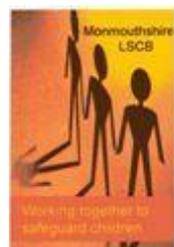


South East Wales Regional Safeguarding Forum



Multi-Agency Practice Guidance Working with Hostile or Uncooperative Parents/Carers



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1. Introduction and Principles

This practice guidance will assist professionals in working together to ensure multi-agency plans for children are not compromised as a result of encountering hostility or non cooperation. The safety and wellbeing of all children and young people is always the central consideration.

Local and national serious case reviews have identified that:

- Agencies have been unable to protect children effectively because of the hostile and uncooperative behaviours of parents and carers;
- Practitioners faced with hostility have failed to assess the impact of parental aggression on the safety and welfare of children;
- Fear of hostility has an inevitable impact on professional judgment and discretion;
- A dramatic change in a family's behaviour from cooperation to inaccessibility can be a serious warning sign and has often precipitated death or significant injury in children and young people.

Where non cooperation is an issue, it is important to appreciate the significance for the child living in the family i.e. it will enhance the parent / carer's power and control and the child may fear reprisals if s/he were to speak to professionals.

A failure to engage with families may have serious implications for the safety and welfare of children and non-intervention is not an option.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards are committed to supporting staff and seek to minimise the impact for children of any practice that may be impaired or affected by hostility or aggression.

2. Impact on Practitioners

Workers may feel extremely vulnerable when visiting hostile families, especially those who challenge effectively and are perceived as a threat. Practitioners may end up putting more effort into dealing with the resistance than addressing the real problems for the child/ren.

Staff should **always report and discuss situations of hostility of any form** and plans should be in place to:

- Identify and respond to the implications for the children and non-threatening partners who may also be victims;
- Ensure that the professional is safe and judgement is not impaired;
- Ensure that member agencies of the LSCB have Lone Working, Violence at Work and Risk Assessment policies in place and they are implemented.

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3. Recognising Unco-operative / Hostile Behaviours

Parents / Carers may present in a number of ways and the behaviour can be demonstrated on a continuum from superficial and ineffective compliance through to hostility, threats and violence.

Staff must recognise when the family is not engaging so as to avoid collusion or avoidance – early recognition of family resistance and failure to achieve progress with plans and agreements for the child is critical.

The behaviour can include:

- Ignoring advice and questioning the role of the professional
- Re-interpreting / minimising the child's needs
- Effectively preventing the child seeing the professional (may be blatant or agreed to appointment, but then ensure it does not occur)
- Controlling discussions
- Preventing meaningful contact with other parents / carer
- Moving away
- Manipulating and splitting professional relationships
- Undermining plans
- Feigned compliance
- Diverting discussions into arguments that distracts the focus from the child
- Misusing complaints procedures
- Aggression and threats, including use of animals particularly dogs
- Evidence of implements of violence
- Known history of actual violence
- Non verbal methods of threat and intimidation e.g. gestures, body language
- Scrutinising and challenging the professional's qualifications, experience and knowledge
- Audio or video recording of the professional
- Controlling what partners and children say to professionals.

4. Good Practice

To assess both the risks involved and the potential strategies needed, it is helpful to have as much information as possible about the family. We need to be able to understand the context of the behaviour and to try to identify the causes or reasons for the apparent aggression, for example, people who are fearful, frustrated, anxious or uncertain. Vulnerable parents / carers, or those with particularly difficulties, may need to have information, advice and expectations conveyed in alternative ways to aid communication and understanding. Support from specialist services may be required to assist e.g. adult mental health services.

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Professionals visiting the families who are met with hostile or uncooperative responses should reflect upon the circumstances that may be contributing to this type of response and seek supervision.

Useful Questions In Understanding Hostile Or Aggressive Responses

- Is the response influenced by:
 - Fear of consequences of intervention i.e. removal of children
 - Potential discovery of substance / alcohol misuse
 - Potential discovery of criminal behaviour or acts
 - Potential discovery of abusive behaviour, in particular 'hidden' behaviours e.g. sexual abuse or domestic abuse
 - Fear of criticism of child rearing practices
 - Negative perception of professionals.
- Is the hostile and uncooperative response influenced by an individual's ability to understand and take part in the plan?
- Is the hostile / uncooperative response influenced by a mental illness or personality disorder?
- Is the hostile/uncooperative response influenced by the impact on behaviour of alcohol or substances?
- Is consultation with, or advice required from specialist services?

