



Managing allegations in residential care

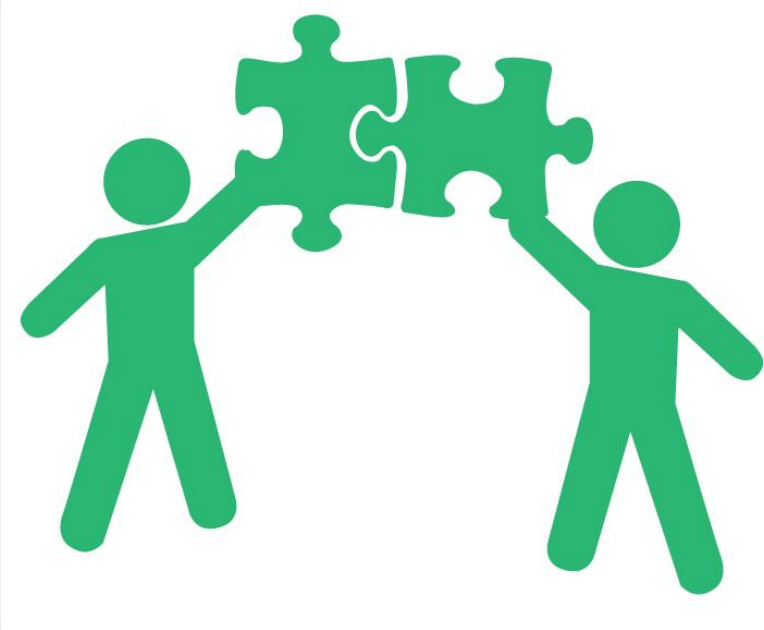
Annabel Timmins – Independent Safeguarding Consultant

Outcomes



- recognise when the allegation threshold may be met
- act immediately to protect children and preserve fairness
- notify and work effectively with the LADO and partner agencies
- make proportionate decisions about risk, suspension and support
- plan, undertake and report a fair internal investigation
- turn findings into individual and organisational learning

How we will work today



- confidentiality — share learning, not identifying detail
 - respectful challenge and curiosity
 - one conversation at a time
 - child-centred and fair to everyone involved
 - use plain language; challenge jargon
 - contribute experience without feeling obliged
 - share expertise and collaborate
-
- comfort break at 10.45-11am
 - recognise impact of training
 - reach out
 - key learning point

Hold the allegation — not a conclusion

“

“Respond as though it may be true; investigate as though it may not be.”

”

Neutral • child-centred • fair

Culture can conceal or surface harm



Risk grows when:

- boundaries drift and poor practice becomes normal
- children's accounts are minimised or explained away
- staff fear challenge, retaliation or being labelled disloyal
- concerns are handled in isolation
- patterns across incidents, homes or staff are not analysed

Protective features are visible in everyday practice

- leaders invite challenge and act on it
- children are heard, believed and kept informed
- supervision tests boundaries, assumptions and patterns
- staff know routes for concerns and whistleblowing
- records support effective monitoring and information sharing
- managers build a confident working relationship with the LADO



Activity • raising concerns

Disclosure exercise

Write down something you've never told anybody before.

Activity • impact of a disclosure



A concern is raised about a staff member seeking opportunities to be alone with a young person and not maintaining boundaries.

How might this feel for:

- the young person?
- the person raising it?
- the staff member?
- the manager?
- the wider team?

What does each person need from the process?

First Response

- Interim protective measures
- Sharing information
- Contain the risk
- Preserve evidence
- Co-ordinate response
- Record actions



Receiving a first disclosure: protect, preserve, notify

- Make the child and anyone else safe.
- Listen; clarify only what is necessary. Do not investigate.
- Considering the risk and immediate threat
- Preserve records, messages, CCTV and other potential evidence.
- Record the concern and the exact words used.
- Report immediately to the senior manager.
- Inform the LADO within one working day where a threshold may be met.



The LADO: oversight, advice and coordination

“

The Local Authority Designated Officer oversees allegations about adults working or volunteering with children and helps agencies manage them without delay, in a coordinated, thorough and fair way.

