

CSCP Supporting Engagement Guidance 2026



Why supporting engagement is important

Camden believes that working with children and families in a relational way can support engagement, improve partnership working and achieve better outcomes for children. Where children are receiving a Family Help service, it is vital to keep the child in focus so that agencies can implement their plan and safeguard their welfare.

There may be times when professionals in the children's workforce find engaging families difficult for several reasons. Families may face practical, emotional, cultural or relational barriers that affect their ability to engage with services.

This policy has been written to help professionals understand why parents sometimes find it difficult to engage with services and what actions can be taken to support and improve engagement.

Effective engagement with families is built through trusting, respectful and honest relationships. Please see Appendix 1 for practice guidance on working with parents to support engagement.

Camden has produced a short animation that covers the principles for working with parents and carers set out in [*Working together to safeguard children*](#) available at: [Working with Parents Principles - Camden Safeguarding Children Partnership CSCP](#)

Scope of guidance

This guidance has been written in relation to cases where the child is known to CSFH but engagement with all children's services such as health and education is vital for safeguarding the child's health and development and improving future outcomes. Where professionals have concerns that families are not engaging with their service, they should follow their agency's own policies but should:

- identify issues with the family's engagement such as missed appointments using records and chronologies to recognise any patterns of behaviour
- form an understanding of why the family is finding engagement difficult
- analyse the impact on and any risk to the child's welfare
- work with the family to support engagement
- where non-engagement is impacting on the child, escalate concerns to the agency's designated safeguarding lead and consider a referral to CSFH.

Impact of non-engagement

- Where families are not engaging fully with services and children are not being seen, it can hinder information gathering necessary for assessment, gauging levels of risk or carrying out any meaningful work to improve outcomes for the child.
- Engagement is vital to ensure that the child's voice is heard so that they are able to share their thoughts, allowing professionals to gain an understanding of their lived experience.
- Lack of contact with families undermines the development of trusting relationships.
- Non-engagement makes it harder for professionals to identify appropriate support for families and can delay intervention where risk is escalating.
- In a multi-agency context, if an agency decides not to take any action to engage a family in the belief that another agency will do so, this can leave children unprotected.

Recognising forms of non-engagement

Families may find engagement difficult for a number of reasons and these may manifest in different ways:

Ambivalence	Families may appear uncertain or conflicted, may miss appointments or be reluctant to discuss some topics. This may reflect anxiety, fear, feeling overwhelmed or a lack of understanding about agency involvement.
Avoidance	Families may miss appointments or be unavailable for planned visits. This can be a protective response to fear, shame or previous negative experiences with services.
Struggles with follow-through	Families might find it difficult to implement agreed plans, either through inaction or actions that unintentionally undermine progress. This may be due to competing priorities, lack of resources or feeling disempowered.
Surface-level engagement	At times, families may appear to comply outwardly while not fully engaging with the underlying goals of the plan. This can be a way of maintaining control or avoiding perceived judgement.
Disagreement or challenge	Families may question professional perspectives or dispute aspects of the plan. While this can feel confrontational, it may also reflect a desire to be heard, assert authority or express frustration.
Expressions of distress or anger	In some cases, families may express their distress through anger or intimidating behaviour. While safety must always be prioritised, it's important to explore what might be driving these responses and seek to de-escalate through relational approaches.

Understanding barriers to engagement

To overcome difficulties in engagement and safeguard children, professionals must recognise the factors that may discourage families from engaging and address them with sensitivity.

- Many parents will be fearful or mistrustful of CSFH intervention; this may be due to previous negative experiences, feeling discriminated against or worrying that they will be judged unfairly.
- Involvement with CSFH can be stressful and stigmatising, particularly when it is not a voluntary choice, leading families to resent outside interference and making it harder for families to engage openly.
- Some parents may fear losing control over their home environment, which can be especially prominent in cases of domestic abuse.
- Parents experiencing issues such as mental illness, substance misuse, or additional challenges affecting parenting capacity may struggle to acknowledge their difficulties or may feel overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them in supporting their child's plan.
- Some families disengage because they do not fully understand the concerns raised by services or the role of the professionals involved. For families who have moved from abroad, unfamiliarity with the UK's child protection system may also contribute to lack of engagement.
- Perhaps the most significant reason for non-engagement is the fear that involvement with CSFH could lead to their children being removed from their care; this is an especially painful prospect for parents who have previously experienced removal. Parents may also worry about being labelled as inadequate by professionals or having personal information shared with other agencies they may wish to avoid, such as immigration authorities.
- Whilst professionals must approach families with compassion and reassurance, they also need to be able to identify when disengagement is not simply based on fear but rather an attempt to hide harm or abuse. Some parents may display resistance to keep professionals at a distance, preventing intervention that is necessary to protect the child.

