TOGETHER for Children and Young People

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Multi-Agency Child Protection Team

LCPP Direct Engagement with Children and Families



Cheshire East Council

1. PURPOSE

1.1 This guidance sets out when, why and how Lead Child Protection Practitioners (LCPPs) may engage directly with children and families as part of their safeguarding leadership, independent scrutiny and statutory child protection responsibilities within the Cheshire East Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT) model.

1.2 Direct engagement should have a clear safeguarding purpose and contribute to understanding:

- The child's lived experience, wishes and feelings.
- The nature and impact of harm or risk of harm.
- The effectiveness of safeguarding and protective arrangements.
- The child's experience of professional intervention.
- The quality of safeguarding analysis and statutory decision-making.

1.3 LCPP engagement should complement rather than duplicate the direct work, assessment and ongoing relationship-based responsibilities of the Family Help Lead Practitioner (FHLP) or allocated Social Worker.

1.4 This guidance does not introduce:

- Mandatory LCPP visits.
- Additional assessments.
- Separate recording templates.
- New statutory requirements.

2. DECISION-MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY SUMMARY

Function	Primary Accountability
Direct work with child and family	FHLP
Assessment and analysis	FHLP
Child protection threshold decisions	LCPP
Conference Chair functions	LCPP
Independent scrutiny of participation and lived experience	LCPP
Ongoing intervention and implementation	FHLP / Locality Team
Family-network planning and coordination	FHLP with partner support
Statutory child protection decision-making	LCPP under delegated authority and MACPT procedures

Key Principle

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2.1 LCPP engagement strengthens independent scrutiny and understanding of the child's lived experience.

2.2 It does not transfer case ownership, create a parallel intervention role or replace the direct work responsibilities of the FHLP.

3. CORE PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

3.1 Purposeful Engagement

3.1.1 There should be a clear reason for direct engagement and a clear understanding of how it will strengthen safeguarding scrutiny, analysis or decision-making.

3.2 Child-Centred Practice

3.2.1 Engagement should be informed by the child's:

- Age.
- Development.
- Communication needs.
- Identity.
- Wishes and feelings.
- Relationships.
- Daily lived experience.

3.3 Relational and Restorative Practice

3.3.1 Children and families should experience engagement that is:

- Respectful.
- Transparent.
- Compassionate.
- Honest.

3.3.2 Professional curiosity and challenge should be exercised without undermining existing relationships or minimising safeguarding concerns.

3.4 Proportionate Involvement

3.4.1 Direct engagement should be the exception rather than the routine expectation and should occur where there is a clearly identifiable safeguarding benefit.

3.4.2 The nature and extent of engagement should reflect:

- The safeguarding concerns.
- The complexity of the situation.
- The potential value of independent engagement.
- The possible impact upon the child or family.

3.5 Coordinated Professional Activity

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3.5.1 Engagement should ordinarily be planned with the FHLP to avoid:

- Unnecessary repetition.
- Confusion for children or families.
- Competing professional relationships.

3.6 Independent Scrutiny

3.6.1 LCPP engagement should strengthen independent consideration of safeguarding information and the child's lived experience rather than create a parallel assessment or case-management function.

3.7 Clear Accountability

3.7.1 The purpose, relevant findings and safeguarding implications of direct engagement should be communicated and recorded through existing arrangements.

4. WHEN DIRECT ENGAGEMENT MAY BE APPROPRIATE

4.1 Direct engagement should be considered where it is reasonably likely to add identifiable safeguarding value.

Circumstance	Potential Safeguarding Purpose
Significant uncertainty regarding the child's lived experience	Develop an independent understanding of the child's day-to-day experiences, relationships and safety
Conflicting or incomplete professional accounts	Test the sufficiency of existing safeguarding analysis
Escalating risk or repeated safeguarding incidents	Understand whether protective arrangements are effective
Longstanding or stalled Child Protection Plans	Explore whether intervention is resulting in meaningful change
Preparation for Initial or Review Child Protection Conferences	Strengthen participation and inform independent conference scrutiny
Concerns regarding children's participation	Establish whether the child's views, wishes and experiences are being adequately understood
Professional disagreement regarding safeguarding decisions	Inform independent scrutiny and decision-making
A child requests contact with the LCPP	Provide an appropriate opportunity for the child to be heard

4.2 Direct engagement should not be automatic simply because a child:

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- Is subject to Section 47 enquiries.
- Has a Child Protection Plan.
- Is involved in statutory review processes.

4.3 The relevant test is whether engagement is likely to provide additional understanding or strengthen safeguarding decision-making.

