

Engaging with families

Practice paper

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Introduction

The purpose of this practice paper is to provide an evidence-based framework that guides the practice of departmental staff when engaging families. The practice paper aims to summarise key research findings, including key principles of engagement, and examine the implications for practice in a child protection context when engaging families who are involuntary.

'No single strategy is of itself effective in protecting children. However, the most important factor contributing to success is the quality of the relationship between the child's family and the responsible professional' (Dartington, 1995).

Research in social and human sciences has long recognised the engagement of individuals and families as a fundamental factor linked to progress in achieving outcomes. In the child protection system, where most families are involuntary participants, engagement is equally important but may present special challenges. It is critical that child protection professionals recognise and accept the importance of engaging families and have the necessary skills to do so.

Engagement is the process of establishing effective working relationships so that there can be a shared understanding of goals and a shared commitment to supporting the child and their family to realise those goals and create sustainable and positive change. Effective engagement enables a productive relationship to develop between a worker, the child and their family with an aim to:

- creating a positive, collaborative, effective working relationship between the worker, child and family to ensure the safety, wellbeing and best interests of the child
- ensuring the family understands and provides feedback on what is happening in circumstances that can often be challenging and distressing
- ensuring the family has opportunities to build on their capacity to address issues in relation to providing care and protection to their children and
- enhancing social inclusion within the family structure (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

“Engagement is often viewed as synonymous with involvement. Involvement in services is important, but **real** engagement goes beyond that. Families can be involved and compliant without being engaged. Engagement is motivating and empowering families to recognize their own needs, strengths and resources and to take an active role in changing things for the better. Engagement is what keeps families working in the sometimes slow process of positive change” (Steib, 2004).

It is generally accepted that the quality of the relationship and ‘helping alliance’ between worker and service user is a key determinant of outcome (Winefield & Barlow, 1995; Dore and Alexander, 1996). Further, research shows that there is a clear link between better outcomes for children and greater involvement of parents (Thoburn, Lewis and Shemmings, 1995).

The NSW Interagency Guidelines (2012) identifies that developing open, honest and positive relationships between a child, their family and workers is important for:

- productive two way communication
- facilitating the family's active participation in decision making, goal setting and case planning
- promoting trust between the family and worker
- genuine contribution and a greater sense of control by the family and maximising accountability of workers and organisations.

Research has also identified that family engagement is important for:

- increasing placement stability (Merkel-Hoguin, Nixon, & Burford, 2003 cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010)
- promoting family "buy-in" to be invested in planning for and achieving outcomes (Yatchmenoff, 2005)
- improving timeliness of permanency decisions (Tam & Ho, 1996; Merkel-Hoguin et al., 2003, cited in Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

It is also acknowledged that the achievement of good relationships in a context as potentially conflictual as child protection is not easy (Yatchmenoff, 2005; Dumbrill, 2006). In a statutory child protection context feelings of guilt, anger, fear, shame, confusion, hostility, suspicion or even depression can lead family members to appear reluctant, unmotivated or unwilling to be involved. This can make engaging a child, young person or their family more difficult (Blythe, Ivanoff & Tripodi, 1994).

Purposeful engagement takes skill, empathy and emotional intelligence to manage often conflicting agendas. Whilst recognising a power imbalance exists between families and professionals within the child protection arena, a model of engagement can be effective in fostering an environment which maximises the potential for collaborative working.

Principles of engagement

Family engagement is the foundation of good child protection practice that promotes the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children and families in the child welfare system. Family engagement is the foundation from which change occurs. To build on a family's resources and kinship connections, family engagement activities focus not only on the immediate family but also on active involvement of both parents, extended family, and the family natural support systems (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Engagement in a child protection context is based on best-practice principles that should underpin the actions to improve the safety, wellbeing and best interests of a child. All engagement activity should be:

- child-centred and family-focused
- strengths-based

- participatory, with every opportunity provided for the child and their family to be involved and contribute
- based on clear and appropriate communication
- encouraging and supporting participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- inclusive, non-discriminatory and considerate of relevant aspects of culture and
- collaborative between the child, their family and organisations providing support services (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Being child centred and family focused

The importance of adopting a child-centred approach is embedded in section 5A of the *Child Protection Act 1999* that states that the main principle for administering this Act is that the safety, wellbeing and best interests of a child are paramount.

