

Professional Advocacy Services Principles and Standards

Developed by Family Rights Group

***“Having an
advocate made
me feel more
confident as a
person and as
a parent”*** *Mother*

Introduction

These Standards, together with the [Code of Practice for Professional Advocates](#), provide a framework of good practice for organisations providing professional advocacy services for families when the local authority makes decisions about the needs, care and protection of their child.

The Standards and Code have been developed by Family Rights Group with support from partner organisations and service users: both are informed by practice experience and research.

“If it happened again I would be more confident but I would still want an advocate and all parents should be able to have this support.

Mother

The role of a professional advocate is different from that of a supporter or friend. These Standards are designed to inform the work of professional advocates when they assist parents, children’s carers or family members who are involved with the local authority concerning the care and protection of their child and also support services the child may need. The Standards will guide trustees and managers providing the advocacy service and any organisation commissioning such services. They will also assist those using an advocacy service to know what to expect and whether this kind of service would be useful for them.

The Code of Practice, which accompanies the Standards, provides guidelines for professional advocates, when they are providing services where there are child protection concerns.

Principles and Standards for Professional Advocacy Services

Trustees and managers are responsible for providing a service which applies the following principles and standards to decision making and service delivery. The seven principles are supported by policy and procedure requirements, which set out what parents, carers and family members are entitled to expect from a professional advocacy service.

Respect for the rights, needs, wishes, experiences and culture of parents, carers and families, including

- supporting advocates to promote respect for the family's right to family life;
- taking account of the impact of the local authority's acts and omissions on their child and their family;
- ensuring the advocacy organisation has policies and a professional and practice culture which expect and enable advocates to be open minded and non judgemental about families to whom they provide services;
- helping service users to present what they consider is best for their child and their family; and
- ensuring the organisation and the individual advocates value the experiences of family members and their knowledge of their child and family circumstances.

Working in partnership with families, including

- supporting advocates to work with families to redress the power imbalance between those entitled to or receiving services and state agencies;
- building the confidence of family members to access services for their child and to participate in decision-making processes;
- supporting advocates to deal constructively with conflict about service provision and practice judgements;
- supporting advocates to exercise their professional judgement about how best to support service users to speak for themselves.

*“The written agreement helped me to know my rights and I understood that if there was a situation where my child was at risk the information would be shared with other professionals
Father*

Confidentiality policy and agreement which addresses issues of safeguarding including

- a clear risk management policy to protect the safety of children, service users and advocates;
- a confidentiality policy which puts the child’s safety and well being as paramount, and which states in what circumstances and in what manner confidential information about a child or adult may be passed to another professional or agency;
- a statement about confidentiality which is discussed and agreed in the service agreement with the service user before any advocacy services are provided, setting out in what circumstances and how the advocate may report confidential information about a child or adult without permission of the service user to the local authority;
- a recorded agreement with service users which states clearly how their confidential information will be recorded and stored;
- systems and processes which enable advocates to record, monitor, process and store confidential information, consistent with data protection and security guidelines.

Independence from statutory service providers, including

- establishing funding streams and service agreements with statutory service providers which do not limit the independence of the advocacy service and the professional practice of the advocates and their supervisors;
- having a statement of purpose, policy and operational structures, including a referral protocol, which make clear how the advocacy service addresses preserving its independence, especially when resolving any potential conflicts of interests with statutory service providers;
- a service agreement with the statutory provider which enables the advocacy service to take up any matters which are not consistent with sound professional practice and decision making.

Enabling parents, carers and wider family members to have equal access to the opportunity to use advocacy services, including ensuring

- parents, carers and family members who use the advocacy service are supported to influence its development;
- there is a written equal opportunities policy which is publicly available and informs the development and delivery of advocacy services;
- compliance with the organisation's equal opportunities policy is a contractual requirement for advocates and all staff working for the organisation;
- there are systems in place to support advocates to identify practices within statutory agencies which directly or indirectly discriminate or exclude families or groups of families and their children from access to statutory services, and to challenge such issues as appropriate;
- there is access to resources providing additional supports to advocates, such as interpreters and signers, if this is required or requested;
- as appropriate, adequate time to enable them to advocate effectively on behalf of service users with additional needs.

Providing a clear remit and accountability within the organisation, including

- ensuring there is a clear statement of purpose so that service users understand what the advocacy service provides, details of any eligibility criteria and any limits on the service;
- ensuring that the organisation has a commitment to accuracy of information, including recording systems, which enable service users to have access to any records kept about them, and to have confidence that their personal data will be kept securely;
- maintaining accountable systems for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the service and the quality of advocacy provided;
- providing a written complaints policy which enables representations or complaints about both the service and the work of an individual advocate.

Promoting quality professional advocacy services by

- ensuring that advocates have current enhanced criminal records checks and that proper references have been taken up before contracting their services consistent with the requirements of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006;
- recruiting advocates who are suitable to provide the service, informed of the values, standards and policy of the advocacy organisation, are properly trained, supported and supervised and who receive continuing professional development;
- providing advocates who have specialist knowledge of child protection processes, child welfare law and local authority procedures, with the skills to challenge other professionals and agencies using a constructive and non confrontational style;
- ensuring that the parent, carer or family member has a named advocate allocated to them in a timely way and that their wishes will be respected when appointing an advocate wherever possible.

“The advocate must have the ability to listen very well and carefully and read between the lines.. and to keep checking that I understood what she was talking about .. because parents are frustrated and upset.” Mother

Reference Sources

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