



Perth and Kinross Child Protection Committee
A Practitioner's Guide:
Working with Hostile and / or Non-Engaging
Parents and Carers - Child Protection

Getting it Right
in Perth and Kinross
Helping children be the best they can be

What to do if you are worried about a child or young person?

If you are worried or concerned about a child or young person you should contact the Perth and Kinross Child Protection Duty Team or Police Scotland:

Perth and Kinross Child Protection Duty Team - (24 hours)	01738 476768
Police Scotland Non-Emergency	101
In an Emergency	Call 999

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Introduction and Purpose

This Practitioner Guidance has been produced by Perth and Kinross Child Protection Committee (CPC) to assist all practitioners and managers working **with hostile and / or non-engaging parents and carers**, especially when there are child protection concerns.

This guidance is for **all** practitioners and managers working with children and families across the public, private and third sectors in Perth and Kinross. It aims to support, protect and empower **all** staff. This guidance may also be particularly helpful to managers who manage and / or supervise practitioners who may, as part of their work, encounter hostile and / or non-engaging behaviours from time to time. This guidance should assist staff to identify how these behaviours can impact on their own welfare and on their ability to undertake required tasks.

Given the number of unknown variables (types of concern, levels of risk, previous behaviours, timescales etc) it is not possible, within the confines of this guidance to identify and / or predict every type of situation which may arise. Nevertheless, there will always be a need for *professional judgement and common sense* to be exercised by the case worker and / or his / her Line Manager / Supervisor.

This guidance should **complement**, not replace, any existing single service and / or agency guidance. It also needs to be considered in conjunction with existing individual service and / or agency generic Health and Safety Risk Assessment procedures, policies and procedures relating to violence and aggression towards staff.

Definitions

Within Perth and Kinross, for the purpose of this guidance, the following broad definitions are being used to describe **hostile and / or non-engaging** behaviours.

Hostile

This involves any behaviour which has a damaging effect, physically and / or emotionally on a third party. This could include a range of behaviours such as actual physical violence, being verbally abusive and / or emotionally abusive. It could also include behaviour which is confrontational, hostile, threatening and / or intimidatory. Intimidation can also extend to making inappropriate use of the complaints system against staff members. The impact of such behaviours on individual staff will vary, but the fear of violence and / or aggression is widely recognised as impacting on judgements, interpretation and intervention.

Non-Engaging

This involves any behaviour which proactively sabotages efforts put in place by practitioners to effect change. This could include a range of ambivalent behaviours aimed at undermining processes, such as being deliberately non-compliant and / or evasive, paying lip service to agreements, failing to keep agreed appointments, being late for appointments and / or frequently changing appointments, cutting visits short, refusing to allow access to the child and / or the home, putting little effort into making the changes work or simply being passive to the involvement of practitioners.

Recognition, Assessment and Response

All practitioners and managers should be alert to a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming, **hostile and / or non-engaging**. They should also know how to respond effectively. The following guidance should assist practitioners in doing so.

The following practice notes can help practitioners and managers to identify when a parent and / or carer is becoming **hostile and / or non-engaging**.

PRACTICE NOTE ONE

- *Practitioners and managers should be aware that the behaviours of a parent and / or carer can be misinterpreted. For example, what may appear to be hostile and / or non-engaging behaviours may mask hidden issues in the family such as domestic abuse; parental problematic alcohol and / or drug use; parental mental ill health and / or parental learning difficulties;*
- *Practitioners and managers should have a broad understanding of these complex issues and the potential impact on the child and / or young person;*
- *Practitioners and managers should also take into account the parenting capacity of the parents and / or carer, together with their race; ethnicity; language; cultural and religious backgrounds where this may impact on their behaviour, attitudes or responses;*
- *Practitioners and managers should recognise hostile and / or non-engaging behaviours and know what action to take quickly and effectively in response to these behaviours. Practitioners should always alert their Line Manager / Supervisor to such behaviours;*

- ***Practitioners and managers should be aware that they could feel intimidated by these behaviours and that this is a natural reaction to these behaviours;***
- ***Practitioners and managers should continue to make every effort to meet with, and to engage with, a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming, hostile and / or non-engaging and where possible, should meet them in an appropriate, supportive setting and / or environment; and***
- ***Practitioners and managers should see and / or attempt to see the child / young person to be assured that the child / young person is safe. Where this is not possible it may be necessary to exercise emergency powers to assess the well-being and safety of the child / young person.***

Impact

We must recognise that working with a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming hostile and / or non-engaging is very challenging.

In many cases practitioners will find this very difficult and intimidating. This will, without doubt, have an impact on the practitioners directly involved with the child, young person and family.