Adopting a child-centred and family focused approach is not only important in terms of enhancing the realisation of positive outcomes, but will improve the likelihood of effectively engaging children and their families. Child-centred and family-focused approaches are not mutually exclusive. While ‘child-centred’ refers to placing the needs of the child at the heart of any decision, being family-focused recognises that the issues and needs of parents will impact on the child (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Winkworth and McArthur (2006) identified the following principles as essential underpinnings to effective child-centred practice:

- Linking children, particularly very young children and their families with services and supports will strengthen their physical, cognitive and social functioning.
- Thorough assessments of children and young people need to take account of their developmental level across a range of spectrums.
- Children and young people should be informed of legal and administrative decisions which affect them and be provided with opportunities to express, clarify and communicate their feelings and wishes, taking into account their age and capacity to understand
- All interventions should seek to create and strengthen children’s networks and include the provision of appropriate information to enable the child’s networks to increase protection and support.
- Interventions involving young people should recognise the importance of the young person developing a sense of self and that it may not always be appropriate for the family to be involved in the resolution of adolescent issues.

Adopting a family-focused approach aims to ensure the worker assesses and responds to issues affecting a family’s capacity to care for and protect their children. It also aims to ensure that the child’s needs are considered within the context of their family. Being family focused means

recognising the important role of the family and responding to the parent's needs so as to enhance the safety, wellbeing and best interests of their children.

Adopting a family focused practice means:

- being inclusive and involving parents, extended family, kin and friends (where appropriate and relevant) as well as recognising and considering the role of the broader community
- understanding the child's position in the family in relation to other family members
- ensuring where possible that there is two-way communication between the family and worker, especially in regards to decision-making
- developing a knowledge and understanding of the family's past experiences, current situation, concerns, and strengths to inform case plans based on an assessment of the child and parent's strengths and needs (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012)
- that case plans reflect ongoing input from the family and are specific, measureable, achievable, realistic and timely
- creating positive connections between birth families and foster families (Casey Families, 2012)
- understanding that the combination of institutional mistrust with the complex issues that families face, for example, substance use, health issues and violence, is a serious impediment to the engagement process for birth families (Littell, Alexander, & Reynolds, 2001)
- recognising that engaging fathers in the child protection context may require different considerations and approaches to those adopted when working with mothers (Casey Families, 2012)
- providing or facilitating the provision of concrete services meet immediate needs for food, housing, child care, transportation and other costs, and help communicate to families a sincere desire to help (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010).

Adopting a strengths-based approach

Seeing the family as multi-faceted with lines of strength and support rather than problems and deficits is not minimising risk, but placing it in context (Doolan, 2005).

A strengths-based approach operates on the assumption that all people, even if they are experiencing problems, have some strengths and resources from which they can draw on to make positive change. A deficit-based approach, which focuses on what is wrong, can overlook valuable skills and experiences a family has. It can also reduce a family's motivation to actively engage with services and impair the likelihood of positive change for children (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Being strengths-based requires a different way of looking at children and families. A strength based approach in child protection is solution focussed and engages the family in providing a safe environment for the children. Children and their families are more than just their “problems” and their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values and hopes need to be identified and utilised (Saleebey, 1996).

A strengths-based approach does not ignore or minimise problems and always holds the safety of the child as paramount. It focuses on using personal strengths to inform strategies to support individuals. It is possible to help people to face up to behaviour they are ashamed of and defensive about, if a rapport has been established that is respectful. This is possible if the practitioner has acknowledged the family’s difficult context, listened and explored the pressures they have been under and validate their good intentions (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

What does being strength-based mean?

