

Safeguarding

Effective practice with “Highly Resistant Families”

Narrator: Safeguarding children who live in families, which are highly resistant to change, can be one of the biggest challenges for social workers.

This film looks at how such families feel about social workers, why resistance to intervention forms and crucially, what can be done to overcome it.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguarding Lead: To make a good diagnosis of a family and what’s making them tick, I suppose, you have to really get to know them and connect with them and you can only do that by spending time with them.

“Family perspectives on safeguarding with children’s services”

Narrator: A recent report from the Children’s Commissioner for England captured the voices of families who fall into the highly resistant category. Their views of social workers are disturbingly negative.

“Trust is important to make a partnership. To understand each other’s needs and work together”

Female 1 voice: If you say anything they twist it, if you get upset they judge you, they rationalise it, accuse you. It can be so demeaning.

Female 2 voice: We had a letter from the social services on a Friday night. It said they had an anonymous call, that they were coming round to visit on Tuesday at 9 am.

Apart from being scared, I thought, “I’ll be at school then, what am I going to do?”

Female 3 voice: I’ll never have children because both me and my partner have been in care and I think they’ll take the child away. I can’t risk it.

Male 1 voice: People contact the social services for help, but then they say they are going to investigate you.

Female 4 voice: They look at me as if I should be grateful for what I have, they judge me for it, they make me feel ashamed. I cannot ask for help.

Narrator: The report shows that social workers are often also frustrated.

Reconstruction video of a social worker walking up a garden path.

Social Worker 1: You just don't know what you're going to face, no one wants to see you, no one's grateful for your services and many are angry that you're there.

Social Worker 2: If families won't let you in, what can you do?

Narrator: The barriers clearly exist but how can they be broken down? In Tameside near Manchester a team of forty-two frontline social workers deal with an increasingly heavy child protection caseload in an area of severe deprivation.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguarding Lead: I suppose the starting point is in terms of having a highly professional competent work force where you do have staff who are experienced, who are confident, who are trained and supported properly in terms of knowing what they've got to do, why they are doing it so that they have that emotional competence to go out and make those relationships with families.

C4EO Knowledge Review: 4 Key messages To Safeguard children in "highly resistant families".

1 A detailed assessment is essential, even if difficulties exist.

Narrator: C4EO Safeguarding Knowledge Review has highlighted four key messages for effective practice to safeguard children in highly resistant families. Firstly, a detailed assessment is essential, even though difficulties may be raised by the family and the environment.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguarding Lead: It's like being a little bit of an investigator really, you have a hypothesis as to whether this person is drinking and it might be that between nine and five they're not. Sometimes people will tell us that, yes, they drink at night so you go there first thing in the morning or late at night, spend enough time with them to kind of like really get to know them.

Reconstruction video of a social worker knocking on somebody's front door and being invited inside by the homeowner, going into the living room and sitting on the sofa together with a small child.

And if they are so resistant, for me, it's like what are you hiding? There will be families who are not in that right place at that moment in time particularly where there are drugs involved or alcohol or mental ill health for that matter where they don't see their problems or there is a denial.

Families can be quite difficult, they can be aggressive. Where the environment in which the social worker goes is not conducive because it's very cluttered, it's unhygienic, it's smelly, it's all the things that are

difficult to deal with and if your value base is different it's very difficult then to kind of stand there and ask the kind of questions where you need to ask or sit down to do that. So, how do we support people to be able to do that?

Reconstruction video of a social worker writing in her work pad.

So the thing for me is being persistent and not letting go.

C4EO Knowledge Review:2 Practitioners be aware of families with changing and unstable membership.

Narrator: The knowledge review recommends that Practitioners should be especially alert to those families with changing and unstable membership.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguard Lead: I mean we have had children where parents have flitted from one address to another so it's like collecting all that intelligence. So kind of, I've had social workers traipsing all the pubs in the local area because they know they'll find her somewhere or the other to say are you going to get back home and look after your children.

Reconstruction video of a social worker knocking on a house door.

Recently we had an example of a mother who we knew was carrying on with her relationship with this man who was very violent but on the face of it from nine to five, whenever we go, he's not there. So my team decided to go there at seven o'clock in the morning and of course lo and behold he's there. If he's going to be here he's going to carry on assaulting you and you're not safeguarding your child, so you're going to have to make this decision.

Reconstruction video of a car driving down a street.

C4EO Knowledge Review:3 Information should be organised and analysed.

Narrator: Information gathered for assessments should be organised and analysed, and assessments should contain information from a number of sources.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguard Lead: Neighbours, grandparents, extended family, older children, ex-partners have plethora of information and other people teachers, parents, health visitors. So it's really important that you collate all that information in a timely fashion.

C4EO Knowledge Review:4 Direct Observation Essential in complex cases.

Narrator: Finally, the review urges that direct observation of parent/child interaction is essential in complex cases.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguard Lead: So if you were to read our assessments now, particularly pre-verbal children, you would read like social workers particularly kind of adding "Saw mum holding the baby, she was looking into his eyes and she was attentive to his needs, so he wanted to play with the toy and she went and grabbed it for him, she was meeting his needs appropriately, she got down to his level on the floor."

Narrator: The advice from this experienced safeguarding lead is valuable for social workers dealing with highly resistant families.

Reconstruction video of social worker walking down a street.

Nina Chaudhry

Safeguard Lead: You don't have to be apologetic for your profession, for your duty, for your responsibility and people accept that I think if you're, again, if you're honest with them, you're not going in there to befriend them, you're not their friend and for me that's where we need to be enabling our staff to know exactly what they're doing and why they're doing it, so they feel equipped to go out and do that.

End of Recording