

Chapter Twenty-Three

Resolution of Professional Disagreements in Work Relating to the Safety of Children

- 23.1 Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children. It is often a sign of developing thinking within a dynamic process and can indicate a lack of clarity in procedure or approach.
- 23.2 Professional disagreement is only dysfunctional if not resolved in a constructive and timely fashion.
- 23.3 Disagreements could arise in a number of areas, but are most likely to arise around thresholds, roles and responsibilities, the need for action, communication.
- 23.4 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 agencies quickly and openly
 - to identify problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and to promote resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures
- 23.5 The safety of individual child(ren) and focus on child(ren) are the paramount considerations in any professional disagreement.
- 23.6 Effective working together depends on an open approach and honest relationships between agencies.
- 23.7 Effective working together depends on resolving disagreements to the satisfaction of workers and agencies; and a belief in genuine partnership.
- 23.8 Professional disputes are reduced by clarity about roles and responsibilities and airing and sharing problems in networking forums.
- 23.9 The process of resolution should be as simple as possible.
- 23.10 The aim should be to resolve difficulties at practitioner/fieldworker level between agencies.
- 23.11 Attempts at problem resolution may leave one worker/agency believing that the child remains at risk of significant harm. This person/agency has responsibility for communication such concerns through agreed channels.
- 23.12 The following stages are likely to be involved:

- recognition that there is a disagreement over a significant issue which impacts on the safety and welfare of a child
- identification of the problem, and clarity about the disagreement and what you aim to achieve

These two stages could involve consulting a colleague to clarify thinking.

23.13 Initial attempts should be taken to resolve the problem. This should normally be between the people who disagree unless the child is at immediate risk.

23.14 It should be recognised that differences in status and/or experience may affect the confidence of some workers to pursue this unsupported.

23.15 If unresolved the problem will be referred to the worker's own line manager or advisor, who will discuss with their opposite number in the other agency.

23.16 If the problem remains unresolved the line manager will refer 'up the line'.

23.17 If the problem is still unresolved, consideration will be given to referring the matter to the Chair of the LSCB who will offer mediation.

23.18 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.

NB The specific procedure for addressing dissent from Child Protection Conference decisions is set out in **Chapter 6: Initial Child Protection Conferences, 6.68?**

23.19 When the issue is resolved, any general issues should be identified and referred to the agency's representative on the LSCB for consideration by the appropriate LSCB Subcommittee to inform future learning.

23.20 It may also be helpful for individuals to debrief following some disputes in order to promote continuing good working relationships.