



BOLTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD - LESSONS LEARNED BRIEFING - CHILD SB

Recognising and Responding to Resistance

One of the key themes to emerge from this review was the challenge of working with parents and a young person who were resistant to engage with services.

While this theme is not unique to Bolton, SB's review highlighted the continuing challenge practitioner's face and the powerlessness they experience at times in knowing how to respond.

This briefing supports practitioners to reflect on the learning and consider what this means for their current practice.

NB – read the briefing from left to right

WHAT DOES RESISTANCE LOOK LIKE?

In SB's case resistance presented mainly as hostility, aggressiveness and avoidance of agency contacts.

There are four broad 'types' of resistance:-

Ambivalence: there is inconsistency in the level of contact with the child and parents; there is an unwillingness by parents to acknowledge that things are not right for their child or there is a level of acknowledgement but the responsibility for this is placed on others

WHY IS THERE RESISTANCE?

There are a number of reasons why children and families do not want to access the help and support on offer. Generally it's because:-

They may have limited understanding of what is expected of them

Past experience of services has made them suspicious and reluctant to engage with support

Some may doubt their ability to make the changes required while others can't see the need to change
Embarrassment or shame in being labelled a failing parent or a child abuser

WHAT CAN HELP

Keep an up to date chronology and use it to identify any patterns ; if you can, collate a multi-agency chronology - this tool can provide evidence to support or challenge parents; it will also evidence any progress in complex situations

If you can't engage with the child or parents - consider if there is someone in the multi-agency system who can - are you making use of this resource effectively

In your analysis scrutinise what you know to be true, with what you observe and with what the child and parents tell you
Have a clear plan that sets out the goal and timescales and that there are clear contingencies that are understood and actioned

Avoidance: a very common method of uncooperativeness, including avoiding appointments, missing meetings, and cutting visits short, not answering contacts or responding to requests to meet

Confrontation: includes challenging professionals, provoking arguments and often indicates a deep-seated lack of trust leading to a 'fight' rather than 'flight' response to difficult situations

Violence: threatened or actual violence from the child or parents; it is important to remember this is a very small minority of families and is usually utilised where they have experience of getting their way through intimidation and violent behaviour

CHALLENGES FOR PRACTITIONERS

Legislation encourages us to work in partnership with children and parents, while using judgement, power and control to effect change and keep children safe - this requires a combination of skills which include a support and challenge element.

At times this can lead to over-optimism, to much focus on the parents needs at the expense of the child and a lack of challenge when progress is slow

At the other extreme practitioners can adopt an overly confrontational approach, particularly when they become frustrated

REFLECTING ON LESSONS LEARNED

There will be cases you will be working with where there is a level of resistance - it is important that you consider and reflect on :-
What form does the resistance take?

Why might this child or these parents be reluctant to accept help?
Have I talked openly to the child or the parents about the resistance?

What impact is the resistance to help and support having on the child? What is it like to be a child living in this family?

Is there high service involvement but little evidence of impact or change for the child?

Is my manager aware of the challenges of working with the child or their parents and have we considered what this means for the child's safety and welfare?