In these circumstances, support from Line Managers / Supervisors is vitally important, as is robust supervision of staff.

The following practice notes can also help practitioners and managers to consider potential factors which may, or may not be having an impact on practitioners working with a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming, hostile and / or non-engaging and help to clarify the source of the hostility.

In addition practitioners and managers may also find some further information and advice, taken from a wide range of literature, useful when working with and / or managing hostile and / or non engaging parents and / or carers (**Appendix A**).

PRACTICE NOTE TWO

- ***What information is held by services and / or agencies with regard to the parent and / or carer?***
- ***What factors of past and current behaviours are known and / or suspected?***
- ***What is the nature of the hostile and / or non-engaging behaviour and why is the parent and / or carer behaving like this?***
- ***Is this behaviour directed at a single practitioner and / or agency, or is it simply universal?***
- ***Will any particular practitioner be perceived as a threat to the parent and / or carer and if so why?***
- ***Does the parent and / or carer have a mental ill-health issue and / or a history of mental ill-health / mental disorder?***
- ***Does the parent and / or carer have a medical condition which may result in a loss of self-control?***
- ***Does the parent and / or carer have a learning disability?***
- ***Does the parent and / or carer have a problematic alcohol and / or drug use issue?***
- ***Are there any gender issues to consider?***
- ***Are there any race, language, ethnicity, cultural and / or religious issues?***
- ***How is the child or young person coping in their current circumstances?***
and
- ***Is there any new information about the parent and / or carer to suggest that the child or young person is considered to be at significant risk of harm or immediate danger – if so what action should be taken, without delay, to ensure the child or young person's safety?***

Practitioners – Advice and Support

Avoiding people who are hostile and / or non-engaging is a normal human response.

In many cases practitioners will find these behaviours very difficult and / or intimidating. Whilst this is a perfectly natural feeling and reaction it can, in some circumstances, lead to potential drift in terms of service provision and support. It is important, therefore, that all practitioners can identify and be alert to these behaviours, share and exchange relevant information with others, and seek further support and guidance from their Line Manager / Supervisor.

Practitioners may find the following practice notes helpful when working with a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming hostile and / or non-engaging.

PRACTICE NOTE THREE

- ***Practitioners should confirm their professional and / or legal authority to work with the child, young person and family;***
- ***Practitioners should confront any behaviour that is considered to be hostile and / or non-engaging;***
- ***Practitioners should keep the relationship formal, though supportive and confirm that the aim of the work is to achieve the best possible outcome for the child;***
- ***Practitioners should continue to share relevant information with other services and / or agencies involved with the child or young person, maintain good record keeping and seek support from their peers and Line Manager / Supervisor. It is also important to emphasise the need to continue to share and exchange information from all available sources.***

Practitioners should also be aware of the impact hostile and / or non-engaging behaviour could have on them personally.

Some practitioners are able to respond to hostile and / or non-engaging families in a positive way which indicates that they are untroubled by such conflict, whilst other practitioners simply cannot. It is important that practitioners understand that this is not unusual and they should not be embarrassed in any way by their reaction and / or response to hostile and / or non-engaging behaviours.

The impact on practitioners may be felt and expressed in a number of different ways which could include:

- Surprise and / or embarrassment;
- Numbness and / or denial;
- Distress and / or fear;
- Avoidance;
- Self-doubt and / or guilt;
- Shock and / or anger;
- Loss of self-esteem and of personal and / or professional confidence;
- A sense of loss and / or helplessness;
- Sleep and dream disturbance; and
- Hyper vigilance.

In more serious cases practitioners may be impacted as follows:

- Preoccupation with the event or related events;
- Repetitive stressful thoughts, images and emotions;
- Illness;
- Post traumatic stress; and
- Loss of objectivity in similar and / or future situations.

When planning necessary work with hostile and / or non-engaging parents and carers it is important that Line Managers / Supervisors acknowledge the impact, or likely impact, on practitioners of such work.

All practitioners have a responsibility to consider their own health and safety just as their Line Manager / Supervisor and their service and / or agency has a responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of all staff.

Planning

It is essential that a plan is formulated between the Line Manager / Supervisor and the practitioner prior to working with parents and carers known to be, or likely to be, hostile and / or non-engaging. The following practice note gives examples of those issues which should be considered prior to contacting a parent and / or carer who is hostile and / or non engaging.

