

Managing Professional Challenge

Background

Professional challenge is an essential part of safeguarding practice. It is an essential mechanism through which professionals can question, clarify and explore decisions or actions which may impact a child's safety and wellbeing. Effective multi-agency working relies on a culture of respectful challenge, which results in stronger multi-agency relationships and working together effectively.

Why does professional challenge matter?

Professional challenge is important improves decision making and ensures the needs and experiences of children remain at the centre of multi-agency work. Below are the key reasons why it matters:

- 1 It protects children by preventing drift and oversight.
- 2 It brings together different professional viewpoints.
- 3 It is a sign of healthy safeguarding culture.
- 4 It ensures assumptions are explored and tested.
- 5 It strengthens accountability and multi-agency working.
- 6 It leads to better outcomes for children and families.
- 7 No single professional holds the full picture - shared ownership ensures risks are identified, understood and addressed.



What does good professional challenge look like?

Effective safeguarding of a child and their family depends on collective accountability and a willingness of professionals to respectfully challenge decisions and each other's practice.

- **Curious:** ask questions when something feels incomplete.
- **Clarity:** seek multi-agency perspectives and be clear on the outcome you are pursuing.
- **Child-focused:** keep the children's lived experience central, not narratives of adults or professional disagreement.
- **Documented:** record challenge, rationale and outcomes clearly.
- **Escalate:** challenge decisions respectfully and escalate if you remain concerned for the child's safety.



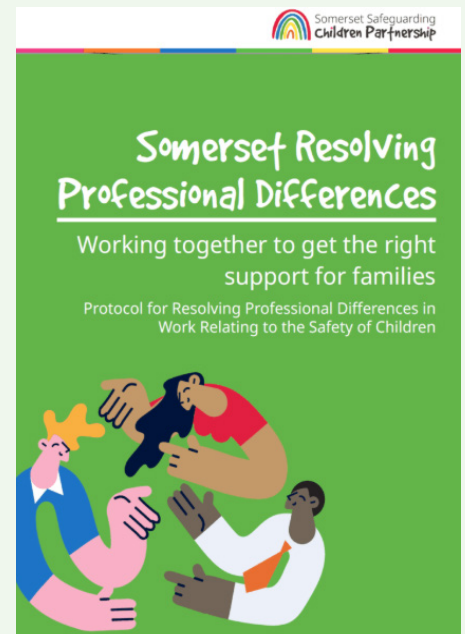
Resolving Professional Differences (RPD)

You can use RPD to get the right outcomes for families, including:

- if there are delays to progressing key support for a family.
- to challenge where you disagree about an agency ending their involvement with a family.
- if key information is missing, inconsistent or oversimplified.

This list provides a few examples, there may be other circumstances where professional challenge is required.

The [Resolving Professional Differences Protocol](#) can support you to understand the steps you should take to manage professional challenge. If resolution cannot be achieved, this must be escalated in a timely manner.



Things to remember:

- Each professional brings valuable insight that contributes to a richer, more holistic understanding of a child and family's circumstances, including both risks and strengths.
- Professional challenge helps to ensure discussions remain focused at keeping the child's lived experience and voice central.
- Professionals are encouraged to connect directly with colleagues in other agencies by phone, video or face-to-face to build a shared understanding in real time. These collaborative conversations help strengthen relationships, reduce delay, and promote confident, well-informed multi-agency decision making.
- A culture that welcomes challenge is a sign of an effective partnership.
- When a shared understanding cannot yet be reached, the Resolving Professional Differences Protocol offers a supportive framework to help colleagues work together toward clarity and the best outcome for the child.
- Learning reviews regularly show that a lack of challenge can contribute to missed opportunities to safeguard children.
- Professionals should share best practice and offer positive feedback to one another, strengthening learning, confidence and relationship building across the partnership.

Finally...

Professional challenge is a vital component of effective safeguarding practice. Embedding professional curiosity and constructive challenge strengthens our partnership and helps prevent missed opportunities to protect children.



Scan the QR code to access the Resolving Professional Differences Protocol!