

Identifying and Recording Barriers to Engagement

Practice Guide

What do we mean by a barrier to engagement?

A barrier to engagement is anything that makes it challenging for children and young people to access or participate in their sentence plan.

Bradford Council's Equality and Diversity Statement outlines the Council's commitment to ensuring that all services provided by or on behalf of the Council are appropriate, inclusive, accessible and fair; this means that as a service we are expected to address any barriers to engagement to ensure that children and young people can access appropriate support and services.

Examples of barriers to engagement (this is not an exhaustive list)

Being the subject of a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO)

Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBO's) can restrict a person's movements, prevent them from associating with specific people and/or stop them from behaving in a certain way. If you are working with a child or young person who is the subject of a CBO check whether or not they have an exclusion zone that prevents them from attending Sir Henry Mitchell House, the premises of our partner agencies and/or education/training/employment providers. Be clear with the child or young person regarding their route of travel to avoid any areas that they are not allowed to pass through due to an exclusion zone (even in a vehicle); the obvious option may not be viable. If there is a non associate named on the CBO, check if that person is known to us. If they are, think about what action is required to ensure they do not come into contact with each other when attending timetabled appointments and/or accessing partner agencies.

Being a young parent

If someone is a parent you will need to decide whether or not it is appropriate for their child to be present during timetabled appointments. If it is not appropriate, review whether there are childcare arrangements in place. Check times for access to any childcare that are available. If there is no access to childcare, consider whether it is appropriate to bring their child to Sir Henry Mitchell House. If this is not possible or suitable, think about where your appointment can take place.

Displaying Sexual Harmful Behaviour (SHB)

If a child or young person has displayed or is displaying Sexual Harmful Behaviour (SHB) give consideration to the risk (if any) they pose to other young people (who may be attending Sir Henry Mitchell House at the same time) and staff. You will need to identify whether it is suitable for the child or young person to complete group work is an example of one of the questions you may need to consider when completing/delivering the sentence plan. You will also need to consider how the child or young person's behaviour might impact on their ability to access education, partner agencies and other resources (i.e. leisure centres) and you may be asked to contribute to a multi-agency risk assessment.

Physical Impairment/Disability

If a child or young person has a physical impairment/disability you will need to consider whether or not Sir Henry Mitchell House and the premises of our partner agencies are accessible to them. If not reflect on whether there is anything you can do to improve access. If it is not appropriate to see the child or young person at our offices, plan where will you see them and how will they get to their timetabled appointments.

Substance Use

Substance use can impact on a child or young person's cognitive functioning and levels of motivation. It can also impact on their physical and/or emotional well-being. When working with a child or young person who uses substances you will need to consider how their substance use impacts on them and take this information into account when completing their sentence plan and delivering work. You will also need to consider the child or young person's patterns of use when timetabling appointments.

Being exploited

If a child or young person is being exploited they may fear those who are exploiting them more than the threat of been returned to Court. They may be being moved around the country and they may not have a choice about whether or not they are available to attend timetabled appointments. Difficult decisions may need to be made about whether National Standards should be enforced or suspended; if a child should be returned to Court in breach of their order if they fail to keep timetabled appointments or whether or not (given the number of services that will be involved if a child or young person is being exploited) the order should be returned to Court as unworkable.

Not trusting professionals

If a child or young person does not trust you they are less likely to share information with you. You can not accurately assess a child or young person's needs (and promote change) or the risk they pose to themselves, others or from others if they are withholding information. If the child or young person you are working with does not trust others and/or professionals, you will need to consider what steps need to be taken to facilitate trust and maximise engagement.

Learning style

Establishing a child or young person's learning style can facilitate engagement, learning and development. After establishing a child or young person's learning style it is important that it is taken into account when planning and delivering pieces of work. Failing to take a child or young person's learning style into account when planning and delivering pieces of work will limit their engagement, learning and development.

Nature of offence(s)

If a child or young person's conviction is violent or sexual in nature you will need to consider the risk (if any) they pose to other young people (who may be attending Sir Henry Mitchell House at the same time) and staff. Is it suitable for this child or young person to complete group work is an example of one of the questions you may need to consider when completing the sentence plan? You will also need to consider how the child or young person's behaviour might impact on their ability to access education and other resources (i.e. youth clubs) and you may be asked to contribute to a multi-agency risk assessment.

