

# ***Engaging Families Toolkit***

***‘Helping families involves working with them and therefore the quality of the relationship between the family and professionals directly impacts on the effectiveness of help given’*** Munro 2011



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## 1.0 What does the Engaging Families Toolkit aim to do?

The Engaging Families Toolkit aims to provide practitioners and managers with guidance to assist the effective engagement of families in the offer early help support across all levels of intervention. The toolkit builds on research and evidence based practice which is known to work in effectively engaging families in offers of support which aims to promote positive and lasting change for all the family. It provides guidance in recognising, understanding and responding to difficult to engage and risky behaviours which may be encountered when working with children, young people and their parents and carers.

### Key Messages

- The quality of the relationship between the worker and the family makes the most significant impact on the effectiveness of the engagement;
- Persistence of workers to engage the family in the offer of support at the earliest opportunity is critical;
- Adopting a 'think family', whole family approach is key, being mindful that child and parental issues do not sit in isolation;
- Families and workers may present barriers to effective engagement;
- Families who present with a range of multiple and complex needs require a clear and timely plan of support rather than episodic intervention if long term sustained change is to be achieved;
- Practitioners need to adopt an authoritative approach ensuring that the child's needs and outcomes stay in sharp focus;

## 2.0 Why do we need an Engagement Toolkit?

The issue of how to engage families is the key to improving outcomes for **children and young people**. The current limits on resources underline the importance of

effective early help underpinned by positive engagement with families in order. Numerous research and evaluations show that developing an effective professional relationship makes a real difference in improving outcomes for service users. No matter how programmes and funding may change, it is the human relationships that are core to the delivery of effective services. Yet too often, they are overlooked. The Munro (2012) review highlighted the

*“Engagement is the basic task of any practitioner but can never be taken for granted and must always be worked for” Patrick Ayre*

importance of professional relationships in improving outcomes for children, young people and their families and the skills and experience of workers in being able to achieve this.

A key feature in many serious case reviews has been the lack of persistence of workers to engage the family in the offer of support as well as the lack of co-operation and/or hostile attitude of a small number of parents/carers. **When there are child wellbeing or protection issues, a failure to engage with the family may have serious implications and non-intervention is not an option.**

It is now well established that it is important to intervene early if more serious problems are to be avoided later in life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2001). The risk factors that increase a family's vulnerability are well known **and effective services are available to support these families.** One of the major barriers to service delivery is that vulnerability increases the likelihood of refusing the offer of services. The more vulnerable families who do engage are also more likely to disengage before positive outcomes are met and sustained (Sanders & Cann, 2002).

**Key reports highlighting the need for effective family engagement include:**

- Lord Laming (2003) emphasised in his report for the Victoria Climbié enquiry the importance of engaging with the child;
- 'Supporting parents, Safeguarding children', CSCI (2006) state that ensuring parents and carers needs are sufficiently well met is necessary to enable them to effectively meet the needs of their children and therefore engaging with them is imperative to achieve this;
- The executive summary completed by Haringey LSCB (2008) states that a key issue which compounded the risk to Child A was the limited efforts made by professionals to engage with the child's father in the first stages of intervention.

### **3.0 Who is the Engagement toolkit aimed at?**

The Engagement Toolkit is aimed at all practitioners working with children, young people and adults who are parents/carers within Barnsley. In support of the Barnsley Early Help Offer the toolkit aims to promote and facilitate the effective engagement of families in the offer of support at the earliest opportunity, from universal and targeted services through to specialist services. The toolkit should be used by practitioners alongside their own agencies policies and procedures.

## 4.0 What do we mean by 'engagement?'

Effectively engaging families can be split into three stages:

*It's not just about getting through the front door (Casey 2012)*

1. The process of first attracting or motivating a family to attend the service for the first time;
2. Enabling the family to recognise the benefits, goals and expectations of the service, and
3. Building a relationship between the practitioner and the family members and engaging them sufficiently to begin delivering meaningful and beneficial support that is accessible and suitable to the individual and their family.

