

Multi-Agency Professionals Meetings

Purpose

A multi-agency professionals meeting (MAPM) is a tool to support practitioners in all agencies who have a genuine desire to work openly and together with families, but who may need the opportunity to talk with other professionals without the family being present. This may be particularly important where there is a concern that the family is undermining attempts to understand potential risks to children in the family; or where there is uncertainty in the professional network about what steps are necessary to protect children.

A multi-agency professionals meeting can be called by any agency that has concerns about a child/young person with additional needs that they feel may require a response from more than one agency. However, it should not be used as a referral process for specialist assessments.

This guidance will outline the purpose of MAPM's; when it is appropriate to convene a MAPM; and how this should be managed.

Inter-agency, inter-disciplinary assessment requires an additional set of knowledge and skills to those which are required for working within a single agency or independently. It requires that all staff understand and appreciate the roles and responsibilities of staff working in contexts different to their own. A MAPM may also be helpful where professional disagreements are impacting on effective work with the family, or where professionals need an opportunity to reflect on the plans for working with a family when progress is not being made.

Scope

A multi-agency professionals meeting can take one of several forms, but only some are covered by this guidance.

What is covered:

- A professional planning meeting;
- A meeting to resolve professional disagreements regarding the management of a case with respect to a child or young person.

What is NOT covered:

- A child protection Strategy Discussion (Children's Social Care, Police, Health, and others, as required);
- Professional advice and management meeting (e.g. Emotional Abuse Forum);

A child protection [Strategy Discussion](#) as informed by The Children Act 1989 and Working Together to Safeguard Children has a clearly defined remit and purpose to consider whether a child is at risk of or has suffered significant harm. Many Strategy Discussions are conducted by telephone calls, although in particularly complex situations it is appropriate to convene a formal face to face meeting. This guidance does not cover the operation or functioning of Strategy Discussion meetings.

A professional advice and management meeting such as the Emotional Abuse forum does not require disclosure of information that would identify the child or family. Any professional can request a 'consultation' in order to seek advice on a situation that they consider may involve aspects of emotional abuse.

A professional planning meeting and a meeting to resolve professional disagreements are the types of MAPM that are covered in this guidance.

Purpose of a Multi-Agency Professionals Meeting

Professionals Meetings provide an opportunity for professionals involved with a family to come together not only to share information, but also to help determine the direction of a case and the plan for a child. It may be held to resolve uncertainty, controversy or inter-agency disagreement. They may be helpful where there are particularly complex family concerns, with extensive professionals/networks.

MAPM's can be particularly effective in addressing issues of disguised compliance and when working with families who are or appear to be avoiding engaging with services, or where it appears that different agencies are being provided with inconsistent and conflicting information. A MAPM may be a useful opportunity to share information when a family are choosing to work with some professionals in the network and not others.

Multi-agency professionals meetings can be used for children at any level of agency involvement, including: early intervention services, Single Assessment Framework (SAF) assessments; and families in receipt of children's social work services as a Child in Need or when the subject of a Child Protection Plan.

NB: Multi-agency meetings involving Children and young people and their parents are not affected by this guidance. E.g. CiN reviews, Child Protection Conferences and Core Group meetings.

Criteria for convening a multi-agency professionals meeting

This type of meeting would not be intended as a routine element in practice, since wherever possible professionals should aim to work in partnership with families, but could be considered in the following situations:

- an agency or agencies working with a family need to share information in order to clarify a concern or address difficulties that have been encountered in working with a family and to involve the family would inhibit discussion;
- an agency or group of professionals feels that the work with a child or young person and their family is not resulting in improved outcomes for children and/or there exists a degree of anxiety about the circumstances within which a child is living;
- when there are significant difficulties in working with the parents/carers of the child, and a failure to progress a situation despite significant resources and input being brought to bear;
- to resolve disagreements regarding an agency's response to a referral request, or concern raised regarding a child or young person;
- the family/child/young person's needs cannot be met from within the agency's own resources and the need or concern remains unaddressed;

- sharing of information by phone or email is not considered adequate to facilitate discussion and decision-making.

Who can call a Multi-Agency Professionals Meeting?

Any agency that is involved with a child and feels that there is a need that is covered by the above criteria can call a Multi-Agency Professionals meeting.

The convening agency is responsible for coordinating the meeting arrangements i.e. invitations, venue, chairing and recording the meeting; however this does not all have to be undertaken solely by the convening agency itself, but may be delegated in agreement with other practitioners in attendance. For example, one agency may chair, and another may take notes, but the convening agency remains responsible for ensuring these roles are agreed.

In arranging the lead for the business of the meeting, the convening agency should normally have had prior consultation to some degree with those agencies invited to attend.

In the case of a disagreement about the need for a MAPM, or concern about the lack of engagement from any invited party, the Resolution of Professional Disagreement procedure applies.

