Engagement in Complex Living Environments

Seven stage engagement continuum | One page practitioner reference

Use the closest description for this person, topic and moment. Engagement can move in any direction. Describe what you see or hear; protective responses are possibilities to explore, not labels or diagnoses.

Stage	What you may observe	Possible protective responses	Useful tools	Practitioner focus	If it becomes too much
1 Protective distance	No response; contact declined or through others; access not agreed.	Flight: avoids contact. Fight: challenges involvement. Freeze: silence. Fawn: quick agreement without follow-through. Withholding: little information.	Plain-language contact; choice of route, time or worker; consistency map; one purpose per contact.	Explain role and limits. Offer two realistic choices. Keep promises; avoid increasing pressure.	Stop questions; state the essential message and a predictable way back.
2 Testing safety	Brief, guarded or doorstep contact; checks your role and consequences; shifts from home or possessions.	Flight: changes topic or leaves. Fight: tests authority. Freeze: loses the thread. Fawn: apologises or agrees quickly. Withholding: shares safer facts.	Agenda choices; transparency about information sharing; reflective listening; consistent contact.	Invite correction. Use the person's words. Let practical conversation build trust.	Offer a pause, another topic or an end to the visit; agree the next contact.
3 Conditional engagement	Some topics or spaces open, others closed; access fluctuates; selected concerns shared.	Flight: avoids a room or task. Fight: protects boundaries. Freeze: stuck amid choices. Fawn: accepts an unowned plan. Withholding: staged disclosure.	Assessment in stages; shared risk map; conversational scaling; values exploration.	Ask permission before each new topic or space. Record observation and disagreement.	Put forms away; return to one concern. Avoid seeking agreement during overwhelm.
4 Collaborative exploration	Reflects on patterns or risks; identifies values; tolerates a different perspective.	Flight: retreats to practical detail. Fight: argues a risk point. Freeze: overwhelmed by scale. Fawn: adopts your goal. Withholding: keeps sensitive meaning private.	Values-based goals; motivational interviewing; decisional balance; compassionate honesty.	Link risk to what matters to the person. Check whose goal is being discussed.	Ground the conversation; summarise what matters without pressing for action today.
5 Preparing for action	Suggests a starting point; makes partial changes; commitment and doubt coexist.	Flight: postpones or moves items. Fight: rejects a service-led plan. Freeze: cannot choose. Fawn: agrees to a clearance. Withholding: hides difficulty.	Micro-plan; confidence questions; stop plan; body doubling; reversible categories.	Agree one small, owned step, decision rights and stop signals. Clarify real deadlines.	Pause before decision fatigue; preserve one success or switch to a reversible task.
6 Supported action	Starts tasks or accepts help; attachment, fatigue and decisions become visible; progress uneven.	Flight: leaves or avoids next visit. Fight: conflicts over pace. Freeze: decision paralysis. Fawn: allows disposal despite distress. Withholding: conceals items or distress.	Short work periods; planned breaks; safe holding categories; CBT/CFT-informed reframing.	Ask before touching. Watch decision quality. Recognise boundaries and learning as progress.	Stop early, reduce demand and offer simple choices. Silence is not consent.
7 Sustaining or re engaging	Maintains, pauses or resumes changes; may ask for help earlier; setbacks follow stress or service changes.	Flight: avoids return. Fight: anger after setback. Freeze: cannot find a restart point. Fawn: reports all is fine. Withholding: hides recurrence.	Recurrence plan; early warning signs; EEP narrative review; agreed route back.	Reconnect before reviewing. Normalise fluctuation; reassess present risk.	Reduce shame and start smaller than the last successful step if needed.

When engagement changes: Notice what changed → pause and reduce demand → offer control → reconnect → revisit the smallest useful next step. Record direct observations, what helped, what increased pressure, and any risk action.

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Engagement in ASB & Neighbour Conflict

Seven stage engagement continuum | One page housing practitioner reference

Use the closest description for this person, topic and moment. Engagement can move in any direction. Describe what you see or hear; protective responses are possibilities to explore, not labels or diagnoses.

