

Panel Referrals

How can referrals to multi-agency panels and meetings capture contextual information? Is it better for referrals to be written or verbal? What questions should we ask? This document offers tips and ideas to guide you through making and receiving referrals for multi-agency panels.

Referrers operate at the boundary between young people and families and other professions and organisations. They collate information into referral documents that convey the views of young people and family members to other professionals. This is a delicate process and is dependent on trusting relationships with young people and families. It is also dependent on the quality of existing information, information that is often focussed around individuals rather than contexts.

Sites have developed different processes to making referrals to multi-agency panels that address extra-familial harm. Some have developed structured formats, that ask the referrer to collate information on a context-by-context basis for each individual young person. Other sites depend on information given verbally to/by panel members. Most sites have identified an initial point of contact for referrers to discuss their concerns and agree if a referral is suitable for discussion at the panel or meeting.

Written Referrals

Pros

- Makes it easier to draw on existing agency documents that might be relevant to the context
- Enables transparent presentation of information to wider professional network
- Helps hold complex inter-play of contexts in mind

Cons

- Time consuming to complete

Verbal Referrals

- Teases out contexts of concerns through the conversation
- Validates the concerns of practitioners and helps shape contextually-informed practice
- Explores relational dynamics between professionals and young people, families and their communities

- Lacks transparency of written records

Questions to ask

Questions for people receiving a referral

- What it is that you want to talk about? What is the dilemma/s that you'd like to discuss?
- Have you spoken with the young people and family about sharing their personal information?
- What people and places matter most to the young person/people?
- Which contexts need to change first to make things better for young person/people?

Questions for people making a referral

- How will making this referral and attending this meeting impact my relationship with the young people and family members affected? How will it impact my relationship with other professionals?
- If I make this referral, and attend a multi-agency panel meeting, will I have the opportunity to think about what is happening for this young person, peer group or location, and hear different perspectives?
- Who will be at the meeting and can they influence change in contexts that I'd like to discuss?

Both referrers and receivers

- Are we paying more attention to statutory "knowledge" e.g. crime reports, over community "knowledge" e.g. what local people tell us about safety and harm?
- Are we listening to the voices of young people, families and other people in the community affected by this issue, as much as we are to professionals?