

# Single Point of Advice (SPOA)

## Guidance for Early Years Settings on what to do if you are concerned about a child.

If you are concerned about a child please refer to the Continuum of Need. In East Sussex the Continuum of Need is intended to provide practitioners with a shared understanding and common language around needs and risks surrounding children and their families.

Continuum of Need Levels are explained in detail in the list of indicators. Download the Continuum of Need and list of indicators from [here](#).

**The only exception to this should be any referrals regarding where a clear and immediate risk of harm has been identified, such as an injury to a child. If a practitioner and safeguarding lead assess that the child is at immediate risk, in an emergency call 999, otherwise contact the Single Point of Advice (SPOA) service making it clear what the concern is about:**

**SPOA Phone: 01323 464222**

**Opening hours: Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm, Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm**

**[Email: 0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:0-19.SPOA@eastsussex.gov.uk)**

The Single Point of Advice (SPOA) is the first point of contact for East Sussex Children's Services and is available for both professionals and public who have concerns about the welfare of a child. The aim of the SPOA Service is to enable Children's Services to be able respond to the right referrals to ensure that children and their families are provided with the appropriate support and interventions in the timeliest way.

**There are 2 components to the SPOA Service:**

- 1) Web based information, advice and guidance for both public and professionals, including guidance about the Continuum of Need can be found on the East Sussex County Council [website](#).
- 2) Screening Triage for the 0 – 19 years age groups using the Continuum of Need this will determine the priority given to the concerns, within one working day.

Triage Outcomes

1. No further action (NFA) as the allegation is found to be unsubstantiated, false, unfounded or malicious.
2. NFA for Children's Services, but there are issues to address in relation to professional conduct or suitability, as concerns were substantiated, but did not meet threshold for criminal investigation. Unsubstantiated outcomes are the most difficult ones to address, as there might still be concerns, but insufficient evidence to proceed; eg a disclosure of sexual abuse where the victim is not willing to make a statement, or physical abuse where there are no injuries, but the account was credible. However, there are occasions when action might be considered to minimise any identified concerns or risks.
3. Duty and Assessment (DAT) or one of the long-term social work teams will take forward a Family Assessment under Child in Need (Section 17 Children Act 1989) as unmet needs were identified for the victim or children linked to the perpetrator. This could result in universal services on levels 1-3 on the Continuum of Need or longer term social work support and action in relation to alleged perpetrator might result in outcomes in paragraphs 1 and 2 above.
4. DAT or one of the long-term social work teams will undertake a Family Assessment due to Child Protection Concerns (Section 47 Children Act 1989). This could result in the actions/outcomes in paragraphs 1-3 above.

5. The Police might undertake a criminal investigation in relation to a suspected criminal offence when concerns are substantiated. This can take several months to complete especially if IT equipment needs to be checked and the Crown Prosecution Service then needs to review the file.
6. Triage and Early Help Allocation Hub – if the initial triage undertaken by SPOA indicates Level 3 then a referral will be made directly by SPOA to the Early Help Allocation Hub.
7. SPOA will pass cases through to the MASH team for further screening and response that will be required for Level 3 - 4 cusp on the Continuum of Need or for a Social Work response via MASH for immediate emergency safeguarding action; Social Care assessment required under Section 17 (Children Act 1989) or for any potential S47 strategy discussion (Level 4 of the Continuum of Need).

### **What SPOA will need:**

When contacting SPOA the safeguarding lead should be prepared with the information they have discussed with the staff member and be ready to email this immediately. This will enable the SPOA worker to have written information in front of them so that the discussion can focus on clarification and reaching a shared understanding of the situation and the level of need using Continuum of Need.

This should include:

- What has been said.
- When was this and how often does this happen,
- Who else knows.
- Have the Police been involved? (If the Police have been involved they will have made a record - a SCARF - and this will automatically be considered by the Police Detective Sergeant in the MASH. If the incident indicates concerns at Level 3 or 4 on the Continuum of Need, the MASH Senior Social Worker and the Police DS will have decided whether a social care response is needed.
- What is the setting's relationship with the child and family like?
- What else do you know about the child and family? (Including rumours and suspicions if relevant).
- Check against other vulnerability factors (consider the Continuum of Need as a prompt).
- How is the child presenting today – are they frightened to go home today?
- Which other professionals are known to be working with the family? - Check the Children Index if necessary.
- If there is an Early Help Family Keyworker working with the family the safeguarding lead should ring and discuss this information with them and/or their manager and agree next steps.
- If there is a Social Worker working with the family the safeguarding lead should ring that worker and discuss this information with them and agree next steps.
- If there is currently no Early Help Family Keyworker or Social Worker working with the family the safeguarding lead needs to consider the information against the Continuum of Need.

### **Submitting a Statement of Referral (SOR)**

The [Children's Portal](#) is a new online system that enables professionals to submit forms securely online to ESCC's Children's Services' recording system.

**SPOA 01323 464222 (1<sup>st</sup> Point of Contact for all referrals East and West of County)**

**Emergency Duty Service (EDS) 01273 335905/335906**

**\*DAT West 01323 747373**

**\*DAT East 01424 724144**