



## **BOLTON SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD - LESSONS LEARNED BRIEFING**

### **Analysing the Impact of missing appointments**

A child under 10 suffered neglect and physical abuse from her mother.

One of the key themes to emerge from this review was how practitioners assess and respond to parents who do not attend support sessions or appointments either for themselves or their child.

Non-attendance at appointments is often viewed as an indicator of parental non-compliance. Numerous Serious Case Reviews have shown that a pattern of non-attendance has often preceded child abuse and death. The reviews have also shown that while practitioners have been aware of the non-attendance they have not always fully analysed what it means for child in terms of their needs and risks to them.

This briefing supports practitioners to reflect on their practice in this area

### **SEEING IT FROM THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE**

Children rely on their parents to take them to appointments, meetings, school and other activities - when they don't it isn't because the child did not attend, it's because they were not brought - let's start using the term 'Was Not Brought' rather than 'Did Not Attend'

#### **WNB, not DNA**

### **EXPLORING WHY APPOINTMENTS ARE MISSED**

It is important to understand what influences a parent to not attend, as opposed to assuming immediately it is an indicator of non-compliance. You should assess the following as a minimum:-

**Forgetfulness** - parents forget or don't prioritise attending because they don't understand the significance of not going

**Fear & Anxiety** - it can be scary and intimidating for parents who may already lack confidence and esteem to meet with practitioners

**Logistics** - house moves, letters going astray, poor communication, competing appointments at diverse locations, on consecutive days etc.

### **WHAT HELPS**

**Pick up on patterns** - use chronologies to record the child and parents attendance at appointments, meetings, assessments etc. and on a monthly basis summarise and evaluate attendance patterns - consider :-

Why has this child not been brought for their appointment or session?

Is this the first or a repeated 'was not brought'?

What is the risk to the child's safety and welfare from not attending the appointment or the series of appointments?

What are the parents' perceptions of these appointments?

What action do I need to take?

### **SEEING IT FROM THE CHILD'S PERSPECTIVE**

When non-attendance relates to the parent, particularly when mental illness, domestic abuse, learning difficulties or substance misuse is present; practitioners should ask themselves "What does this mean for the child's care and safety? What do I need to do?"

#### **TAKE PROACTIVE ACTION**

### **PARENTS PERCEPTIONS**

It is important to recognise that while parents may be the cause of harm to children, they are also part of the solution. So it is important to understand what other factors may influence whether or not they attend or continue to attend appointments and sessions. Research tells us that engagement will improve when:-

Parents are given enough information about what is happening, why and what is expected from them

Parents and professionals have a shared understanding of what needs to change in their family

Parents are confident their views and experiences are valued; practitioners should consider their working style and use of power, and how this will be perceived

### **WHAT HELPS**

**Plan SMART** - when developing plans with children and parents make sure you include essential appointments and assessment sessions in the plan

**Be Clear** - talk to parents and children about why it is important to attend, what the benefits will be and exploring any barriers; identify ways in which you can help - setting up reminders in their phone, providing a diary, providing one list of all the key dates, times and venues, practical support with transport etc.

**Be Proactive** - if you start to identify patterns then don't delay in taking action

**Agency Policy** - some organisations in Bolton have policy's in place to respond to missed appointments, make sure you make use of these