



Leeds Safeguarding
Children Partnership

Professional Concerns Resolution Process

What to do if you wish to challenge professional
practice / decision making in safeguarding children
and young people

Version	4
Initial date of this document:	22.08.2014
Date Document Amended	11.10.2019
Document Review Date	11.10.2022
JFDI Level	Level 1, (all agencies)



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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: lscp.info@leeds.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

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 Duty and Advice 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
- 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

3. Resolving Concerns

The following process should be followed by practitioners when raising a concern (a diagram of the process can be found in Appendix 2). 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.

Time scales not exceeding 10 working days should be agreed for each stage taking into consideration risk to the child.

Step 1: Practitioner to Practitioner

Immediately discuss with colleagues and own agency designated lead for safeguarding to clarify thinking and practice. Attempt to resolve any disagreements with the practitioner face to face before initiating the full process. 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.

Step 2: Line manager to Line manager

If following Step 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.

They should do this within an agreed timescale with the practitioner raising the concern, and a timescale for response from the other line manager should also be agreed. Where possible this should not exceed 10 working days between stages and one month for the overall process to be completed.

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.*

Step 3a: Head of Service / Senior Manager to Head of Service / Senior 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, again with agreed timescales for responses. The LSCP must also be notified to allow for assurance and oversight (lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk) using the template in Appendix 3.

Where possible this should not exceed 10 working days between stages and one month for the overall process to be completed.

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

Step 3b: Director/Assistant Director to Director/Assistant Director

If professional disagreements remain unresolved, each Head of Service / senior manager will raise the disagreement within a further **2 working days** at Director / Assistant Director level within their own agency.

The Director / Assistant Director of the complainant agency will then write to the Director / Assistant Director of the receiving agency and meet to achieve a final resolution.

The LSCP must also be notified to allow for assurance and oversight (lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk) using the template in Appendix 3.

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

Stage 4: Exceptional Circumstances

If the disagreement cannot be resolved within the 3 step process set out above, this should be referred to the LSCP Executive (lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk) using the template in Appendix 3, who will take action with both parties to resolve. If the LSCP Exec is unable to agree a way forward and resolve the situation they will involve the LSCP Chair.

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.

4. Things for Consideration

- Appropriate timescales for passing on, and responding to, concerns should be agreed for each stage (ideally within 10 working days). These should take into consideration any potential risk to the child and need for provision of services. 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 Duty and Advice 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 consider the use of processes such as restorative circles and Rethink Formulation to support this process as appropriate.
- The NSPCC Whistleblowing Helpline for practitioners (further details can be found on the NSPCC Website) is not intended to replace existing processes to resolve disputes or the local LADO arrangements.

5. Contacts

Duty & Advice	0113 3760336 (option 3)
LSCP	lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk
LSCP Independent Chair	lscp.info@leeds.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 Work Services. 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 Work Services convene a Child Protection Conference if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not otherwise be adequately safeguarded. This should be done through a restorative conversation with the appropriate area team manager, and following discussion with your agencies safeguarding lead.

