

Hard to engage families – advice for practitioners

All agencies and organisations should devise and implement policies on working to engage with children, young people and their families more effectively. They should consider their roles as referring and/or receiving agencies and devise policy appropriately

Working with families who are hard to engage is a commonly recognised feature in safeguarding and the SSCP seek to challenge all agencies and organisations to consider how they ensure the fullest engagement possible of young people and families.

There are many reasons for families finding it hard to engage. Children and families reluctance to engage can show itself in several ways, including:

- ambivalence towards the service;
- denial of the need for the service or avoidance of it;
- lack of response to the service, despite apparently cooperating and complying; and/or
- hostility (sometimes including violence) towards the service provider(s).

Frequently this reluctance to engage can be overcome through (amongst others):

- communication;
- understanding of the perceptions of the service user; often through
- understanding of social, cultural, religious and ethnic background of the service user in addition to other diversity factors of the individual including age, gender and sexuality;
- flexibility in adapting to the diverse needs of individual service users; and
- understanding the service user's history and expectations of the service.

Preparing and implementing policies to overcome this reluctance can have (amongst others) the following benefits:

- improved safeguarding for children and families
- better meeting the individual needs of the child and family
- reduction in waste of resource for the receiving agency;
- reliable referral pathways for the referring agency;
- increases ownership, responsibility and clarity of approach; and
- it informs equality impact assessments (a statutory requirement under the Equality Act 2010).

NSPCC Solution-Focused Practice Toolkit

NSPCC have created a free solution focused practice toolkit to work with children and young people young people available from www.nspcc.org.uk/solution-focused-practice-toolkit