”

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026

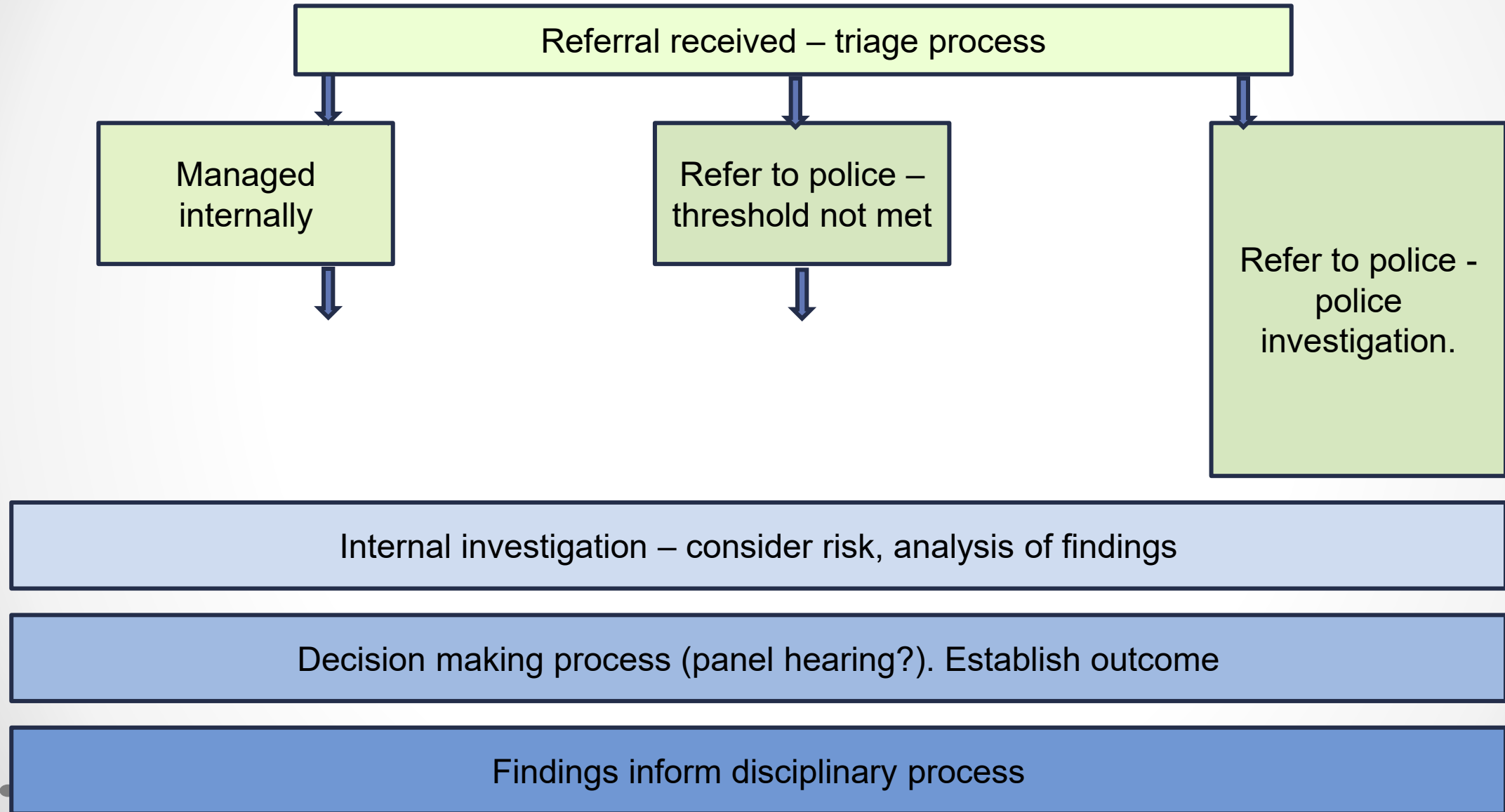
When may it be an allegation?

or a suitability concern?