Stage	What you may observe	Possible protective responses	Useful tools	Practitioner focus	If it becomes too much
1 Protective distance	No reply; avoids visits; communicates through others; refuses access or discussion.	Flight: avoids contact. Fight: rejects allegations or challenges authority. Freeze: shuts down. Fawn: agrees quickly to end contact. Withholding: gives minimal information.	Plain-language contact; clear purpose; choice of route/time; one issue per contact; written summary.	Explain role, evidence and limits. Separate the person from the behaviour. Avoid threat-heavy opening language.	Stop questions; state the one essential message; agree a realistic way back.
2 Testing safety	Brief or guarded contact; disputes wording; checks what evidence exists; focuses on fairness or who complained.	Flight: changes subject or leaves. Fight: argues process. Freeze: cannot take in multiple allegations. Fawn: agrees to conditions without ownership. Withholding: omits visitors/events.	Agenda choices; neutral incident descriptions; check understanding; transparency about process and confidentiality.	Invite correction. Acknowledge impact without assuming intent. Be specific about what needs to change.	Pause; reduce to one incident or one expectation; agree next contact.
3 Conditional engagement	Some incidents can be discussed; engagement varies by topic; accepts some impact but rejects other parts.	Flight: avoids difficult examples. Fight: counter-alleges. Freeze: gets stuck on detail. Fawn: says yes to every action. Withholding: partial account.	Timeline; ABC-style incident mapping; restorative questions; proportionality check; support-needs screen.	Explore triggers, context and impact. Distinguish nuisance, vulnerability, conflict and deliberate harm.	Put evidence bundle aside; summarise what is agreed and what remains disputed.
4 Collaborative exploration	Reflects on patterns; can consider neighbour impact; identifies triggers, needs or misunderstandings.	Flight: pulls back when consequences are discussed. Fight: debates blame. Freeze: overwhelmed by options. Fawn: adopts worker's plan. Withholding: keeps sensitive context private.	Values-based goals; problem-solving; mediation only where safe/appropriate; communication plan; support referrals.	Link behaviour change to what matters to the person: home, privacy, tenancy, relationships and stability.	Ground the conversation; choose one practical change for the next few days.
5 Preparing for action	Suggests a workable step; weighs consequences; commitment and doubt coexist.	Flight: postpones meetings. Fight: rejects formal wording. Freeze: decision fatigue. Fawn: agrees to unrealistic terms. Withholding: minimises barriers.	Micro-plan; SMART actions; confidence scaling; environmental adjustments; named support.	Agree one owned step and what support is needed. Make expectations measurable and proportionate.	Pause before adding conditions; preserve one success or switch to a reversible step.
6 Supported action	Starts agreed actions; may engage with support; progress uneven; setbacks occur.	Flight: misses follow-up. Fight: reacts to enforcement. Freeze: loses momentum. Fawn: reports compliance despite difficulty. Withholding: hides recurrence.	Short review periods; reinforce progress; tenancy sustainment support; behaviour agreements; practical problem-solving.	Review evidence fairly. Recognise improvement as well as recurrence. Keep consequences clear but not shaming.	Reduce demand; return to the smallest action; re-check support needs and risk.
7 Sustaining or re-engaging	Maintains change, asks for help earlier, or re-engages after a further incident or complaint.	Flight: avoids review after setback. Fight: expects punishment. Freeze: cannot restart. Fawn: promises too much. Withholding: conceals recurrence.	Early-warning signs; relapse/re-engagement plan; agreed communication route; periodic review.	Normalise fluctuation without minimising impact. Reconnect before escalating where safe and proportionate.	Start smaller than last time and rebuild from the last successful point.

When engagement changes: Notice what changed -> pause and reduce demand -> offer control -> reconnect -> revisit the smallest useful next step. Record direct observations, what helped, what increased pressure, and any risk action.

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Engagement Where Domestic Abuse Is Present

Seven stage engagement continuum | One page housing practitioner reference

Use with a safety-first, trauma-informed approach. Do not assume that reluctance, inconsistency or missed contact means lack of risk. Speak with the person privately wherever possible and follow local domestic abuse and safeguarding procedures.

