



TEA-BREAK GUIDE



Professional Disagreements

Effective safeguarding of children is based on practitioners and front-line staff wanting the very best for children. You need to be ready to stand up in the best interests of children even if this brings you into disagreement with other practitioners, with other organisations or with your own managers.

Escalating concerns about a child is an expected part of partnership working in Northamptonshire. There is often no right or wrong answer when it comes to safeguarding children and decisions should be made by way of robust challenge, discussion and debate about the most effective way forward to ensure the child receives the best possible outcome. Children's cases can only be successfully escalated or conflicts resolved if those involved are willing for that to happen and genuinely want resolution to be the outcome.

Professionals raising issues with each other can almost always result in an agreed way forward. When they do not, there is an expectation that resolution will be sought through manager-to-manager dialogue and that resolution continues up hierarchies until a resolution is reached. If necessary, this should be up to, and include, senior managers and leaders in organisations.

Disagreements and conflicts can arise at a number of different stages and around a variety of areas in casework with children and families. Examples of some of the most common areas where you may find a disagreement has occurred, include the following:

- A referral not considered to meet the threshold for assessment by Children's Social Care;
- A referral not considered to meet the threshold for intervention by a specific Health service;
- There is a disagreement as to whether the child protection procedures should be invoked;
- There is a disagreement over the sharing of information and/or provision of services;
- There are different views about what the right level of intervention is at different times.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and demonstrates areas where professional robust challenge is often needed.

[Read the Procedure on the NSCP Website](#)

The Process

Below you will find details of the steps all organisations should go through when conflict in cases occurs in order to resolve these in a timely manner.

Timescales for a resolution will vary from case to case. The expectation is that resolution is timely and not drawn out and, in some cases, a speedy resolution will be required.

It should be noted that the below is to be used as a guide when escalating concerns, in some organisations some professionals will need to represent the agency at all stages while other may have multiple levels of management to resolve a conflict. For example a head teacher within a school may need to act at all levels of the process while the Local Authority has multiple layers of management that may be able to resolve a case.

The success of this procedure is only possible with the full co-operation of all organisations and a professionalism displayed by all working with children in Northamptonshire, this includes communicating clearly and effectively. Practitioners should avoid using terms such as 'complaint' to describe escalating a case to a management level to resolve a conflict.

Requests to provide management contact details should also be dealt with without delay, unfortunately it is not possible to have contact details in this procedure due to the size of the partnership, and recognising staff will change over time.

Stage 1 – Direct Professional to Professional Discussion

Initial attempts should be taken to resolve the conflict. This should normally be between the people who disagree who will try to achieve a shared understanding and agree a local resolution, in line with the plan or to ensure a plan is developed if needed. This must occur immediately with an acknowledgement and mutually agreed plan of action, including timescales within **48 hours (2 working days)**. It should be noted that some professionals may need support when raising a disagreement.

Issue resolved no further action required.

Stage 2 – Direct Manager to Manager Discussion

If unresolved the problem should be referred to each professionals' own line manager in their organisation, who should review the concerns and discuss with their opposite number in the other agency. At this stage it may be useful for the line managers/safeguarding children leads to agree a meeting between themselves and the concerned practitioners to assist with the exploration. The discussion between managers must occur within **5 working days** of stage 1, with a mutually agreed plan of action including timescales agreed.

Stage 3 – Senior Manager to Senior Manager Discussion

If the problem remains unresolved the line managers will refer to their line managers for consideration. This should continue through an organisation's management structure. In all circumstances of escalation through a management structure the case should be reviewed with agreed actions and timescales agreed. Each Manager to Manager discussion should take place within **5 working days** of the previous stage.

Stage 4 – Director / Chief Executive Level

The final stage for escalation with agencies will be to Directors / Chief Executive level of partners. Should a disagreement reach this stage a mutually agreeable plan of action including timescales should be in place within **48 hours (2 working days)**. This may involve a resolution meeting to ensure any learning points are recorded and brought forward.

Stage 5 – Partnership

In the rare circumstances where the problem cannot be resolved through partner's line management arrangements, the matter will be referred to the Business Office of the Safeguarding Children Partnership where one of the Strategic Leads will offer mediation within 5 working days of notification to the Business Office.

The partner providing mediation will provide a report on the case to the Partnership.

[Read the Procedure on the NSCP Website](#)