PRACTICE NOTE FOUR

Prior to contacting a parent and / or carer who is hostile and / or non-engaging, practitioners should consider the following additional factors:

- ***Am I clear about the nature of the perceived risk from the hostile or non engaging parent or carer?***
- ***Have I fully planned for contact with the hostile or non-engaging parent or carer?***
- ***Does this visit need to take place or should an inter-agency meeting take place first to discuss issues / concerns?***
- ***Should I make this visit jointly with a colleague from my own service and / or agency and / or another service and / or agency including the police?***
- ***Should I arrange this visit at the office or at a neutral venue?***
- ***Do I have a mobile phone with me or some other means of summoning help (e.g. personal alarm)?***
- ***Are my colleagues and / or my Line Manager / Supervisor aware of where I am going and when I should be back?***
- ***Have I discussed my fears about my perceived vulnerability during the visit?***
- ***Does my Line Manager / Supervisor know my mobile phone number, my car registration number and my home address and phone number?***
- ***Are there clear procedures for what should be done if a practitioner does not return or report back within the agreed time from a home visit and have I discussed this and my role in it with my colleagues / Line Manager / Supervisor?***
- ***Do my family members know how to contact someone from work if I do not come home as expected?***
- ***Have I accessed any personal safety training? and***
- ***Is it possible for me to continue to work effectively with this family?***

Line Managers/Supervisors – Advice and Support

Line Managers / Supervisors have many responsibilities, including briefing / debriefing and learning and development, for ensuring the health and safety of their staff and for their general day to day supervision and support.

This includes monitoring, reviewing and supporting staff via supervision. ***In terms of this guidance, by far the greatest responsibility is the requirement for supportive and robust supervision and clear planning around managing contact.***

Line Managers / Supervisors should also be aware that *“heightened stress reduces the capacity of parents and workers to keep at-risk children in mind and in focus”* (Howe 2010).

Line Managers / Supervisors may find the following practice notes helpful when supporting and supervising their practitioners working with a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming, hostile and / or non-engaging:

PRACTICE NOTE FIVE

- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should, when allocating cases, be mindful of the skills, knowledge and capacity of their practitioners;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should empower their practitioners to take charge of situations and have confidence in their actions, whilst also recognising the capacity and limitations of their practitioners and acknowledging external threats to the practitioner’s safety and well-being;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should support practitioners to have confidence and / or be able to speak freely about any concerns relating to children and families;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should ensure that regular discussions take place with practitioners who are working with a parent and / or carer who is or is becoming hostile and / or non-engaging;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should prioritise case supervisions as appropriate and necessary, particularly where the parent and / or carer is or is becoming hostile and / or non-engaging;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should ensure that health and safety is part of all new employee inductions;***

- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should keep health and safety as a standing item on the agenda of their team meetings and in doing so may find the practice notes and checklists within this guidance helpful;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should ensure staff have access to learning and development opportunities that take into account current research and practice developments, particularly in terms of hostile and / or non-engaging parents and carers;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should be alert to a parent and / or carer who is, or is becoming, hostile and / or non-engaging and the potential impact upon their practitioners and, most importantly, on the welfare of the child;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should deal with these situations sensitively acknowledging and addressing the impact upon individual practitioners;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should ensure that information about a parent and / or a carer who, is or is becoming, hostile and / or non-engaging is properly recorded in case file notes and on electronic systems and that this information is shared with other practitioners, service/agencies as necessary;***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should ensure that when a parent and / or carer is, or is becoming, hostile and / or non-engaging, alerts and / or places flags on electronic databases and within case files to alert other practitioners; and***
- ***Line Managers / Supervisors should ensure that their practitioners have been provided with a copy of this guidance and have had an opportunity to read and discuss it individually and collectively within their staff teams.***

Service / Agency – Responsibilities

All services and agencies have a legal responsibility for the care, protection, welfare and safety of their staff, both in and out of the workplace. All services and agencies should also have in place robust supervision arrangements for staff who may actually be working with hostile and / or non-engaging parents and carers and, in addition, all staff should have access to professional practice advice and assistance.

Staff Care and Welfare

In addition to line management support and supervision arrangements, all services and agencies should have in place self-referral schemes and / or arrangements which provide access to confidential support, help and / or assistance to staff.

Normally these arrangements are in place via Human Resources and / or Occupational Health. These services should be clearly signposted and all practitioners and managers should be aware of how to contact and access them as and when they may require doing so. In certain cases it may be necessary to continue that support beyond the practitioner's current involvement with hostile and / or non-engaging parents and carers. An example of such arrangements is the *Police Scotland Trauma Risk Management Policy*.

Recording of Incidents

In terms of health and safety requirements all services and agencies will have in place health and safety risk assessment procedures, and all practitioners and managers should be aware of them and / or how to access them. In addition, all services and agencies should have in place systems and processes relating to the reporting and recording of incidents involving violence and aggression towards staff.