## 5.0 Why some practitioners find it difficult to engage

- Professionals not having the necessary skills needed to address families' defensiveness and anxieties;
- professionals misunderstanding the practical and emotional difficulties that impact on people's ability to engage;
- lack of time to build meaningful, trusting relationships with all family members;
- professionals' frame of reference; (values, beliefs and attitudes may be different to those of the family and lead to value clashes);
- Pressure from the service to engage and make changes within a family quickly;

## 6.0 Why some families find it difficult to engage

Effective engagement is crucial to work with all families but especially with families with multiple and complex needs, particularly since many of these families have a history of non-engagement and often have actively disengaged (dropped out) or rejected previous support for a range of reasons:

- previous negative experiences of agencies;
- experience of intervention as a young person
- not understanding professionals concerns
- cultural differences
- genuine fear – will my children be removed?
- anti-authority stance, dislike or fear of authority figures;
- lack of communication from professionals;

- do not want to have their privacy invaded;
- have something to hide;
- families may have experienced services where their problems have been treated in isolation, so they disengaged because they were overwhelmed by the other needs they face;
- families may have very low aspirations or are daunted by how services present themselves;
- there may be some unidentified needs for example, mental health issues or learning disability, which have previously stopped the family from engaging in support or making progress;
- families may struggle to engage with services because the wider problems they face are not taken into account. For example, appointments might not be kept due to ongoing circumstances which service providers are unaware of;
- individuals may fail to acknowledge their own needs (for example, mental health needs) or to acknowledge the impact that their needs and/or behaviour are having on others. For example, a parent with mental health needs may fail to recognise the impact that his/her behaviour is having on his/her child's needs being met;
- a family may have engaged with services and received support in the past, but the support may not have been sustained for a long enough period of time causing the family to regress once the support ceased. This may mean the family is now not motivated to re-engage;
- a chaotic lifestyle (for example, substance misuse, mental health issues/needs, lack of time management skills) may have previously led to missed appointments and being discharged prematurely from a service, leaving the family member feeling demotivated to try again;
- if a family feels inadequate, stressed or threatened by the service being offered or cannot see its practical benefits they are more likely to avoid participating;
- not understanding what is expected and why;
- resentment of staff changes;
- fear of oppressive judgements (particularly for disabled or substance misusing parents);
- fear of stigmatisation;
- being overwhelmed by emotional pain, depression, anxiety and guilty;
- having nothing to lose, if children have already been removed;

- sometimes when families are most in need of assistance, they do not feel comfortable seeking help;
- a difference of opinion between parents and professionals around the presenting needs of the family;
- a history of not receiving the help when requested by the family and only when identified by a professional;

## 7.0 Defining and recognising difficult to engage behaviour

Families may present in a number of ways on a continuum from superficial and ineffective engagement to, in a small number of cases, hostility, threats and violence.

### Behaviours may include:

**Ambivalence:** can be displayed when the family are consistently late for planned appointments or they always have an excuse for missing a visit. When discussing an uncomfortable topic such as a worker sharing concerns, the subject will be changed. Ambivalence is a common occurrence and does not necessarily mean it will be difficult to engage with the family. It can occur due to the family being unclear about what is expected of them or poor experiences with previous professionals.

**Confrontation:** includes provoking arguments, extreme avoidance (not answering the door) and can indicate a deep dismissive body language is used.

**Avoidance:** is very common and something that we all do in our everyday lives. It includes cutting short visits due to other apparent important activities. This is often associated in a lack of trust leading to a "fight" not "flight" situation.

**Refusal:** when families will not meet with workers or refuse permission for a child to be seen on their own.

**Violence:** threatened or actual may only involve a minority of cases but is the most difficult and challenging of hard to engage behaviours to work with. People may have previous experience of getting their way through violence and intimidation.