When adopting a strengths-based approach the following points may provide assistance:

- try to identify what a child or family is doing well or what personal resources they may have as these strengths could influence the identification of appropriate services or supports
- ask the child or family what they believe their strengths are
- use positive language as the right words and language can be empowering
- use strength-based skills, such as:
 - allowing the child or their family to tell their story without interruption
 - highlighting strengths
 - exploring and addressing structural and personal constraints
 - identifying significant people who can support the child and/or family
 - developing a picture of the future and establishing realistic goals
 - actively identifying and measuring change and progress
 - identifying achievable steps and strategies (McCashen, 2005 cited in NSW Interagency Guidelines)
 - celebrating successes.

When engagement uses a strengths-based approach, the following indicators of success may be present:

- communication is open and information is being exchanged
- appointments are kept both by the worker and by the family
- ideas are generated on ways to address issues or possible programs and activities that could help
- the child and/or their family listens, considers suggestions and may make their own suggestions
- the child and/or their family takes responsibility for following up on agreed actions

- the family is keeping the worker updated on their progress and advises of changes in circumstances including contact details and personal information (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Encouraging participation

Participation is an essential aspect of the engagement process. True participation for families includes the right to information and knowledge held by professionals, the opportunity to identify solutions within a supportive familial and community context and the right to self-agency supported by respectful professional services (Doolan, 2005). It also involves providing the child and their family with the confidence and skills to effectively participate (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

In terms of outcomes, parental involvement has been linked to improved rates of family restoration (Dale, 2004; Maiter, Palmer & Manji, 2006). Further, involving parents in child protection practice recognises the importance of supporting the child's attachment relationships, even when removal is deemed necessary while failure to involve parents increases the trauma associated with separation, and tends to reduce children's resilience and self-esteem (Thorpe, 2008).

Darlington, Healy and Feeney (2010) found that despite the demonstrated benefits of parents' participation, factors relating to the statutory context of child protection work presented challenges to translating participation into reality. Darlington et al identified a number of contingencies where parent and system factors influence each other and exert a joint influence on participation. Parent factors included their willingness to engage with child welfare authorities, their demonstrated understanding of their children's needs, and their willingness to effect parenting changes in order to meet these needs. System factors including the power of the child protection system in relation to parents, and the extent to which workers have time for thorough case planning and for building relationships with parents.

Similarly, Altman (2008) described participation in the child welfare context as 'a dynamic, complex and multi-level phenomenon', involving client factors such as insight and desire for change, together with elements of practice such as setting of clear goals, affirmation of parenting capacity, and cultural awareness.

Disabilities, such as serious emotional disturbance, developmental, psychiatric, serious medical, serious physical or perceptual impairment can affect the ability to participate effectively. Participation can be made more meaningful for a person with a disability through the use of: a support person or advocate; using signers and interpreters, as well as appropriate aids to facilitate effective communication; and ensuring transport is available or that meetings are arranged in accessible locations (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

The use of effective communication skills and attempting to minimise any concerns or mistrust, especially if there are cultural or historical issues associated with government involvement, can facilitate the active participation of the family.

Communicating clearly

Engagement is dependent upon ongoing and skilled communication and requires commitment from all parties. Effective communication recognises that different approaches and strategies may be required as well as sensitivity to the role of both verbal and non-verbal cues in seeking to communicate successfully with families.

Effective communication recognises the inherent inequality in the relationship between a child protection worker and a family. Being clear at the start of engagement about the purpose and parameters of a worker's involvement, their expectations, as well as those of the child or young person and their family, the strategies to be used and the expected outcomes are essential first steps in good communication. Where there is resistance, the potential for conflict may be reduced by modifying engagement strategies, without compromising the objective of engagement (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Purposeful and focused communication reduces stress and anxiety for a family and the respective worker. It can lead to a more productive working relationship and can also increase the likelihood of active engagement.

In addition to communication skills, effective communication with families requires an empathic approach. Forrester, Kershaw, Moss and Hughes (2008) found that empathic social workers created less resistance and increased the amount of information disclosed by parents involved with the child protection system and that it was not associated with failure to identify and discuss concerns with parents. Empathy, therefore, appeared to be central to good social work communication in child protection situations.

Maiter et al (2006) also found that the personality and character of workers were more central to client satisfaction than their agency function, and noted that even when families were hostile towards interventions, they could still engage positively with workers when the right qualities were present. Genuineness, empathy, helpfulness, willingness to listen, being non-judgmental and acceptance were qualities that were appreciated in workers.

