“Client resistance is not something that solely exists within the client, nor even something that is simply produced by the context of child protection. Rather, it is also to some degree a product of the nature and quality of the interaction between client and social worker”.

Parental resistance and Social Worker Skills - D Forrester, D Westlake and G Glynn

How to use the Practice Principles:

The Practice Principles are intended as a guide to learning and practice through conversations in supervision, self-reflection and peer discussion. Developed by children’s workforce managers and practitioners, the Principles aim to support the aim of Relationship Based Practice, placing at the centre of our work the notion that often help is provided to families through the relationship formed between family member and worker.
Principle 1: Establishing and Building Rapport

- **Preparedness**
  Gathering information about the family before contact. Being aware of names and key relationships. Prepare where English is not first language or other communication method is needed.

- **Courtesy**
  Even when irritated or angry.

- **Clearly Defined, Explained and Understood Role**
  Be clear yourself as to your role. Be prepared to explain. Check understanding as children and families may be emotionally charged and may not easily understand.

- **Methods of Communication That Fits the Purpose**
  Where possible using face to face when dealing with important matters. Only using the telephone, email or text for less serious matters or where there are no alternatives.

- **Congruent Messages, Voice Tone and Body Language**
  When body language and/or voice tone are at odds with the words said, it is the former that are understood and remembered. Allow enough time for understanding.

- **Strength Focused**
  Be interested in what is going well. Listen and inquire as to the strengths of the situation. Model a focus on finding solutions.

- **Listen Fully and Well**
  Listen to allow people to speak and explain, not just “waiting your turn” to speak. Be mindful of confirmatory bias – making your mind up early and seeking for confirmation that you are right.

- **Use Formal Power Lightly**
  Clearly describe your formal role and authority to family members. However maintain a sense of equality with the family, using understandable language. Be mindful that your body language be welcoming and inclusive.

Principle 2: Clearly Describe Your Worries about Children

- **Understandable Description of Worries**
  Say what has happened, or what you are worried has happened and how this has led to your worries about a child’s welfare. What you know (and what you don’t know) and what you are worried may happen to the child/children now and in the future. Check understanding.

- **Listen to the Parents Response**
  Collaboration at this stage may be key to a successful future. Ask what they think. Model managing contrary views i.e. in a way that demonstrates you value their input whilst maintaining your concerns, if appropriate. Encourage and listen
to the worries of children and families.

- **Child Focus**
  It is understandable that workers respond to the parent’s behaviour and what they say, however the observation of “the child’s lived experience” is a better indicator of risk and progress.

- **“Own” on the Worries of the Professional Network**
  Be mindful of “leaking out” a view that it’s another agencies worries and not yours in order to avoid conflict with the family. Maintain this focus whilst being explicit about the source of the referral.

- **Awareness of Prejudicial Bias**
  Challenge yourself to consider your assumptions and prejudicial beliefs, ensuring that you are acting to support different lifestyles and parenting which meet children’s needs.

### Principle 3: Helpful Dialogue with Families

- **Empathetic Listening**
  Empathetic listening is often a powerful tool to help people reach solutions to their own problems. Catch yourself “waiting to speak” or “looking for confirmation” and turn our attention to active listening. Be patient.

- **Show Interest, Reflect, Affirm and Summarise**
  These are core drivers of relationship-based practice. People with trust those who they believe are genuinely interested in them and their family, rather in a “case”.

- **Confident Recognition of Strong Feelings**
  It can be tempting to quickly placate anger or comfort the distressed. It can useful for people to express, and see you listen to, strong feelings.

- **Encourage Manageable Change**
  Families can become overloaded with agencies expectations. Deal with highly important matters first. Appreciate small signs of progress.

- **Creativity and Flexibility in the Use of Agency Tools**
  Agency pro-forma often appear bureaucratic but are necessary for information gathering and record keeping. Analyse and make sense of conversations to inform planning and intervention. Be flexible in your communication tools, especially with children and young people.

- **The Success of Communication is Defined by the Receiver**
  Be flexible in your communication to help families collaborate with you. Be mindful of jargon. Find out how they like to communicate and use that method.
Principle 4: Managing Conflict Successfully

- **Awareness of Your Own Fears**
  Respectfully maintaining your concerns in the face of conflict may be key to helping change in the family. Many of us have previous experiences that will cause us to respond in conflict circumstances in ways that won’t help our practice. Use supervision to discuss your specific fears about such situations.

- **Understand the Physiological Effects of Conflict**
  Understanding our own responses will help us understand what is happening to us and become more emotionally aware.

- **Safe Working Practices**
  It is difficult to undertake this difficult work when fearful and you have a right to be safe at work. Engage with the arrangements your team has for safe working.

- **Acknowledging Family Member’s Feelings**
  Whilst we may not agree with individuals statements, it may be easier to understand the feelings and concerns which lay behind them. Demonstrate empathy for someone’s situation even if you don’t agree with their statements.

Principle 5: Seek Meaningful Engagement

- **Understand the Continuum between Compliance and Collaboration**
  Apparent compliance may be welcome but may tell us little about how parents will work alongside agencies towards improving circumstances with children. Compliant parents may lead us to play down risk, maintain your focus on “the lived experience of the child”.

- **Communication is More than Telling**
  It’s listening, co constructing, sitting in silence, passing someone a handkerchief. Body language and other non verbal elements communicate more then words.

- **Difficult to Engage Children and Families Require Flexible Communication**
  Whilst we may find it justifiable to label an individual as “resistant” this label in itself may get in the way of our work with them. Workers who energetically seek ways of communicating with the individual to help them collaborate may be rewarded with better relationships.

- **Manage Counter Arguments:**
  Some parents may refer to a workers age, gender, parental status, qualifications, and experience to undermine them. Whilst it may be useful to repeat your worries arguing is rarely fruitful. If the counter argument has some legitimacy i.e. an alternative medical interpretation, then a second opinion may be helpful. Parents are often concerned to keep control of the situation and if we can build collaboration then they can be helped to do so.
Principle 6: Learning from Experience

- **Supervision Agenda Item**
  Although skills in difficult conversations are called “soft” skills they are extremely difficult. Discussing what went well and what could have helped matters go even better can be invaluable, even when the conversation has been successful.

- **Consciously Implementing Learning**
  Our practice is often built out of habits formed by how we repeatedly behave with others and what we have seen more experienced practitioners do. Consciously use a different approach, if it would be appropriate, and reflect on its use.

- **Applying learning**
  Tools for working with families, Motivational Interviewing, Solution Focus and other theories need to be used and re-used before they become embedded. This may take some persistence.

- **Share Your Skills with Others**
  Look for opportunities to share what you do well with others. Mentor colleagues from your own and others teams. Run mini-training sessions, support novice practitioners, encourage your team to use peer supervision.

Phil Jones – Workplace Dynamics - February 2017