



# Professionals' Meetings

Practice Guidance

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## Purpose

This guidance sets out the key circumstances and lawful basis upon which multi-agency professional's meetings are convened.

Issued by the City & Hackney Safeguarding Partnership (CHSCP), it forms part of our local safeguarding arrangements and is aligned with [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#) and the Department for Education's non-statutory guidance on [Information Sharing](#).

## What are professionals' meetings?

A multi-agency professionals' meeting is a tool to support practitioners who have a genuine desire to work openly with families, but who need the opportunity to share information and talk without the family being present. They are held for the purpose of safeguarding children.

When deciding whether to convene a professionals' meeting, the most important consideration is whether the sharing of information in this way is required to support the safeguarding of a child. Whilst they should ordinarily be held in exceptional circumstances, they are not limited to any particular situation or threshold for intervention and can be triggered for a variety of different reasons.

## Understanding safeguarding

For the purposes of this guidance, the definition of safeguarding as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023 is applicable. This covers:

- providing help and support to meet the needs of children as soon as problems emerge.
- protecting children from maltreatment, whether that is within or outside the home, including online.
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development.
- ensuring that children are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care.
- promoting the upbringing of children with their birth parents, or otherwise their family network through a kinship care arrangement, whenever possible and where this is in the best interests of the children.
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes in line with the outcomes set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework.

## Understanding information sharing

The sharing of information between practitioners can take place informally or via formal safeguarding processes. It can take place virtually or through face-to face contact.

In the context of professionals' meetings, information sharing involves the appropriate and secure exchange of personal information between practitioners and other individuals with a responsibility for safeguarding children. This includes the sharing of case-level information about individual children and, where necessary, information about family members and other people who might – through their actions or neglect – put a child at risk of harm.

Sharing information for safeguarding purposes (and hence the convening of a professional's meeting) can be justified solely based on preventing harm to a child. It is not dependent upon any thresholds for intervention. For example, it is not necessary for a formal process under section 17 or section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to be invoked in order for information to be shared, provided that the sharing is necessary for organisations and agencies to safeguard a child at possible risk of harm.

## Consent and information sharing

Under data protection law, practitioners must have a valid lawful basis in order to share personal information. From the six lawful bases, it is likely that '[legal obligation](#)' and '[public task](#)' will be the most appropriate to use when sharing information as part of a professional's meeting.

### **Consent should not be seen as the default lawful basis in this context.**

Using consent as a lawful basis means an individual has given agreement for personal information about themselves, or their child's personal information, to be shared or processed for a purpose where they have a clear choice about its use. It also means that the individual is able to withdraw their consent at any time (in which case the information would need to be deleted).

These conditions are unlikely to be present in situations where practitioners are under a professional duty to record information – irrespective of the wishes of the child or their family – in order to justify the decisions and actions they take in relation to the child's needs, and where

the overarching consideration will be whether information needs to be shared to safeguard a child where there is an established or potential risk of harm.

Additionally, in some circumstances, seeking consent from a person that might be harming a child is likely to undermine safeguarding procedures and may increase risk to the child or another person.

So, whilst being upfront, transparent and honest with children and families (whenever it is safe to do so) is recognised as good practice, this does equate to there being a need to obtain 'consent' for practitioners to share information. This applies whether information sharing is undertaken in the context of a multi-agency professionals' meeting or otherwise.

## **The complexities of 'consent' and why it causes confusion**

The meaning attached to the term 'consent', and the expectations that it sets for how people make decisions, can be different depending on the context and how people are used to working within a particular environment. If these different meanings and expectations are conflated and confused, they can act as a barrier to appropriate information sharing when decisions have to be made about sharing information for safeguarding purpose. Some meanings attached to "consent" include:

- "consent" as a lawful basis to share information, as defined by data protection legislation (and relevant for the purpose of this Advice), is different to the general meaning of consent – such as the giving of permission. As set out above, this is not usually the appropriate legal basis for sharing information to safeguard children.
- "consent" or "agreement" to receive a service, such as a parent's agreement to engage with services under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. The meaning of 'consent' in this context is the general sense of the word and is separate from the meaning of 'consent' as a lawful basis under data protection law. It may be necessary to share information even if the threshold for service intervention (for example, under s.17 of the Children Act 1989) has not been reached or where a person does not agree to the provision of particular services.
- "consent" to receive medical treatment, there are specific meanings of implied and explicit consent for health purposes. Health practitioners should refer to their regulator's guidance or NHS advice.

## When to hold a professionals' meeting

For the purposes of this guidance, professionals' meetings should only be held for the purposes of safeguarding. They should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and will ordinarily be held as either a 'planning meeting' or a meeting to 'resolve professional disagreement'. Whilst the need for professionals' meeting can vary, some common reasons are set out below.

- When there is uncertainty about the necessary steps to safeguard a child
- When there is a concern that a family is undermining the attempts of practitioners to understand the potential risks to a child.
- When there are professional disagreements that might impact on the safeguarding of a child.
- When practitioners need an opportunity to reflect on the plans for working with a family, when progress to safeguard a child is not being made.

They **should not be held** in circumstances where defined guidance and procedures are already in place. For example:

- A strategy discussion (involving Children's Social Care, Police, Health, and others, as required).
- An Initial or Review Child Protection Conference.
- A Child in Need review
- A Team around the Child meeting
- A Looked After Children (LAC) / Child in Care (CIC) Review.
- Professional advice and management meetings where the child/family name isn't shared.

## Who can call a professionals' meeting?

If any practitioner believes that there is a need for a professional's meeting, they should discuss the rationale with their designated safeguarding lead and/or their line manager.

The designated safeguarding lead / line manager, if they agree, should authorise the meeting. In the case of a disagreement about the need for a professionals' meeting, or concern about the lack of engagement from any invited party, the [CHSCP Dispute Resolution Policy](#) applies.

## Chairing and administration

The agency requesting the professionals' meeting should identify the chair. This should be someone who has sufficient safeguarding knowledge and experience and is used to chairing meetings of a similar type (supervisory level).

The chair should ensure that the meeting focuses upon the safeguarding needs and outcomes for the child and facilitate a respectful and constructive conversation.

The chair should also ask that all parties use language that is respectful of families and differentiates fact from opinion. Consideration should always be given to any issues relating to culture and ethnicity and the potential impact of discrimination, oppression and racism upon the family within the context of intervention.

Care and attention should also be given to the power dynamics in the meeting between different agencies, particularly in relation to role, status, and ethnicity given the risk of discrimination, oppression or racism being mirrored in such forums.

The convening agency is responsible for initiating the meeting and ensuring that the minutes and agreed actions are distributed to all attendees (and where appropriate the family).

- Where there is an existing plan for the child/family, this should be reviewed and updated in line with any agreed actions.
- Each meeting should agree how and when the family (and child if appropriate) is told about the professionals' meeting and its outcomes.
- Where required, the meeting should agree dates of further meetings.
- If actions are not implemented as agreed, or they fail to meet the needs / address the concerns, a further multi-agency professionals meeting can be requested by any practitioner before the agreed review date.