

# Influencing skills for Health Visitors

## From October 2015, the commissioning of health visiting services will transfer to the local authorities.

This brings both many opportunities for health visiting but also significant challenges for the profession. Having the skills to influence stakeholders, commissioners and local councillors will play an important part in the success of this change. Many health visitors (HVs) have the key skills required for successful influencing. These include empathy, credibility, expertise and clear values.

Influencing skills can be learned and developed, and they can help us to influence the environments we work within to support our resilience and growth.

### Characteristics of influential people:

- Influential people understand the importance of self-belief. They are willing to come out of their comfort zones, take considered risks and build the resilience to bounce back from setbacks.
- Influential people understand that to influence someone you have to be able to understand their point of view. They acknowledge and listen to others' point of view and work with what others think, feel and believe.
- Influential people demonstrate enthusiasm with authenticity. Genuine enthusiasm is infectious and people remember emotions more than words (Dalley and Burton, 2010).

### Build on your strengths

Health visitors build and use relationships of trust to influence health outcomes for the children and families they work with on a day to day basis, even in the absence

of formal authority. They start from an advantage because influencing skills are a particular application of relationship-building skills.

### Good practice points to building your strengths (Cohen-Bradford 2005):

1. Assume that everyone can help you.
2. Prioritise objectives.
3. Understand the other person's situation.
4. Identify what matters – to you and to them.
5. Analyse the relationship.
6. Make the “exchange” of what each party has to offer to the other.

**These steps are explained in more detail here:**  
[bit.ly/1GsUyvA](http://bit.ly/1GsUyvA)

**Maintain your strengths by building resilience:** Developing Resilience in Practice: A Health Visiting Framework is a detailed resource for health visitors [bit.ly/1JFQ47o](http://bit.ly/1JFQ47o)

[More information on Page 2](#)

For additional fact sheets see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)

## Influencing skills for Health Visitors

### Courageous or difficult conversations

Some of the many professional relationships for the health visitor will be with clients, colleagues, other professionals or managers. These may be conversations that many of us dread and either put off or do badly (Patterson, 2011).

It is important to remember that conflict and addressing difficulties is an important, functional and normal part of human relationships. When we learn how to manage it well, conflict presents an opportunity to strengthen and repair relationships, learn, and find new solutions. A few good practice points are summarised below:

#### Good practice points for managing difficult conversations

Influential people prepare well for important conversations. For example, when preparing for a meeting:

- Clearly define your starting point and goals: What do you want to achieve? Prepare and practise the key content.
- Articulate what you want to happen in a positive way:

It is much easier for people to state what they want in negative terms. Stating what you don't want is not a positive influencing trait. To become more influential it is essential to start with clarity on what you do want.

- Be simple and explicit – waffling and rambling should be avoided at all costs. It is helpful to distil your arguments to three key points, each backed up by evidence.
- The use of short videos is often useful. Don't be afraid to bring a service user with you; there is nothing more compelling and powerful than the voice of the parent.
- It is much better to work directly with the other person in the conflict. Going via others makes an escalation of the conflict or further misunderstanding much more likely.

- Recognise that if the person is behaving in a difficult way, he or she may be suffering somehow. Approach the other person with a genuine desire to help reduce the suffering and to find common, constructive ground to move forward. Begin the process from a position of openness and honesty.
- When raising issues be careful to do so in a very objective and factual way, describing exactly what has happened or what you have seen.
- Offer options with an open mind, using your creativity to brainstorm possible ways of meeting the expressed concerns, needs and interests of both people. Conclude negotiations with agreements in good faith which are specific and satisfying for everyone.
- Keep your discussions confidential unless you jointly agree to tell any others who may need to know what your resolution involves.

Finally, if you don't reach agreement, don't be afraid to try again another time. It can sometimes be better to try to resolve a conflict bit by bit, giving everyone concerned time to think. Remain open-minded and be willing to be influenced yourself. Challenge your mind to see things in a different, more flexible way.

#### Additional reading:

[bit.ly/1Mp6heO](https://bit.ly/1Mp6heO)

#### References

Cohen, A, and Bradford, D (2005) *Influence Without Authority*, 2nd Ed London: Wiley

Dalley, D and Burton, L. (2010) *Developing Your Influencing Skills How to Influence People by Increasing Your Credibility, Trustworthiness and Communication Skills*. Lancashire: Universe of Learning Ltd.

Institute of Health Visiting (2015) *Developing Resilience in Practice: A Health Visiting Framework* is a detailed resource for health visitors. Available: [bit.ly/1JFQ47o](https://bit.ly/1JFQ47o)

Patterson, K., Grenny, J., McMillan, R. (2011). *Crucial conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* 2nd Ed London: McGraw Hill

**Authors: Elaine McInnes, FiHV, Lead Professional Development Officer, Project Lead, Institute of Health Visiting and Dr Robert Nettleton, FiHV, Education advisor, Institute of Health Visiting**

For additional fact sheets see [www.ihv.org.uk](http://www.ihv.org.uk)