

Gweithio'n Gytân Ar Gyfer Plant



Working Together For Children

South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board

Multi Agency Practice Guidance Resolving Professional Differences

Date first ratified by SEWSCB:

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Developed by:

Protocols and Procedures Group

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11th May 2017

1. Purpose and Context

The South East Wales Safeguarding Children Board is committed to the continuous improvement of joint working arrangements to safeguard children and promote their welfare.

Effective joint working arrangements are supported by legislation, national policy and guidance and protocols and practice guidance developed by Safeguarding Children Boards. However, it is still possible for professionals to disagree about the management of a child/young person's case. Differences can arise about a number of issues but most often are about:

- thresholds for action/inaction
- roles and responsibilities
- inter-agency communication
- timeliness of interventions.

The protection of children and young people fundamentally depends on effective joint working between professionals and agencies. This requires an open and honest approach and the recognition that in some instances this may involve professional challenge and the need to resolve professional differences of opinion.

It is essential that professional differences are resolved as swiftly as possible so as not to lose focus on the safety and welfare of the children or young people. Professional differences must not impede the progress of case working.

One way of achieving this is by providing professionals with a framework for expressing concerns that may arise about the management of cases. This practice guidance sets out that framework.

In the course of routine practice, there should be an initial attempt to resolve any professional differences on an informal basis, as would be the expectation for any effective joint working arrangements. However, if professional differences remain despite having followed these usual business practices, the owning agency should clearly communicate to all involved agencies that it is invoking the Resolving Professional Differences Guidance.

2. Professional Responsibility

Research and case reviews have consistently emphasised the need for good inter-agency communication, constructive professional challenge and the swift resolution of professional differences of opinion.

It is the responsibility of all professionals, regardless of status or agency, to challenge other professionals appropriately if they believe that the action, or inaction, of another professional/agency is placing a child at risk of harm, or contributing to a situation where a child may be at risk of harm. It is also the responsibility of all professionals to ensure that all multi agency documentation (e.g. minutes from child protection conferences, strategy meeting documentation, assessments etc) truly reflect any difference of opinion and if not that this is challenged for accuracy.

Some professionals may require support from their line managers in order to challenge other professionals, as they may feel inexperienced, lacking in authority, or wary of causing conflict. It is essential that managers provide relevant and appropriate support.

It is also the responsibility of all professionals to escalate concerns if they can't resolve the issue and they remain concerned.

It is essential when trying to resolve the concerns that you are clear about the outcome you are seeking e.g. do you want the agency to change their course of action, do you want your concerns recognised and listened to etc.

Resolution does not necessarily mean that everyone will agree; there will be occasions when agencies will continue to disagree on the course of action required in a case, however, this process encourages open and transparent communication between professionals and agencies that allows for the debate to be had and the concerns to be explored. The focus should always remain upon the safety / wellbeing of the child.

3. The Process

All discussions (including telephone and email correspondence) must be recorded in accordance with the recording policies and procedures of the individual agency. There should be no unnecessary delays in implementing this process. At any stage of this process any informal meetings should be recorded and outcome actions agreed and shared with other agencies.

1. In the first instance the professional who has a concern about a case or differing professional opinion should attempt to resolve these differences with the other professional / agency involved. This should be done as soon as possible with a view to resolving the differences and agreeing a course of action.
2. If they are unable to agree a way forward, both professionals should discuss this with their respective line managers / supervisors as soon as possible. (In certain agencies this could be the Child Protection / Safeguarding Lead.)
3. The line manager/supervisor should discuss the concerns raised with their counterpart in the other agency / organisation and attempt to resolve the matter within 2 working days of the issue being brought to their attention. This may involve a meeting to agree a course of action between the professionals concerned and their line managers/supervisors.
4. If agreement cannot be reached at this stage, then the line managers / supervisors should contact the designated lead for child protection/safeguarding leads or their agency representative on the Safeguarding Children Board (SCB) who will then contact their counterpart in the other agency within 2 working days.

It may be useful at this stage to consider a wider multi-agency meeting involving professionals and line managers with the child protection/safeguarding leads. It should be made clear to all involved agencies attending this meeting that this falls under the Resolving Professional Differences Guidance. The meeting should be chaired by a member of the Learning and Reviewing group with sufficient knowledge and experience to chair a complex meeting and this needs to be agreed by the Chair of the Learning and Reviewing group. The Chair of the Resolving Professional Differences meeting should clarify whether any immediate action is required to safeguard the child/children being discussed and gather the information required in order to be able to fulfill their role.

The purpose of this meeting is to consider and resolve the differences of opinion and agree a way forward. The Chair of the Resolving Professional Differences meeting should inform the Chair of the Learning and Reviewing group of the outcome of the meeting and of any proposed actions.

5. If resolution cannot be achieved by this stage then the Chair of the Resolving Professional Differences meeting should inform the Chair of the Learning and Reviewing group and request a review of the case. The RSCB Business Unit should be notified that a professional challenge has been escalated at this point. The number of challenges at this stage will be monitored through the RSCB Performance Management Framework.

6. The request will be considered by the Chair of the Learning and Reviewing group against the following criteria:
- i) One or more professionals believe that the child / young person is at risk of harm as a consequence of another agency's action / inaction, and
 - ii) Steps 1 to 5 of this process have been followed and there is still no resolution.

The Chair of the Learning and Reviewing group should decide whether any immediate action to safeguard the child is required and whether a review of the case should be undertaken.

The Chair of the Learning and Reviewing group will also decide whether the review will be undertaken by the Learning and Reviewing group or whether a request is made to an individual agency to undertake the review. The Chair will notify the SCB representatives/safeguarding leads of the agencies involved, of these decisions within 5 working days.

The process for undertaking a review or learning event with professionals will be subject to local or regional arrangements. There is an expectation that the professionals involved will be included in the review / learning event and will be kept fully informed.

7. Following completion of the review, a report will be presented to the next meeting of the Learning and Reviewing group. The report will identify any actions taken and outcomes for the child/young person and how these will be disseminated. The report will also identify key learning points.
8. If there are any organisational issues arising then the SCB Business Manager should be notified. The Business Manager will discuss this with the Chair of the Board and a decision will be made as to how these issues will be addressed with the agency/agencies. Feedback will be given to the Learning and Reviewing group on conclusion.

NB: If at any stage in this process it is identified that immediate action is necessary to safeguard a child/children, then this must be referred to Children's Services without delay or escalate within own agency for immediate action.

PROCESS FLOW CHART