Stage	What you may observe	Possible protective responses	Useful tools	Practitioner focus	If it becomes too much
1 Protective distance	No safe contact; partner or family answers; missed appointments; person appears watched, rushed or unable to speak freely.	Flight: avoids contact to stay safe. Fight: becomes defensive if risk is raised. Freeze: very limited speech. Fawn: says everything is fine. Withholding: conceals abuse, location or injuries.	Safe-contact check; neutral messages; choice of channel/time; coded or agreed contact arrangements; private enquiry.	Prioritise immediate safety and privacy. Do not disclose concerns to the suspected perpetrator or arrange joint mediation.	Stop detail-gathering; check if it is safe to continue; agree the safest next contact.
2 Testing safety	Brief disclosure or hints; changes story; asks what will happen if they tell you; worries about tenancy, children, immigration or finances.	Flight: withdraws after disclosure. Fight: rejects labels. Freeze: cannot sequence events. Fawn: tells you what seems safest. Withholding: omits coercive control.	Explain confidentiality and its limits; survivor-led questions; validate without pressing; safe referral options; interpreters independent of family.	Build trust through transparency. Ask what the person wants help with today rather than demanding a full account.	Offer a pause and return to immediate needs: safety, housing, children, money, medication, contact.
3 Conditional engagement	Some risks can be discussed; person accepts some support but not others; contact fluctuates.	Flight: misses referral calls. Fight: resists professional direction. Freeze: decision overload. Fawn: accepts plans they do not want. Withholding: protects perpetrator or fears consequences.	Safety planning; DASH/local risk tool where trained and required; housing options; specialist DA service; MARAC pathway where threshold met.	Respect autonomy while explaining risk and options clearly. Avoid making leaving the relationship the only measure of progress.	Reduce choices; identify one safe action and one person/service they are willing to contact.
4 Collaborative exploration	Can identify patterns of coercion, risk escalation and practical barriers; starts to define what safer would look like.	Flight: retreats when legal/housing consequences arise. Fight: anger at systems. Freeze: overwhelm. Fawn: follows worker priorities. Withholding: keeps parts private.	Values-based goals; practical safety map; tenancy and legal options; financial support; children's safety planning; specialist advocacy.	Link actions to the person's own priorities. Plan around perpetrator monitoring, technology, transport and money.	Return to one immediate priority and remove non-essential tasks.
5 Preparing for action	Chooses a step: specialist referral, safe contact, lock/security option, management move discussion, evidence plan or support network.	Flight: delays action when risk rises. Fight: rejects formal process. Freeze: cannot choose. Fawn: agrees to unsafe plan. Withholding: hides change in risk.	Micro-plan; written/hidden safety plan only if safe; named professional; contingency planning; practical housing actions.	Check that each action will not increase danger. Agree who does what and when, and how contact can safely occur.	Stop if action may alert the perpetrator; revert to safety and specialist advice.
6 Supported action	Uses support or housing measures; progress may be stop-start; may return to or remain with perpetrator.	Flight: disappears from services. Fight: frustration with delays. Freeze: exhaustion. Fawn: reports what professionals want to hear. Withholding: conceals renewed contact.	Regular safe check-ins; multi-agency coordination; flexible appointments; security measures; evidence support; advocacy.	Do not punish re-engagement with the perpetrator. Reassess risk and practical barriers each time circumstances change.	Reduce pressure; re-establish safe contact; act on immediate danger through local emergency/safeguarding pathways.
7 Sustaining or re-engaging	Maintains safer arrangements, re-engages after a setback, or asks for help earlier when risk changes.	Flight: avoids review due to shame/fear. Fight: distrust after system failures. Freeze: unable to restart. Fawn: over-promises. Withholding: conceals renewed risk.	Early-warning plan; safe re-referral route; ongoing advocacy; tenancy sustainment; agreed review points.	Normalise re-engagement. Keep the door open and make access to support as simple and safe as possible.	Start with safety and one achievable next step; do not require a full retelling.

When engagement changes: Notice what changed -> pause and reduce demand -> offer control -> reconnect -> revisit the smallest useful next step. Record direct observations, what helped, what increased pressure, and any risk action.

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Engagement Where Cuckooing / Exploitation Is Suspected

Seven stage engagement continuum | One page housing practitioner reference

Use when there are concerns that another person or group may be taking over a home, finances, access, belongings or decision-making. Lack of disclosure may reflect fear, coercion, loyalty or dependency rather than consent.

