

Resolving Professional Differences/Escalation Policy

(Joint Children and Adult)

Document profile	
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Short Title	Resolving Professional Differences /Escalation Policy (Joint Children and Adult)
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Target Audience	Staff that work with adults at risk and staff in statutory departments and third sector agencies who work with children in Jersey
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1. Introduction

Partnership working depends on resolving conflict as soon as possible. Professional differences of opinion can block effective partnership working and can lead to poorer outcomes for children and adults at risk. Effective partnership working depends on understanding differences of opinion and working towards resolving professional disagreement as soon as possible. Members of the Safeguarding Partnership Board (SPB) have agreed on an SPB Values Statement around partnership working ([Appendix 1](#))

Multi-agency working, to safeguarding children and adults at risk, is often complex and means from time to time staff from different professional backgrounds may hold a different professional opinion. It is important that this is fully understood as a different perspective has the potential to cause conflict and lead to poorer outcomes.

The focus of this policy is to ensure resolution and the continuation of effective partnership working built on the principle of restoring relationships and resolving differences at the earliest opportunity. This will ensure agencies are satisfied their concerns have been listened to, that plans of care recognise all agencies perspective of risk and that the best interests of the child, adult at risk and their families is at the centre of any supportive intervention.

2. Factors to Consider

Often there are multiple factors that affect professionals and how they gather and analyse information about individual circumstances and the level of professional anxiety they experience.

These factors may affect professional judgement and it is helpful to clarify them. For consideration:

- is limited information and/ or liaison with other agencies adversely impacting staffs full understanding of the case;
- are there strong emotional issues being raised on professional judgment;
- are there issues of managing power and authority between staff, agencies, with the family; is this having an impact on decision making;
- do issues relating to professional status, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or any associated issue have a bearing on the case;

- are there disputes within the professional group, for example do certain agencies work with more of an adult or child centric focus which leads to differences of professional opinion on risk;
- are there disputes between professional groups mirroring disputes and conflict within the family;
- does one member of staff/agency hold more information than another agency;
- are organisational issues e.g. structural changes, access to support or resources, affecting judgements?

The very nature of professionally challenging or escalating can be a difficult and worrying process for practitioners to be a part of. It is important that professionals are aware of the support mechanisms in place within their organisation. These may include, using their internal management structure to seek emotional support, supervision, network of staff and access to their professional bodies or union.

Remember - in all situations the over-riding consideration as to whether to share information should be the safety and welfare of the individual child or adult at risk.

3. Professional Curiosity/Challenge

Nurturing professional curiosity and challenge are a fundamental aspects of multi-agency working to keep children, young people, adults and their families safe.

All agencies and services should promote a culture which encourages constructive challenge within and between organisations. Effective partnership working depends on a culture of open and honest relationships. Different professional perspectives are welcomed and given serious consideration by professionals who want the best outcomes for children, young people, adults and their families. For this to happen there needs to be, trust in each other, a willingness to work in partnership and to see a case from another agency's perspective.

The term 'professional curiosity' often refers to the capacity to explore and understand what is happening in all aspects of a child, young person, adult and families' life rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value.

Being professionally curious requires practitioners to think differently about ways that they can engage with children, young people, adults, families and carers,

Whilst exercising professional curiosity please consider;

- keeping an open mind and not presume or assume you know what is happening within the family home or personal circumstances;
- not to be afraid to ask questions and clarify information with families or other professionals and agencies;
- explaining that you are asking because you want to keep the child, young person, or adult safe, without wanting to judge or criticise;
- being open to the unexpected and incorporate information that does not support your initial assumptions into your assessment;
- Be respectful to each other.

4. Escalation

4.1 Pre-escalation

“Effective problem solving occurs when both the problem and its solution are owned by all parties involved” (Morrison 2002)

Any escalation of concern should be carried out in the spirit of achieving better outcomes for children, young people, adults and their families.

Where possible, efforts should be made to address differences as they happen rather than after the matter has been dealt with.

