**Multi-Agency Professionals Only Meetings**

Findings from local and national case reviews, indicate that the commitment to working in partnership with families has inadvertently led to an assumption that professionals cannot meet together without the family being present, e.g. when they have concerns regarding the progress of a child’s plan.

Although working in partnership with and involving families in decisions and meetings about them should be the norm, there will be times when it is beneficial for professionals to come together not only to share information, but also to explore and understand differing views to help determine the direction of the plan for a child.

They may be helpful where there are particularly complex family concerns, with extensive professionals/networks. In such circumstances, a professionals/multi-disciplinary team meeting, peer-supervision or case mapping meeting may be required and the usefulness of such meetings, and when they are justified, needs to be understood and agreed among agencies.

**Purpose**

A multi-agency professionals meeting is a tool to support practitioners whose standard practice is to work openly with families, but who may need the opportunity to talk with other professionals without the family being present.

Their use, as part of the local framework to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, is endorsed by Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB).

A professionals meeting may be important where there is uncertainty amongst professionals about the necessary steps to safeguard the welfare of a child; or there are difficulties in working co-operatively with the family.

They may also be helpful where professional disagreements arise that are impacting on effective work with the family, or where professionals need an opportunity to reflect on the plans for working with a family when progress is not being made or is starting to drift.

These meetings do not replace usual planning and review meetings, or other ‘professionals only’ meetings, such as child protection [Strategy Meetings](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/p_ch_protection_enq.html?zoom_highlight=strategy+meeting). The meeting will generally be one-off and held within a timescale that will influence potential plans for the child.

A professionals meeting should always be considered before referring to [Complex Case Panel.](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/p_complex_case_pan.html?zoom_highlight=complex+case+panel)

**Criteria for convening a multi-agency professionals meeting**

This type of meeting would not be considered routine in practice, since wherever possible professionals should aim to work in partnership with families, but could be considered in the following situations:

* an agency or group of professionals feels that the work with a child or young person and their family is not resulting in improved outcomes for children
* an agency or agencies working with a family need to share information to clarify a concern or address difficulties in working with a family and to involve the family would inhibit discussion;
* to resolve concerns within the professional group, such as understanding of the degree of risk, meaning given to information, the approach and priority actions and the reasonable expectations of other professionals;
* to resolve disagreements regarding an agency’s response to a referral request, or concern raised regarding a child or young person;
* the family/child/young person’s needs cannot be met from within the agency’s own resources and the need or concern remains unaddressed;
* sharing of information by phone or email is not considered adequate to facilitate discussion and decision-making.
* when there are concerns about Fabricated or Induced Illness and there is a need to clarify the nature and extent of the health concerns.

**Who can convene professionals only meetings?**

Any agency can convene a professionals meeting. Where a practitioner feels that there is a need for a meeting that is covered by the above criteria, they should discuss the rationale with their relevant designated safeguarding lead and/or their line manager.

The designated safeguarding lead / line manager, if they agree, should authorise the meeting. In the case of a disagreement about the need for a professionals meeting, or concern about the lack of engagement from any invited party, the [OSCB Resolving Multi-Agency Disagreements and Escalation Policy](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/resolve_multi_agency.pdf) applies.

Where there is a legitimate concern over professionals’ safety, a professionals meeting may be appropriate. Where a professional is concerned about passing information on, or raising issues in front of a family, they should seek supervision with their line manager/ clinical supervisor to discuss the reasons for this.

**Leadership of the meeting**

The convening agency is responsible for initiating the meeting and should agree the following with involved agencies prior to the meeting:

* Whether the parents / carers should be informed of the meeting beforehand
* A venue, date and time for the meeting or if it is to be held virtually ensure all participants have access to the required technology
* Invitations to all attendees
* A chair for the meeting
* A minute taker who will also circulate the minutes afterwards to all attendees, and where appropriate the family

**Chairing professionals only meetings**

The meeting should be chaired by someone who has experience of chairing similar solutions focused meetings, centred on the needs of the child or young person. This should be agreed between the involved agencies and could be a manager, senior practitioner, lead professional or keyworker.

**Minutes from professionals only meetings**

Minutes should be brief and clear, capture the main areas of need and outline the agreed actions to address the needs and concerns that have been raised. Any action plan developed as a result of the meeting should address how the issues discussed are then raised with the parents / carers, and by whom, unless to do so would potentially place the children concerned at risk of further harm.

One particular exception to routinely sharing information about the meeting, is if there are concerns about [Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII),](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/p_fab_ind_illness.html?zoom_highlight=fabricated) and these cases should be discussed with a Senior Manager or Named/Designated Doctor.

