SAFEGUARDING ADULTS WEEK 2026 • EVERY VOICE. EVERY CHOICE.

Before We Call It Non-Engagement

A practical reflective tool for safeguarding, housing and frontline teams

When contact is missed, support is declined or an agreed action does not happen, it can be tempting to record “not engaging”. This tool encourages a reflective pause before that becomes the case narrative. Keep risk, rights and professional responsibilities in view while remaining curious about what may be happening for the person.

Five questions to pause, reflect and plan

1. What do we actually know?

Separate observed facts, direct accounts and verified information from interpretations. What do we still need to find out?

2. What might be sitting behind the response?

Consider possibilities, not labels: shame, fear, overwhelm, accessibility, relationships, past experiences or practical barriers. What are we assuming?

3. How might our own approach be affecting engagement?

Think about language, pace, repeated contact, who visits, what is expected and the level of choice. What could reduce threat?

4. What risk must be addressed, and where can choice remain?

Distinguish urgent action from longer-term support. Be clear about duties and boundaries while preserving dignity, autonomy and meaningful options.

5. What is the smallest realistic next step?

What can we agree or offer now? Who will do what, by when? What evidence of progress, including relational progress, will we record?

Use with anonymised cases. This resource supports professional judgement; it does not replace safeguarding procedures, legal duties, formal risk assessment or organisational information-governance requirements.

Putting Reflection Into Practice

Fictional practice case: “I don’t need help.”

Marian lives alone and has repeatedly cancelled visits. A neighbour has raised concerns about boxes near her front door and says the situation is getting worse. The case record describes Marian as “refusing to engage”. When a housing officer phones, Marian says, “The last time someone came in they started telling me what to throw away. I’m not having that again.” She admits the entrance is difficult to get through, but says she needs to know nobody will touch her belongings without asking.

Discuss the case

- What do we know, what do we not know, and which assumptions need challenging?
- What might Marian’s response be telling us about safety, trust and previous experiences?
- What needs checking urgently, and how could we preserve meaningful choice?
- How could we begin a clear, compassionate conversation about the risk?

Turn reflection into action

A better first sentence

What would I say differently to acknowledge concerns and remain clear about the risk?

One practical next step

What small, proportionate action could help, and how would the person be involved?

What I would record

Facts, the person’s own words, uncertainties, risk reasoning, choices offered and the agreed plan.

Bring it back to your team

What is one assumption, phrase or routine you want to challenge in your next case discussion? How will you know whether your change has helped?

The aim is not to explain away risk or to assume every refusal has the same cause. It is to keep our understanding accurate, our responses proportionate and the person’s voice visible.