**Disguised Compliance:** some parents may give the appearance of cooperating to avoid raising suspicions and to minimise agency engagement and intervention. Some families may deliberately sabotage efforts to bring about change i.e. missed appointments. This could also be seen when:-

- parents/carers agreeing with professionals regarding changes but put little effort into making changes work;
- change does occur but as a result of external agencies/resources not the parental/carer efforts;
- no significant change at reviews despite significant input (i.e. are interventions resulting in timely, improved outcomes for the children);
- change in one area of functioning is not matched by change in other areas;
- parents/carers will engage with certain aspects of a plan only;
- parents/carers align themselves with certain professionals;
- child's report of issues is in conflict with parent's/carer's report;
- mobile families: moving/changing addresses, registering with different GP's, taking children to different A&E departments with non-accidental injuries;
- blocking the worker's way into the home;
- 'stage-managing' visits by restricting workers' sight of and contact with the child;
- using the physical space of the home and objects in rooms – tables, televisions, dogs/other pets – to control where workers or children sit, obscuring views of the child and distracting the worker and stopping them from moving;
- using clothing and substances (such as chocolate) to hide injuries;
- coaching children to suggest all is well;
- dirt and smell used to disgust workers and prevent them from moving towards and touching the child;
- using part of the home to hide abusers and children (e.g. bedrooms, lofts, sheds etc.)



Many Child Protection studies and Serious Case Reviews have highlighted what is commonly known as the 'rule of optimism' where practitioners are reluctant to make negative professional judgements about the parents they are working with.

Parents may give convincing but false accounts and it is very important that throughout the process of engaging and working with families, workers need to have a degree of caution in their judgements, to maintain what Lord Laming called '**respectful uncertainty**' and '**healthy scepticism**'.

## 8.0 What families say they need from services and workers?

### 8.1 parents say it helps when workers:-

- communicate openly, are honest, direct, yet sensitive and take time to explain things clearly;
- take the time to listen and make the effort to develop trusting relationship and build rapport;
- are reliable;
- provide services and support which is practical, tailored to particular needs and accessible;
- have an approach which reinforces rather than undermines their parenting capacity;
- focus first on the issues of most importance to the family;
- enable them to be involved in the process from the start;
- are transparent;
- write information down to help remember things;
- hold smaller sized meetings and support family to get to meetings;
- develop a clear plan of support and what's happening next and involve the family in the development of the plan and set some achievable goals.

### 8.2 What children and young people say they need from a worker

A recent review highlighted by Eileen Munro (2011) summarises the key characteristics that children and young people look for in a worker.

These are:

*'I was never asked about how I felt or what I wanted to happen. Asking me 10 minutes before the meeting is not the same' young person*

- willingness to listen and show empathy, reliability, taking action, respecting confidences, and viewing the child or young person as a whole person and not overly identifying a child with a particular problem; and
- ability to communicate with children of varying abilities and address the emotional needs of children at key points in their lives.

### 8.3 The things that parents said did not help:

- professionals making assumptions about what you would like or need to happen next;
- not being kept informed by professionals;
- not feeling listened too or feeling like their point was misunderstood;

- big intimidating meetings where they didn't recognise everyone and didn't know what their roles were;
- not being able to access the information because they didn't have very good reading skills;

## 9.0 Engagement: What we know works

### 9.1 Principles for successful and sustained engagement with families

- be child centred;
- the process of engaging and helping families is largely determined by the qualities and skills of the practitioner in building an effective trusting relationship with the family;
- recognises that the most effective relationship to enable change is a 'partnership';
- practitioners and parents being willing to listen to and learn from each other;
- acknowledges that families are the experts in their own lives;
- acknowledges and uses family strengths;
- all families have the potential to change;
- requires an understanding and honest sharing of issues around safeguarding;
- uses of persistent and proactive approaches to engage the family;
- happens where there is support for the whole family;
- requires effective support and supervision for staff, encourages evaluation and self-reflection;