**NB** Minutes can be disclosed in subject access requests and legal proceedings.

**Attendance**

The meeting needs to bring together all those who can provide relevant information about the child/young person and family. In addition to professionals directly involved with the child and family, this may include any worker with a particular expertise that could inform discussion and help to identify more effective ways of working, e.g. psychologist/systemically trained professional, named or designated health professionals, specialist social worker/manager and others.

A [Multi-Agency Chronology](https://www.oscb.org.uk/practitioners-volunteers/multi-agency-guidance-tools/) may be used to evidence needs and risks, and to help understand the impact, of events and changes on the child and family’s progress.

The meeting should agree who is the most appropriate person to inform the child and family of the outcome.

**Permissions / Family Involvement / Confidentiality**

In normal circumstances it is only fair to inform a family that a professionals’ meeting is taking place. In most cases families understand that professionals do need to discuss their case amongst themselves to establish the best course of action. In rare cases, e.g. where there are significant safeguarding concerns and parental knowledge of a professionals’ meeting may have adverse consequences for the child/children, a decision may be made between senior professionals not to share details of a meeting with a family.

If the parents / carers have not been informed of the meeting, then agreement should be sought from invited agencies that the meeting will take place without the family being informed.

Professionals meetings must agree how the decisions and actions arising from the meeting will be sensitively and respectfully communicated to the family/ child concerned. When decisions have been made without the parents present, arrangements need to be made to inform them as soon as possible afterwards.

Where appropriate, a record of the meeting will be sent to the parents / carers that are subject of the meeting. Consideration should be given by agencies to the child’s age for the most appropriate method of feedback.

Normal rules of confidentiality apply in that only information relevant to ensuring the safety and welfare of the children in the family should be shared. For further information please see the [Seven Golden Rules for Information Sharing](https://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Seven-Golden-Rules-for-Info-Sharing.pdf).

**Reviewing decisions taken at professionals only meetings**

A professionals meeting is likely to be a one-off meeting, but there will need to be a plan made to ensure that the issues that it was convened to consider, have been resolved. If any professional is still concerned following the decisions of the professionals meeting, it should be referred to their line manager who will make contact with their opposite number in the relevant agency. (For further information see [OSCB Resolving Multi-Agency Disagreements and Escalation](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/resolve_multi_agency.pdf) Policy).

These procedures have been compiled with reference to similar procedures in other areas (Swindon, Calderdale, Manchester, Nottingham, and Hackney and a Freedom of Information request in Northamptonshire County Council FR5004a).

**Appendix A**

**Suggested Meeting Format**

It is recommended that the meeting follow a case mapping format, as follows:

* Date, time and venue
* Introduction (who is in attendance and why)
* Attendance / Apologies
* Aim of meeting (what is the issue to be addressed)
* Needs, Strengths and Risks identified by convening agency prior to meeting
* Additional or new information shared at meeting (from all agencies)
* Other Needs, Strengths and Risks identified during the meeting
* How to address these needs? What has already been tried?
* Plan to support the family, identifying clearly who is responsible for which actions, with timescales clearly defined
* Consideration and decision on how the decisions and actions arising from the meeting will be communicated to the child/family and by whom?
* Has a Family Group Conference been considered?
* Date of next review (if the meeting agrees that this is required).

For further guidance and templates, please see [Oxfordshire Signs of Safety Guidance](https://www.oscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Oxfordshire_Signs_of_Safety_Guidance.pdf)

**Appendix B: Flowchart: Convening a Professionals Only Meeting**

Is the criteria met for a Professionals Only Meeting?

**No**, practitioner to discuss concerns and next steps with their Line Manager/DSL

**Yes**, practitioner to discuss with their Line Manager or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL)

**No**, practitioner and manager/DSL to discuss further. If the practitioner does not agree, they may refer to the [Resolving Professional Disagreements and Escalation Policy](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/resolve_multi_agency.pdf)

Line Manager/DSL authorises the meeting

**Yes**, agency to convene meeting.

**No**, if there is disagreement between the involved agencies, they should refer to the [Resolving Professional Disagreements and Escalation Policy](https://oxfordshirescb.proceduresonline.com/files/resolve_multi_agency.pdf)

Involved agencies agree with the decision to convene the meeting

**Yes**, agencies agree who is the most appropriate person to Chair the meeting, and who will take the minutes and distribute them.

**No**, if any practitioner feels the meeting has not addressed the concerns raised, they should refer to their line manager who will make contact with their equivalent in the involved agency/s

Involved agencies agree with the decision to convene the meeting

**Yes**, and the meeting agreed who would inform the child and family of the outcome, where safe and appropriate to do so