

ROTH: setting values and challenging one another

It can be challenging to remain focused on welfare and contexts during multi-agency meetings such as Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) conferences. It can also be challenging to maintain consistent values and goals. Partners involved in the process will have different:

- Levels of experience or knowledge of ROTH child protection pathways
- Values that underpin their work
- Levels of understanding and experience in using Contextual Safeguarding approaches
- Experiences, goals and ways of measuring success
- Approaches to practice

These differences can be beneficial; but these benefits can only be realised if participants have shared goals that they are working towards, and a shared value base that everybody understands. Partners also need to feel comfortable challenging one another, and need to recognise that disagreements are often expected when multi-agency working is authentic and where no single agency dominates over others.

When observing ROTH conferences, we have seen that sometimes attendees have to redirect conversations or challenge one another, which can be difficult to do. Below are some of examples of how we have seen the negative impact of this mitigated, and how we must think about ways in which professionals can respectfully challenge one another in the moment.

1. Establishing shared values and goals

Before the conference begins, stating goals and values out loud can be a valuable way of setting the tone for the meeting and making sure everyone understands the shared approach. This is also beneficial for referring back to should a meeting deviate from the established goals and values. Below are some ideas as to what can be included in a statement - on the left is the overarching mission of the statement, and on the right is some of the detail you might include. The statement might be read by the chair, or the lead social worker, and could include:

Stating that the ROTH process is centred around care

Centring relationships both between professionals and the young person/ their family and valuing the relationships a young person holds with their friends, other professionals, and important people in their lives

Centring the person, not the stats and recognising that the young person being discussed is a fully rounded person with needs, interests, strengths, and experiences that include but also go beyond issues of extra-familial harm

Recognising the efforts and achievements of parents/ carers, the young person and professionals in finding/ providing safety

Recognising how contexts and the people within them create safety for young people, as well as any harm that might occur or has taken place

Stating that the focus of the ROTH process is on risk outside the home, not on parenting

Parent/ carers are partners in the planning process alongside other professionals

Parents/ carers can be tasked with actions just like other partner agencies

Parents/carers can be challenged, and can challenge partners, with the focus on building a plan that promotes the welfare of the young person and builds safety in the contexts where they have come to harm

The efforts/ actions of parents/ carers should be acknowledged just like those of other partner agencies

Specifying the tone and language expected

Stating that professionals are expected to speak kindly and respectfully about the young person, their families, and their friends e.g. committing to the idea that 'we talk about the young person as if they are in the room with us'

Acknowledging young people when they are present in the meeting and therefore stressing the importance of accessible and non-jargonistic language

**Stating that this
is a children's
social-care
pathway**



The process is underpinned by child protection legislation, and as such is one where children's welfare is held as paramount and their needs are prioritised

The primary goal of the meeting is not crime prevention or disruption, but these areas of work may be drawn upon to meet the primary goal of safeguarding a children's welfare or when in their best interest

**Acknowledging
complexity and
difficulty**



Reassuring parents, carers and young people in attendance that if they want to take a break or to leave they can

Reassuring parents, carers and young people that if they want to challenge or clarify anything a professional says about them or their child then they are welcome to do so

**Challenging one
another is part
of the process**



All attendees should welcome critical reflection and challenges to their language and practice if it facilitates in making young people safer (see section three)

2. Keeping conversation contextual

Targeting contexts is the first of the four domains of Contextual Safeguarding. Yet identifying and responding to the contextual dynamics of harm via targeting contexts, as opposed to solely trying to change the behaviour of individuals, continues to be a challenge in ROTH conferences. Where we have seen this done successfully has often included chairs steering conversations to focus on context, but any partner present can and should do this too. Steering the conversation back to contexts might include doing things such as:

- Respectfully noting when a conversation is focused on individual behaviour change, and asking whether this can be reframed to think about school, community contexts, peer groups, or other contexts outside the home

- Structuring the meeting using Contextual Safeguarding principles; for example, having prompts about different types of contexts such as peers, locations, school – this makes it easier to redirect when conversations become about individual behaviour
- Asking what can be put in place within these contexts for all young people, not just the individual who is the subject of the ROTH conference
- Using tools, such as context weighting, to support a shared approach within the partnership

Keeping a conversation contextual is challenging because it is not the usual way in which systems tend to function. Being patient, respectful, and open with one another in these meetings is critical, while also holding strongly the clear aims and values underpinning the approach. Steering conversation back to contexts and reminding participants of this core facet of the ROTH approach is vital in stopping blame for extra-familial harm shifting from parents onto the young people themselves.

3. Speaking out against harmful practice or language

Embodying shared values requires respectfully challenging one another. This is particularly important when the actions of professionals or systems are harmful to young people or their communities. We have seen a multitude of ways in which professionals have challenged one another in ROTH conferences. This has included:

- Naming or questioning actions taken by agencies that increase young people's exposure to risk e.g. decisions to permanently exclude from education
- Questioning language that inadvertently places blame on a young person or their family for harm they experience – for example, responding to statements like the young person is 'putting themselves at risk' by asking partners about the situations in which the young person is unsafe
- Naming assumptions about race, ethnicity, gender or neurodivergence – for example, asking whether we would take the same approach if a young person were a girl instead of a boy

- Querying proposals for interventions focused solely on behaviour change or education without also addressing the contexts in which young people feel unsafe – for example, returning to context weighting findings that state a child is unsafe at school when the proposed intervention is solely a knife-carrying education programme
- Asking questions about the purpose of disruptive activities that seek to move young people on without other spaces or opportunities for them to be together – for example, removing a bench where young people are known to spend time because of community fears
- Reframing outdated or labelling language e.g. questioning the use of the term ‘gangs’ to describe a group of young people

Professionals must feel safe and supported by the chair and the wider professional network to challenge one another and also be open to change and learning as they navigate these complex cases. Creating the conditions for ROTH meetings that facilitate challenges is the responsibility of the chair, but also the wider multi-agency partnership. Acknowledging that challenging one another might happen, and that complex power-sharing and power-shift dynamics within the meetings are inevitable, is critical. Identifying this as part of the “establishing shared goals and values” part of a ROTH meeting might be a beneficial way of creating these conditions.