Professional Challenge

Purpose

To establish processes to ensure a culture which promotes professional challenge.

To ensure that staff in all agencies are competent and confident in challenging practice in the child’s best interests

Introduction

Professional challenge is a positive activity and a sign of good professional practice, a healthy organisation and effective multiagency working. Being professionally challenged should not be seen as a criticism of the person’s professional capabilities.

Many serious case reviews, both nationally and locally, have identified an apparent reluctance to challenge interagency decision making. Such reviews have often identified one, if not more, professional(s) who were concerned with a decision made by a different agency. However the serious case reviews have identified that their concerns were not followed up with robust professional challenge which may have altered the professional response and the outcome for the child.

Professional challenge and critical reflection about the focus and intended outcome of intervention should include questioning and being open to professional challenge from colleagues, as well as being confident to challenge others.

Professional challenge is a fundamental professional responsibility. In this context it is about challenging decisions, practice or actions which may not effectively ensure the safety or well-being of a child or young person or his/her family.
Many professional challenges will be resolved on an informal basis by contact between the professional raising the challenge (or their manager) and agency receiving the challenge and will end there.

**How should a professional make a challenge?**

1. Any professional who is unhappy about a decision/action should contact the professional who made the decision/took the action to express their views/concerns and discuss the basis of that decision. Documentation is crucial. The professional needs to record the reasons why they do not agree with the decision/action and all subsequent actions taken.

2. If the issue cannot be resolved between them both professionals should raise the issue with their manager/Named professional/Designated Safeguarding Lead.

3. If either manager considers it appropriate an interagency meeting should be held between the agency raising the professional challenge and the receiving agency to discuss the different views. An agreement should be made on who should attend between the LSCB Business Manager and the agencies involved.

4. If the issue cannot be resolved at this interagency meeting the worker raising the concern should discuss it with their relevant Head of Service who would contact the relevant agency’s Head of Service to attempt to resolve the issue.

5. If resolution still cannot be found, the worker’s (who raised the concern) Head of Service should raise the issue with the agency’s representative on the Safeguarding Children Board - who has the ultimate decision on the next course of action and if deemed necessary a meeting between the agency’s representatives could take place.

**The threshold for reporting the use of professional challenge to the LSCB**

The threshold for reporting professional challenge to the LSCB is when it becomes necessary to move to stage 5 above. (i.e. it has not been possible to satisfactorily resolve the issue at stages 1 and 2 and an interagency meeting is held between the agency raising the professional challenge and the receiving agency to discuss the different views).
Reporting the use of professional challenge

To monitor the use of this procedure the following information should be provided to the LSCB Business Support Unit by the Named Person for the agency which raised the challenge:

- What was the challenge?
- What was done to address the challenge?
- What was the outcome of these actions?
- How was the issue resolved?
- Are the professionals involved satisfied with the outcome?
- If resolution could not be achieved was the issue referred to the LSCB?

Reporting professional challenge activity

1. The areas of challenge, the use of this procedure and the outcomes will be reported to the Local Safeguarding Children Board and subsequently reported to the Chief Executive of the Local Authority (as the lead agency for safeguarding children) on a six monthly basis.

2. Statistical information about professional challenge and the use of this procedure to address professional challenges will be reported in the Local Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report.

3. This procedure will be reviewed in the light of feedback provided to the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Raising awareness of this procedure

The Safeguarding Children Board will raise awareness of this procedure across multiagency staff through its training programme and website.