Aberdeenshire Child Protection Committee

1. What is when services find it hard to engage

The **National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland (2021, updated 2023)** reframes the previous registration category **'Non-Compliance'** to **'When Services Find It Hard to Engage'**, shifting the focus **away from blaming families** and towards understanding what may be affecting engagement.
This change encourages practitioners to explore the **reasons behind the behaviour**, rather than assuming refusal or resistance.

2.Recognising reasons behind the non-engagement

We frequently talk about things like ***non-engagement***, ***resistance***, ***disguised compliance***, or even ***disguised non-compliance***.

These labels help us describe behaviours we're observing, but they also give us clues about what might be happening beneath the surface.

"Importantly, these terms remind us that a lack of engagement doesn't automatically mean a lack of care. It can signal stress, fear, confusion, trauma, or simply feeling overwhelmed."

Why This Matters
These descriptions matter because they help us understand *why* change might be resisted, or why risks to the child may not be fully acknowledged or addressed.
They encourage us to look beyond the behaviour itself and consider the wider context."

3. Why it matters

A child's safety and wellbeing can be compromised when services struggle to engage with parents or carers. Research and learning from case reviews show that non-engagement can indicate:

- increased or **hidden risk**
- **drift** in child protection planning
- **disguised compliance** masking underlying concerns
- delays in identifying or responding to harm

The national guidance emphasises the need for early, coordinated, multi-agency action to prevent these risks escalating.

6. Aberdeenshire approach

- **National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland**
  Includes Section 4.8 on *When Services Find It Hard to Engage*.

- **Engaging Parents and Families – Education Scotland Toolkit**
- **Why Language Matters – NSPCC Learning**

ALDO e-Modules
Child Protection: When Services Find It Hard to Engage
Trauma-Informed Practice

5. What to do

Professionals in **ALL** sectors must:

- Maintain **professional curiosity**: look, listen, ask, check.
- Avoid assumptions and reflect on **your own practice**.
- **Check understanding** rather than assuming information has been heard.
- Explore what may be contributing to the difficulty.
- Use **multi-agency escalation processes** when concerns persist.
- Seek **supervision** early.
- Keep the **child's experience** at the centre of analysis and decision-making.

4. What are the signs

Practitioners may notice:

- repeated non-attendance or last-minute cancellations
- reluctance to participate in assessments or planning
- partial or superficial cooperation
- avoidance, hostility, or inconsistent communication
- withholding information or restricting access to the child
- parents agreeing to actions but not following through

These patterns should trigger **professional curiosity, not assumptions**.