LOOK Safeguarding Framework® practice briefing | Adult safeguarding in England

When to escalate a safeguarding concern

Escalate when the adult's safety is unresolved and the current response does not address the risk you can describe.

1 When should you escalate?

Closed, but concerns emerging
A referral is closed while new concerns are appearing.

Repeated incidents
Incidents are treated separately, so the pattern is missed.

No one owns the next step
Several agencies are involved but nobody takes responsibility.

Also escalate a delay or lack of response.

Immediate danger or serious, immediate threat to life: call 999.
Otherwise follow your local escalation protocol and use its urgent route where waiting would increase the risk.

2 What does the law help you ask for?

Care Act 2014, section 42: the local authority must make, or arrange, necessary enquiries where it has reasonable cause to suspect an adult in its area:

1 has needs for care and support, whether or not the authority is meeting them;

2 is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect; and

3 as a result of those needs, cannot protect themselves from it.

The local authority decides whether the duty applies. If not, ask what other response is appropriate, who will take it forward and when it will be reviewed. For charities and independent providers, the local multi-agency escalation protocol is usually the practical route for disagreements (section 7 applies to bodies named in the Act). Sources: gov.uk, legislation.gov.uk

3 What helps when you get pushback?

"It doesn't meet threshold."	"Which of the three section 42 criteria is not met? Can we review that decision against the chronology? If no enquiry is triggered, who will address the remaining risks?"
"They've declined support."	"What did the adult want? Could they speak privately? Is there fear, coercion or a communication barrier?" **A refusal alone does not establish a lack of capacity.** Record their wishes; seek advice if capacity is in question.
"Another agency is involved."	"Who is coordinating? Do they have the full chronology? When will agencies review the risk together?"
"We haven't had a response."	"Raised on [date]. Since then, [what changed]. We need a decision by [time] because [risk]. Please confirm who is responsible."

Sharing information: use a secure route and record what, with whom and why. Take the adult's objections seriously and weigh the risks; seek advice from your safeguarding or information governance lead. In an emergency, share what is necessary and proportionate.

4 Use LOOK to make the escalation specific

L Living Circumstances
What in daily life might a single contact miss?

O Obstacles and Barriers
What makes it hard to speak safely or accept support?

O Ongoing Risks and Escalation
What has repeated or intensified? What if action is delayed?

K Keeping the Person in View
What does the adult want, and what would make them safer?

Suggested wording

"I am escalating this concern because the current response does not address the pattern we are seeing. Since [date], [brief chronology and impact]. The adult has told us [their wishes, or why we have not been able to establish them safely]. We are concerned that [specific risk] could worsen if action is delayed. Please review the decision using the combined information and confirm who will take the next action and by when."

Sources Care Act 2014, sections 6, 7 and 42 · Care and Support Statutory Guidance, Chapter 14 · ICO Data Sharing Code