



# One Minute Guide



## What do we mean by “building trusting relationships”?

Building a trusting relationship is about creating a safe, respectful and non-judgemental space in which children, young people and families feel able to talk openly about their experiences. Many families in Wakefield meet services during stressful, complex or crisis driven periods of their lives. Trust is not automatic, instead, it needs to be built through the way we communicate, the consistency we show, and the empathy we bring.

Trust isn't a “soft skill”: it's a core safeguarding tool that allows practitioners to identify risks earlier, understand the lived experience of the family, and work together in a meaningful and sustainable way.

## Why trust matters in safeguarding work

Families who have experienced trauma, fear, stigma, previous negative involvement with services or repeated changes of worker may be wary of professionals. Without trust:

- **Families may withhold information or minimise concerns**
- **Children may mask distress or needs**
- **Engagement can become inconsistent or crisis-driven**

Professionals may miss early signs of harm or change. When trust is established, families are more open, children feel safer, and practitioners can work collaboratively rather than from a place of conflict or resistance. This directly supports good decision making across the [Continuum of Need](#), as practitioners better understand what level of support is genuinely required.

## Core principles you should use in every interaction

### 1. Use respectful, empowering language

Avoid technical wording and avoid framing concerns in a way that feels blaming or shaming. Make your communication clear, kind and transparent.

### 2. Share control wherever possible

Offering choices, even small ones, helps families feel involved rather than “done to”. Explain processes, next steps and decision points so there are no surprises.

### 3. Be reliable and predictable

Doing what you say you will do, being on time, and following up build's confidence. Be consistent across visits, meetings and communication, many families struggle with the inconsistencies in the allocation of practitioners.

### 4. Recognise and respond to emotion early

If you notice anxiety, frustration or fear, acknowledge it. Early validation prevents escalation and shows the family that their feelings matter.

### 5. Remove judgement and increase curiosity

Families may not behave in ways we expect, that doesn't make them resistant. Approach with curiosity, “I wonder what might be going on here...”, rather than assumption. Be mindful of how you work with fathers and male care givers as many assumptions can be made when working with this cohort. See the [WSCP Professional Curiosity and Challenge](#) page.

**Active Listening**

- 1 Be fully Present**
  - Give your full attention
  - Reduce distractions
- 2 Stay Curious, Not Judgemental**
  - Allow the speaker time
  - Pause before responding
- 3 Show you are listening**
  - Use open body language
  - Small verbal encouragers (“OK...”, “Go on...”)
- 4 Notice Feelings as well as Words**
  - Listen for tone, emotion and behaviour
  - Acknowledge what the speaker is feeling
- 5 Don't Interrupt**
  - Allow the speaker time
  - Pause before responding
- 6 Clarify and Check**
  - Reflect back what you've heard
  - Ask short clarifying questions
- 7 Summarise and Agree**
  - Briefly summarise key points
  - Agree what will happen next



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## Understanding behaviours that may challenge

Behaviours such as avoidance, anger, lateness, shutting down, or changing the subject can be easy to interpret as unwillingness. But often they are protective strategies shaped by trauma, uncertainty, or fear of consequences.

### Ask yourself:

- *What has this family experienced before?*
- *What need is this behaviour meeting for them?*
- *What might feel frightening or overwhelming right now?*

## What you might see and what it may signal

### Ambivalence

- Missing appointments
- Repeated lateness
- Changing the subject when concerns are raised

### This may indicate:

- The family is overwhelmed
- They don't fully understand expectations
- They've had negative experiences with previous professionals

They don't yet feel safe having difficult conversations

**Your role is to recognise patterns in behaviour, explore what's behind them, and work together to remove those barriers. For more information visit the [Building Trusting Relationships](#) page on the WSCP website.**

## Practical approaches that strengthen trust

- Prepare for each contact: who am I seeing, what is the purpose, what is the most trauma-aware way to approach this?
- Ask open questions and [actively listen](#), including what is **not** said.
- Keep explanations simple and avoid jargon.
- Don't rush silence; allow time for thinking and emotional processing.
- Be transparent about concerns AND strengths.
- Check understanding regularly and invite the family to correct you.
- Bring in multi-agency information only with clear explanation and purpose.

Reflect on your own [biases and assumptions](#) - they shape how you interpret behaviour.

## Resources

### Podcasts

- [The Neuroscience of Trust • A Trauma-Informed Future](#)
- [Using Motivational Interviewing to Support Families \(Pt.6\) - Doing MI vs Being MI • The P Pod](#)

### Webpages

- [Making trauma-informed practice a reality | Research in Practice Building Trusting Relationships - Wakefield Safeguarding Knowledge Hub](#)
- [Motivational Interviewing - Wakefield Safeguarding Knowledge Hub](#)
- [Building Trusting Relationships](#)