

PRACTITIONER GUIDE

Resolution of Professional Disagreement

Safeguarding children and promoting their welfare is a responsibility shared by all partner organisations and requires a commitment to effective collaboration. This includes appropriate information sharing and the adoption of a coordinated approach to agreed multi-agency decisions and planning. It is also recognised that good practice will sometimes include constructive challenge or healthy debate between colleagues whilst they seek to safeguard a child, as working with families and children can be difficult and complex. *Problem resolution is therefore an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.*

Purpose of the HIPS Joint Working Protocol for Professional Challenge and Resolution of Professional Disagreement

Learning from local and national Serious Case Reviews has highlighted the need for a clear escalation policy that *all* practitioners can feel confident to use. This quick guide summarises the content and procedures contained in the [HIPS Joint Working Protocol for the Professional Challenge and Resolution of Professional Disagreement](#). The HIPS procedure provides guidance for resolving operational disagreement and professional differences *between* agencies. Its aim is to ensure that positive resolution of professional difference leads to better outcomes for children and importantly, the continuation of good partnership working.

NB: For disputes within agencies, in house procedures should be followed.

Examples of Professional Disagreement Scenarios

- Disagreement over criteria for referrals
- Disagreement over outcomes of assessments
- Disagreement over roles and responsibilities of workers
- Disagreement over service provision
- Disagreement over information sharing and communication



Key Principles

Safeguarding children can be a complicated and challenging process. In most circumstances, there is mutual agreement between professionals. It is inevitable that, at times, professional disagreement will arise. Whilst this is accepted, it is vital that these tensions do not detrimentally affect outcomes for children and young people. All professionals should have due regard to their local area's [Thresholds Documents](#). They should also have regard to, and use where appropriate, any [relevant toolkits](#) that support practitioners in describing and quantifying their concerns.

To ensure continued best practice, practitioners should be encouraged to give or receive professional challenge in a constructive and positive way.

Professional disagreement is only damaging if not resolved quickly in a constructive, respectful manner and with a genuine commitment to partnership working.

Regardless of role/level of expertise, all individuals concerned about a safeguarding decision or plan have the right and duty to challenge if they think a child's safety or welfare is not being adequately met.

When communicating disagreement, professionals should remain respectful of each other at all times, and this should be evidenced in both their direct and written communication.

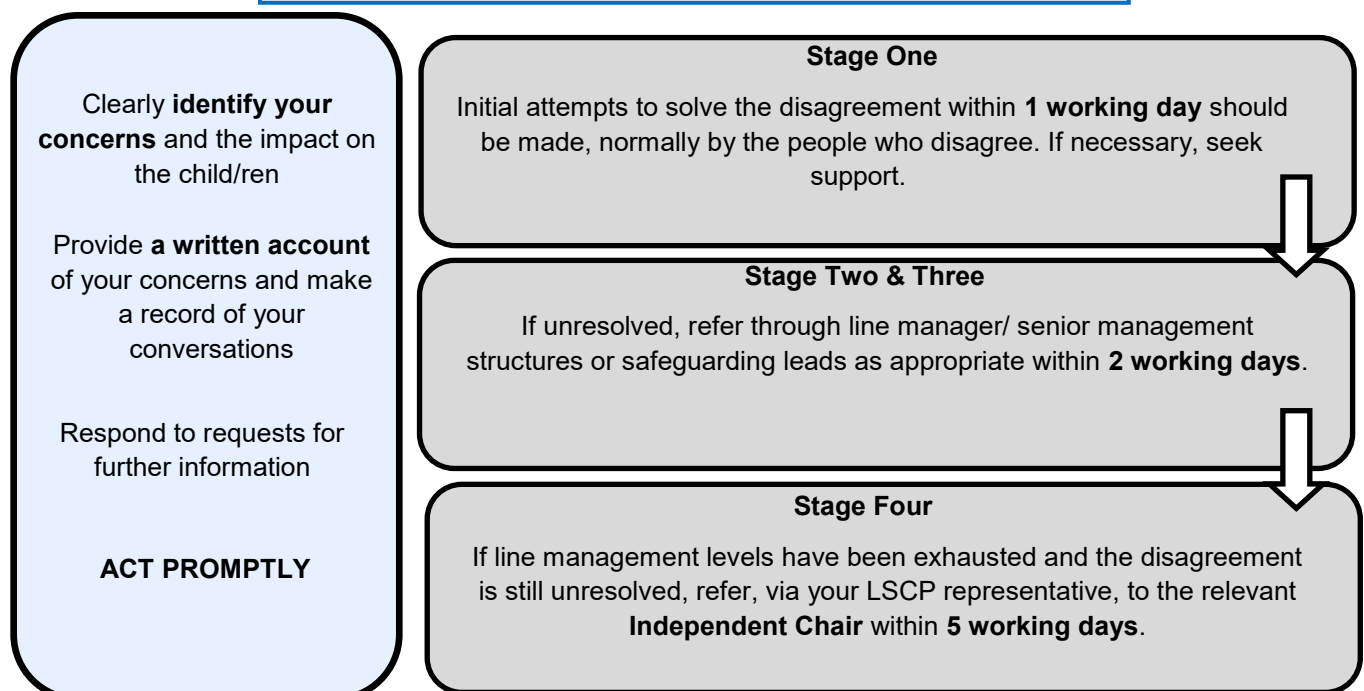
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During the escalation process, it is important to remember:

1. Difficulties at practitioner / fieldworker level between agencies should be resolved as simply and quickly as possible between the practitioners concerned.
2. In the event that staff working directly with the child cannot resolve the disagreement and need to involve more senior managers or safeguarding advisers, a four-stage process can be followed as set out below and detailed within the [HIPS Joint Working Protocol for the Professional Challenge and Resolution of Professional Disagreement](#).
3. Clear written records should be kept of disagreements and agreed outcomes of resolutions reached by all parties.
4. Swift timeframes are required (see diagram for timeframe at each stage).
5. It should be noted that, professional challenge and discussion, and the subsequent resolution of disagreements at any stage, may not necessarily change the outcome of the safeguarding decisions that were originally challenged.

Process and Timescales Diagram



Link to HSCP eLearning Course:

[eLearning](#) on [Professional Challenge and Escalation](#)