



Resolution of Professional Disagreements in work relating to the Safety of Children

September 2009

These procedures replace section 14.5.1 – 14.5.6 of the 2006 SET Procedures

Resolution of Professional Disagreements in work relating to the Safety of Children

Problem resolution is an integral part of professional co-operation and joint working to safeguard children.

Concern or disagreement may arise over another professional's decisions, actions or lack of actions in relation to a referral, an assessment or an enquiry.

It is important to:

- avoid professional disputes that put children at risk or obscure the focus of the child
- resolve difficulties (within and) between agencies quickly and openly
- identify problem areas in working together where there is a lack of clarity and to promote resolution via amendment to protocols and procedures.

The safety of individual child/ren and focus on child/ren are the paramount considerations in any professional disagreement and any unresolved issues should be escalated with due consideration to the risks that might exist for the child.

For disputes within agencies, in house procedures should be followed. This process relates to the resolution of differences between agencies.

Professional disagreements – stage 1

The aim should be to resolve difficulties at practitioner/fieldworker level between agencies.

Initial attempts should be taken to resolve the problem within a maximum of 5 working days for stages 1 and 2, or earlier if the child is at risk. This should normally be between the people who disagree, unless the child is at immediate risk.

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

Professional disagreements - Escalation – stage 2

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

Most day-to-day inter-agency differences of opinion will require a LA children's social care team manager to liaise with their (first line manager) equivalent in the relevant agencies, e.g.

- A police detective sergeant;
- A named health professional;
- Designated teacher.

Professional disagreement –Escalation - Stage 3

If agreement cannot be reached following discussions between the above first line managers within a maximum of a further working week **or a timescale that protects the child from harm (whichever is less)**, the issue must be referred without delay through the line management to the equivalent of service manager / detective inspector / head teacher or other designated senior professional.

Alternatively (e.g. in health services), input may be sought directly from the designated doctor or nurse in preference to the use of line management.

The professionals involved in this conflict resolution process must contemporaneously record each intra- and inter-agency discussion they have, approve and date the record and place a copy on the child's file together with any other written communications and information.

If the problem remains unresolved, the line manager will refer 'up the line'. Any verbal report should be followed up in writing, showing the nature of the dispute and what attempts have been made to resolve this.

Professional disagreements -Escalation – stage 4

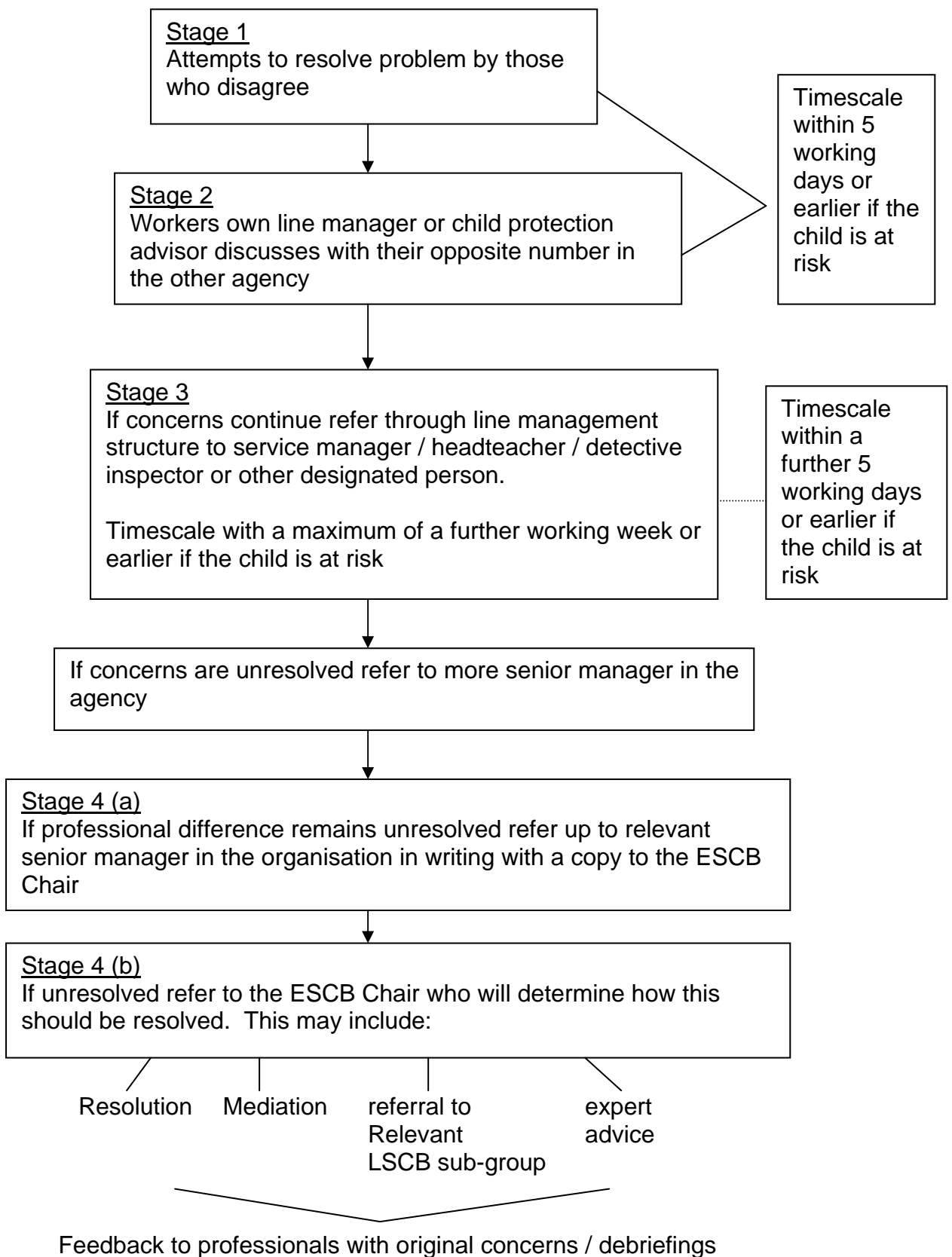
If professional differences remain unresolved, the matter must be referred to the relevant senior manager for each agency involved, with a copy being sent to the Chair of the LSCB. This should include forwarding a written account of the dispute and what attempts have been made to resolve this.

In the unlikely event that the issue is not resolved by the steps described, consideration will be given to referring the matter to the Chair of the LSCB who will offer mediation/or refer to the appropriate LSCB sub-committee as soon as possible bearing in mind the impact on the child or young person. 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.

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 relevant LSCB subgroup to inform future learning. At any stage in the process, it may be appropriate to seek expert advice to ensure resolution is informed by evidence based practice.

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

**Essex Safeguarding Children Board
Resolution of Professional Disagreements between Organisations**



At all stages actions / decisions must be recorded in writing and shared with relevant personnel