Similar findings in a study by Dale (2004) indicated that child protection service users identified the worker characteristics of being supportive, being careful listeners, being 'matter of fact', 'human' and able to promote cooperation, as making an important difference to their relationship with the child protection system.

Effective communication

Where communication is difficult, particularly with families resistant to services, a worker may need additional support. This can take the form of debriefings and supervision with line managers or colleagues with particular expertise. For communication to be effective it must be:

- open and honest
- positive and focused on identifying strengths
- non-judgmental
- respectful of the people involved and of their culture, faith and ideals

- aware of strengths and positive attributes
- understanding of any special needs and circumstances, such as literacy skills or a disability
- able to incorporate the use of interpreters and translation of material, when required
- jargon free and appropriate for the person's abilities and understanding
- aware of body language and eye contact and how these can be used to establish a rapport and put a person at ease, or used inappropriately to intimidate and control
- cognisant that appearance and style of dress are a part of communication and need to be respectful (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires a sensitivity and understanding of the role of the family and community. Cultural and historical factors need to be acknowledged by anyone who works closely with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and an understanding of how these factors have shaped and influenced the community's social and emotional wellbeing.

Legislative provisions of the *Child Protection Act 1999* require that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families receive services from the department that meet their cultural and identity needs and are based on the following principles:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive a service that meets their cultural and identity needs stemming from their history as Indigenous Australians
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, kinship groups, communities and organisations have the right to participate in decisions making processes concerning their children and young persons.
- Consultation must occur with a recognised Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander entity before a significant decision is made in respect of a child
- Aboriginal children and young people should, where possible, be placed with a member of their extended family or kinship group, as recognised by the community to which the child or young person belongs.
- When an Aboriginal or Torres Strait child cannot be placed with extended family or kinship group, they should be placed with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carer with connections to the community of which the child belongs.
- If an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child is to be placed with non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carers contact with their community and culture must be maintained (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

The practice paper [Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#) is a guide developed to improve service delivery by providing key facts and relevant information when engaging and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse families

It is important that a “one size fits all” approach is not adopted when engaging with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families and to recognise the multifaceted nature of identity and experiences and incorporate this into practice. Central to successful engagement is communication and being culturally competent. These skills can greatly assist workers in ensuring responsive, appropriate and equitable outcomes.

Practical strategies that will assist when engaging with CALD children, young people and families include:

- demonstrating awareness of how acculturative stress, the psychological stress of impact of adaptation to a new culture, may underlie or contribute to an immigrant’s cultural context and challenges in Australia
- being aware of and celebrating cultural differences and acknowledging human sameness while acknowledging that perceived and actual racism and discrimination can be a significant stressor for CALD families
- remaining mindful of how intergenerational conflict can give rise to challenges such as culture clashes and role reversals between children and their carers
- being aware that a person’s proficiency with English, where it is learnt as a second language, can deteriorate in stressful situations
- being clear about the role, responsibilities, practices and policies of the department and use a National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accredited interpreter where necessary, and where possible, providing information pamphlets in their language
- being sensitive to the fact that CALD families will view the department’s role through the lens of their past experiences (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

The practice paper [Working with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds](#) provides further information and advice to assist in working effectively with children, families and other people who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Working collaboratively

Collaboration refers to relevant organisations working together to address the needs of the child or young person and their family. Ensuring the safety, wellbeing and best interests of children and young people is the collective responsibility of parents, families, communities, non-government organisations and government.

A range of complex and often chronic factors characterise many of the families coming into contact with the child protection system, such as low income, unemployment, substance abuse, limited social supports, imprisonment, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

Caseworkers need to connect children and families with services of other government and community-based providers. Accordingly, there may be a need for a number of different service supports, provided by a range of organisations and workers (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

Interagency collaboration in systems of care is "the process of agencies and families joining together for the purpose of interdependent problem solving that focuses on improving services to children and families" (Hodges, Nesman, & Hernandez, 1999). Delivery of an integrated child protection service then relies on individual agencies and professionals working in collaboration with others in the service system, regardless of differences in size, individual philosophies, and structures or funding sources. Adopting a collaborative, integrated approach is fundamental to engagement in a child protection context.

Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, collaboration is distinct from cooperation and coordination (ARACY, 2009). On a continuum of partnership models, collaboration is the most intense involving a higher level of interdependence, risk and reward, contribution and commitment (ARACY, 2009).

Problems regarding interagency collaboration, particularly during period of organisational change have marked child protection systems since the 1960s. Lack of interagency communication and trust has been identified as a persistent theme in public inquiries into child deaths in England (Horwath & Morrison, 2007). This suggests attention to nurturing relationships and building trusted networks becomes imperative in changing environments for families (Hudson et al., 2003 cited in Horwath & Morrison, 2007).

Horwath and Morrison (2007) also identified that placing families at the centre of agencies' attention, viewing families as the primary stakeholder for collaboration, and understanding their experiences and expectations as critical for identifying and developing responsive services.

Effective communication is a key component for establishing trust. Because collaboration "is not a one-way relationship," it is important to build trust by recognizing both the strengths and limitations of participating agencies. Collaboration requires participants to think bigger and to act beyond their own agency by identifying new ideas and new solutions that are not bound by an individual agency (Hodges et al, 1999).

Ways in which departmental government and non-government agencies can facilitate an integrated service built on collaborative partnerships include: building better local networks, agreeing on better ways of working to support shared clients, establishing formal protocols, creating opportunities for shared training, recognising the function of strengthening relationships (Horwath & Morrison, 2007).

Engaging with fathers

Many of the barriers to engagement with the child welfare system, for example mistrust on the part of the parent, are exacerbated for fathers. In many cases, engaging fathers presents the

additional challenges of locating absentee fathers, paternity and legal issues and a lack of training on the part of case workers. Also persistent risk factors, including drug and alcohol use, unemployment, emotional instability predict lower levels of paternal engagement (Farrie, Lee & Fagan, 2011 cited in Casey Families, 2012) and strained mother-father relationships can present barriers to father engagement (Casey Families, 2012).

Franck (2001) found that when working with families, caseworkers directed more efforts toward mothers. Caseworkers did not totally ignore fathers but expected them to be harder to engage and anticipated that their 'investment' in working with birth mothers would yield a better 'return' than working with fathers (Franck, 2001).

Research has identified that fathers can exert a significant influence on the non-physical developmental outcomes of children in such areas as educational attainment, cognitive development, sex role development, and the acquisition of social skills (O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, & Thornton, 2005). Father participation can also reduce children's length of stay in foster care (Coakley, 2013) and may potentially improve child wellbeing (Malm, Murray & Green, 2006 cited in Casey Families Program, 2012).

Providing fathers with services that address employment may significantly increase their involvement. Lower income and unemployment can increase stress, exacerbating the already negative association between stress or conflict and father engagement. Hence, reductions in stress and conflict can also promote father engagement and support co-parenting (Bronte-Tinkerew & Horowitz, 2010; Bronte-Tinkerew, Horowitz & Carrano, 2010 cited in Casey Family Programs, 2012). Targeted interventions for fathers to increase engagement should be directed towards supporting men make and maintain positive life changes, and maintain positive relationships with birth mothers (Casey Family Programs, 2012).

When engagement is difficult or not working

The process of engagement and what works, and what doesn't, will vary because each person and their circumstances are different. Importantly, the way engagement is approached needs to be considered for each individual family member.

There is a difference between "failing to engage" and "disengaging". The former refers to situations where a child or their family appears unwilling to engage with services or is openly opposed to organisational involvement. "Disengagement" refers to situations where a family has engaged but at some stage starts to avoid, or "step-away" from the service, worker or organisation (NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

There are a variety of reasons for families wanting to avoid a service, poorly engaging with a service, disengaging over time, or refusing a service. Families may have different responses to different services or change over time in their response to services. Service 'fatigue' is not uncommon, particularly in families with complex needs.