- harmed a child, or may have harmed a child
- possibly committed a criminal offence against or related to a child
- behaved towards a child in a way indicating a risk of harm

- behaved—or may have behaved—in a way indicating they may not be suitable to work with children

The interface between safeguarding, disciplinary and criminal investigations

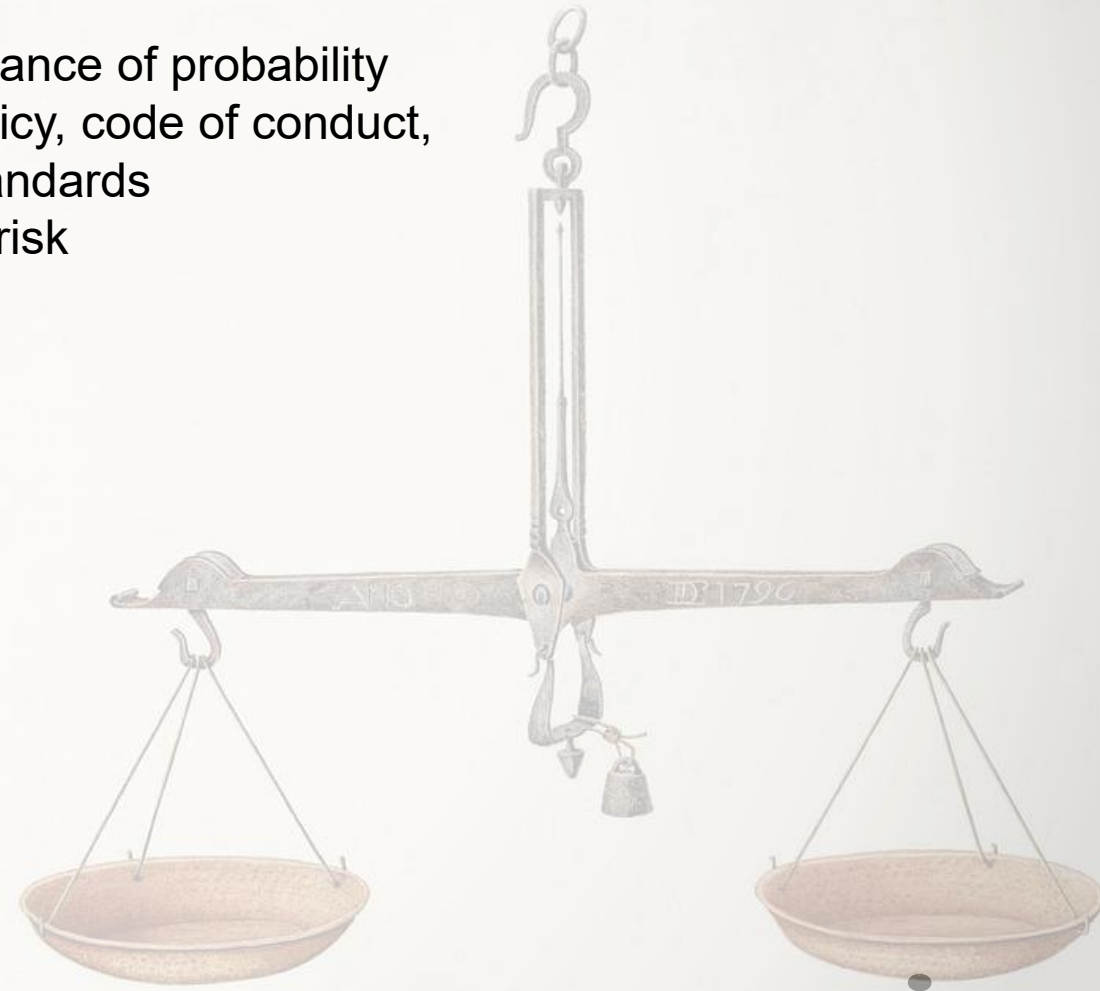


Criminal Investigation

Threshold – beyond reasonable doubt
Breaches in legislation
Investigate the allegation

Safeguarding investigation

Threshold – balance of probability
Breaches in policy, code of conduct,
professional standards
Investigate the risk



CONCERN ABOUT PRACTICE

A quality, capability or practice issue that does not indicate harm or unsuitability. Address, record and review under local policy.

**Concern, conduct issue
or allegation?**

CONDUCT / BOUNDARY CONCERN

May be lower-level alone, but patterns or context can raise the risk. Share with the designated manager and check local procedures.

ALLEGATION THRESHOLD MAY BE MET

Protect, record and contact the LADO without delay. Do not wait for proof.

Case studies

In your groups provide an example of:

A concern about practice

A conduct/boundary concern

An allegation of harm or abuse

Triage • decide • explain

Rapid triage • what level of concern?



A staff member is heard shouting at a young person because they are being disruptive.