### 9.2 Strategies and approaches to support family engagement

- **Working in partnership with the family**

Most research indicates that it is the **quality of the relationship between the worker and the family** that makes the most significant impact on the effectiveness of the engagement and support offered to the family and the lasting change it can bring. Evidence suggests that the most effective relationship to enable change is a **partnership** and this can be defined in terms of:-

- Active involvement;
- Shared decision making;
- Complementary expertise;
- Agreement of aims and processes;
- Mutual trust and respect;

- Openness and honesty;
- Clear communication;
- Negotiation

- **Practitioner Quality and Skills**

This model also highlights that the process of helping families is largely determined by the **qualities and skills** of the practitioner in building an effective trusting **partnership** with the family and therefore must be the primary focus at the start of any offer of support with a family.

**The following personal qualities and skills can help to build trusting relationships with a family:-**

Practitioner Qualities	Practitioner Skills
A non-judgemental attitude; Respectful attitude; An encouraging and empowering approach; Warmth and empathy; Being genuine	Active listening; Prompting and exploring; Responding empathetically; Summarising; Enabling change; Negotiating; Problem solving Able to reflect Adaptable

- **Establishing a Named Lead Worker:** ensuring the family has a single point of contact i.e. Lead Professional known by name, who is responsible for building trusting relationship with the family and act as a single point of contact for other professionals involved in supporting the family;
- **Use persistent, assertive and proactive approaches** to engage the family: persistent message that you are there to help; persistently challenging parents' behaviour encourages them to take ownership of the issues that need to be addressed, whilst ensuring they are clear about the implications and consequences of

their behaviours. Consideration of the timing of challenge and the parental response to that challenge helps avoid any negative impact on children and young people;

At the first meeting with the family being mindful that this is an introduction and the family's first impression of the worker and the service, this doesn't mean practitioners cannot be challenging or say difficult things but more often than not how we say things matters more to families than what we say;

- **At all times remain 'child centred'**, ensure the child's voice and their wishes and feelings are central throughout. It is imperative that workers ensure that children and young people are actively engaged in the support on offer. The reason for speaking to children and young people is that they are a key source of information to understand the problems they and their families have, and the impact this is having on them and what they feel needs to change. Workers need to consider '*What does the child think needs to change to address their problem?*' The development of positive relationships with children and young people in the family also allows practitioners to use modelling behaviour, to encourage parents to recognise and mimic positive interactions with their children. Practitioners' ability to interact positively and voluntarily with children and young people ensures that practitioners are able to recognise and evidence the impact of parental support on children and young people;

Throughout the intervention practitioners must balance the views of the parents with the protection of the child, **keep the child in clear focus**;

- Ensure **non-resident parents** and/or significant others are actively engaged to participate in offer of support; Include men, male partners, grandparents and siblings rather than over-rely on mothers' views;
- **Be transparent** with families about why engagement is necessary;
- Clearly **set the professional boundaries** of the relationship between practitioners and parents. Setting clear ground rules from the start makes sure that families know where they stand. This assists in developing trust between practitioners and parents and helps secure and maintain parental engagement;
- **The whole family** will be supported e.g. the needs of the parents will be addressed and met as well as the needs of the children;

- **Actively engaging families** in the process from the start asking them what help they need and then responding positively to this.
- Support parents to identify their own solutions to their problems even when they have not been able to fully meet the needs of their children;
- Practitioners use and model **active listening techniques** to hear and understand what parents want and demonstrate you have heard and value what they say;
- Explain to the family the need to undertake an assessment of their needs will help to develop a clear plan of support;
- Use the assessment process as an important mechanism for allowing time to get to know parents and the children and understand the issues facing them. Practitioners are able to use the assessment process to make sure they are providing the right services for the families and that all needs/issues have been identified. It also allows practitioners to work in partnership with parents and children to enable them to set their own targets and goals (another mechanism for helping build trust) and for parents and children to recognise that the service is there to support and work with them to improve outcomes;

The assessment process also provides practitioners with the opportunity to 'get behind the label' of a family, encouraging them to get to know the parents' strengths, weaknesses and issues for themselves. This is important in overcoming any pre-conceptions and encouraging practitioners to focus on positive approaches to working with the families;

- **Start with and build on family strengths:** The focus of engaging and working with families is always to reduce risk but in such a way that builds on family strengths. All families have strengths. A strength based approach occurs when workers place a positive emphasis on resilience and protective factors. This can have the effect of communicating a sense of hope, establishing expectations for success within an individual/ family's capabilities and can promote empowerment and independence.