Yatchmenoff (2005) noted that where participation is involuntary, such as engagement with a statutory child protection system, there may be a distinction between compliant behaviour (going through the motions) and engagement or full participation. Dumbrill (2006) identified a distinction between power being used "over" clients and power being used "with" them, to support and

assist change. In Dumbrill's study, parents who perceived power had been used "over" them tended to either actively oppose or feign cooperation with intervention rather than work collaboratively with child protection professionals.

Whilst most reasons behind families failing to engage or disengaging from services are innocuous, workers need to be vigilant and actively work with families to overcome barriers. Any persistent displays of avoidant, hostile or resistant behaviour should be taken very seriously. For more information on engaging with hostile or aggressive people, refer to [practice paper Working with parents who demonstrate hostile or aggressive behaviour](#).

Research consistently shows that this behaviour can be a predictive factor for fatal child abuse and neglect. The 'Beyond Blame' project in the United Kingdom examined 35 cases where children had died as a result of abuse or neglect and it was noted that there was avoidance of services by parents in over half of the cases (Reder, Duncan & Gray, 1993, cited in NSW Interagency Guidelines, 2012).

These deaths suggest that when engaging with vulnerable children, young people and families, it is important that all children and young people in a family are sighted by the worker, and where possible, spoken with, particularly where the worker feels intimidated by a parent who is aggressive, abusive or resistant to organisational involvement.

Why a family does not want to engage

The NSW Interagency Guidelines (2012) identifies a number of reasons why a family may not want to engage that include having:

- a lack of trust in the 'system', the worker or organisation, which could be due to previous bad experiences with government or authority figures
- no, limited or distorted understanding of what child and young person safety, and wellbeing is and why a statutory child protection agency is involved
- a preference to engage in other activities instead of casework driven tasks
- difficulties in accessing a service that may include challenges meeting program or activity costs, accessing transport, attending during hours of operation or accessing child care
- cultural considerations, such as language barriers and lack of confidence in speaking or understanding English fluently
- concerns about being stigmatised by a worker or a service
- not engaged from the outset .

What does a failure to engage or disengaging look like?

Families who display evasive or resistant behaviour can be challenging to work with. Examples of this type of behaviour include:

- avoiding home visits (often cancelling at the last minute) or not appearing to be home (curtains drawn and not responding to telephone calls or knocks on the door)
- children failing to attend school or child care

- parents not attending appointments, in particular prearranged meetings that involve the assessment of themselves or the children
- repeated excuses why the worker cannot see the child or young person, for example “they are at their grandparents” or are “sleeping”.

If a family begins to disengage it may be indicative of a broader issue such as:

- an alcohol or drug misuse relapse
- non-compliance with medication or other treatment plan
- a change in family dynamics
- a change in life circumstance.

Ways to improve engagement

There are a number of common strategies that could be used to improve engagement of families that include:

- re-evaluating the current engagement strategy and communication techniques
- identifying how engagement could be improved, by reflecting on what has not worked and concentrating on what may work
- using strengths-based approaches to identify even small signs of positive engagement with a view to building ‘successes’
- discussing the issues or concerns with the family and identifying solutions together
- discussing the issues or concerns with a supervisor, manager and/or colleagues
- debriefing with a supervisor or manager during supervision.

Conclusion

There are inherent challenges in developing productive and meaningful partnerships with involuntary families in a statutory child protection system. The development of an engagement framework must acknowledge that achieving good relationships can be difficult and that relationships with family members may be characterised by conflict and mistrust.

However, significant benefits can be achieved through the use of skills that result in the effective engagement of a family. Engagement can increase the likelihood of achieving long-term and positive changes in the life of a family. A model of engagement based on sound principles and evidence of what works, can be effective in developing collaborative and productive relationships that contribute to positive and safe outcomes for children.

The explicit, cognitive aspects of the work are important but provide an incomplete account. Knowing what data to collect is useful, but it is equally useful to know how to collect them; how to get through the front door and create a relationship where the parent is willing to tell you anything about the child and family; how to ask challenging questions about very sensitive matters; and how to develop the expertise to sense that the child or parent is being evasive. Above all, it is important to be able to work directly with children and young people and their families to understand their experiences, worries, hopes and dreams, and help them change (Munro, 2011).

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