A young person says a residential staff member gave them an expensive gift.

A staff member receives a disclosure and does not report it to the safeguarding lead.

For each: what else do you need to know, what do you do now, and who needs to know?

Suspension is a risk decision—not a default

Use a reasoned, proportionate risk assessment. Consider whether safe alternatives can manage the risk, and record why the chosen measure is necessary.

Proportionate • reviewed • time-limited

Interim risk management: four questions



- What is the specific risk to this child—or to other children?
- Could remaining at work compromise evidence, witnesses or the process?
- Can the risk be managed by duties, supervision, location, contact restrictions or redeployment?
- When will the decision be reviewed, and who will communicate it?

Suspension may be necessary, but the rationale must be evidence-based and recorded.

Delay harms everyone—and can weaken the evidence

Delay can affect:

- the child's safety, trust and willingness to engage
- the staff member's wellbeing, reputation and employment
- memory, evidence quality and witness availability
- team culture, staffing stability and confidence in leadership

Set a case plan, named owner, review points and communication rhythm. Escalate drift.



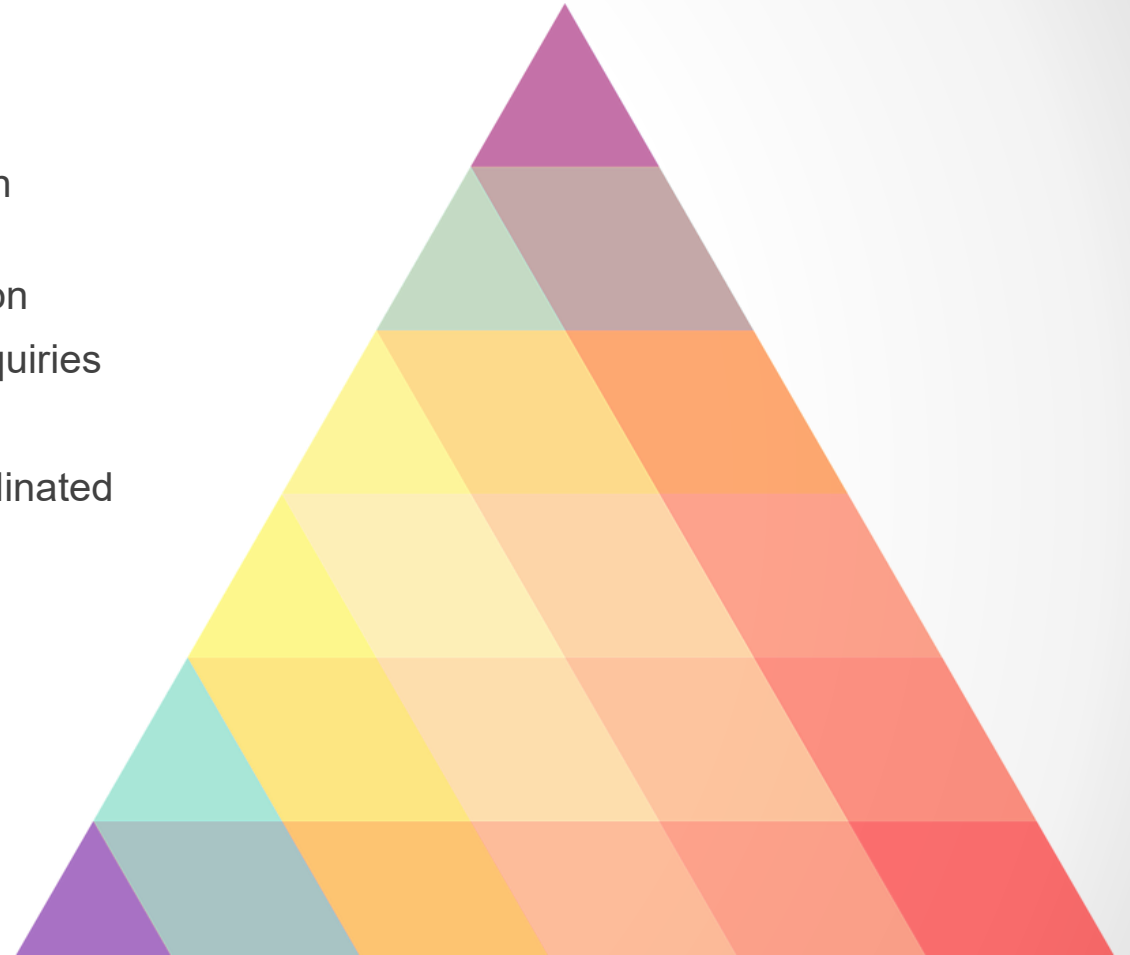
Information sharing: necessary, proportionate, recorded

