

# Principles of engagement to improve communicating and working with people



Richmond and  
Wandsworth  
**Safeguarding  
Adults Board**

## Who can services have difficulties engaging with?

- People who are under distress and feel they have no option but to live in a situation that places them or others at risk.
- People who have capacity but limited cognitive understanding that makes it difficult to make decisions around risk.
- People who are socially isolated which leads them to increased anxiety, feeling unsafe and leading to acute crisis.
- People who have multiple exclusions e.g., homeless, moving around services and struggle with substance misuse or mental health, violence which is having direct impact on their health & well-being.

## Professionals' Challenges

- Significantly increased risk of mental health problems in those who have experienced trauma and impact on their behaviour.
- Excessive hoarding causing health and safety concerns.
- Personal or domestic hygiene that exacerbates a medical condition and could lead to a serious health problem.
- The condition of the property and potential risks to others living in a block of flats (i.e., increase risks of fire) could lead to possible eviction.
- Structural problems with the property and the person cannot afford repairs or refuses to do so.
- Anti-social behaviour that results to frequent complaints and causes social isolation.
- The conditions in the property cause a potential risk to agencies providing support and services.
- People could have consistent difficulty organising their lives, may lose family or friends support and become isolated, which put them at risk of exploitation.

*There could be other wide-ranging situations not listed here, or a situation could include a combination of the above.*

## Why do people at times not engage with services?



- People with complex histories can often have lack of trust in institutions and/or professionals.
- People could have pride in self-sufficiency. They could find it hard to admit they might need help.
- Sense of connectedness to a place or possession.
- Having experienced, or currently experiencing loss or traumatic life events.
- Adverse Childhood Experiences.
- A drive to preserve continuity of identity and control, which includes ethnicity, culture, religious beliefs.
- Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health problems e.g., personality disorder, depression, dementia.
- Cognitive impairments e.g., learning disability, Diogenes syndrome (chronic hoarding).
- Diminishing social networks and/or economic resources.
- Manipulation, coercive control and bullying by others.



## How can we work better with people so we could find ways to engage with them?

Professionals should use flexible approaches to encourage engagement to reach out, recognising that people's circumstances may mean they are unable to respond in a timely and traditional way. Ensure all responsibilities of the Equalities Act, reasonable

adjustments and protected characteristics are considered. In addition, consider the individual needs, for example of Autistic people, young people and those with fluctuating capacity.

**The following Principles of Engagement should be followed:**

## Principles of Engagement

### 1. Ask the person what their preferred method of communication is.

Knowing how the person prefers to be communicated with will improve the chances of them being able to engage. Consider factors including:

- The person's ability to read and write.
- Language considerations - what is the person's first language? Is it possible to provide information in a different language or format?
- Does the person have a sensory impairment? If so, what support does the person require to help them engage? For example, this could include the use of an interpreter.
- Safety, for example, if the person is experiencing domestic abuse, is it safe to send a letter to their address?

### 2. Recognise the extent to which a person's vulnerability may impact on their ability to engage.

Consider factors such as Learning Disability, substance use and capacity. Always consider what you know about a person's vulnerability and the extent to which it may impact on the person's ability to engage.

### 3. Use the Mental Capacity Act (MCA)

Remember to use the Mental Capacity Act to empower people to make decisions and support people who may lack the capacity to make some decisions. Remember to consider the extent to which a person's capacity to engage with services may have been affected by threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour.

### 4. Consider the person's mental capacity to engage but also the consequences of non-engagement.

When considering a person's capacity in relation to engagement it is really important to consider whether the person understands the consequences of non-engagement. The risks might relate to areas such as the person's health, access to benefits, offers of care and support.

### 5. Where possible, identify a lead professional to build up a trusting relationship with the person.

Whilst this may not always be possible, it is really helpful for the person if they have an identified lead worker. The lead worker will be in a vital position for monitoring trends of engagement, sharing information and assisting the person through service navigation. The lead professional may change depending on the circumstances of the case and the management of risk remains a shared responsibility. As part of the safeguarding adults process consideration must also be given to whether the adult may benefit from the support of an independent advocate.

### 6. Don't assume that someone else is dealing with the problem.

When a person's circumstances change, or concerns arise about their lack of engagement, don't presume that other professionals are aware of what you know. Build up good relationships with professionals from other agencies and ensure that information is shared appropriately, using safeguarding procedures if required. Where a Safeguarding Adults Plan is in place, it should be clear how information will be shared between all of the agencies involved, including how concerns will be escalated if the person's lack of engagement continues to be a risk factor.

### 7. Be careful what you record around engagement or lack of.

The language used in your recording can make a big difference. Terms like "failed to attend" and "difficult to engage with" place the emphasis solely on the person, there may be external factors impacting on a person's ability to engage. Recording of this nature can also affect the way another professional may approach the case.

### 8. Remember, engagement may fluctuate.

Just because a person has not engaged with services in the past, it does not mean that this will always be the case, this time it might be different. Be tenacious with clients and always let them know that services are available should they need them.

### 9. What else can we do?

- Arrange a multi-agency meeting – see the [Multi-agency Risk Assessment Framework](#) or use [Safeguarding Adults Procedures](#) to support a multi-agency intervention plan which explores wider range of professionals' involvement to establish any better avenues for engagement.
- Escalate to the police if there are safety concerns for the person or others.

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