



Conflict Resolution Policy (Resolving Professional Differences)

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1. Introduction

At no time must professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. The child's welfare and safety must remain paramount throughout.

This procedure identifies a non-exhaustive list of potential areas of disagreement, guidance on preventing disputes and procedures to be followed when disputes cannot be resolved through discussion and negotiation between professionals at front line level. It does not include procedures when there is a disagreement regarding the need to convene an Initial Child Protection Conference or the implementation of the Child Protection Plan.

2. Potential Areas of Disagreement

- A referral not considered to meet the threshold for assessment by Children's social care;
- Children's social care conclude that further information should be sought by the referrer before a referral is progressed;
- There is disagreement as to whether the child protection procedures should be invoked;
- Children's social care and the Police place different interpretations on the need for significant agency response in relation to a child protection enquiry;
- There is a disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services;
- There is disagreement over the outcome of any assessment and whether the appropriate action plan is in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

3. Stage One: Preventing Disputes

Most disagreements can be resolved through discussion and negotiation. The professionals involved should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within one working day, but if they are unable to do so, their disagreement must be reported by them to their line managers or equivalent.

With respect to most day-to-day issues, the relevant line managers will be able to resolve the disagreement. This contact should take place within twenty-four hours. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. It may be

helpful to consider the involvement of the designated or named professional at this stage in preference to use of line management.

Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant managers involved and the detail of the conflict and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

4. Stage Two: Informal Dispute Procedure

Where it is not possible to resolve the matter at front line management level, the matter should be referred without delay to second tier management level.

The issue will then be considered at second tier management level and/or include Team Around the Family, with direct communication taking place with the designated professional or named professional for safeguarding within the individual agency or at a second tier management level.

If the area of conflict relates to whether a case meets the threshold for a referral or service from Children's social care, then the CAF/TAC Implementation Officer will also be involved in this discussion.

5. Stage Three: Formal Dispute Procedure

If despite following the Stage Two process the disagreement remains, the matter will be referred to an appropriate Head of Service within Specialist Children's Services, who will consider the matter with their equivalent level of management within the concerned agency who is in dispute.

The purpose of escalating the dispute to this level is to reach a position where differing professional opinions have been taken into account and efforts made to explore whether the dispute has arisen through lack of clarity or understanding in the professional dialogue. Ultimately a decision will need to be reached where agencies agree a way forward where the interests of the child take precedence over a professional stalemate.

6. Stage Four: Where Disagreements Remain

In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains unresolved, the matter must be referred to the Head of Safeguarding, who will determine a course of action including reporting the matter to the Safeguarding Children Board Chair.

In all cases where it has not been possible to resolve differences and/or where there may be lessons to be learned for future practice, consideration should be given to holding a multi-agency case review.

At any stage of the process, any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the second tier management staff involved and the detail of the conflict and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

All disputes should be resolved in a timely way so that the welfare of the child remains paramount. In some situations, it may be required to instigate all of the stages within a short period of time or to escalate the process so that the safety of the child is not compromised.

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