Possible resolutions that should be considered before the decision is taken to follow the Escalation Pathway are;

- taking the case through Safeguarding Supervision using either a single or multi-agency process;
- calling a multi-disciplinary meeting, which any professional can call;
- in adult services referral of the case to the Safeguarding Cell or the Community Adult Support Panel.

4.2 When to Follow the Escalation Pathway

Where professional curiosity or challenge has not resolved any professional conflict, then the unresolved dispute can be escalated using the Escalation Pathway (unless the situation is **so serious** that it requires urgent action to protect a child or adult at risk). See [Report a Concern](#) for more information on taking more urgent action.

The Escalation Pathway has four stages to consider ([Appendix 2](#))

All discussions must be clearly documented in writing or digitally and stored in the case notes.

Timescales of meetings and decisions will be case and risk dependent. Some cases may require immediate action and may quickly escalate from Stage 1 to 3. In most cases, each stage may take more time, if meetings are organised to reach resolution.

Meetings should be arranged and agreed as soon as practicably possible however, each stage should take no longer than 5 working days

4.3 Stage 1: Direct and Respectful Professional to Professional Challenge (up to 5 working days)

Any professional who is unhappy or conflicted about the decision, action or inaction of another professional or their agency should state their concerns clearly. If this is in a meeting, they should respectfully state their different or conflicted opinion with their rationale and request that this is included in the minutes of the meeting. If this is outside of a meeting, they should make contact with the key professional who has made the decision/taken action or has not acted to:

- express their views and concerns;
- aim to achieve a shared understanding of the issues raised; *and*
- agree a solution focused plan of action to resolve the conflict.

All parties involved should:

- work with an open and honest approach to resolve the problem to ask;
- understand why there is a difference of opinion;
- understand what information views are based on;
- ensure everyone has access to the same information;
- seek to clarify what the difference of opinion is and whether there are specific areas of concern;

- consider communication routes and if more information is required to clarify this for each party;
- understand what is known or not known about the child, family or individual concerned;
- discuss what facts or evidence exists? Has this come from more than one source;
- understand what the conclusions are and provide an analysis? Do they draw on theory and research;
- does analysis draw on research and theory which supports practice e.g. lessons learned from SCR.

Analysis and reaching of judgement:-

- What is life like for this child/adult and how serious are the concerns?
- Has additional information helped to clarify the opinions of the people involved?
- Is a multi-agency meeting needed to bring together historical and current information from different agencies to decide how to proceed?
- Can a judgement be agreed, or does a significant difference of opinion remain?
- Have we done enough to safeguarding this child, adult and family?
- Is there agreement about the actions that now need to be taken, by whom, timescales and has a date been set for when they will be reviewed?

Where there are concerns around a person's professional practice that is deemed unsafe for the child, young person or adult, this should be addressed through the [Multi-Agency Allegation Framework for Adults or Children](#) or via the [Government of Jersey Whistleblowing Policy](#).

When receiving challenge, professionals should remember that it will have taken courage for the other professional to raise their concern. It is a natural response to act in a defensive manner, however it is important to be self-aware and remain clear that the best interest of the child, young person or adult at risk is at the forefront of each professional's mind.

Inform your line manager that you have raised a concern to resolve a professional difference and used escalation Stage 1. Record if this resolved at Stage 1 with the plan of action. If this has not resolved, then record and proceed to **Stage 2** of this process.

4.4 Stage 2: Escalate to Line Manager / Agency Safeguarding Lead

Professional (or equivalent) (up to 5 working days)

(where a plan of action can be formed as to what the next stage will be as this may differ dependant on risk).

If the conflict cannot be resolved at **Stage 1** and you still have concerns that a child/adult remains at risk, discuss this with your manager and / or named / designated safeguarding lead and make a plan of action around how to proceed.

If you have a process of Safeguarding Supervision in your organisation take your case to supervision so that you have support and an objective space to look at the case where you have concern.

The manager/named designate safeguarding lead should make sure that the professional raising the concern has co-operated with the other professionals to ensure that all the steps have been followed to resolve the concern.

A clear record should be kept of all stages by all parties.