Working with families where engagement is difficult

Where agencies are working in partnership with CSFH to implement a Family Help plan or child protection plan, difficulties in engaging families need to be shared with the allocated Family Help practitioner and the professional network so that action can be taken.

Professionals should ensure that they keep records of contact with families and share this information with the professional network so that it is possible to identify difficulties in engagement early and take timely action.

- Schools and nurseries should follow the procedures set out in Camden's [Children missing and absent from education](#) guidance and consider the impact of absence from education on the child's development. Where the child is known to CSFH, the allocated Family Help practitioner should be notified of any instances of persistent non-attendance where there is no reasonable explanation or where a child is removed from the roll.
- Health services should consider the impact of failure to attend and follow the [NSPCC guidance on recording](#), using *was not brought* rather than *did not attend*. Where a child is known to CSFH, allocated Family Help professionals should be notified if families are failing to keep health appointments or attend clinics as agreed within the child's plan or fails to attend for universal health services such as developmental checks or immunisations.
- Adult social care services such as mental health, substance misuse services and domestic abuse services should notify Family Help professionals where parents are failing to engage with any services or agreed programmes of work and where there are concerns that parent's difficulties are increasing.

All professionals should report:

- any difficulties gaining access to a child and family as agreed in the child's plan either during visits or through meetings
- any difficulties in seeing the child alone where this is a requirement set out in the child's plan
- where contact with the family is of poor quality and makes implementation of planned work difficult or impossible
- any instance of parents exhibiting challenging behaviour towards professionals.

Where families are not engaging and the child's plan is not being implemented and/or risk is escalating, the allocated Family Help practitioner will convene a network meeting (or core group meeting where the child is subject to a child protection plan) specifically for the purpose of looking at non-engagement and its consequences for the child.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- allow the professional network to share information and review the family's patterns of engagement across agencies
- help professionals to identify the type of non-engagement and understand difficulties to engagement
- develop a multi-agency strategy for engagement that helps reduce the barriers to engagement and helps the network build a good working relationship with the family
- avoid "agency split" (where families align themselves with some agencies to the exclusion of others)
- consider whether CSFH need to escalate action to safeguard the child
- keep the child in focus.

Strategies for supporting engagement

- It is important that there is a coordinated multi-agency approach with close collaboration to share insights on emerging risks, patterns of engagement, and effective strategies already in place. By working together, agencies can identify challenges, understand the reason for non-engagement and develop a unified plan to support families.
- Responses should be proportionate and strike a careful balance between safeguarding the child and fostering a collaborative relationship with the family. While partnership working is key to achieving positive outcomes, interventions should always be proportionate to the level of concern.
- Approaches may range from encouragement and support to legal intervention where necessary. Voluntary strategies can be effective for families who are displaying resistance but maintain contact with services and where there are no serious concerns about the child's welfare.
- To build trust and cooperation, professionals should communicate clearly about their role and look to developing a relationship based on honesty, respect, and openness and that is not judgemental.

- Using written agreements can help families understand the concerns in making necessary changes, and the actions CSFH may take if those changes are not made in a timely manner.
- Families may engage well with a particular member of the professional network who could provide a “stepping stone” to re-engagement. Agencies should share information about any strategies currently being used by them to successfully engage the family.
- In cases where domestic abuse is a factor, victims may need discrete methods of communication that safeguards their wellbeing while keeping them connected to support.

Use of private health care

Health and social care professionals should always be aware when families are using private health care and seek the name and professional details of any private practitioner. Consent should be sought from the patient to share information based on a ‘need to know basis’ that is proportionate to the circumstances of the case but may be legally shared where there are safeguarding concerns.

