

### What is defensible decision making?

Defensible decision making is not making the 'correct' decision as we do not have the benefit of hindsight. If we can justify a decision, it will be defensible. When a defensible decision has been made, we will see evidence that all reasonable steps have been taken to support and protect the child or adult. It is:

- A decision that is based on evidence, using all the information available to you at the time (while at the same time being aware that we rarely have all the information)
- Where the information has been thoroughly evaluated and analysed
- Where the different options and potential outcomes have been weighed up before making a decision
- Where the rationale for the decision is evidenced, including anyone consulted
- Where policy and legislative responsibilities/duties have been followed
- Recorded in a way that evidences all the above.

### Why is defensible decision making important in social care?

When we think about the term 'defensible' we might be thinking about internal scrutiny carried out by managers or external inspections. Perhaps the most meaningful lens with which we would want to review our decision-making and record keeping is through the eyes of the child or adult we are writing about. Practitioners are making decisions that impact on people's right to a private and family life. We need to be accountable for the decisions we make, and they need to be understood by the people we are working with (even if they do not agree with the decision that was made).

It is important to understand and be able to explain why certain decisions were made. Think about the following scenarios:

- An adult wants to understand their childhood and family involvement with services and asks why they had been removed from their parents' care as a child.
- You are going to be giving evidence in a court proceeding and are going to be asked why you removed a child from their parents' care.
- You have been asked why no further action was taken after concerns had been raised.
- You are a new worker with a family and need to understand the reasons behind actions taken by previous workers, so that you can think about what support might be the most effective.
- You are supervising a worker and want to understand why an Adult Support and Protection inquiry was started.

### What can help me in assessing evidence?

Wonnacott's Discrepancy Matrix encourages practitioners to reflect on what is known about a case and what is unknown or not yet known – a vital aspect of working with uncertainty. It supports the practitioner to tease out the information they hold into four types: evidence, ambiguous, assumption, and missing. Watch this six-minute video [here](#) to see how this works in practice. It helps you to ask:

- What do I know?
- What is ambiguous?
- What do I think I know?
- What is missing?

It also helps you to hypothesise and test – to ask what might happen, identify gaps and think about where you might find out more information.

Where can I learn more?

[Decision making and social work in Scotland: The role of evidence and practice wisdom](#)

[Time, the Written Record, and Professional Practice: The Case of Contemporary Social Work](#)

[Using professional judgement and language in writing](#)

[Defensible decision-making in children's social care](#)

