

# ADOPTING A FAMILY APPROACH

## Practical Tips

## Engaging with Adults at Risk

### 1. Ask the person what their preferred method of communication is.

Knowing how the person prefers to be communicated with will improve the chances of them being able to engage. Consider factors including:

- The person's ability to read and write.
- Language considerations - what is the person's first language? Is it possible to provide information in a different language or format? Also consider cultural differences in communication.
- Does the person have a sensory impairment? If so, what support does the person require to help them engage? For example, this could include the use of an interpreter.
- Safety - for example, if the person is experiencing domestic abuse, is it safe to send a letter to their address?

### 2. Recognise the extent to which a person's vulnerability may impact on their ability to engage.

Consider factors such as learning disability, substance use and mental capacity. Always consider and support people who may lack the capacity to make some decisions. Remember to consider the extent to which a person's capacity to engage with services may have been affected by threatening, controlling or coercive behaviour.

### 3. Use the Mental Capacity Act (2005).

Remember to use the Mental Capacity Act to empower people to make decisions and support people who may lack the capacity to make decisions.

For further information see the [Short Guide](#) on the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005.

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### 4. Consider the persons mental capacity to engage but also the consequences of non-engagement.

When considering a person's capacity in relation to engagement, it is important to consider whether the person understands the consequences of non-engagement. The risks might relate to areas such as the person's health, access to benefits, offers of care and support.

### 5. Consider Advocacy

As part of the safeguarding adults process consideration must also be given to whether the adult may benefit from the support of an independent advocate.

Advocacy helps and supports individuals to:

- say what they want,
- secure their rights,
- represent their interests,
- obtain services they need.

There are many different types of advocacy, including self-advocacy and peer advocacy. However, there are certain circumstances set out in law when local authorities must provide an independent advocate. Local authority commissioned advocacy services can be accessed via a referral from a social worker.

The legislation sets out who can act as an advocate. An advocate must have appropriate training for the particular type of advocacy; competency; integrity; and independence from the local authority.

For further information, see the [Short Guide](#) on Advocacy for Adults.

### 6. Where possible, identify a lead professional to build up a trusting relationship with the person.

Whilst this may not always be possible, it is helpful for the person if they have an identified lead worker. The lead professional will be in a vital position for monitoring trends of engagement, sharing information and assisting the person through service navigation. The lead professional may change depending on the circumstances of the case, but the management of risk remains a shared responsibility.

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### 7. Difficult conversations.

Professionals are required to have honest conversations with adults at risk, their families/carers and other professionals. It can sometimes be difficult to navigate these conversations and find the right words and approach to convey what you need to say in a way that will be understood and accepted by those receiving the message.

For further support, see the [Practical Tips](#) on Having Honest Conversations.

### 8. Don't assume that someone else is dealing with the problem.

When a person's circumstances change, or concerns arise about their lack of engagement, don't presume that other professionals are aware of what you know. Build up good relationships with professionals from other agencies and ensure that information is shared appropriately, using safeguarding procedures, if required. Where a safeguarding adults plan is in place, it should be clear how information will be shared between all the agencies involved, including how concerns will be escalated if the person's lack of engagement continues to be a risk factor.

### 9. Be professionally curious.

Professional curiosity is the capacity and communication skill to explore and understand what is happening rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value, to seek reasons and explanations for actions or behaviour. Look, listen, ask and clarify.

For further information, see the [Practical Tips](#) on Professional Curiosity.

### 10. Be careful what you record around engagement or lack of.

The language used in your recording can make a big difference. Terms like "failed to attend" and "difficult to engage with" place the emphasis solely on the person; however, there may be external factors impacting on a person's ability to engage. Recording of this nature can also affect the way another professional may approach the case. It is important to document any mental capacity assessments or risk assessments that you may have completed, and to document what has been communicated to the adult about the risks they are experiencing and the possible consequences of their actions.

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### 11. Remember, engagement may fluctuate.

Just because a person has not engaged with services in the past, it does not mean that this will always be the case, this time it might be different. Be tenacious with people and always let them know that services are available should they need them.