It is essential that where concerns are raised these are evidenced and that factual matters are clear

The manager/named or designated safeguarding lead should liaise with the equivalent colleague in the other agency involved to resolve outstanding concerns. They may require a face to face meeting and this may involve more than one agency.

Continued professional differences will be brought forward with the member of staff and their line manager or safeguarding lead.

This may involve taking this further through the escalation pathway if it cannot be resolved at this stage. This is a timely process and is driven by the level of risk for the child or adult at risk of harm. Actions need to be recorded clearly, recording if the problem has been resolved at this stage or if this needs to be escalated to Stage 3.

4.5 Stage 3: Line Manager / Agency Safeguarding Lead Professional (or equivalent) Escalation to Senior Management / Heads of Service / Designated Safeguarding Lead Professional (up to 5 working days)

If **Stage 2** fails to achieve resolution, the Line Manager / Named Lead for the professional raising the challenge should consult with his/her Senior Line Manager / Head of Service or Designated Safeguarding Lead and together bring the case to Stage 3.

The Senior Manager, Head of Service or Designated Safeguarding Lead professional should then consult as soon as practicably possible with his/her counterpart within the agency receiving the challenge and make a plan on how to reach resolution and agree a plan of action.

If professional differences remain unresolved and especially if resources are a relevant factor, the matter must be referred to heads of service for each agency involved for resolution.

This should be done in a timely manner and as far as practicably possible, within 5 working days as by the fact that resolution has not been achieved it means there may be serious concerns about agencies relationships and that a child or adult may be at risk of significant harm. As soon as practicably possible there needs to be effort to resolve differences of opinion or conflict and this may require immediate and/or out of hour's action if required.

4.6 Stage 4: Escalation to the Safeguarding Partnership Board (up to 5 working days)

Although uncommon, for disputes that continue to be unresolved despite following the pathway for escalation through 1-3 and having exhausted all other possibilities for resolution, the concern should be referred to the Independent Chair to the SPB via the [SPB email](mailto:safeguardingpartnershipboard@gov.je) (safeguardingpartnershipboard@gov.je). This is done via the senior manager, head of service representing the agency raising the concern. At this stage consideration will be given to the possibility of wider lessons that can be learned, including possible inconsistencies within existing multi-agency policy or procedures.

Information required at stage 4 when escalating to the SPB is listed in [Appendix 3](#).

The SPB Chair will make a **clear recommendation** on the most appropriate way to proceed and this will be communicated to all involved of the issue being brought to his/her attention.

The SPB will retain a record of any unresolved concerns which reach Stage 4 and include this information in the SPB Annual Report.

All discussions as part of the escalation pathway must be clearly documented.

Professionals in all agencies have a responsibility to act without delay to appropriately safeguard any child or adult at risk.

5. Further Information

[Government of Jersey Whistleblowing Policy](#)

[SPB Raising Concerns, Complaints procedure](#)

[SPB Multi-agency Managing Allegations Framework for Adults](#)

