

Learning Summary: Professional Challenge and Escalation

1. What is this Policy about?

The **Multi-Agency Professional Challenge and Escalation Policy** sets out how practitioners and agencies should respond when there is a professional disagreement or concern about safeguarding practice relating to a child, young person or family. The policy is clear that professional disagreements must not obstruct the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person.

2. Why does this matter?

Safeguarding Practice Reviews, both nationally and locally, continue to identify that lack of professional challenge can contribute to weak decision-making. The policy promotes a culture where practitioners feel confident and supported to respectfully challenge decisions or practice that may not be in the best interests of a child or young person.

3. When should the policy be used

This policy should be used when there are concerns or disagreements between practitioners or agencies, including:

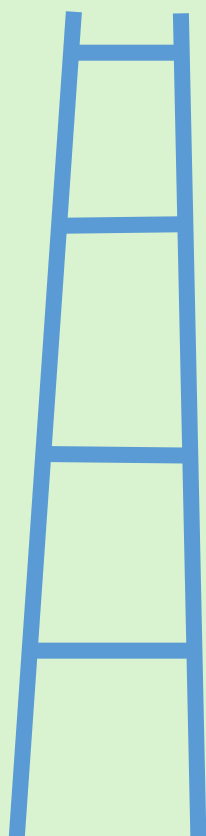
- different views about levels of need, thresholds or intervention;
- disagreement about decision-making or action to be taken at a strategy meeting, child protection conference or other professional meeting;
- concern about lack of action by another professional or agency;
- concern about drift or unreasonable delay in progressing actions;
- disagreement about the provision of services;
- lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities.

4. Key Principles

When resolving professional disagreement, practitioners should ensure that:

- the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person remains paramount;
- the child, young person and family remain central to professional discussions;
- the right conversations happen with the right people at the right time, face to face where possible;
- professional challenge is promoted within an inclusive and safe culture;
- disagreements are resolved in a timely way;
- concerns, actions, responses and outcomes are recorded.

1. Escalation Process



Day 1–2: Practitioner to practitioner

Initial attempts should be made between workers to resolve the issue through conversation. This should take place as soon as possible and within **48 hours** of the concern arising. The concern and discussion should be recorded on the child's record.

Step 1 — Day 3–7: Line manager to line manager

If the concern remains unresolved, the professional should notify their line manager. Line managers should seek resolution within **5 working days** of being notified, or sooner where the level of risk requires this. Any agreed outcome and outstanding actions must be confirmed in writing and shared with the workers involved.

Step 2 — Day 8–13: Designated Safeguarding Leads

If line managers cannot resolve the concern, the issue should be escalated to the relevant Designated Safeguarding Leads, who should seek resolution with their equivalent. The outcome should be recorded on the child's record and communicated to the managers involved.

Step 3 — Day 14–19: Delegated Safeguarding Partners

If the concern remains unresolved, it should be escalated to the Delegated Safeguarding Partners within the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements using the form found in the Policy. The Delegated Safeguarding Partner may resolve the issue directly or convene a resolution meeting, with outcomes communicated to all relevant parties and recorded on the child's record.

2. Important Message

The timescales in the policy are guidance only. Escalation and resolution should happen at the earliest opportunity and with urgency where there is any indication that a child may be at risk of significant harm. Where a child is considered to be at significant risk, the local authority children's social care front door should be contacted.

3. Recording Expectations

Each agency should have a recording system that demonstrates the use of professional challenge and escalation at each step. An entry should be made on the child's record whenever an escalation is raised. The Safeguarding Partnership will maintain a record of escalations and outcomes that reach Step 3 and may request information about Step 1 and Step 2 outcomes as part of quality assurance activity.

4. Step 3 Submission Route

For Step 3 escalations, the Appendix A form should be submitted to the relevant local safeguarding children partnership. For Cheshire East, the policy states that submissions should be sent to **CESCP@cheshireeast.gov.uk**.

5. Key Message for Practitioners

Professional challenge is a safeguarding responsibility. It should be respectful, timely, clearly recorded and focused on achieving the best outcome for the child or young person. Challenge is not a sign of poor partnership working; when used well, it strengthens decision-making, promotes shared accountability and helps prevent drift or delay.