- share early enough to protect children and coordinate action
- share relevant facts—not speculation or unnecessary detail
- check what the child, parents and staff member can safely be told
- follow LADO, police and children's social care advice on timing
- record what was shared, with whom, why and under which lawful basis
- revisit communication as the case changes



Possible routes after initial LADO discussion

- no further action under the allegation process, with rationale recorded
- further information gathering or management action
- children's social care assessment / section 47 enquiries
- police investigation
- internal fact-finding or employment process, coordinated with partners
- regulator or professional-body notification where appropriate



The routes may run in parallel—but must not undermine one another.

Outcomes



- A repeated concern may reveal a pattern; do not dismiss it because earlier concerns were unsubstantiated.
- **Unsubstantiated** means evidence was insufficient—it does not mean the concern was invented.
- **False** means evidence shows the allegation did not happen.
- **Malicious** requires evidence of a deliberate intention to deceive.
- **Substantiated** means there is sufficient evidence to conclude the concern was upheld.

Consider support or safeguarding needs behind every allegation and agree a coordinated response.

Key learning points

What has been your key learning point from today?





2 • Investigate

Scoped, fair and person-centred fact-finding

Support everyone without compromising the process



CHILD/YOUNG PERSON/ADULT

Safe contact, advocacy, clear updates, attention to communication needs and protection from retaliation.

STAFF MEMBER/PERSON OF CONCERN

Named contact, process and timescale information, wellbeing support, representation and meaningful updates.

WIDER TEAM/WITNESSES

Need-to-know communication, supervision, protection from pressure or gossip, and access to support.

The internal investigation – first steps

- confirm with the POLICE/LADO when internal investigation can begin
- write clear, answerable terms of reference
- identify what is outside scope and what triggers a pause
- appoint an investigator with sufficient independence and competence
- separate fact-finding from the later disciplinary decision
- plan timescales, updates, support and governance



People will forget what you
said, people will forget what
you did, but people will never
forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

What makes an investigation fair?



- open-minded: test evidence for and against each proposition
- proportionate: pursue reasonable lines of enquiry
- independent: manage conflicts and perceived bias
- child-centred: hear the child safely and avoid repeated questioning
- transparent: share the process and allow meaningful response
- analytical: distinguish fact, inference, opinion and policy expectation
- decisive: make findings on the balance of probabilities

Terms of reference



Background
Purpose
Scope
Matters to be investigated
Matters outside of scope
Standard of proof
Methodology
Powers of the investigator
Limitations
Confidentiality
Reporting
Amendments
Procedural fairness
Safeguarding concerns

Interviews: trauma informed and evidence-led

- Safety
- Trust and transparency
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Recognise the impact of trauma on memory
- Trauma-informed questioning
- Start with the evidence
- Gather an uninterrupted account where possible
- Test the evidence rather than challenge the person
- Corroborate where possible
- Explore fairly
- Consider unconscious bias
- Base findings on totality of evidence



Write a report that another decision-maker can use



terms of reference and investigator independence
allegation(s), relevant policy and chronology
method, evidence obtained and limitations
evidence for and against each proposition
credibility and reliability analysis—without speculation
findings on the balance of probabilities
learning and recommendations, kept separate from employment
decisions
indexed supporting documents

Outcomes



- A repeated concern may reveal a pattern; do not dismiss it because earlier concerns were unsubstantiated.
- **Unsubstantiated** means evidence was insufficient—it does not mean the concern was invented.
- **False** means evidence shows the allegation did not happen.
- **Malicious** requires evidence of a deliberate intention to deceive.
- **Substantiated** means there is sufficient evidence to conclude the concern was upheld.