Strategies to assist practitioners:

- Keep communications clear, and ensure that parents understand what is expected of them by the agency and that they have the ability to comply;
- Recognise where there is opportunity for negotiation and flexibility as long as the agreed outcomes for the child are achieved;
- Acknowledge that the family may see things differently and have their own cultural or religious values. Demonstrate a respect for their views, whilst challenging inappropriate attitudes and parenting practices. Seek to achieve common goals for the child;
- Ensure that there is a clear risk assessment, shared within the multi-agency group;
- Consideration should be given to supporting all staff who may be exposed to hostility, including receptionists and those dealing with telephone calls.
- Seek expert advice with managing behaviours (e.g. substance misuse services);
- Ensure that multi-agency interventions / plans and appointments are coordinated with consideration for joint agency visiting;

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- Single agency or merged multi-agency chronologies are important tools in identifying patterns of hostility and non-cooperation and the impact of this for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- Ensure workers are well-supported with access to regular supervision and consider seeking multi-agency supervision;
- Supervision should be used to explore the dynamics of any hostility or non-compliance and plan how best to address the situation including possible specialist assessments;
- Ensure that all decisions and communications, including the views of children and parents, are recorded clearly.

The principles outlined here can be applied to any single agency intervention or multi-agency interventions.

Maintaining the focus on the child is central and the process of assessing the child's welfare and safety should be continual. In circumstances when there are planned interventions that cannot be implemented because of parental resistance consideration should be given to the impact on the child in terms of their health, well-being and development, and in these situations supervision should be sought. If plans do not progress according to the agreed timescales, or information comes to light indicating increased risk, then consideration should be given to:

- Convening a strategy discussion / meeting
- Convening a core group or child in need planning meeting
- Requesting a Child Protection review conference be brought forward
- **A manager must be consulted if access to the child is ever denied.**

Child Protection Conference Chairs should highlight this document to staff where the plan may be hampered due to hostility or un-cooperative responses.

Additional Strategies for Working with Hostility

- Plan visits or appointments so as to ensure you have a safe exit
- Carry out aspects of work at a neutral venue such as a family centre or other agreed place
- Consider the usefulness of seeing members of the family individually being mindful of how this may affect family relationships and risks
- Consider the use of advocates / legal advisers within the child protection process to communicate with family members
- Be clear with families about what will happen in the event of threat or intimidation
- Record any incidents of aggression, update risk assessment documents and ensure that other agencies / workers are informed
- Involve the Police and report any criminal behaviour
- Use supervision to de-brief and reflect upon the implications for practice and personal life of being exposed to hostility

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Appendix 1 – Practice Tool for Identifying Hostile and Unco-operative Responses

	Yes	No
<u>Is there evidence of the following:</u>		
Ignoring advice and/or questioning the role of the professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Re-interpreting / minimising the child's needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effectively preventing the child seeing the professional (may be blatant or agreed to appointment, but then ensure it does not occur)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Controlling discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Preventing meaningful contact with the other parent / carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Moving away to avoid professionals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manipulating and splitting professional relationship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sabotaging, subverting or feigning change	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Diverting discussions into arguments that distracts the focus from the child	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Misusing the complaints procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Aggression and threats, including use of animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evidence of weapons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Known history of actual violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Non verbal methods of threat and intimidation e.g. gestures, body language	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scrutinising and challenging the professional's qualifications, experience and knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio or video recording of the professional	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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<u>Is the response influenced by:</u>	Yes	No
Fear of consequences of intervention i.e. removal of children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potential discovery of substance / alcohol misuse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potential discovery of criminal behaviour or acts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Potential discovery of abusive behaviour e.g. sexual abuse or domestic violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of criticism of child rearing practices	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Negative prior experience of professionals.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the hostile and unco-operative response influenced by an individual's ability to understand and take part in the plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the hostile / unco-operative response influenced by a mental illness or personality disorder?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is the hostile/unco-operative response influenced by the impact on behaviour of alcohol or substances?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is consultation with or advise required from specialist services?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What is the impact for the child's safety and wellbeing?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
What should happen next?	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

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