

Re-Think: A new approach to the resolution of concerns

"We are not here to be right, we are here to get it right" Brene Brown

1. What is this guidance about and who is it for?

This guidance has been produced to help practitioners and managers across the Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Partnership resolve disagreements in a constructive, restorative way, which keeps children safe.

As a Partnership we benefit from the agreement in 2019 of a Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton (HIPS) protocol for the resolution of disagreements. That protocol, attached as Annex B, sets out **what steps** which practitioners can and should take to resolve disagreements. This guidance is about **how** practitioners can try to resolve disagreements restoratively, including how they can use the protocol as part of that.

The guidance is for all practitioners and managers in services whose work affects children, young people and families and who are part of the Portsmouth Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

2. Responsibilities; the importance of acting on and responding to concerns

When working with practitioners from other agencies there will at times be differences of opinion with regards to how to respond to an identified concern about a child, young person or family. Disagreements can be a sign of developing thinking, and the value of exchanging ideas from different perspectives should not be under-estimated.

Everyone working to support a child and family needs to keep an open mind at all times and to consider very carefully points of view with which they may not immediately agree. Healthy debate is normal and usually practitioners will be able to come to agreement through that.

That is not always possible, however, and this guidance is designed to help practitioners take the right steps in those circumstances. Throughout our work the safety and wellbeing of the child or young person is the primary concern, and professional disputes must not obstruct this. **If you feel that a practitioner or an agency is not acting in the best interests of the child, young person or family, you have a responsibility respectfully to challenge the practitioner or agency.**

If you are the lead professional for a child it is your responsibility to ensure that challenges between different practitioners working with you are resolved through debate managed in a respectful and restorative way. **If the challenge is to you, you must always take time to consider it carefully, listen to what is being said** and ensure that the position you come to is well founded in your view and that others understand the rationale for that position. **If you resist challenge you are putting the safety of a child at risk.**

3. Key Principles

There are some important principles which should be respected at all times:

- The safety of children and their families is paramount
- The child and their family must be engaged fully in any changes to plans for them.
- Professionals and their managers must be open and curious in their response to respectful challenge, and willing to explore further to develop understanding
- Everyone should aim to have the right conversation with the right person at the right time - this may on occasion be a "professionals only" reflection space
- Challenge should be received as an opportunity to make everyone even safer
- Disagreements must be resolved in a timely manner
- Concerns, actions, responses and outcomes must be recorded.
- Where a practitioner is concerned and does not feel that they will be able to resolve their concerns without the involvement of their manager, this must be regarded as an essential part of keeping everyone safe and fully consistent with a restorative approach to joint working.

4. Taking the time to "re-think" where necessary

Giving and receiving honest challenge can be difficult and taking time to 'slow down' and consider how to go about hearing challenge is vital to ensure children and their families are kept at the centre of all conversations. Resolving concerns should be seen as an integral part of how we advocate for children and their families in Portsmouth.

In many circumstances concerns can be resolved by simply have the right conversation with the right person at the right time, leading to action which is recorded and undertaken in a timely way. If there is a need for further exploration 're-think time' can be a helpful strategy to bring professionals together. This can be done either before the use of the protocol or as part of it. The "re think" guidance here is designed to help practitioners feel comfortable either using the protocol or taking steps to reach agreement without the need to use it.

A key feature of the escalation protocol is the involvement of the manager of the practitioner who has concerns. Where you as a practitioner are concerned about the welfare of a child you should not hesitate to involve your manager, either to let them know that you have asked for a "re think" exercise or to ask them to be involved in such an exercise or simply to ask them to exercise the judgement which is a key part of their management role about what needs to happen.

'Re-think' is a strategy whereby professionals reflect on the case either virtually, on the telephone or face to face to explore the current concerns and find resolution. The model for this conversation is the 5 step framework for restorative practice:

- The current concerns - sharing perspective
- How the professional network thinks and feels about the situation
- How the professional network see the impact and who / how they are affected
- Together find ways forward to resolve the challenges
- Record all agreed actions

Requesting 'Re-think' can be a helpful way to move forward with decisions and / or a plan ensuring there is equality within the professional network. Hearing all perspectives before moving towards understanding impact and agreeing actions is an essential part of this strategy. Any professional within the network can request 'Re-think' with the end goal being resolution of the concerns, whatever the concerns are. 'Re-think' can be a strategy used on a one to one or in a group work setting to include the multi-agency network. Annex B sets out some additional ideas to help.