Co-accused

If a child or young person has a co-accused or if someone else who accesses our service is known to have a negative influence on their behaviour you will need to consider what action you will take to manage this or ensure they do not come into contact with each other when attending timetabled appointments and/or accessing partner agencies.

Speech, language and communication needs

The nature of the child or young person's speech, language and/or communication difficulty will generally determine what challenges the child or young person will face. For example, a child or young person who has a stammer knows exactly what they want to say but frequently finds themselves unable to get the words out. This may lead to teasing, which could cause the child or young person to become withdrawn and quiet. On the other hand, a child or young person may have a thought in their head that they are unable to put into words and have trouble understanding and/or remembering what other people say. This can be quite frustrating and can cause a child or young person to become short-tempered, lash out and withdrawn from others. These children and young people may struggle to access education and meetings about their care. A child or young person's speech, language and communication needs can also impact on their ability to form relationships with those around them. A child or young person's (un)diagnosed speech, language and/or communication needs, and the indicator (i.e. being short-tempered) of the child or young person's speech, language and/or communication needs, will need to be taken into account when completing their sentence plan and delivering work.

Unstable and/or unsuitable accommodation

If a child or young person does not have a permanent place of abode they may not be receiving mail and other methods of communicating with them may need to be negotiated and agreed. If a child or young person is 'sofa surfing' their sleep will be dictated by the lifestyle habits of their friends. Disrupted sleep may make it difficult for children or young people to attend education/training/employment on time or keep morning appointments with statutory agencies.

Conditions that are diagnosed by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Children and young people who are diagnosed with conditions such as Autism, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder and/or Conduct Disorder (to name a few) will display varying emotional, behavioural and social needs; each of which may present as being a barrier to engagement and each of which will need to be taken into account when completing the sentence plan and delivering pieces of work.

Covid-19 / the digital divide

The pandemic has limited face to face contact with children and young people. During periods of national lockdown, as a service, we have been reliant on technology to facilitate contact with children and young people. We have learnt that not all children and young people have access to 'smart' technology and those that do might not want to use it for their appointments. Virtual contact may prove difficult for many young people, particularly those with identified speech, language and communication needs.

Please see Appendix 1 to see where and how this information is recorded in Asset+.

Appendix 1

Foundations for Change: Engagement and Participation

Have particular barriers to engagement and participation been identified?

(what is the behaviour/concern and what is it about the behaviour/concern that makes it a barrier to engagement?)

This is the behaviour/concern

1. Billy has been diagnosed with Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), a condition which impacts on his ability to concentrate for extended periods of time and retain information.

This is what makes the behaviour/concern a barrier to engagement

2. Billy's family have a negative view of professionals and resent their presence. His family's view means that Billy does not trust professionals and withholds information from them, which makes it difficult to accurately access his needs and the risks he poses to himself and others.

3. Billy has been convicted of offences of robbery and possession of an offensive weapon. The nature of his conviction indicates that Billy may pose a risk to staff and other service users. It will also make it difficult for Billy to be accepted into college or get a job.

4. Billy has identified speech, language and communication needs; more specifically he has a stammer. Billy's stammer has had a negative impact on his self-esteem. Billy does not like talking in groups and/or to people he does not know.

Pathways and Planning: Tailoring Interventions

Where any other barriers to engagement/participation have been identified, state how these will be addressed in the intervention plan.

1. Taking into account Billy's FAS diagnosis, to ensure our time together is productive and to reduce the likelihood of Billy getting bored and acting out, in accordance with his Education and Health Care Plan, contact with Billy will be limited to 30 minutes. Wherever possible the work set will be interactive, taking into account the fact that Billy struggles in classroom settings.

2. Initial contact with Billy will be above that required by National Standards, which will help me establish a good relationship with him. Clear, concise and consistent boundaries will facilitate trust and ensure that Billy and his mother know what is expected of him and what the consequences will be if he does not comply with his court order.

3. To promote staff and service user safety Billy will be scanned every time he enters the building. When required I will work closely with college and/or a prospective employer (ensuring disclosure is legal, necessary and proportionate) to complete a risk assessment.

4. In accordance with the recommendations made by the Speech and Language Therapist, when working with Billy I will:

- Maintain eye contact and wait for Billy to finish speaking if he is stammering.
- Pause before I answer Billy and slow down my speech slightly to provide an un-rushed model of communication.
- Give Billy time to get his message across.
- If I am finding it difficult to follow what Billy is saying, I will recap what I have understood and ask Billy to repeat only what was unclear.