If workers only focus on the family's problems it can be easy to ignore the fact that it takes a positive approach to be successful. Identifying and using a strength based approach the worker assists the family in identifying their own strengths, needs and current resources in order to formulate a plan to address their concerns and help them achieve their goals.

- **Display a non-judgemental, respectful attitude** to parents as this is important in building trust; Practitioners achieve this through not criticising parents in a way that is counter-productive to addressing needs. It is also important for practitioners to allow time for parents to give their opinions, avoid being patronising and demonstrating to parents that their views are important.
- Helping families to recap the points raised during the visit so the worker can check the families understanding; Misunderstanding can be of great interest to workers as it tells that we have not been clear enough and it also gives the worker a chance to correct misperceptions and provides worker with feedback on their own communications skills which should lead to more effective sessions in the future;
- The package of support offered to families will include coordinated programmes of support from other services such as health or drug / alcohol treatment to meet the needs of different family members;
- **Establishment of a 'Team around the Family'** of key services who can offer support to meet the family's needs in a coherent and coordinated manner; Services may be provided either within general or specialist multi-disciplinary teams, depending on the severity and complexity of the problem, but in all cases should be collaborative and coordinated. A strong focus on developing links with other agencies helps increase family accessibility to other services, also increasing practitioners' awareness of other agencies that could be brought in to help meet the needs of children, young people and families;
- Establish an **agreed single action plan** that outlines what support is to be offered to the family and by who and tasks to be undertaken by each family member and worker, so that the family know what everyone is doing and why; Have a clear written agreement which shows what we expect from the family as well as what they can expect from us. (It is a two way process);

- Provide ongoing encouragement to parents throughout the support process, remaining focused on improving outcomes for children and young people. Adopting a positive approach and a '**can do**' attitude even when challenging parents on difficult issues, supports the establishment of a good relationship between practitioners and parents;

Practitioners should recognise that for some parents there might be a willingness to want to make changes, but a lack of self-esteem or confidence in how to achieve this. For other parents, having to deal with some issues may be a daunting prospect. Using skills and qualities such as openness, respect and praise practitioners can support and encourage parents to make positive changes;

- **Provide practical 'hands on' support** to the family to address family issues; Directly supporting the family with practical tasks and challenges and having a hands on approach when necessary; Actions often speak louder than words and demonstrate that you are proactive and you genuinely want to help , always follow up what you have said you will do;
- **Working at flexible times** allowing parents/ carers to choose times and venues which suit them, when families are presented with unexpected calls it can make them defensive and angry which is not helpful when the worker may want to help the family think about difficult or challenging issues.
- Be on time, try not to cancel or reschedule appointments
- Being positive and courteous whilst being clear about concerns and what work needs to take place to achieve change and what support is needed to help the family achieve change;
- Be consistent even when getting a negative response;
- Use a trusted third party to help engage the family, this could be another family member or a professional the family already have a relationship with , do a joint home visit as a way of engaging with the family;