5. DECIDING WHETHER TO ENGAGE

5.1 Before undertaking direct engagement, the LCPP should consider:

1. What safeguarding question are we seeking to answer?
2. What is already known regarding the child's wishes, feelings and lived experience?
3. What direct work has already taken place?
4. What additional understanding could independent engagement provide?
5. Could additional professional contact cause distress, confusion or repetition?
6. What method of engagement would best meet the child's needs?
7. How will the information obtained influence safeguarding analysis, planning or decision-making?

5.2 The proposed engagement should ordinarily be discussed with the FHLP, including how the purpose of contact will be explained to the child and family.

5.3 Requests for Direct Contact

5.3.1 Where a child has requested direct contact with the LCPP, their wishes should carry particular weight.

5.3.2 Any decision not to facilitate such engagement should be based upon a clear consideration of:

- The child's circumstances.
- Their wishes and feelings.
- Their safeguarding needs.
- The likely safeguarding value of direct engagement.

5.3.3 Where direct engagement is not considered necessary, the LCPP should ensure that the child is offered an appropriate alternative opportunity to have their views heard and represented within safeguarding decision-making.

5.3.4 Where urgent safeguarding concerns require immediate action, the LCPP should act in accordance with agreed responsibilities without unnecessary delay.

6. HOW DIRECT ENGAGEMENT SHOULD TAKE PLACE

6.1 Engagement should be planned and delivered in a way that reflects the child's circumstances.

6.2 Consideration should be given to:

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- Age and development.
- Communication needs.
- Disability or additional support requirements.
- Language, culture and identity.
- Trauma and emotional wellbeing.
- Existing trusted relationships.
- The child's preferences regarding contact.

6.3 Engagement may include:

- Direct conversation.
- Observation.
- Supported communication.
- Participation in conference or review activity.
- Other appropriate methods.

6.4 Children should understand:

- Who the LCPP is.
- Why engagement is taking place.
- How their views will be considered.
- What may happen next.
- How information may need to be used to support their safety.

6.5 The LCPP should not promise confidentiality where safeguarding concerns require information to be shared.

6.6 Where appropriate, children should be offered choices regarding:

- How they communicate.
- Who supports them.
- Whether they wish their views to be shared by another trusted professional or advocate.

6.7 Important Safeguarding Consideration

6.7.1 Engagement must be coordinated appropriately where there are:

- Police investigations.
- Evidential considerations.
- Criminal proceedings.
- Circumstances in which additional professional contact may increase risk.

6.7.2 The timing and nature of engagement should be agreed with relevant professionals where evidential integrity or safeguarding concerns may be affected.

7. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FHLP

7.1 The FHLP or allocated Social Worker retains responsibility for:

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- Ongoing direct work.
- Assessment and analysis.
- Building and maintaining relationships.
- Coordinating safeguarding intervention.
- Implementing agreed actions and plans.
- Communicating with the child and family.
- Case management.

7.2 The LCPP provides independent safeguarding scrutiny and undertakes the statutory child protection functions defined within the MACPT Operational Procedures.

7.3 LCPP engagement should therefore be complementary.

7.4 The LCPP should ordinarily:

- Clarify the purpose of engagement with the FHLP.
- Review existing direct-work evidence.
- Agree how engagement will be introduced.
- Avoid unnecessary duplication.
- Share relevant findings promptly.
- Identify any safeguarding implications arising from engagement.

7.5 Direct engagement by the LCPP does not transfer responsibility for assessment, intervention or ongoing casework from the FHLP.

8. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN CHILD PROTECTION CONFERENCES

8.1 Practice Expectation

8.1.1 Every child should be supported to participate meaningfully in Child Protection Conference processes in a manner appropriate to their:

- Age.
- Understanding.
- Communication needs.
- Wishes.
- Individual circumstances.

8.1.2 The LCPP, as independent Chair, should be satisfied that the child's views, wishes, feelings and lived experience are adequately understood and represented.

Important Principle

This guidance does not create an expectation that the LCPP will personally meet every child before every Initial or Review Child Protection Conference.

8.2 Determining the Need for Direct LCPP Engagement

8.2.1 The LCPP should consider:



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- Direct work already undertaken by the FHLP.
- The child's expressed wishes and feelings.
- Existing professional contributions.
- Advocacy arrangements.
- Participation arrangements.
- The child's wishes regarding conference involvement.

8.2.3 The LCPP should determine whether the information available provides a sufficiently meaningful understanding of the child's perspective to support independent safeguarding scrutiny and conference decision-making.

8.2.4 Where information regarding the child's lived experience, wishes and feelings is insufficient, inconsistent, outdated or unclear, the LCPP should consider how participation can be strengthened before decision-making takes place.