Stage	What you may observe	Possible protective responses	Useful tools	Practitioner focus	If it becomes too much
1 Protective distance	No access or contact; others answer the door; resident is rarely seen alone; unfamiliar people control entry or speak for them.	Flight: avoids professionals. Fight: denies concerns. Freeze: appears unable to speak. Fawn: agrees with those present. Withholding: conceals who is staying or controlling access.	Safe private contact; alternative venues; unannounced contact only within policy; multi-agency information check; simple questions.	Create a chance to speak without potential exploiters present. Do not challenge suspected perpetrators in front of the resident.	Leave safely; avoid escalating the situation; agree a discreet route back where possible.
2 Testing safety	Brief private contact; inconsistent accounts; worry about getting others into trouble; missing money, food, medication or possessions.	Flight: ends conversation. Fight: insists visitors are friends. Freeze: cannot answer direct questions. Fawn: minimises to protect others. Withholding: hides threats or debt.	Explain role and confidentiality; curiosity-based questions; exploitation indicators; basic needs check; safeguarding consultation.	Focus on what has changed in the person's home and choices. Avoid forcing the label "cuckooing".	Stop detailed questioning; check immediate safety, food, medication, money and who can safely be contacted.
3 Conditional engagement	Acknowledges some loss of control or unwanted visitors; may accept help with one issue but not wider safeguarding.	Flight: avoids agreed meetings. Fight: resists restrictions. Freeze: overwhelm. Fawn: agrees to action under pressure. Withholding: partial disclosure.	Contextual safeguarding map; financial abuse check; tenancy/security options; police liaison where appropriate; advocacy.	Build from the person's priorities: sleep, food, keys, visitors, money, feeling safe. Clarify consent and coercion separately.	Reduce to one concern; avoid large multi-agency meetings unless necessary and agreed.
4 Collaborative exploration	Can explore patterns: who comes, what they want, what happens if they say no, and what keeps the situation going.	Flight: retreats when consequences are discussed. Fight: anger about services/police. Freeze: fear of retaliation. Fawn: adopts professional plan. Withholding: protects relationships.	Network mapping; safe contact plan; risk formulation; values-based goals; practical tenancy/security measures; specialist exploitation support.	Link risk to loss of choice and control, not just property damage or visitors. Plan for retaliation risk.	Pause and return to one safety goal; do not over-promise removal of risk.
5 Preparing for action	Chooses a step such as changing locks, safe banking support, restricting access, reporting, temporary accommodation or specialist referral.	Flight: postpones when fear rises. Fight: rejects formal action. Freeze: decision fatigue. Fawn: accepts unsafe plan. Withholding: hides continuing contact.	Micro-plan; contingency plan; named lead professional; evidence logging; emergency contacts; practical resource support.	Agree who acts first and how the person will be protected if exploiters react. Coordinate agencies around one plan.	Stop if action could expose the person; re-check safety and seek safeguarding/police advice.
6 Supported action	Some control is restored; unwanted visitors reduce; finances or routines stabilise; setbacks remain possible.	Flight: drops out after confrontation. Fight: anger at restrictions. Freeze: exhaustion. Fawn: says risk is resolved. Withholding: conceals return of exploiters.	Short reviews; repeat safeguarding checks; tenancy sustainment; money/benefits support; practical security; outreach.	Watch for displacement or return of exploitation. Recognise small gains in autonomy and control.	Reduce demands; restore essentials; revisit the last point at which the person had more control.
7 Sustaining or re-engaging	Maintains greater control, asks for help earlier, or re-engages when visitors/exploitation return.	Flight: avoids services from shame/fear. Fight: expects blame. Freeze: cannot restart. Fawn: promises everything is fine. Withholding: hides recurrence.	Early-warning signs; rapid re-entry route; trusted worker; periodic multi-agency review; safety planning.	Normalise recurrence as a risk pattern, not a failure. Keep re-entry to support straightforward.	Start with immediate safety and one practical action; escalate only as risk requires.

When engagement changes: Notice what changed -> pause and reduce demand -> offer control -> reconnect -> revisit the smallest useful next step. Record direct observations, what helped, what increased pressure, and any risk action.