- Telephone contact, including texting if preferred by family, to speak to parent to arrange an appointment rather than sending an 'official' looking letter;
- Being mindful that some parents/carers are not be able to read letters or appointment invites;
- Being mindful that families may not keep diaries and may require support in remembering appointments;
- Model appropriate behaviour;
- The package of support offered to families could include access to evidence based parenting programme provision;
- Advocate on behalf of the family or family members;
- Recognise and acknowledge progress, using affirmations, even on a simple basis such as thanking them for their time if they have previously declined a visit.
- It is important that practitioners are able to help parents understand terminology, jargon or actions needed in a way that is not patronising. Presenting information to parents in plain English and at an appropriate level helps practitioners make sure that parents fully understand the information provided. Practitioners also have a role in presenting difficult information to parents in a sensitive and appropriate way.
- **Establishing a balance of support and challenge**; utilising the range of sanctions and rewards available;
- Reducing the **risk of sanctions** can also be a **reward** in motivating families to change. The worker and the 'Team around the Family' can support the family to improve their behaviour in order to avoid such actions, often initially through a temporary suspension arrangement with agencies whilst being clear with families about the risks facing them if change are not made or sustained. Possible sanctions could include a risk of a fine for poor school attendance or risk of eviction from tenancy.

- **Working with the family over an extended period of time** and ensuring ongoing support from a single agency practitioner when multi-agency response is no longer required;
- Provide the family with a **seamless service** that evidences the decisions are being made in the best interest of the child;
- Specifically observe parent-child dynamics to assess actual parenting as distinct from descriptions of how parents say they parent;
- Make sure endings are effective to support their next engagement experience;
- Access existing community resources that have good links with a range of agencies;



It is important to remember family engagement is not a one off event, i.e. getting through the front door to get the family to consent to being involved and accepting of help and support, it is also about engagement in the ongoing process of working towards positive outcomes for the children, young people and parents and carers.

## 10.0 Cycle of Change

It is vital that when working with families' that consideration is given to where the parent(s) are on the cycle of change in order assess their willingness to work to achieve and sustain the necessary changes. Capacity to change is made up of motivation and ability, and it is suggested in much research that if either of these is missing, the parent in question will lack the ability to change. **This is a critical element of effective engagement, if strategies are used which are known to work when a parent is in the 'determination' phase when the parent is still in the 'contemplation' phase, such strategies will likely to be ineffective.**

The use of DiClemente's model of change (1991) can be helpful to practitioners to understand the change cycle and its application to working with families

# Five stages of change



Stage of change	Indicator	Practitioner tasks and strategies
<b>Pre –contemplation</b>	<p>Most families are at this stage at the start of the contact with agencies;</p> <p>Parents will deny there is a problem and see no need to change. They may present as being defensive/denial/ projecting/minimising/ blame/depressed/ unaware of the problem;</p>	<p>Focus efforts to build a trusting relationship with the family;</p> <p>Raise parents' awareness of the problem and the possibility of change;</p> <p>Affirm strengths as starting points for change;</p> <p>Use motivational interviewing strategies to raise awareness and encourage questioning;</p> <p>Do not give prescriptive advice and avoid confrontation.</p>

<p><b>Contemplation</b></p>	<p><b>At this stage, the parents acknowledge there is a problem and will explore how to tackle it.</b></p> <p>Parent considers change but may need time to:</p> <p>Look at themselves and come to terms with what they see;</p> <p>appreciate the child's needs;</p> <p>count the cost of change;</p> <p>Identify the benefit of change;</p> <p>Identify goals which are meaningful to them. Parent can be ambivalent and may often feel 'stuck' .They may argue for and against change.</p>	<p>Identify the pros and cons of present behaviour as well as the pros and cons of change;</p> <p>Asserting the belief that change is possible;</p> <p>Helping family to see that they have the capacity to change;</p> <p>Exploring the options the family has considered for how they might change;</p> <p>Consider commitment and capacity to change;</p> <p>Recognise that each parent may be at a different stage of the change process;</p> <p>Recognise that different changes may be required from each parent;</p> <p>Help the parent tip the balance in favour of change;</p>
<p><b>Determination</b></p>	<p><b>At this stage parent has decided to change and wants to do something about the problem; There is now a window of opportunity for change;</b></p> <p>At this stage parents should be able to express</p> <p>Real problems and their effect on the child;</p> <p>changes they wish to make;</p> <p>specific goals to achieve change; how parents and professionals will co-operate to achieve the goals;</p> <p>the rewards of meeting goals;</p> <p>Consequences if change is not achieved.</p>	<p>Help the parent identify best actions to take for change;</p> <p>Identify short and long term goals;</p> <p>Identify internal and external resources to support change;</p> <p>Support their motivation for change;</p> <p>Start to work with the family to develop an agreed family support plan, (Change strategy) that is realistic, acceptable, accessible appropriate and effective.</p>