Chairing the multi-agency meeting

The convening agency will have arranged from among those attending who should chair the multi-agency meeting. This should be someone who is used to chairing meetings of a similar type (supervisory level), and must ensure that the meeting focuses on the needs of the child or young person. The Chair should have sufficient knowledge of the Child Protection procedures (www.swcpp.org.uk).

The convening agency should present their concerns and their involvement so far by having shared a copy of their most recent assessment report, with all those invited to attend prior to the meeting.

Administration and Recording

The convening agency is responsible for initiating the meeting and should ensure that arrangements are in place to ensure that minutes of the meeting and the 'Actions arising' are distributed to all attendee's and where appropriate the family within 5 working days. The minutes should capture the main areas of need and the action plan developed to address them.

During the meeting, any new information which emerges in relation to the child(ren) and family should be noted in the minutes.

Where there is an existing plan for the child/family, this should be reviewed, and additional information recorded in the plan. Each meeting should end with an agreed Action Plan (or updated Action Plan where appropriate) to address the needs and concerns that have been raised and agreed as important. Where these relate to the child or family they must be discussed with the family without undue delay. The meeting will also agree dates of further meetings to ensure progress on desired outcomes and review the services provided where this is required.

The following format for the multi-agency meeting is suggested:

1. Date, time and venue
2. Introduction (who is in attendance and why)

3. Attendance / Apologies
4. Aim of meeting (what is the issue to be addressed)
5. Needs, Strengths and Risks identified by convening agency prior to meeting
6. Additional or new information shared at meeting (from all agencies)
7. Other Needs, Strengths and Risks identified during the meeting
8. How to address these needs? What has already been tried?
9. Plan to support the family, identifying clearly who is responsible for which actions, with timescales clearly defined
10. Has a Family Group Conference been considered?
11. Agreement about who is to continue as Lead Practitioner, if a change is deemed appropriate
12. Date of next review (if the meeting agrees that this is required).

Attendance

The meeting could involve:

- those with a direct and relevant involvement with the child/young person and family;
- those who may be able to offer support or services to the family;
- those who have relevant information to share in the meeting;
- where consultation has been provided, it may be appropriate for the consultant to attend.

The meeting needs to bring together all those who can provide relevant information about the child/young person and family. After the meeting, a member of the meeting should be appointed to inform the child and family of the outcome, which will be recorded.

Venue

The venue should be the most convenient and comfortable place to meet for a confidential discussion. It could be the school, clinic, surgery, hospital, Children's Social Care offices, etc. - whichever agency is able to provide a suitable and accessible meeting room.

Permissions / Family Involvement / Confidentiality

It may be appropriate to inform the family in advance of the plan to have a professionals-only meeting to discuss their situation. However, professional judgment may need to be brought to bear on whether this is appropriate in all situations.

If the parents have not been informed of the meeting by the convening agency, then agreement should be sought from invited agencies that the meeting will take place without the family being informed.

If the parent(s)/Carer(s) raise an objection to the meeting taking place, consideration should be given to whether concerns are sufficient to require a different approach (i.e. a Strategy Discussion).

Where the issues to be discussed relate to difficulties with engagement with the parents, i.e. refusing to have contact with services; or disguised or withheld compliance, then seeking permission for the meeting to take place is unlikely to yield the desired result.

The agency who are requesting the meeting should consider whether the parents should be informed of the meeting beforehand.

Where the meeting is to discuss complex matters and to develop a fuller picture of the family's circumstances it is not necessary to gain consent for the meeting to take place.

Where appropriate, a record of the meeting, with the plan arising from the discussion, will be sent to the parents and children/young people that are subject of the meeting. Consideration should be given by agencies to the child's age for the most appropriate method of feedback.

Normal rules of confidentiality apply in that only information relevant to ensuring the safety and welfare of the children in the family should be shared. Any action plan developed as a result of the meeting should address how the issues discussed are then raised with the parents, unless to do so would potentially place the children concerned at risk of further harm.

In some situations it may be appropriate to conduct the meeting in two parts involving the relevant professionals in the first part and inviting the parent(s)/Carer(s) to the second part of the meeting. This could be the case where the professionals are in disagreement and airing these issues in a frank discussion would not be appropriate with the parent(s)/ Carer(s) or child present.

Where the parents have not been directly involved in the meeting the Lead Practitioner will be expected to feedback the outcomes of the meeting and to discuss the plan with the parent(s)/Carer(s) after the meeting.

Implementation of the Action Plan

The meeting should consider how the **Action Plan** agreed for the child/young person and family is to be co-ordinated and reviewed, the Lead Practitioner role is agreed, and if required dates are set for further 'review' meetings.

If it is considered necessary to hold a further multi-agency professionals meeting, the Action Plan for meeting a child or young person's needs should be **reviewed** at a minimum of every three months. Reviews should be held on the same basis as the initial meeting.

If the **Action Plan** is not implemented as agreed, or fails to meet the needs or address the concerns, the Lead Practitioner will consult and decide whether to reconvene another multi-agency professionals meeting before the agreed review date.