The child’s GP should be aware of any on-going assessment and treatment and services that are being or will be provided by a private practitioner, particularly in the case of GP/health led referrals. The professional network should be notified where:

- the private practitioner’s details have not been provided and there is uncertainty about whether the child is receiving appropriate health assessment or treatment and services, leading to concerns about significant harm
- there are perceived concerns about the nature of any assessment or treatment and services which may lead to the child being likely to suffer significant harm.

These cases must be discussed with CSFH and a decision made on whether to escalate responses, including a child protection response.

In complex cases requiring a multi-agency response, sharing information in a timely and appropriate manner will be an integral component of care planning. Families and data subjects (where appropriate) should be aware of this important professional dynamic.

Where important information that would enable professionals to determine 'safety' and 'well-being' is being withheld, professionals should seek advice from their safeguarding teams as to whether their concerns meet the threshold for statutory intervention.

Appendix 1:

Building trusted relationships to support engagement: practice guidance

Effective engagement with services and safeguarding interventions are underpinned by strong, trusting relationships. Children, parents and carers are more likely to engage with services when they experience professionals as respectful, honest, reliable and genuinely interested in understanding their circumstances. Building trust can help families feel safer to discuss difficulties, accept support and work collaboratively towards positive change for their children.

Building relationships does not mean avoiding difficult conversations or lowering professional expectations. Rather, it involves working alongside families with empathy and curiosity whilst remaining clear about concerns, risks and the actions needed to safeguard children.

Professionals should seek to:

Be curious and seek to understand: Families' responses to professionals are often shaped by their life experiences, including previous involvement with services, trauma, discrimination, poverty, domestic abuse, mental health difficulties or other challenges. Professionals should approach families with professional curiosity, seeking to understand what may be influencing engagement.

Questions professionals may wish to consider include:

- What might this family's experience of services have been?
- What barriers may be affecting their engagement?
- What strengths and resources are present within the family?
- What would help this family feel more able to work with professionals?

Be honest and transparent: Trust is strengthened when professionals are open about their role, concerns, responsibilities and decision-making. Families should be provided with clear information about:

- why services are involved
- what professionals are worried about
- what needs to change
- what support is available
- what may happen if concerns are not addressed.

Being transparent helps reduce uncertainty and can support families to engage more openly.

Recognise and build on strengths: While it is important to identify risks and concerns, professionals should also acknowledge family strengths, protective factors and progress. Recognising what families are doing well can help build confidence, increase motivation and support collaborative working.

Professionals should actively identify:

- positive relationships within the family
- existing support networks
- examples of resilience
- previous successes and achievements
- family and community resources.

Be consistent and reliable: Trust develops over time through consistent actions.

Professionals should seek to:

- keep appointments wherever possible
- follow through on commitments
- communicate clearly and promptly
- explain any changes in plans
- maintain contact even when engagement is difficult.

Families who have experienced inconsistent support or multiple changes of professionals may require additional time and persistence to build trust.

Work collaboratively with families: Families are more likely to engage when they feel involved in decision-making. Professionals should work with families to develop plans, identify goals and agree actions wherever possible.

This includes:

- listening to families' views and experiences
- understanding what matters to them
- identifying shared goals
- involving them in planning and review processes
- ensuring plans are realistic and achievable.

Repair relationships when difficulties arise: Disagreements, misunderstandings and periods of disengagement can occur in any professional relationship. Where relationships become strained, professionals should make efforts to repair and rebuild trust while maintaining focus on the child's welfare.

This may involve:

- acknowledging difficulties openly
- revisiting expectations and concerns
- listening to the family's perspective
- clarifying misunderstandings
- identifying ways of working together more effectively.

Maintain a focus on the child: Building relationships with parents and carers is an essential part of effective safeguarding; however, professionals must always maintain a clear focus on the child's lived experience, safety and wellbeing. Professionals should ensure they:

- see and speak with children regularly
- understand the child's daily experience
- consider the impact of non-engagement on the child
- balance support for parents with accountability for change
- remain professionally curious where concerns persist.

Strong relationships create opportunities for engagement, understanding and change. However, where concerns about a child's welfare remain or increase, professionals must take timely safeguarding action regardless of the level of parental engagement.