

Berkshire Escalation Process for Professionals with Safeguarding Concerns

In cases where a professional considers the child or young person to be at imminent risk of harm due to the decision made by the other agency and the other agency professional disagrees they should refer directly to their Safeguarding Lead or line manager (where there is no safeguarding lead or they are not available) within their agency. Where time does not allow for the above due to the immediacy of the risk, the professional should use their **professional judgement** and as appropriate dial 999 and ask for police assistance.

Stage One – Preventing Disputes

Most disagreements can be resolved through discussion and negotiation. The professionals involved should attempt to resolve differences through discussion within one working day, but if they are unable to do so, their disagreement must be reported by them to their line manager / team manager. With respect to cases where a concern is ongoing, or progress is slow, it may be useful to instigate a professionals meeting to understand the risks and lived experience for the child. Most issues or concerns can be resolved, through discussion by the relevant line managers / team manager. This contact should take place within twenty-four hours. The purpose of this contact is to review the available information and to resolve the concern. It may be helpful to consider the involvement of the designated or named professional at this stage. Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant managers involved and the detail of the escalation and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

Issue resolved: No further action required

Stage Two – Dispute Procedure

Where it is not possible to resolve the matter at frontline/ team manager level, the matter should be referred without delay to the next management level or appropriate safeguarding lead. The issue will then be considered at that management level, with direct communication taking place with the designated professional or named professional for safeguarding within the individual agency that raised the dispute. Any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the relevant managers involved and the detail of the escalation and agreements reached should be recorded on the child's file.

Stage Three – Formal Dispute Procedure

If despite following the Stage Two process the disagreement remains, the matter will be referred to a senior manager with responsibility for safeguarding who will consider the matter with their equivalent level of management within the concerned agency who is in dispute. The purpose of escalating the dispute to this level is to reach a position where differing professional opinions have been taken into account and efforts made to explore whether the dispute has arisen through lack of clarity or understanding in the professional dialogue. Ultimately a decision will need to be reached where agencies agree a way forward where the interests of the child take precedence over a professional stalemate.

Decisions and Actions must be recorded and from Stage 4 onwards forwarded to the Local Statutory Safeguarding Children Partners.

Stage Four – Where disagreements remain

In the unlikely event that the professional disagreement remains unresolved, the matter must be referred to the departmental head with responsibility for safeguarding, who will report the matter to the relevant local Statutory Safeguarding Children Partners. They will also instigate a meeting of senior managers with operational responsibility for the case, where a senior member from an uninvolved organisation should be identified as chair. This meeting will review the issues at hand and provide a final opportunity for the involved agencies to ensure that there is a full understanding of the issues before a decision is finalised. The Chair of this meeting will then report on issues arising from this process to the Serious Case Review Subgroup of the local Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Partnership. In all cases where it has not been possible to resolve differences and/or where there may be lessons to be learned for future practice, consideration should be given to holding a multi-agency case review. At any stage of the process, any action agreed should be fed back immediately to the second tier management staff

Stage Five – Conclusion

All disputes should be resolved in a timely way so that the welfare of the child remains paramount. In some situations, it may be required to instigate all of the stages within a short period of time or to escalate the process so that the safety of the child is not compromised. However, if a child is thought to be at risk of immediate harm the designated safeguarding lead/line manager in your agency should be informed immediately. The professional should use their professional judgement and as appropriate dial 999 and ask for Police assistance. If the process highlights gaps in policies and procedures this must be brought to the attention of the Local Statutory Safeguarding Children Partners and referred to the Berkshire Child Protection Policy and Procedures Sub Group.