



## **A Parent and Carers Guide to Non Violence Resistance (NVR)**

Reference – Partnerships Projects 2023

## Welcome

We are delighted that you are considering joining the Oasis Encounter Tribe. This guide will give you information on the therapeutic framework of our course (NVR) and will answer frequent questions. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

[oasisencounter@oasisuk.org](mailto:oasisencounter@oasisuk.org) or speak to your Encounter Practitioner.

## Why NVR?

NVR is a new approach, which has been specifically developed for responding effectively to aggressive, violent, self-destructive, and controlling behaviour in children, adolescents and young adults.

NVR is now being successfully used with anxious young people, whose obsessive-compulsive behaviour controls the family, or who isolate themselves socially, have become addicted to the internet, or refuse to go to school. A further area in which the approach is proving very helpful, is working with families in which young adults show 'entrenched dependency', and young adults with ongoing mental health problems or neuro diversities such as Autism Spectrum Conditions (ASC) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

## Why does my child push boundaries, act aggressively or ignore instructions?

You may have been given a variety of different explanations for your child's behaviour. Professionals in child health or child- and adolescent mental health services, education or social services may have spoken of 'ADHD', an 'autistic spectrum disorder', an 'attachment disorder', or you may have been told that your child has been traumatised. He or she may have been given a diagnosis of 'conduct disorder'. Your child may have seen violence, and you or others may believe that they are modelling their behaviour upon this.

None of this alone explains why a young person acts in aggressive and unmanageable ways. What's more, many young people become violent, without any of these 'conditions' ever being present. It may be tempting to believe that the aggression could be dealt with by tackling an 'underlying problem'.

However, clinical experience and research show that it is important to directly address the aggression or self-destructive behaviour – and to do this in very specific ways, with careful, supportive planning.

With very few exceptions, young people who act in defiant, aggressive, or violent ways control others around them. Their dismissiveness towards adults, and their rejection of the adults' tries to look after their well-being, can make it very difficult for parents, carers, or teachers to uphold a caring responsiveness.

When the child's needs are hidden behind an angry face, they are much more difficult to detect. In Non Violent Resistance, parents or carers learn to get a position of strength, not giving in to unreasonable or harmful demands by the child, protecting themselves from aggression and violence, yet avoiding the unnecessary, unhelpful, and painful battles of the past. "Raising parental presence" becomes the alternative to trying to control an uncontrollable and often out of control child. Feeling empowered and stronger, parents can then use 'reconciliation work' to develop a stronger focus on the young person's needs and show that they continue to love and care about their child.

## **I feel helpless, I've tried everything, I can't take this any longer. Can't someone just take and treat them?**

Parents almost inevitably feel helpless in this situation. Of course, you would like a professional to 'take over' when you believe that all avenues have been exhausted. However, this wish can further disempower you: trying to get them to come along to family therapy, to individual therapy, or to take their medication, may put a parent into yet another emotionally and physically exhausting, and often fruitless struggle. Or a young person may enjoy their individual therapy, and insist that their therapist keeps confidentiality, while the behaviour at home does not change.

NVR does not require the young person to take part. In fact, it is often much more productive to plan new steps in challenging the controlling behaviour, without being disrupted by the young person who may try to control the therapy session as well or making the fruitless effort of trying to 'get through' to your child – you have already tried that countless times yourself.

You have probably made the same attempts to improve things over and over again. You will often find yourself in a situation that is utterly predictable – e.g., when you are trying to reason with your child, part of you already knows that this will merely lead to a heated argument, with smashed objects in the house, shouting, and maybe even physical violence. You have become locked in a repetitive, unhelpful pattern.

Using NVR, you will carefully develop ‘strategies’ to respond to the controlling behaviour, that at first may appear strange and counterintuitive, but that are very different from the reactions you have shown before. However, this is not “behaviour management” – these are strategies for making peace in the family and changing relationships. Making peace requires constructively challenging harmful behaviour, refusing to be controlled by harmful behaviour, and reaching out and reconciling with the young person – to again become the parent who can look after their child’s needs.

This process will take much of your time. NVR is not an easy way out, and it requires intensive involvement by parents, in order to be effective. You may not feel up to it at this point, having been worn down by such a degree of trouble. However, many parents that their confidence grows in the process of resistance. As they begin to feel less helpless, parents –and other adults dealing with a difficult young person- feel energised.

## **How long does Encounter last? How involved do I need to be?**

Resisting aggressive and controlling behaviour is a hard struggle. Each parent needs to invest many hours each week in resisting their child’s violence. The intervention is planned for 10 group sessions. Added support is available through our Facebook Support Group. The added support helps parents find encouragement when things are very difficult, get advice, and express their frustration – they are an aid to staying on track.