It is important that all practitioners and managers are aware of these arrangements and that those managers, in particular, identify any risks or actual incidents of violence and aggression and ensure that they are reported and recorded correctly.

An example of such arrangements is the *Perth and Kinross Council Violence and Aggression Policy*.

Finally – Remember

PRACTICE NOTE SIX

Keep alert to any behaviour you consider to be hostile and / or non-engaging;

Doing nothing is not an option;

Do not be afraid or embarrassed if you feel intimidated in any way – this is normal;

Seek and share information quickly and effectively;

Seek support from your peers and your Line Manager / Supervisor;

Always consider your own safety, the safety of others and the safety of the child or young person – that is paramount

and

Always ensure that a plan is in place for working with hostile and / or non-engaging parents and carers.

Suggested Approaches to Aggression Management – Basic Intervention Strategies

This is just a list of suggestions taken from a wide range of associated literature which practitioners and managers may find useful in a variety of situations:

- Try to get the aggressor to agree to something, either in word or action, to initiate the start of co-operation;
- Try to accept and re-interpret their hostile actions in a more positive light, seeking points of similarity rather than differences and enlisting their help as allies rather than enemies;
- Try to comment on the other person's behaviour, rather than on their apparent motivation. Avoid the impression of trying to read their mind or of judging their intent. Try to give the person space to explain or deny feelings attached to their actions;
- Try to deal with the "here and now" rather than on past issues;
- Try to keep explanations and instructions simple, avoiding use of complex or loaded words;
- Try to reassure, calm and support the aggressor, stating that the worker is there to help maintain control of him / her. Try to encourage understanding that they should accept the responsibility for controlling their own behaviour;
- Try to keep requests short, direct and non-condescending;
- When asking questions, try to avoid casting doubt on the other person's ability to perform a task, but rather their willingness to do so. This could be seen as patronising and may further damage any low self-esteem;
- Try to avoid making promises or guarantees that cannot be kept or that are beyond your control. Talk about what is known, rather than attempting to predict future outcomes or events;
- Try to offer a "face-saving" alternative or a way out, as they may feel trapped or confused;
- Any limits that may have to be set need to be reasonable and easily understood. It may help to reinforce the benefits for them in complying;
- Try to slow and extend the communication where possible. This gives time for listening, analysing and considering a response;
- Try to reassure the person that they have heard what the problem is, and acknowledge it is a problem, and try to give them time to talk about what has made them upset or angry;

Useful Links and / or Further Reading

Significant and Serious Case Reviews

A Child in Trust: Report into the Death of Rikki Neave (London Borough of Brent: 1985)

The Victoria Climbié Inquiry (Lord Laming: 2003)

An Inspection into the Care and Protection of Children in Eilean Siar (SWIA: 2005)

Serious Case Review: Baby Peter (Haringey: 2009)

The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report (Lord Laming: 2009)

Significant Case Review: Brandon Lee Muir (Dundee C&YPPC: 2009)

Serious Case Review into the Death of Kyhra Ishak (Birmingham Safeguarding Children Board: 2010)

Significant Case Review: Declan Hainey (Renfrewshire Council: 2012)

Audit and Analysis of Significant Case Reviews (Sharon Vincent: 2012)

List of Recently Published Significant Case Reviews – [WithScotland](#)

Key Policy Framework

[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[Audit and Review Report \(2002\) entitled “It’s everyone’s job to make sure I’m alright \(Scottish Executive: 2002\)](#)

[Protecting Children and Young People: The Charter \(Scottish Executive: 2004\)](#)

[Protecting Children and Young People: Framework for Standards \(Scottish Executive: 2004\)](#)

[National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014 \(Scottish Government: 2014\)](#)

[Scottish Government – Getting it Right for Every Child Website](#)

Perth and Kinross CPC Practitioner Guides, Toolkits and Useful Links

[Perth and Kinross Council ECS Child Protection Guidance and Procedures 2014](#)

[Perth and Kinross Child Protection Website](#)

[Perth and Kinross CPC Inter-Agency Child Protection Guidelines 2011](#)

[Perth and Kinross Practitioners Guide and Toolkit – Information Sharing, Confidentiality and Consent](#)

[Perth and Kinross Practitioners Guide and Toolkit – Getting Our Priorities Right \(GOPR\)](#) for working together with Children and Young People and Families Affected by Problematic Alcohol and / or drugs use across Perth and Kinross

[Perth and Kinross Guide and Toolkit - Child Sexual Exploitation \(CSE\)](#)