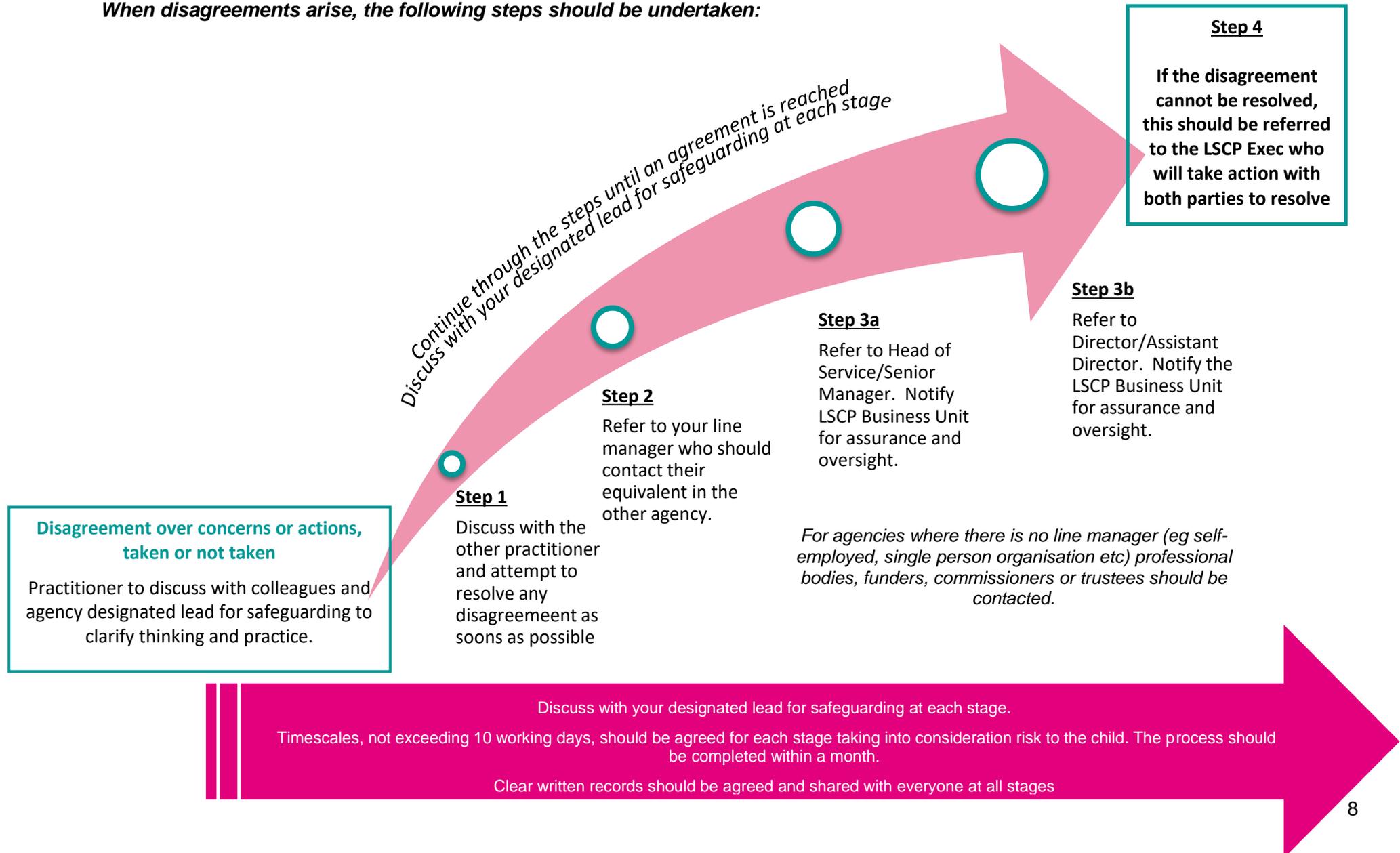
Where there remain differences of view over the necessity for a conference with a specific child, every effort should be made to resolve them through restorative conversations and an explanation of CSWS decision. The resolution process (Appendix 2) would then be initiated by the individual agency or 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 West Yorkshire procedure for [Initial Child Protection Conferences](#) section 14, Dissent from the Conference Decision. They 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 West Yorkshire procedure for [Initial Child Protection Conferences](#) section 13.4, The Decision Making Process.

Appendix 2: Professional Concerns Resolutions Process

When disagreements arise, the following steps should be undertaken:



Appendix 3: Professional Concerns Resolution Process; Stage 3 Notifications and Outcomes Form

Notification	
Details of person providing notification Name: Agency: Role: Email and telephone:	Date of notification
Summary of notification Agencies involved: Initial concerns: Steps taken to date:	
Outcome of process and next steps	
<i>Please outline outcome of process, any next steps and when all parties were informed of outcome</i>	
Date of outcome:	Notification of outcome from:
Outcome and any Next Steps:	
To be returned to lscp.info@leeds.gov.uk FAO LSCP Business Manager	