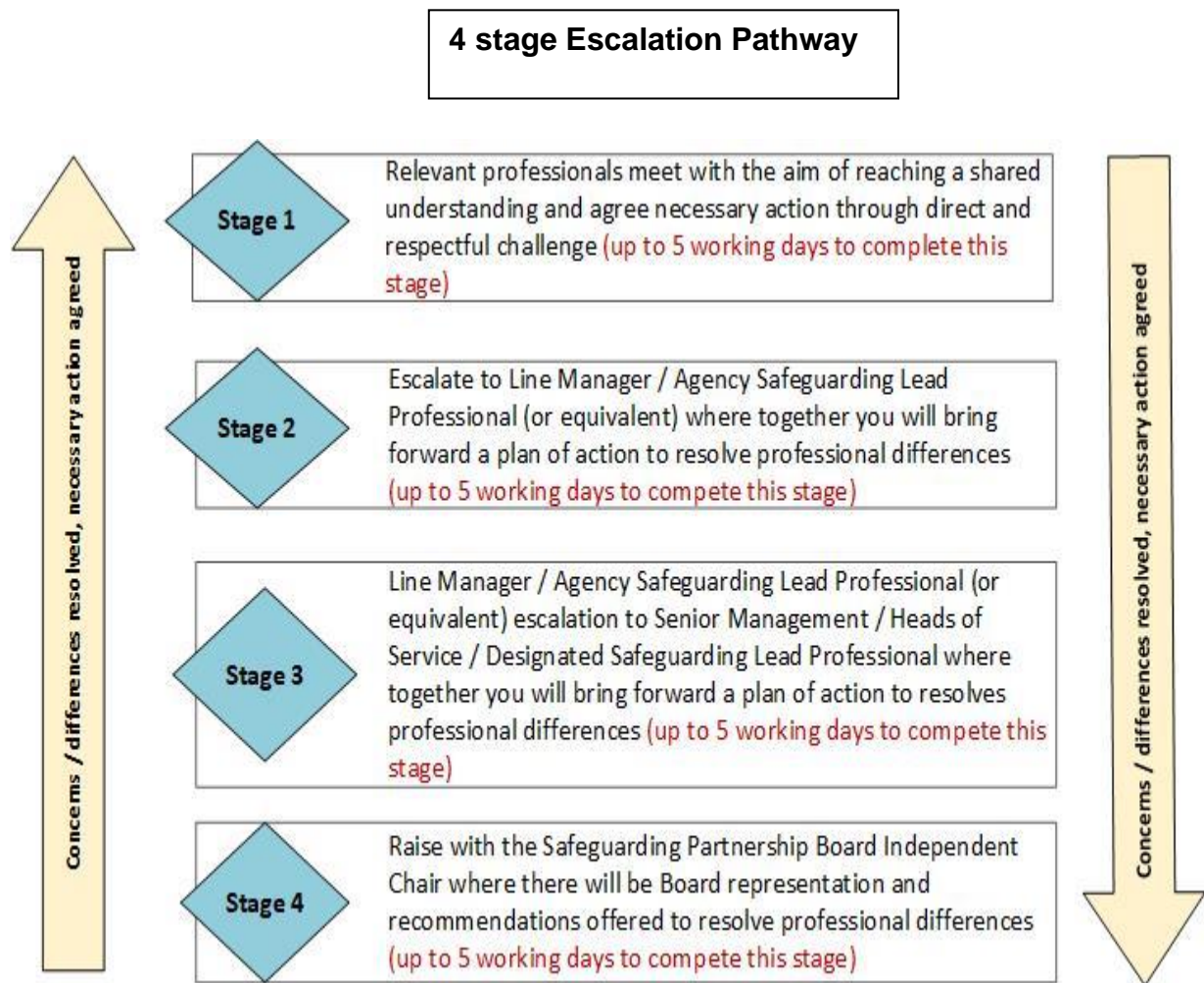
[SPB Managing Allegations Framework for Children](#)

Appendix 1 -SPB Values Statement



Value	To show this we will:	It's not helpful when:
Kind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about the needs of others • Value the true worth of other people • Really listen to understand • Go the extra mile 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I act before I understand • We ignore the needs of others • We don't try our best • We dismiss the values of others
Trusting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always be honest • Do what we say • Build positive relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are unreliable • We are not fair • We break our promises
Inclusive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe that every person matters • Acknowledge diversity • Ensure every voice is heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We leave people out • We do not embrace differences • We do not make effective, timely changes
Together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work in partnership with others • Work towards shared goals • Hold ourselves to account 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We work by ourselves • We do our own thing • We do not take responsibility
Improving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn from experience and take action • Challenge what we do • Always want to do better 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We think we know best • We make the same mistakes • We do not get better/learn/develop

Appendix 2 – Escalation Pathway



Appendix 3– Information required for escalation to Stage 4

Cases submitted under stage 4 of the Resolving Professional Differences/Escalation Policy should include the following:

- Personal Details of Child/Adult (including case reference (where applicable) and whether consent has been given.
- Names of involved key practitioners - plus any 'third party' agencies working with the family
- Brief history of family/intervention
- Summary of the issue about which agencies/workers are in dispute
- Objective/Outcome sought from the resolution process
- Date of submission
- Next Steps (next stage of escalation/resolution if concerns are not resolved)