

What is Engagement?

Engagement is about exploring what matters to people and what works for them whilst developing, discussing, and testing new ideas.

Engagement requires professionals and people with lived experience to build professional working relationships and work together to accomplish agreed goals.

Why Engage?

Engagement is vital to the process practitioners use to build trust and encourage individuals to become active and involved in the pursuit and accomplishment of agreed goals.

Safeguarding practice demands professionals build on strengths, be tenacious and creative, to promote positive relationships that better support effective engagement.

Individuals You May Have Challenges Engaging With

- In distress and feel they have no option but to live in a situation that places them at risk.
- Have capacity but their cognitive understanding makes it difficult to make decisions about risk.
- Are socially isolated, leading to increased anxiety and feelings of being unsafe.
- Have multiple exclusions such as homelessness, substance use concerns, a learning disability or autism, experience of mental ill-health, and/or experiencing violence.
- Have Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) or who have experienced or currently experiencing loss or traumatic or life events. Have complex histories who can often have a lack of trust in professionals.
- Have pride in being self sufficient and find it hard to accept or admit they may need help.
- A determination to preserve continuity of identity and control, including ethnicity, culture, religious beliefs. Individual may have diminishing social networks and/or economic resources.

Who may be being manipulated, coerced or bullied by others!

Key Messages

- Clear communication is crucial for engagement, share:
 - the reason(s) for contacting them;
 - what is going to happen next;
 - what the likely outcomes could be.
- Seek to understand and respond in ways that are appropriate for the person and their situation. Be aware of language barriers, communication difficulties, a person's vulnerabilities or cultural factors.
- Establish a meaningful relationship based on trust and respect, which is developed over time.
- Work face to face together with the person to create a shared plan.
- Listen to and understand the person's perspective and respond in a meaningful way, using a trauma informed approach. **Perseverance and empathy are crucial.**
- Ensure the person is involved in discussions and decisions, ensuring access to appropriate support e.g. independent advocacy.
- Be clear and honest about what you are doing. Provide information and decisions clearly, in verbal and written formats.

People with lived experience share the same requests:

- Believe us
- Listen to us
- Support us
- Give us choices

What Does it Mean for Professionals?

- Consider how you will communicate with individuals, what is their preferred method of communication?
- Avoid professional language, jargon, or acronyms to enable the person to be actively involved and ensure clear communication.
- Be proportionate with the information you are providing so as not to overwhelm.

Build trust by:

- **Being consistent**
- **Keeping promises**
- **Being honest**
- **Apologise if you or your organisation make a mistake**

- People may have intense emotions from previous experiences in working with professionals, acknowledge this.
- Engagement may fluctuate, show you care, keep communication lines open, actively listen, and work together with the person's circumstances.
- Maintain a consistent worker/group of workers as engagement works best when trusted relationships are built.
- Work in partnership with other agencies to deliver consistent support.
- Work in a strengths-based way to support the person with things they prioritise e.g. practical tasks, support to attend appointments.
- Be flexible and work at the individual's pace.
- Be aware of power imbalances and empower the person by seeking their views and ensuring their preferred outcomes are identified.
- Consider coercion & control as a factor where you may not be able to engage with the person.
- Use the principles of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) to support decision-making.
- Explore the use of advocacy and independent mediation services where required.
- Reflect on what is working well with the person and adapt where change is required to learn & improve.
- Be willing to have difficult conversations sensitively and respectfully.
- Empower yourself to have confidence and ask for support where needed, through peer support, forums and reflective supervision.

Reminder: Solihull Safeguarding Adults Board regularly seek feedback from people going through the safeguarding process, therefore please can you ask the people you are supporting if they are willing to share their experiences, to help inform SSAB's work and continue to improve the ongoing process.

Engagement takes time and persistence. Progress can often be slow. **Persevere!**

Be Tenacious. Be Patient. Do Not Close!

“Building a relationship will support the adult to be involved in their own protection, by exploring their situation, identifying potential outcomes and recovering from harm”

(Spreadbury and Hubbard, 2020)

Resources

Click below to access each resource

- **Engagement Report - Engagement with children and young people** - (Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse)
- **Engagement Toolkit** - (Safeguarding Adults Board Network)
- **Engaging with Complexity - Providing effective trauma-informed care for women** - (Centre for Mental Health)
- **Engaging with Involuntary Service Users in Social Work - Good practice guide** - (University of Edinburgh)
- **Principles of Engagement to Improve Communicating and Working with People** - (Richmond & Wandsworth Safeguarding Adults Board)
- **Principles of Engagement within the Safeguarding Adults Process** - (Gateshead Safeguarding Adults Board)
- **Self Neglect Policy** - (Worcestershire Safeguarding Boards)
- **West Midlands Adult Self Neglect Best Practice Guidance** - (West Midlands Adult Safeguarding Group)

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