



SOUTH TYNESIDE
**Safeguarding
Partnership**

Practitioner Guide

Professional Dissent, Escalation and Challenge

This briefing supports practitioners across South Tyneside to identify the correct route when there is professional disagreement about safeguarding decisions, actions or outcomes. It should be used alongside the South Tyneside Escalation and Challenge Protocol and the Child Protection Conference Professional Dissent Process.

1. Disagreement, Dissent and Escalation

Disagreement within a meeting is part of normal professional discussion.

Practitioners should use meetings to share evidence, test assumptions, ask questions and explain different professional views. If the matter is resolved in the meeting, the rationale and agreed actions should be recorded in the meeting notes and on relevant agency systems.

Formal dissent is much narrower. It applies only within a Child Protection Conference where an attending professional disagrees so strongly with the conference outcome that they need their independent view formally recorded. Dissent must be raised during the conference and followed up in writing to the Children's Standards Unit within 24 hours.

Escalation of an unresolved safeguarding concern applies when a practitioner remains worried that another agency's decision, action or response is not adequate or safe. Practitioners should first seek to resolve the concern directly and respectfully. If the issue remains unresolved, it should be escalated through line managers, senior managers and, where necessary, formal consideration by South Tyneside Safeguarding Children Partnership (STSCP) or South Tyneside Safeguarding Adults Board (STSAB).

The key test is: is this a conference outcome that requires formal dissent, or an unresolved safeguarding concern that requires escalation and challenge? In both circumstances, the focus must remain on the safety and welfare of the child, young person or adult, with clear recording of concerns, rationale, actions, outcomes and feedback.

2. When to use the Child Protection Conference Professional Dissent Process

Use the formal dissent process only when a professional disagrees with the outcome of a Child Protection Conference to the extent that they need their independent view formally recorded. This process applies to conference outcomes about whether a child should or should not be made subject to a Child Protection Plan.

- Dissent must be raised within the Child Protection Conference by the attending professional.
- Dissent cannot be raised retrospectively or by a professional who did not attend the conference.
- The reasons for dissent must be evidence-based and linked to the information shared in conference.
- The professional who dissents should inform their manager and explain the reasons for dissent.
- The dissent form must be sent to the Children's Standards Unit within 24 hours of the conference.

3. When to use the Escalation and Challenge Protocol

Use the Escalation and Challenge Protocol when there is an unresolved inter-agency safeguarding disagreement and the practitioner believes that a decision, action or response may not be adequate or safe. The process applies across both children's and adults' safeguarding and should be used where informal discussion has not resolved the concern.

- Examples include disagreement about levels of need, agency roles and responsibilities, quality or progression of safeguarding plans, communication, information sharing or management of risk.
- The child, young person or adult's welfare and safety must remain the paramount concern throughout.
- The process should not delay immediate safeguarding action.
- Concerns about the conduct or behaviour of a professional should be addressed through the relevant Allegations Management Process or Person in Position of Trust process, not through escalation and challenge.

4. Key distinction at a glance

Issue	Use formal dissent when...	Use escalation and challenge when...
Context	The disagreement is about the outcome of a Child Protection Conference.	The concern is about a safeguarding decision, action, response, plan, communication, information sharing, risk management or inter-agency practice issue.
Who can use it?	A professional who attended the Child Protection Conference and raises dissent during the conference.	Any practitioner who is concerned that a decision, action or response from another agency is not adequate or safe.
Timing	Dissent must be raised in the conference there and then and followed up in writing within 24 hours.	Concerns should be discussed promptly with the practitioner who made the decision or took the action. If unresolved, line managers should be involved within one working day.
Outcome being challenged	The conference decision about whether a child should or should not be subject to a Child Protection Plan.	An unresolved safeguarding concern relating to a child, young person or adult, including levels of need, roles and responsibilities, safeguarding plans, communication, information sharing or management of risk.
Final route	Children's Standards Unit review, then STSCP Dissent Panel if unresolved.	Escalation through management stages, with formal consideration by STSCP or STSAB if unresolved.

Further information around the Professional Dissent, Escalation and Challenge Protocol can be found at:

Safeguarding Children - [Local Resources](#) (South Tyneside)

Safeguarding adults - [Escalation and Challenge Protocol](#)