5. What we expect from one another when making a challenge

Consistent with our ambition to be restorative in all our work with each other, the following should be expected behaviours across the partnership when any of us challenge plans and actions:

- We make observations which are neutral descriptions on what happened - this takes us away from 'who is right' and therefore stops us punishing or others feeling punished (even if this is not our intention!)
- We keep the needs of the child and family at the centre of our observation
- We use equal challenge, authority and boundaries as we listen, support, nurture and show compassion - high challenge high support
- We are resolution focussed and open to different ways of doing things
- We seek to understand and be curious, asking open questions to further develop thinking and resolution

6. What we expect from one another when receiving a challenge:

Equally there are behaviours which should be expected of anyone who is receiving challenge:

- We listen openly and respectfully asking curious questions to understand fully the perspective which is being shared
- We use equal challenge, authority and boundaries as we listen, support, nurture and show compassion - high challenge high support
- We accept that all professionals have an equal voice and it is our role to hear what is being shared
- We are calm and patient in our responses and use the restorative questions to re-balance any power differences

Strategies for supporting the workforce to resolve concerns

These strategies can be initiated / undertaken by all professionals using the key principles for resolving concerns. The below should not be viewed as a set way to do things but more like a range of strategies which may help and support the resolution of concerns.

Strategy 1

You have concerns and the desired progress is not being made. There may be some professional disagreement e.g. in terms of tier of need, step up / step across / step down. If you are the Lead Professional go to strategy 2

Options:

1. A restorative conversation with the Lead Professional to 'unpick' concerns - one to one 'RE-THINK'
2. LP to call a meeting of professionals with the family to discuss concerns. If you are following statutory processes those processes need to be followed, e.g. call an early review meeting.
3. If the LP does not agree with concerns raised - consult the [HIPS escalation Policy](#)

Strategy 2

You have raised your concerns with the Lead Professional and a meeting with the family has not resolved the concerns / progress has not been made. Or you are the Lead Professional and there continues to be limited progress.

Options:

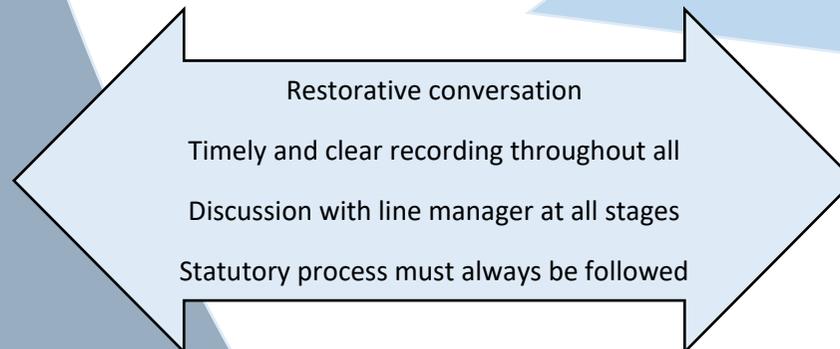
1. A multi-agency (professionals only) 'RE-THINK' reflection time is arranged, facilitated by the Lead professional or their line manager. (see model of practice above) and / or
2. A senior member of the team to attend the next review meeting to support different actions being agreed

Strategy 3

You have undertaken strategy 1 & 2 and there are still concerns regarding progress, it feels stuck, there is limited progress and more help is needed.

Option:

1. A multi-agency (professionals only) 'RE-THINK' is arranged, facilitated by an external facilitator



Annex B - Question phraseology to support 'Re-think' strategies

Developing a curious questioning style is helpful when exploring concerns and respectfully challenging other professionals. The below sets out how language and the way we phrase questions can help or hinder communication.

Why questions can often cause the respondent to feel defensive and shamed resulting in a loss of connection and progress being limited, for example:

Why questions	Alternatives
Why haven't you...?	Tell me what got in the way of...
Why has this happened?	How come this happened?
Why did....?	What happened next?
	How do you think that happened?

Leading questions subtly prompts the respondent to answer in a particular way. **Leading questions** are generally undesirable as they result in false or biased information. They can also limit connection and progress, for example:

Leading questions	Alternatives
Have you thought about....	What else could happen / work?
Do you have a problem with this?	How do you feel about...?
You saw the family on Tuesday, didn't you?	When was the family last seen?
Have you asked your manager for help?	Who could help with this?

Examples of open and curious questions:

What have you done so far?	Can you see a pattern emerging?	What do you think about the situation?
What are the family saying about this?	Who has the power to make it happen?	What is stopping you....?
What makes the concern challenging?	Whose help is needed?	What other reasons could there be to explain why this has happened?
Who else is involved?	What sense are you making from the feedback you are receiving?	What help & support might be needed?
Who have you spoken to so far?	How do you feel about what is happening?	What could we do more of / less of?
What needs to happen next?	What alternatives are there?	How will you / we decide what action to take?