

RESOLVING PROFESSIONAL DIFFERENCES

Background: Working Together 2018 requires organisations to challenge appropriately and hold one another to account. Professional challenge is a professional responsibility – different professional perspectives should be welcomed and given serious consideration in order to achieve the best outcomes for children and adults at risk. The SPB’s Resolving Professional Differences/ Escalation Policy details four stages to resolve differences and escalate concerns: 1) Direct and Respectful Professional to Professional Challenge; 2) Escalate to Line Manager/Agency Safeguarding Lead Professional; 3) Escalate to Senior Management/Heads of Service; 4) Escalate to Safeguarding Partnership Board

Why it Matters: UK SCRs have identified practice issues relating to professional challenge including: professionals feeling unable to challenge the decisions of another agency, professionals feeling unsure about trusting their own judgement, escalation procedures not being used and a lack of confidence in escalating concerns. Effective partnership working depends on understanding differences of opinion and working towards resolving professional disagreement as soon as possible.

Question to consider: Do you have all the information you need about the child/family/adult at risk? Have you been professionally curious? Is a multi-agency meeting needed to bring together historical & current information from different agencies to decide how to proceed? Are all staff aware of the four stages of the SPB’s Resolving Professional Differences/Escalation Policy?



Information: Professional differences are most likely to arise in relation to: criteria for referrals, outcomes of assessments, roles and responsibilities of workers, service provision, timeliness of interventions, information sharing and communication.

Factors that may affect professional judgement:

- limited information/liason with other agencies adversely impacting full understanding of the case
- strong emotional issues being raised on professional judgement
- issues of managing power & authority between staff/agencies/ family impacting decision making

What to do: Resolve differences and disagreements as simply & quickly as possible. Respect the views of others whatever their level of experience (remember that challenging more senior or experienced practitioners can be hard). Expect to be challenged – working together effectively depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies. Use the SPB’s Resolving Professional Differences/ Escalation Policy. (<https://safeguarding.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/20201102-V4-Resolving-Professional-Differences-Escalation-Policy-FINAL-Operational.pdf>)

Any escalation of concern should be carried out for the purpose of achieving better outcomes for children, families and adults at risk. Before escalating a case consider any factors that might be affecting judgement. You could also consider taking the case through safeguarding supervision (single or multi-agency) or calling a multi-disciplinary meeting. The SPB’s Resolving Professional Differences/Escalation Policy has further guidance.

- issues relating to professional status, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality or any associated issue having a bearing on the case
- disputes within the professional group, eg does one agency work with more of an adult or child centric focus?
- one practitioner or agency holds more information than another
- organisational issues affecting judgements, eg access to support or resources