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Engagement in Mental Health Complexity

Seven stage engagement continuum | One page housing practitioner reference

Use the closest description for this person and moment. Changes in communication, organisation or behaviour may have many causes. Do not diagnose; focus on what is observable, what helps the person engage, and what housing action is needed.

Stage	What you may observe	Possible protective responses	Useful tools	Practitioner focus	If it becomes too much
1 Protective distance	No response; missed contact; avoids home visits; communication may be minimal, suspicious, disorganised or highly anxious.	Flight: avoids contact. Fight: challenges motives. Freeze: cannot respond. Fawn: agrees quickly. Withholding: conceals distress, medication issues or support needs.	Low-demand contact; predictable worker; written and verbal options; reasonable adjustments; one message at a time.	Explain role and purpose clearly. Reduce uncertainty. Do not interpret non-response as wilful non-compliance.	Stop questions; give one essential message; offer a clear route back and crisis information where relevant.
2 Testing safety	Brief contact; checks intentions; may appear guarded, distracted, hopeless, highly activated or slow to process.	Flight: changes topic or leaves. Fight: distrust or irritability. Freeze: blankness/confusion. Fawn: agrees to end pressure. Withholding: hides symptoms or risk.	Agenda choice; check understanding; grounding/orientation; allow processing time; accessible information.	Invite correction. Ask what would make the conversation easier. Avoid arguing with beliefs or overwhelming with evidence.	Pause; reduce stimulation; return to one practical housing issue and immediate wellbeing.
3 Conditional engagement	Can discuss some issues or accept selected support; engagement varies with mood, stress, sleep or symptoms.	Flight: misses appointments. Fight: rejects services. Freeze: becomes stuck. Fawn: says yes without capacity to act. Withholding: partial disclosure.	Task chunking; support mapping; consent-based liaison; executive-function scaffolding; flexible appointments.	Separate ability, motivation and distress. Check whether adjustments or support could make action possible.	Put forms aside; agree one concern and one next contact.
4 Collaborative exploration	Can reflect on patterns and identify what makes housing tasks easier or harder; may discuss triggers or early warning signs.	Flight: retreats from difficult topics. Fight: frustration with services. Freeze: overwhelmed by choices. Fawn: follows worker priorities. Withholding: keeps private concerns private.	Values-based goals; problem-solving; relapse/early-warning plan; decision balance; supportive referrals.	Link housing tasks to the person's priorities and stability. Maintain boundaries: support engagement without becoming therapist.	Ground the conversation; choose one short task and one support.
5 Preparing for action	Suggests a starting point; considers support; confidence and doubt coexist.	Flight: postpones action. Fight: rejects deadlines. Freeze: decision fatigue. Fawn: agrees to unrealistic plan. Withholding: hides barriers.	Micro-plan; body doubling where appropriate; reminders; written checklist; confidence scaling; named contact.	Agree one owned step, realistic timescale and what help is needed. Consider reasonable adjustments.	Pause before adding tasks; preserve one success and simplify.
6 Supported action	Starts tasks or accepts help; progress may fluctuate with symptoms, stress or service changes.	Flight: misses reviews. Fight: conflict when pressured. Freeze: loses momentum. Fawn: reports progress to avoid disappointment. Withholding: conceals deterioration.	Short review cycles; reinforce progress; practical support; joint working with consent; crisis/contingency plan.	Watch for changes in risk, capacity or functioning. Reassess rather than assuming non-compliance.	Reduce demand; return to essentials; use local crisis/safeguarding pathways if risk increases.
7 Sustaining or re-engaging	Maintains routines, asks for help earlier, or re-engages after deterioration or discharge.	Flight: avoids review after setback. Fight: expects judgement. Freeze: cannot restart. Fawn: over-promises. Withholding: hides relapse.	Early-warning signs; re-engagement plan; agreed communication; tenancy sustainment; periodic review.	Normalise fluctuation while keeping expectations clear. Make restarting support simple.	Start smaller than last time and rebuild from the last successful step.

When engagement changes: Notice what changed -> pause and reduce demand -> offer control -> reconnect -> revisit the smallest useful next step. Record direct observations, what helped, what increased pressure, and any risk action.

