**Guidance on differentiating between level 3 and level 4 referrals**

All practitioners should know our Continuum of Need (CON) guidance, Working Together (2018), and our Tri-X Manual. This guidance is to supplement these core documents providing specific tips around differentiating level 3 and 4 referrals.

**Top Tips in Making Level 3 / 4 Decisions**

The core of deciding between level 3 or 4 on the CON is ***having reasonable cause to suspect a child is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm***. There is no absolute criteria for what constitutes significant harm, but the key to making good decisions is a sound understanding this significant harm definition:

* What constitutes 'likely'? More likely than not – probable, consider past events, put these into context with the current situation.
* What constitutes 'significant'? Likely to have serious and lasting effects rather than minor deficits, but consider the wider context and implications (e.g. accidental broken leg vs intentional cigarette burn).
* What constitutes 'harm'? (abuse: physical, sexual, emotional, and neglect) -
  + Ill-treatment (physical, mental, sexual),
  + Impairment of health (physical or mental),
  + Impairment of development (physical, emotional, behavioural, intellectual or social),
  + Includes impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill treatment of another (domestic abuse).
* Compare the child's experience with what could reasonably be expected of a 'similar child' in terms of development and care. Don't forget there is no single way to parent, we must allow for a variety of parenting.
* The harm should be attributable to the care given or likely to be given to that child, i.e. due to the parent(s) or carer(s) – what they are doing or not doing.
* Is the child beyond parental control? If yes, are the parent(s) or carer(s) doing what you would reasonably expect? If also yes then it is not level 4.

All local authorities publish CON guidance, please refer to our [Lancashire CON](http://www.lancashiresafeguarding.org.uk/media/45811/LSCB-Thresholds-Guidance-Final-Oct-2018.pdf) for examples that are level 3 and level 4. These are not exhaustive and do not apply these rigidly. Use your holistic social work assessment skills and consider:

* The strength of the evidence you have, its' source, quality and accuracy,
* Any historical evidence we and other agencies have,
* Take a holistic view – use a breadth of evidence, consider the child's environment and circumstances, capture strengths and protective factors as well as concerns,
* Be child-focused in applying the significant harm threshold – consider the impact, what the information you have actually means for that specific child,
* Lack of consent should not on its own lead to the concerns becoming a level 4 decision (see Consent Top Tips on our [Tri-X Local Resources Page](https://www.proceduresonline.com/lancashirecsc/local_resources.html))