

# Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board

## Escalation of Professional Concerns Guidance - November 2017



Safeguarding Children

The safety of individual children must always be the most important consideration in any professional disagreement and at no time must the professional disagreement detract from ensuring that the child is safeguarded. This guidance has been developed for all practitioners working with children and families in Gloucestershire. Its aim is to assist with developing quick and straightforward means of resolving professional differences of opinion in relation to concerns about a child/ren<sup>1</sup>.

**If the disagreement is between you and your manager then you should consider using your agency's whistle-blowing process.**

### Introduction

Differences of opinion relating to the level of risk to a child will exist, and are an expected part of quality safeguarding practice. It is a sign of a healthy safeguarding system to have a culture of respectful, professional challenge both within and between organisations. Professionals are expected to discuss these differences in a professional and productive manner, using the restorative practice principles of 'high expectations' 'high challenge' and 'high support'. These principles should be used in all work with children and families, colleagues, professionals within other agencies and through strategic partnerships. Restorative practice<sup>2</sup> describes a core set of beliefs, principles and a way of being with people that builds and maintains healthy relationships, a sense of community and a shared sense of accountability. It is about having high expectations that then enables high levels of challenge and support to inspire people and communities to feel able to resolve their problems and shape their own futures. There is a wealth of evidence to suggest that working with and alongside people can lead to significant and sustained positive change.

In order to be able to resolve difficulties within and between agencies quickly and openly in the best interests of the child, there are a number of key principles that need to be adopted by all professionals:

- **Respond positively to feedback – it is not personal, it's about children; issues have been raised because there are concerns about the level of risk/lived experiences for a child/ren. Being able to positively accept challenge is equally as important as being able to raise a challenge**
- **Seek to resolve any professional disagreements at the lowest possible level as part of everyday working practice and within the timescales laid out in this guidance**

<sup>1</sup> In this guidance a child is defined as anyone who has not yet reached their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. 'Children' therefore means 'children and young people' throughout

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/children-young-people-and-families/restorative-practice-in-gloucestershire/>

- Encourage others to challenge or question your own practice to ensure healthy challenge becomes part of all of our professional and learning cultures
- Wherever possible, discussions should take place face-to-face or by telephone. Try to avoid the use of email alone to raise a challenge. However, it is good practice to follow up your conversation by email to document the discussions that took place
- The tone of challenge should be one of respectful enquiry, not criticism – be curious and remain curious until you understand and accept the reasons behind the decision that has been made or an alternative decision has been reached
- Challenge should always be evidence based and solution focussed
- Be persistent and keep asking questions
- Discuss your concerns with the named/designated safeguarding lead within your organisation or through supervision arrangements
- Always keep a written record of actions and decisions taken in line with your own organisation's information governance and record keeping policies
- REMEMBER, you are acting in the best interests of the child and they must always remain central to your discussions and decision making

Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around:

**Levels of need** (always refer to the Gloucestershire Levels of Intervention Guidance to inform your decision making) <http://www.gscb.org.uk/i-work-with-children-young-people-and-parents/guidance-for-working-with-children-and-young-people/>

- A referral is not considered to meet eligibility criteria for assessment by Children's Social Care
- A decision is made that further information should be sought by the referrer before a referral is progressed
- There is a disagreement as to whether child protection procedures should be invoked
- There is a disagreement regarding whether the case should be stepped down from CP to Child in Need, or from Child in Need to Early Help

## **Roles and responsibilities**

### **The need for action**

#### **Communication**

- Lack of response to queries/requests for information within agreed timescales
- Disagreement over the sharing of information and/or the provision of services
- Documents, such as assessments and plans, not shared with all agencies
- Inadequate explanation for how a decision has been reached

All practitioners should feel able to challenge decision-making and see this as their right and responsibility in order to promote the best multi-agency safeguarding practice. This guidance provides practitioners with the means to raise significant concerns they have about decisions made by other professionals or agencies by:

- a) avoiding professional disputes that put children at risk or obscure the focus on the child

- b) resolving the difficulties within and between agencies quickly and openly
- c) identifying problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and promoting the resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures

Effective working together depends on a culture of open and honest relationships between agencies. Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.

Resolution should be sought within the shortest timescale possible to ensure the child is protected. Disagreements should be resolved at the lowest possible stage. The vast majority of disagreements will be resolved as part of multi-agency case discussions through day to day casework. However if a child is thought to be at risk of immediate harm, discretion should be used as to which stage is initiated.

### **Case Example**

**Details of Concern:** Concerns raised by maternity staff in relation to a pregnant lady living at home with her partner and 15 year old daughter. The 15 year old daughter has recently returned to the family home due to a breakdown of her foster placement. The daughter poses a risk to the baby due to her aggressive behaviour and mother is planning a home birth. Maternity staff are concerned and feel that a home birth with an aggressive teenager present will be a safeguarding risk to the new born and those professionals present. Children's Social Care advise that a new foster placement is being sought but it will not be confirmed until after the baby is born.

**Action Taken:** The Escalation Procedure was followed and although a resolution couldn't be reached through discussions between the two practitioners (Stage 1), the concerns were resolved through a Manager to Manager discussion (Stage 2).

**Outcome:** It was agreed that a care plan would be made for the safety of the baby and midwives. The teenage daughter stayed with another family member around the time of birth and the immediate postnatal period. These arrangements would continue until permanent plans could be put in place.

### **Additional Notes**

At all stages of the process, actions and decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel (in line with your organisation's information governance and record keeping policies), to include the worker 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.

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

It is the responsibility of each setting/agency/organisation to record the number of escalations that take place from Stage 1 onwards. These should be reported to the named/designated safeguarding lead within your organisation. This should form part of your organisation's internal quality assurance processes.

## Stages of Escalation

### Stage One - expected everyday practice

Any practitioner who feels that a decision is not safe or is inappropriate should have an open and honest conversation with the other practitioner (whether this is a practitioner within their own agency or a different agency), highlighting the reasons/evidence why they think the decision is not safe/inappropriate. They should be clear about the outcome they are seeking to achieve for the child and the timescales they are working towards. A practitioner may consult a supervisor/manager to clarify their thinking in order to identify the problem, and needs to be specific as to what the disagreement is about and what they aim to achieve. **Timescale for resolution: within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less)**

### Stage Two - expected everyday practice

If the problem is not resolved at stage one the concerned worker should contact their supervisor/manager/named professional within their own agency who should raise the concerns with the equivalent supervisor/manager in the other agency. Again, this is part of the expected everyday practice, and is reflective of an open and honest culture of all practitioners acting in the best interests of the child and continuing to pursue their concerns, until they are satisfied they have been resolved or they understand the reasons why an alternative decision has been reached. **Timescale for resolution: within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less)**

### Stage Three

If the problem is not resolved at stage two the supervisor/manager/named professional reports to their respective Head of Service/operations manager or named/designated safeguarding representative to raise with the equivalent manager in the other agency. These two managers must attempt to resolve the professional differences through discussion. The GSCB Business Manager should be notified by the person who is escalating at the start of this stage and also advised of any outcome. The two senior managers should agree a clear plan of action, which includes timescales in the best interests of the child. **Timescale for resolution: within 5 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less)**

### Stage Four

If professional disagreements remain unresolved, the matter should be referred to the Chair of the GSCB who may either seek to resolve the issue direct, or convene a Resolution Panel. **Timescale for resolution: within 10 working days or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less).**

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