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Engagement During Crisis or Acute Distress

Seven stage engagement continuum | One page housing practitioner reference

Use when a person is highly distressed, overwhelmed or at immediate risk. The aim is not to complete the housing task at all costs; it is to reduce pressure, establish safety, identify urgent needs and connect the person with the right response.

Stage	What you may observe	Possible protective responses	Useful tools	Practitioner focus	If it becomes too much
1 Protective distance	No meaningful engagement; leaves, locks door, does not respond, appears highly agitated, shut down or unreachable.	Flight: escapes contact. Fight: shouting/threats. Freeze: immobility/silence. Fawn: agrees to anything. Withholding: conceals risk or intent.	Reduce stimulation; calm tone; physical space; one speaker; simple orientation; check if immediate danger is present.	Safety first. Do not crowd, argue or force a complex conversation. Maintain your own safety and lone-working procedures.	End non-essential discussion. Use emergency, police, ambulance, crisis or safeguarding pathways if immediate risk requires it.
2 Testing safety	Brief contact possible; person may be disoriented, panicked, hopeless, suspicious or unable to process much information.	Flight: tries to leave. Fight: escalates when challenged. Freeze: cannot answer. Fawn: says yes to stop pressure. Withholding: avoids discussing risk.	Short sentences; offer two choices; grounding; water/quiet space if appropriate; direct but calm safety questions.	Establish who is present, what is happening now and what the person needs in the next hour. Avoid debating causes.	Pause. Move from information-gathering to containment and safety.
3 Conditional engagement	Can answer some questions and tolerate brief planning; distress remains high and attention may fluctuate.	Flight: disengages quickly. Fight: anger at services. Freeze: cannot sequence events. Fawn: accepts unsuitable options. Withholding: partial risk disclosure.	Prioritise essentials; crisis contacts; medication/physical health check where appropriate; safe person/network; brief written plan.	Separate urgent from important. Deal with safety, shelter, food, medication, children/dependants and immediate housing risk first.	Remove non-urgent tasks. One decision at a time.
4 Collaborative exploration	Can identify what has happened, what is making things worse and what would help them feel safer.	Flight: retreats when detail increases. Fight: frustration rises. Freeze: overwhelm returns. Fawn: follows worker agenda. Withholding: avoids painful detail.	Collaborative safety plan; grounding; practical problem-solving; trusted person involvement with consent; crisis service liaison.	Keep the person in control of manageable choices. Do not turn the moment into therapy or a full assessment beyond your role.	Return to here-and-now safety and one stabilising action.
5 Preparing for action	Can choose a next step: crisis team, safe place, medical help, trusted contact, temporary housing measure or follow-up.	Flight: backs out. Fight: refuses service. Freeze: decision fatigue. Fawn: agrees without intent. Withholding: hides barriers.	Micro-plan; warm handover; transport/contact support; contingency plan; confirm who will follow up and when.	Make the next step immediate and concrete. Where possible, stay connected until the handover is clear.	If the plan fails or risk rises, escalate through local emergency/safeguarding procedures.
6 Supported action	Accepts support or moves into a safer situation; may remain exhausted, embarrassed or ambivalent afterwards.	Flight: avoids follow-up. Fight: anger about intervention. Freeze: depleted. Fawn: minimises needs. Withholding: conceals ongoing risk.	Short follow-up; practical recovery steps; housing stabilisation; review what helped; restore routine and choice.	Avoid punitive responses to crisis behaviour where possible. Re-establish ordinary contact and clear expectations.	Reduce demand and focus on recovery essentials before restarting routine casework.
7 Sustaining or re-engaging	Re-engages after crisis, uses support earlier, or recognises warning signs before the next escalation.	Flight: avoids revisiting event. Fight: distrust after intervention. Freeze: fears recurrence. Fawn: promises it will not happen again. Withholding: hides warning signs.	Early-warning plan; named contacts; crisis card; agreed communication; review triggers and practical prevention.	Learn from the episode without shame. Build a simpler route back into support and crisis response.	Start with one warning sign and one action that has worked before.

When engagement changes: Notice what changed -> pause and reduce demand -> offer control -> reconnect -> revisit the smallest useful next step. Record direct observations, what helped, what increased pressure, and any risk action.

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