

Resistant Families – Working with Refusal to Consent or Engage

Some families will refuse to consent or co-operate when early help is suggested. Sometimes verbal consent will be given (as a result of a Safeguarding referral) and then withdrawn when a professional or practitioner attempts to engage the family. Other families, where there have been no safeguarding concerns raised, will refuse offers of early help and may be suspicious of professionals' intentions.

- Where the family has come to you through an Early Help Assessment recommendation from the Early Help team in MASH, consider escalating the family's refusal to consent or engage in support to the Early Help Support Service who can offer advice and guidance. They can be contacted on **0300 126 1000, select Option 1 and then Option 2.**
- If the family has come to you through a referral from another agency, contact the referrer if the family refuse to engage. They may have a better relationship with the family and can support you with a warm handover/joint visit.
- If you are attempting to make contact with a family by telephone, make attempts at different times of the day and on different days. Record these attempts on the family file. Check the number you have and look for an alternative in your records or on the referral if there is no response.
- If you have an address and have not been able to make contact by telephone, you might consider calling at the property to leave an invitation to the family to make contact. The invitation should be an offer of support and include contact details of a named individual.

Resistant Families – Working with Disguised Compliance

Disguised compliance, resistance and denial are common features of families with early help needs. Apparent resistance may be the result of fear, stigma, shame, denial, ambivalence, or the parent's lack of confidence in their ability to change or lack of insight into their parenting capability and the impact on their children.

- Indicators of disguised compliance can include: a lack of measurable progress at reviews, despite apparent effort and co-operation from parents; parental agreement to change but not completing agreed actions to achieve it; change occurring due to the efforts of other agencies rather than the parents; inconsistency in the areas where change is achieved with parents opting to work with some professionals and not others or on some actions and not others; children's views differing significantly from that of the parents.
- Look out for missed appointments; exaggerated co-operation and compliance; attempts to minimise professionals' concerns or denial of the impact of the lived experience of the child; aggressive or threatening behaviour when challenged; unjustified claims of progress being made or actions carried out and a refusal to discuss key issues whilst focussing on others that have less or no impact for the child.
- Some parents may be resistant to the involvement of professionals, rather than resistant to change in itself, particularly where they feel professionals are excising power over them instead of working with

them in a supportive manner. Consider the professional relationship with parents and ensure parents feel respected and avoid judgmental language or assertions about their behaviours or motivation.

- Be alert to the risk of collusion with parents. Where parents appear co-operative, remain open to hearing the voice of the child throughout the process and always measure parents' assertions there has been progress against the child's lived experience. See and speak to the child regularly.
- Ensure there is *evidence* of improvement through the use of assessment tools and do not rely solely on the parents' views to measure success. Cross check against the evidence, maintain 'respectful uncertainty' and check what parents say with other professionals.
- Without good evidence, do not be over-optimistic about progress. Share information with other professionals regularly and check on their view of progress made to challenge your assumptions.
- Challenge your approach with the family through supervision. With your supervisor, hypothesise about possible underlying issues that parents may not want to face, consider evidence carefully and reflect on the quality of parental engagement and motivation to change when progress is not being achieved.
- Where parents are openly hostile or aggressive, consider risk to the worker and discuss in supervision the strategies needed to overcome this. Re-evaluate risk to the worker and the child regularly.