

## 14. Resolving interagency disagreements (Escalation Procedure)

- 14.1 Problem resolution is an integral part of interagency working to safeguard children. It is often a sign of developing thinking within a dynamic process and can indicate a lack of clarity in current procedures or approach. Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.
- 14.2 Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies and a commitment to genuine partnership working. As part of this there needs to be a system in place to enable disagreements to be resolved to the satisfaction of practitioners and organisations involved. The aim should be to resolve difficulties at practitioner/field practitioner level between organisations, where this is possible, but where not the disagreement should be escalated until a resolution is achieved. Disagreements should not be left unresolved.
- 14.3 Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around thresholds, roles and responsibilities, the need for action and communication.
- 14.4 It is important:
- to avoid professional disputes that put children at risk or obscure the focus on the child
  - to resolve difficulties (within and) between organisations quickly and openly
  - to identify problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity in existing procedures and to promote resolution via necessary amendments.
- 14.5 Throughout any dispute between individuals or organisations practitioners must remain child focused. The safety of individual child(ren) remain the paramount considerations.

## Procedure

- 14.6 Initial attempts should be taken to resolve the problem. This should normally be between the people who disagree. It should be recognised however that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some practitioners to pursue this unsupported. Practitioners should consult with their line manager or practitioner lead as appropriate.
- 14.7 If unresolved the problem should be referred to the practitioner's own line manager or practitioner advisor, who will discuss with their opposite number in the other agency. At this stage it may be useful for the line managers to agree a meeting between themselves and the concerned practitioners to assist with the exploration of the problem.
- 14.8 If the problem remains unresolved the line managers will refer to their line managers for consideration. This process will continue until a resolution can be found.
- 14.9 If the problem cannot be resolved, the matter will be referred to the Chair of the SCB who will offer mediation. Where felt appropriate, a mediation meeting will be set up involving as a minimum the SCB chair, the respective organisations Board representatives and the SCB manager.
- 14.10 A clear record should be kept at all stages, by all parties. In particular this must include written confirmation between the parties about an agreed outcome of the disagreement and how any outstanding issues will be pursued.
- 14.11 When the issue is resolved, any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the SCB for consideration by the appropriate LSCB Subcommittee to inform future learning.
- 14.12 It may also be helpful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.