your line manager, for them to discuss with the line manager of the other practitioner\*.

Line managers may consider utilising any of the identified approaches listed above to facilitate the resolution. The line manager should ascertain the specific circumstances of the disagreement and contact should occur between agencies within **one working day**.

The principles of recording as outlined in Stage 1 should be followed both during the process and at the point of resolution.

\*For agencies where there is no line manager (e.g. self-employed, single person organisation etc.) professional bodies, funders, commissioners or trustees should be contacted.

## **Stage 3: Senior Manager to Senior Manager (eg Head of Service, Strategic Manager)**

If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between first line managers the issue must be referred without delay through the line management structure to the equivalent of Head of Service. The senior manager will contact their agency equivalent within a maximum of **one working day** and attempt to resolve the issue. If necessary, a meeting should take place within **two working days** to resolve the issue.

Any decision making arising from this process should be communicated to relevant personnel in each agency without delay and in writing within **two working days** of the

matter being formally escalated and be subject to monitoring and reviewing processes as appropriate.

If resolution escalates to stage 3 the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership must also be notified to allow for assurance and oversight using the Professionals Concerns Resolutions Notifications and Outcomes Form (available on request from [SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk)).

The principles of recording as outlined in Stage 1 should be followed both during the process and at the point of resolution.

#### **Stage 4: Senior Leader to Senior Leader (e.g. Assistant Director / Director)**

If professional disagreements remain unresolved, each Head of Service / Senior Manager will raise the disagreement within **five working days** at Senior Leader level such as Director / Assistant Director level within their own agency or within health the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children.

The Director / Assistant Director (or within health the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children) of the complainant agency will then write to the Director / Assistant Director (or within health the Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children) of the receiving agency and meet to achieve a final resolution.

If resolution escalates to stage 4 the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership must also be notified to allow for assurance and oversight using the Professionals Concerns Resolutions Notifications and Outcomes Form (available on request from [SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk)).

The principles of recording as outlined in Stage 1 should be followed both during the process and at the point of resolution.

#### **Stage 5: Escalation to Safeguarding Children Partnership (Exceptional Circumstances )**

If the disagreement cannot be resolved within the 4 stage process set out above, this should be referred to Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership within **two working days** using the Professionals Concerns Resolutions Notifications and Outcomes Form which is available on request from [SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk) (see Appendix 2).

The Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive will take action with both parties to resolve. If the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive is unable to agree a way forward and resolve the situation they will involve the an independent professional advisor.

If at any stage the process is halted for any reason such as sickness, meetings being cancelled etc the agency with the concern should record why the process has been halted and ensure that the process is resumed as soon as possible, seeking line management support if required. It may be that in cases of sickness a different person needs to take over the process. Every effort should be made by all parties to ensure that the process does not drift.

## **6. Things for Consideration**

Appropriate timescales for passing on, and responding to, concerns have been agreed for each stage. These take into consideration any potential risk to the child and need for provision of services. Therefore, any changes or requests for extensions to timescales should be agreed and recorded.

Where a meeting is convened to discuss concerns, consideration needs to be given as to whether it is appropriate for families to attend and this should be communicated with all involved. When these meetings are called they remain the responsibility of the agency who calls the meeting to take the lead on inviting appropriate professionals and administrate the meeting

Clear agreed written records should be kept and shared with everyone at all stages, which must include written confirmation between the parties about agreed resolutions, next steps and the proposed follow-up of any outstanding issues. Feedback should be given at every stage to the practitioner who raised the original concern

If throughout the process you feel that a child is suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm, you are responsible for communicating your concerns to your immediate line manager and / or your organisation's designated lead for child protection and contacting Children's Advice and Duty service (CHAD) in line with your own agencies safeguarding policies or the child's social worker if they have one

Practitioners should continue to use their agency procedures in conjunction with this document

Practitioners should be supported by their line manager to appropriately challenge in situations where this may be difficult due to confidence, perceived hierarchy or potential other barriers

Practitioners should consider the use of processes such as restorative circles and Rethink Formulation to support this process as appropriate

The NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline for practitioners ([Whistleblowing Advice Line | NSPCC](#)) is not intended to replace existing processes to resolve disputes or the local LADO arrangements.

## **7. Contacts**

Children's Social Care: Children's Advice and Duty service (CHAD) 01782 235100 (Monday to Friday 8.30am to 6pm)

Children's Social Care: Emergency Duty Team (EDT) 01782 234234

Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership: [SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk)

NSPCC: Whistleblowing Helpline 0800 028 0285

# **Appendix 1: Child Protection Conferences**

## **a) Need for Child Protection Conferences**

The decision whether or not to convene a Child Protection Conference rests with Children's Social Care. However, those professionals and agencies who are most involved with the child and family, and those who have taken part in a Section 47 Enquiry have the right to request that Children's Social Care convene a Child Protection Conference if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not otherwise be adequately safeguarded (see Stoke-on-Trent Children's Services Procedures Child Protection Enquiries (Section 47) [Child Protection Enquiries \(Section 47\) \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com)). This should be done through a restorative conversation with the appropriate area team manager, and following discussion with your agencies safeguarding lead.

Where there remain differences of view over the necessity for a conference with a specific child, every effort should be made to resolve them through restorative conversations and an explanation of Children's Social Care decision. If the difference remains the resolution process outlined above would then be initiated by the individual agency or professional as necessary.

## **b) Dissent at Child Protection Conferences**

If a Child Protection Conference Chair is unable to achieve a consensus as to the need for a Child Protection Plan, they should follow the Stoke on Trent Children's Social Care Procedure for Child Protection Case Dispute

[https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/10705/1\\_3\\_10\\_escalation\\_policy\\_nov\\_2021.pdf](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/10705/1_3_10_escalation_policy_nov_2021.pdf)

The Chair will make a decision and note any dissenting views. This will include the situation where there is no majority view and where the Conference Chair exercises their decision making powers as set out in the Stoke on Trent Children's Social Care procedure Child Protection Pathway

[child-protection-pathway-update-sept-2021.pdf \(proceduresonline.com\)](https://proceduresonline.com/trixcms2/media/10705/1_3_10_escalation_policy_nov_2021.pdf).

## Appendix 2: Professionals Concerns Resolutions Notifications and Outcomes Form

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.)

### Current Stage in the Escalation Process:

### Requested Action:

### Response:

### Resolution of Issues:

### Actions Taken to Resolve the Professional Disagreement:

Please send a copy to the Stoke-on-Trent Safeguarding Children Partnership at stages 3 to 5. Once complete send **SECURELY** to: [SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk](mailto:SSCP.Information@stoke.gov.uk)

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