

1) What is professional challenge & escalation and when is it needed? Professional challenge is a normal and routine part of safeguarding practice which involves questioning, challenging or disagreeing with other agencies. Escalation is the formal and structured process for seeking to resolve difference of opinion when professional challenge has not resolved disagreements. Professional challenge & escalation are required when there are concerns relating to decisions made, actions taken or a lack of action from another agency in relation to child safeguarding responses. For example, concerns about threshold decisions, lack of communication, drift / delay or a failure to follow processes.

2) Why is professional challenge & escalation important? Poor escalation of concerns featured in nearly half of the 330 serious child safeguarding incidents considered by the National Panel in their 2023/2024 annual report and in 41% of local Lambeth reviews between 2020-25.

3) What might stop someone from professional challenge & escalation? Some commonly identified reasons include:

- Not knowing how
- Professional deference
- Fear of damaging professional relationships
- Lack of confidence in the process
- Over-optimism in the system
- Diffusion of responsibility
- Emotional impacts
- Perception of escalation



7) Further reading & support:

- [LSCP Multi-Agency Escalation Policy](#)
- [Access free LSCP training](#)
- [Contact lscptraining@lambeth.gov.uk](mailto:lscptraining@lambeth.gov.uk) to request a copy of *Understanding Lambeth's Statutory Partner's Guidance*

4) What is the process in Lambeth? When professional challenge is formally recorded in writing with a specific resolution requested, this triggers escalation. There are 5 possible stages of escalation. Each stage involves a discussion between equivalents in each agency which is recorded and tracked using the [escalation form](#):

1. Stage 1 (day 1): Professional to professional
2. Stage 2 (day 3): Manager to manager (CP / IRO chair notified where involved)
3. Stage 3 (day 5): Senior manager to senior manager (LSCP notified for information)
4. Stage 4 (day 7): Director to director (LSCP notified for information)
5. Stage 5 (day 10): Resolution by LSCP

The LSCP has guidance about structures, roles and key contacts to help you identify who should be involved at each stage.

6) Reflective questions:

- When I am raising or receiving a challenge, how confident am I that the child's safety and wellbeing are the primary focus, and that concerns are addressed promptly rather than delayed or deflected?
- How do I fulfil my professional duty to challenge others, and how open am I to being challenged myself, using evidence and professional judgement rather than personal opinion, hierarchy or organisational pressure?
- When I am giving or receiving challenge, am I willing to listen to other points of view and change my mind if the best available evidence indicates this is in the best interests of the child?
- How aware am I of my emotional responses and how can I ensure these do not detract from respectful, focussed and solution-orientated communication?

5) Principles of professional challenge & escalation.

- The safety and wellbeing of children is the primary concern
- Professional challenge and escalation is a duty, not a choice
- Concerns should be raised and resolved promptly
- Professional challenge and escalation are welcomed as a hallmark of good practice
- Professionals should approach all cases with an open-mindset
- Disagreements are grounded in professional judgement, not personal opinion or organisational pressure
- All communication must be respectful, focussed and solution-orientated