

# Independent review: Disagreements in the care of critically ill children

NUFFIELD  
COUNCIL ON  
BIOETHICS

Healthcare professionals' perspectives

Some findings from our survey for healthcare professionals with experience of disagreements between families and healthcare teams in the care of critically ill children in England\*

## Disagreements and how they arise

New disagreements do not arise very frequently, but take up considerable time when they do

How often do new disagreements arise?



**52%**  
said **monthly**  
or more often\*

How much time do you spend on navigating or resolving these disagreements?



**78%**  
said at least  
some time  
each month



## What impacts disagreements about the care of critically ill children?

**75%** **Mismatch of expectations** about what can be done for a child medically

**65%** **Differences in belief** about quality of life, end of life, decision-making and other values

**65%** **Communication issues** between families and professionals

\*Proportion of respondents who answered monthly, weekly, more than once a week vs quarterly or less than quarterly

## Impacts on healthcare professionals

As a result of a disagreement about a critically ill child...



**49%**  
said they **have felt unsafe**,  
either physically or  
emotionally, at work



**45%**  
said they **have been subject to**  
**comments, criticism** or other coverage  
in the media or on social media

**66%** Have **experienced moral distress** and/or moral injury

**61%** Think there is **less trust generally in healthcare professionals**

**59%** Have a **better understanding of families' perspectives** and priorities



Find out more: [www.nuffieldbioethics.org/disagreements](http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/disagreements)

Contact: [children@nuffieldbioethics.org](mailto:children@nuffieldbioethics.org)

Survey: 280 England-based healthcare professionals, May-June 2023

\*Full survey data to follow within the final report

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## What is helpful in resolving disagreements?



### What have healthcare professionals found helpful?



Proportion of respondents who had tried these methods and found them 'helpful' or 'very helpful'

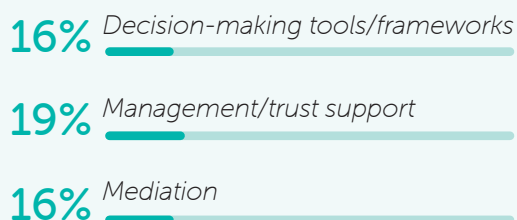
### What doesn't help?



43%

found families having access to their child's clinical records to be **unhelpful or very unhelpful**

These factors were also found to be unhelpful or very unhelpful:



### What would be helpful if it were available?

31%



Mediation

Accessible information for families about their options when they disagree with healthcare professionals



26%

31%



Ethics training

Proportion of respondents who had not tried these options, but thought they would be helpful if available

Find out more at  
[www.nuffieldbioethics.org/disagreements](http://www.nuffieldbioethics.org/disagreements)

We would like to thank all those who submitted a response to this survey. The findings from this survey will be used in conjunction with evidence gathered from other research activities, to help inform this review and produce a final report to go before UK Parliament in September 2023.



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