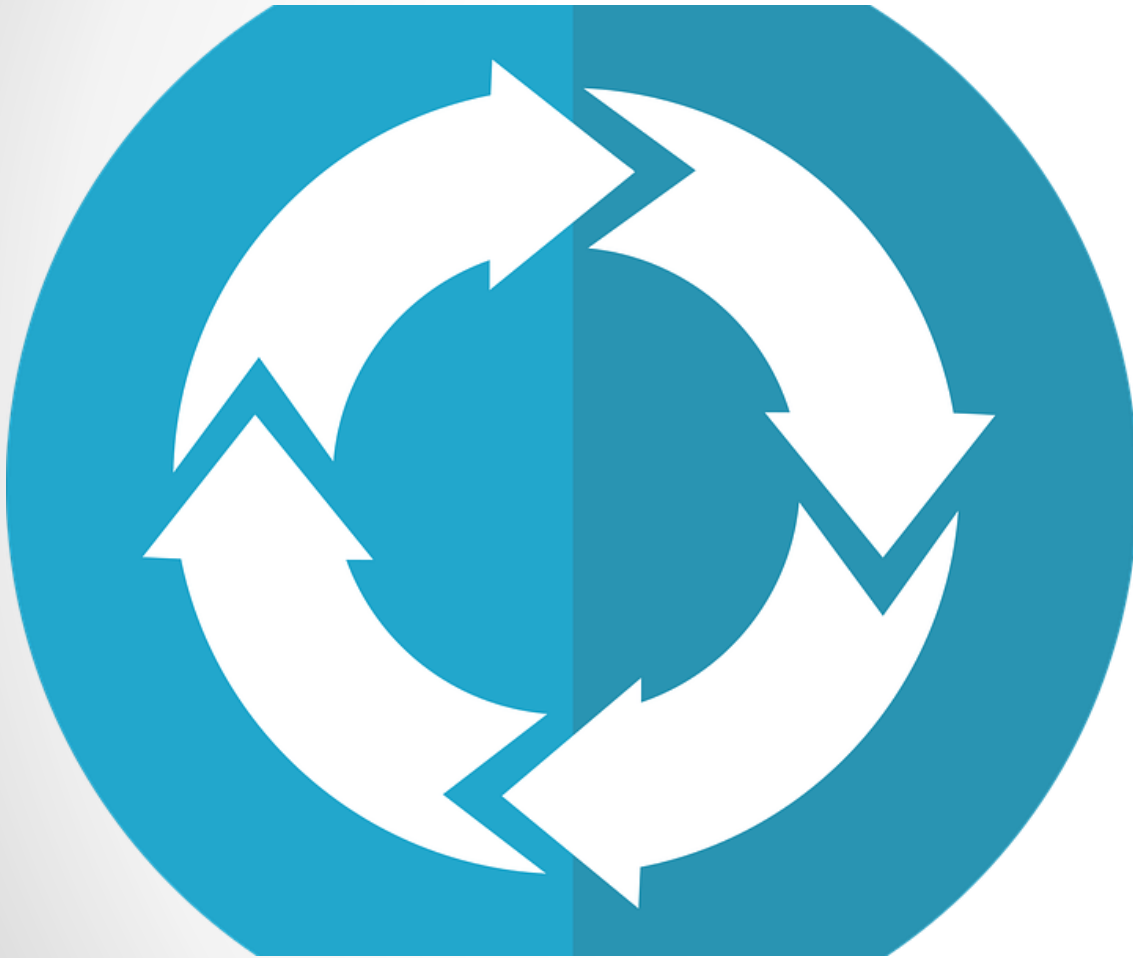
Consider support or safeguarding needs behind every allegation and agree a coordinated response.

Post investigation process

- Investigation report completed
- Initial review by commissioning organisation
- Safeguarding/case management panel
- Decision on disciplinary referral
- Disciplinary hearing
- Outcome and sanction
- Written decision
- Appeal
- Implementation and review



Close the loop: people, notifications and learning



start with the child/adult: safety, explanation, support and care planning

communicate the outcome appropriately to the person of concern and referrer

complete employment action and restore or manage working relationships

make required notifications, including Ofsted, the placing/local authority and professional bodies as applicable

make a DBS/PVG referral where the legal conditions are met—even if the person resigned first

identify practice, supervision, staffing, policy and cultural learning
track actions to completion

Self care



The expectation that we can be immersed in safeguarding concerns, allegations and difficult human experiences every day and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to walk through water without getting wet

Key learning points

What has been your key learning point from today?



Thank you



Questions • reflections • next steps