<p><b>Action</b></p>	<p>Parents take steps to change;  Parents engage in specific actions to bring about change;  This is the point of change, parents use themselves and services.  Family rehearse new thinking, behaviours and relationships.</p>	<p>Help parent to implement the support plan(change strategy);  Focus on short term goals;  Help them envision the long term goal;  Reframe when necessary;  Make sure all appointments are kept;  Advocate for the parent and identify available sources of support;  Review progress and any barriers to progress;  Planning for and rehearsing the ways of overcoming challenges and obstacles;  Be mindful of parents feeling overwhelmed and consequently disengage so clarity of goals is essential and recognising and praising progress however small.</p>
<p><b>Maintenance</b></p>	<p>This stage is about consolidating changes rehearsing and testing of new skills and coping strategies over time and in different conditions;  Sustaining and internalising new behaviour</p>	<p>Help parents identify the possibility of relapse;  Support parent to identify their triggers to relapse and develop coping strategies to prevent relapse;  Noticing, acknowledging affirming and celebrating successes;  Reflecting on the difficult challenging journey;  Talk about where the family will go from here .what is the next goal?</p>

## 10.1 The 'GROW' Model

One model that could be used to set goals and identify motivation to change is the **GROW** model:-

	GROW model	GROW Questions
<b>G</b>	<b>Goal</b> setting includes the initial short term goals and further on the medium and long-term goals;	<p>What do you want?</p> <p>What would be the goals from our working together?</p> <p>What does success look like and feel like for you?</p> <p>How much influence or control do you have over the goal?</p>
<b>R</b>	<b>Reality</b> checking to explore in full the current situation	<p>What happens now?</p> <p>What have you done so far about this?</p> <p>Who is involved and who else could be involved?</p> <p>What has stopped you so far from achieving this goal?</p>
<b>O</b>	Options and alternative strategies or course of action	<p>What could you do?</p> <p>And what else could you do?</p> <p>What are the benefits for each option and are there any costs?</p> <p>Can you think of any risks?</p>
<b>W</b>	What will be done, when, by whom, and the WILL to do it. (Motivation to change)	<p>What will you do?</p> <p>Will this meet your objective or goal?</p> <p>Who needs to know, and what is your next step?</p> <p>What support do you need and who will provide this</p>

### Listen for “change talk”

*I could try ...  
It may work if ...*

### Non-change talk:

*That would not work  
Yes, but it is not*



Sometimes, insufficient time is spent identifying the “real goal” and the temptation to move to the next step of identifying “the reality” and this can create a sense of rush.

## 11.0 When engagement is difficult or not working

Where engagement continues to be difficult and workers have not found a way to help the parent/carer see the benefits to them of being involved in the support on offer and they are still unwilling to participate, the Lead Professional and/or the ‘Team around the Family’ need to re-evaluate the engagement strategy otherwise the impact can be:

- everyone withdraws leaving the child at risk of ongoing poor outcomes and/or unprotected;
- the family is ‘punished’ by the withholding of some services at the expense of assessing and resolving the situation for the child;
- there is a divide between those who want to appease the parents and those who want to oppose - or everyone colludes.



It is paramount that practitioners adhere to their own organisations policies and procedures to address their own personal safety when working to effectively engage a family. E.g. Lone Working Policy. LSCB procedures must also be adhered to if at any time concerns are raised over the serious harm to child/ren/ young people or if a crime is being committed.