8.2.5 The LCPP should be satisfied that any limitations in understanding the child's perspective have been identified, acknowledged and considered within safeguarding analysis and conference decision-making.

8.2.6 This may involve:

- Additional work by the FHLP.
- Gathering information from trusted professionals.
- Alternative participation arrangements.
- Independent advocacy.
- Direct engagement by the LCPP where it would add safeguarding value.

8.3 Participation and Feedback

8.3.1 Children should be supported to understand the ways they may contribute, including:

- Attending all or part of a conference where appropriate.
- Speaking directly with the Chair.
- Contributing through an advocate or trusted professional.
- Providing written views.
- Using creative or supported communication methods.

8.3.2 Following conference activity, the child should receive an accessible explanation of relevant decisions, including how their views were considered and, where appropriate, influenced decision-making, through the professional best placed to provide this.

9. USING CHILDREN'S VIEWS IN SAFEGUARDING ANALYSIS

9.1 The child's views should inform safeguarding analysis rather than simply demonstrate consultation.

9.2 The LCPP should consider whether engagement provides additional understanding regarding:

- Harm or risk.

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- Safety.
- Relationships.
- Protective adults.
- Effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements.
- The child's experience of professional intervention.
- Barriers to disclosure.
- Sustainability of protection.

9.3 Where safeguarding decisions differ from the child's wishes, the rationale should be clear and communicated appropriately.

9.4 The child's views should be taken seriously without placing responsibility for safeguarding decisions upon them.

9.5 Where appropriate, the child should receive feedback about how their contribution influenced professional understanding, planning or decision-making.

10. ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS, CARERS AND FAMILY NETWORKS

10.1 LCPP engagement with parents, carers or wider family members may be appropriate where it would strengthen:

- Independent scrutiny.
- Understanding of concerns.
- Participation in statutory processes.
- Safeguarding analysis.

10.2 The LCPP should consider:

- Whether safeguarding concerns are understood.
- Whether participation has been meaningful.
- Whether strengths and protective relationships are understood.
- Whether additional engagement would add value.

10.3 Family-network involvement may include a Family Network Meeting where appropriate.

10.4 The focus should remain on strengthening protection and improving outcomes rather than introducing additional process.

10.5 The LCPP should not assume responsibility for ongoing family intervention, case coordination or implementation of safeguarding plans.

11. COMMUNICATION AND PROFESSIONAL COORDINATION

11.1 The LCPP should ensure that information arising from engagement is communicated promptly to:

- The FHLP.
- Relevant managers.

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- Appropriate professionals.

11.2 Communication should distinguish:

- What was said.
- What was observed.
- What remains uncertain.
- Professional analysis.
- Safeguarding implications.
- Required actions.

11.3 Immediate safeguarding concerns should never be delayed pending further discussion.

Where direct engagement identifies professional disagreement or concerns regarding safeguarding analysis, decision-making, intervention or protective arrangements, these should be recorded and addressed through the agreed MACPT and partnership escalation procedures. Necessary safeguarding action must not be delayed whilst professional disagreement is resolved.

12. RECORDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

12.1 Existing recording systems should be used.

12.2 Recording should establish:

- The purpose of engagement.
- Views and experiences shared.
- Significant observations.
- Safeguarding analysis.
- Decisions.
- Actions.
- Communication of outcomes.
- Implications for planning and decision-making.

12.3 Recording should remain proportionate.

12.4 No additional form, assessment or parallel recording system is required.

13. WHAT GOOD PRACTICE LOOKS LIKE

13.1 Effective LCPP engagement contributes to:

- Stronger understanding of the child's lived experience.
- More meaningful participation.
- Better independent scrutiny.
- Better-informed statutory decision-making.
- Improved understanding of harm and protection.
- Greater clarity for children and families.

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- More effective safeguarding intervention.

13.2 The effectiveness of engagement should not be judged by the number of children seen.

The central test is whether engagement meaningfully strengthens safeguarding understanding, participation, protection and decision-making.

Final Practice Questions

Before deciding whether direct engagement is necessary, the LCPP should be able to answer:

1. What do we know about this child's lived experience?
2. How have their wishes and feelings been understood?
3. Is their perspective sufficiently represented?
4. What additional understanding would direct engagement provide?
5. Could the same purpose be achieved through existing relationships or participation arrangements?
6. How will engagement influence safeguarding decisions or planning?
7. How will the child know their views have been heard and considered?

Final Principle

The guiding principle is meaningful participation and purposeful independent scrutiny, not routine duplication of direct work.

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