In group sessions, you will discuss and plan each new step, reflect on the steps you have taken in the previous week, and have conversations about your feelings and thoughts. Group sessions are an opportunity to gain an understanding of your strengths and abilities in resisting the violence. You will also learn more about yourself, e.g., come to understand how feeling ashamed and blaming yourself for the problems may have been an obstacle

for obtaining support from other adults, discover a manner in which you can regulate yourself so that you are no longer prone to angry responses, or learn ways of overcoming the fear that has controlled you for so long.

As you go along, you learn more and more about effective resistance to the violence, and you will be able to discuss what you have learned in group sessions. There may also be helpers meetings, at which parents and other adults from outside of the family form a support network. Most of your time in NVR however will be spent planning, preparing, and carrying out concrete action against the problematic behaviours in life outside the session, and making gestures of reconciliation in order to re-connect with your child.

## **Is the approach effective?**

A number of recent outcome studies have shown that NVR is very effective in improving the behaviour of a large percentage of young people, reducing parents' feelings of helplessness, and raising their confidence, as well as bringing about a more peaceful atmosphere all round in the family. The retention rate, i.e., the percentage of families that stay in group, is over 90%.

## **Do I have to involve my other children in this?**

Other children in the family are likely to have become victimised, and often parents do not know the full extent of what is going on. Siblings may believe that their parents are powerless, they may think their parents don't care if they get hurt, they may not want to burden or upset their parents, or they may feel that what is happening to them is normal, because it has been going on for so long. Usually, other children are affected by the way 'everything revolves around (the child)'. The Encounter Practitioner may suggest speaking to a violent young person's siblings, in order to help them understand what the parents are doing to resist the violence, and to find ways in which they can communicate with their parents about any abuse they may be experiencing. This then becomes the siblings' own form of resistance and empowerment.

## **How does Encounter (NVR) work?**

Resistance against the violent or problematic behaviour is developed step by step, building on what parents experience in the process, the support they are able to receive, and their growing confidence. We do not engage a child with aggressive or harmful behaviour in any conversations about why they may feel angry or lose self-control. Action replaces talking.

Talking is kept to a minimum, and consists mainly of brief announcements or declarations, which are used to communicate what kind of action parents are taking and why. Parents do not try to 'get through' to their child – this has been tried without success many times before. However, there may be a time and place for talking – once the child is no longer acting out and controlling their environment in harmful ways, no longer being self-destructive. Frequently, unmet psychological needs then become clear, and direct work with the young person, who is now a “customer” to the therapy, can be fruitful.

There are four areas in which parents – with support – become active:

### *De-escalation*

Parents develop strategies to manage risk, without getting involved in fruitless power struggles. They learn how to regulate themselves, and no longer get motivated by their own unhelpful beliefs (I must at once take control of my child; They must see what it is really like...), driven to act in hot anger.

### *Breaking taboos*

After months or years of 'walking on eggshells' and feeling they have to give in to their child's demands, if they wish to keep peace in the family, parents learn to strategically break the rules their child has set up for the family. Parents are supported in overcoming their tendency to avoid necessary action because of fear or shame.

### *Taking non-violent action*

Consequences and punishment no longer work. Parents raise their presence by carefully planned, delayed action within the home, and in the outside environment. This is especially important, when parents must act in response to aggressive incidents, in order to protect themselves and their other children by developing a deterrent against further harmful acts.

### *Reconciliation gestures*

Certain gestures show young people, that their families care about them. They help parents and children, or young people relate to one another

beyond the aggression. In child-focused reconciliation work, we look 'behind the veil of anger', to bring back a dialogue between parent and child, in which the parent can look after the young person's needs.

## Can this be done with other problems, as well?

There are a number of other difficulties, for which a modified form of NVR can be helpful – especially if your child is unwilling to cooperate in the therapy, and the family is controlled by the difficulties. Non-violently challenging destructive or self-destructive behaviour is suited to any situation in which someone acts in harmful ways –whether harmful to others, or to themselves. NVR is now being used when young people or adults misuse drugs, socially isolate themselves, become addicted to the internet, or control the family with compulsive behaviour. It can be helpful in responding to eating disorders, and currently, new methods in lowering the risk of self-harm or suicidal behaviour are being developed. NVR therapy can also be used very effectively as support in resisting domestic violence.

## Where can I read more about NVR?

You can read more about NVR at:

[Home - PartnershipProjects UK](#)

[Training for Parents and Practitioners - NVR Practitioners Consortium \(nvrpc.org.uk\)](#)