## 11.1 Strategies which may be helpful when engagement is difficult or not working

Re-evaluating the engagement strategy and communication techniques needs to begin with reflecting **on what has not worked and on what might work in the future.**

**These may include:-**

- use a **strength based approach** to identify small signs of positive engagement with a view to building successes. This can be used where there is a level of avoidance by the family to engage. Utilise techniques of being flexible and times and venues to meet and consider the possibility of having contact with the family jointly with another person in whom the family has confidence;
- adopt a **balanced approach**: professionals must attain and hold a balanced position and be able to shift that position to reflect changing circumstances for children – there will be times when an optimistic and supportive position should take precedence and others when a more explicit scepticism and mistrusting approach is warranted
- **use an authoritative approach** aimed at containing anxiety and ensuring that the child's needs and outcomes stay in sharp focus. "Authoritative practice means that professionals are aware of their professional power, use it judiciously and that they also interact with clients and other professionals with sensitivity, empathy, willingness to listen and negotiate and to engage in partnerships. They respect client autonomy and dignity while recognising their primary responsibility is the protection of children from harm and the promotion of their well-being." It is important that practitioners are clear about what can and cannot be negotiated and try to identify what the resistance is really about and what is working well;
- discuss the issues/concerns with the child, young person and family and identify solutions together;
- **continue to be open and honest** with the family about why the offer of support will be beneficial to all family and where required state professional and/or legal authority;
- **use Motivational Interviewing Techniques** to help the family see that change is possible and to non-judgementally develop reasons why change should be tried;
- **seek advice and information from other professionals** known to the family to ascertain a clear picture of any ongoing concerns or progress made with the family and avoid being overly optimistic over changes that have yet to be sustained and retain a clear focus on achieving outcomes for the child;
- listen to the family and demonstrate understanding of what is being said;

- confront uncooperativeness when it arises; **where confrontation** is an issue it is important in these situations that workers are clear about their role and purpose by demonstrating a concern to support the family. However at some point the parent's behaviour will have to be challenged safely so they are able to understand that professionals will not give up working with the family. This may require the professional/having to cope with confrontation until co-operation can be achieved;
- where violence is threatened or actual the practitioner must ensure the child's welfare remains paramount at all times. Professionals need to be realistic about the adult's capacity to change and internal health and safety policies must be adhered to as well as seeking legal advice where necessary. Ask yourself if I feel scared what it like is for the child living in the family. Threats of violence should be challenged by child protection agencies and in dangerous situations professionals should not work alone;
- ensure that parents understand what is required of them and the consequences of not fulfilling these requirements. At the end of each contact it may be helpful to provide a summary of what the purpose has been, what has been done, what is required by whom and when;
- be willing to take appropriate action to protect the child/ren, despite the action giving rise to a feeling of personal failure by the professional in the task of engaging the parent/s;
- practitioners must ensure they access regular supervision with their manager to ensure that progress or lack of engagement with the family is discussed and addressed;

## **11.2 Lead Professional Responsibility**

Where engagement with a family, for whatever reason, is preventing professionals from working with them it is important for workers to record and assess what area of engagement is difficult to achieve and why.

Practitioners must also consider what impact the family's lack of engagement is having on undertaking the Early Help Assessment and/or delivery of the action plan support and interventions and the potential impact on the wellbeing and protection of the child/ren within the family.

Practitioners identifying an issue arising from concerns about poor access/engagement should seek to promptly:

- discuss the concerns/issues with their Line Manager
- ensure all discussions and attempts at engagement are clearly recorded;
- gather information from other services known to the family;
- consider what other agencies need to be informed of the engagement difficulties;
- consider how quickly it is necessary to respond; is there a need for immediate action?
- Meet as a 'team around the family' to discuss barriers to engagement and agree an action plan to address and overcome these



**LSCB Child Protection procedures must be followed where there are concerns over serious harm to children/ young people or if a crime is being committed**