

THE HORIZONS PROJECT

PUBLICATION SERIES

HP-003

# Why People Disengage

*The reasons people lose connection with support, even when that support matters.*

Version 1.0

Publication Edition

July 2026

## About This Publication

Every organisation begins with an idea. Some ideas emerge from research, professional experience, personal reflection or years of noticing the same question from different angles.

This publication asks why so many people begin with genuine intention, then slowly lose connection with support they wanted to keep. It is not primarily concerned with how people first access support or which service should help them, but with something much simpler: why does connection sometimes weaken even when the support still matters?

It explores what can happen after support has begun, when everyday pressure, uncertainty and discouragement gradually weaken engagement. Its focus is the ordinary pressures, missed moments and quiet discouragements that can widen the gap between a person and the support they still value.

## It Doesn't Usually Happen in the Appointment

Imagine somebody leaving an appointment feeling hopeful. Perhaps they have just spoken with their counsellor, explored difficult experiences, identified practical goals and agreed on a realistic plan for the week ahead. As they leave the room, things feel possible again.

Then Tuesday arrives. An unexpected bill lands on the doormat, a family disagreement brings old emotions to the surface, a bus is missed, a phone call goes unanswered and a letter stays unopened on the kitchen table because, today, it simply feels like too much.

None of these moments would normally appear in a case note, yet together they begin to change the direction of the week. By Friday, the confidence that felt so real after Monday's appointment has quietly faded. Nothing dramatic happened; life simply continued.

Sometimes connection weakens because ordinary life keeps exerting pressure after support has begun. This is not because existing services are failing, but because everyday life continues between appointments.

Professional support often has to work within appointments, and those boundaries matter. Counsellors cannot be available every day, housing officers cannot visit every afternoon and recovery workers cannot accompany every difficult decision. Nor should they be expected to; their expertise lies within the work they do.

Disengagement often begins with what happens beyond those conversations. The hours between appointments are not empty spaces. They are where people make decisions, absorb setbacks, lose confidence, rediscover hope and sometimes drift away from the very support they wanted to keep.

If we want to understand why people disengage, we have to notice how those ordinary hours can affect confidence, capacity and trust. Seen in this way, disengagement is rarely a single decision. More often, connection weakens gradually as ordinary pressures wear those things down.

## **Disengagement Rarely Happens All at Once**

People do not usually lose connection with support in one dramatic moment. More often, discouragement gathers quietly: a difficult week makes the next appointment harder to face, an unanswered message becomes awkward to return, or a practical setback begins to feel like personal failure.

Over time, these small pressures can create distance between people and the support they still need. Understanding disengagement therefore means paying attention to that gradual weakening, not only to the point at which someone stops attending.

## **Horizons in Practice**

Sarah has been attending counselling for several months. The sessions are helping, but each week begins in much the same way: the first twenty minutes are spent trying to remember everything that has happened since the previous appointment. By the time she reaches the issue she most wanted to discuss, the session is almost over.

Between appointments, Sarah begins making short notes about moments that feel important. During a Momentum conversation, she realises there is one subject she keeps avoiding because she finds it difficult to raise. Together, she prepares a reminder for herself.

With her informed consent, the counsellor is simply told that Sarah hopes to raise something important during the next session. Nothing more. The counselling itself does not change, and the counsellor remains entirely responsible for the therapeutic conversation.

The subject Sarah had been avoiding becomes easier to name before the next appointment, rather than remaining hidden until the session is almost over. Sometimes disengagement begins not because support is unwanted, but because the person

arrives with too much to hold, too little time to explain it and no clear way to bring the most important issue into view.

## **A Different Way of Looking at Progress**

Traditional measures of progress often focus on outcomes such as finding employment, maintaining recovery, securing accommodation or completing education. These achievements matter enormously, but they are rarely created by one single decision.

More often, they emerge from hundreds of smaller moments that pass almost unnoticed: choosing to answer the telephone, getting out of bed when motivation is low, or keeping a promise made to yourself the day before.

These moments matter because disengagement often begins before it becomes visible. A missed call, an unopened letter or a promise quietly abandoned can signal that connection is weakening long before anyone stops attending.

## **What Momentum Is — and What It Is Not**

Momentum is the Horizons framework for helping people sustain connection with the support, safeguards and relationships already around them. It complements professional support rather than replacing it.

Counselling, psychotherapy, statutory services and other professional interventions require specialist knowledge, defined responsibilities and carefully held relationships. Momentum has a different purpose: to help people remain connected to the support, safeguards and relationships already around them.

That distinction matters because disengagement is often misunderstood as a lack of willingness, when it may also reflect pressure, uncertainty or a gradual loss of confidence.

## **A Philosophy Designed to Keep Learning**

The Horizons Project does not present Momentum as a finished theory. It would be unrealistic to claim that any single philosophy can fully explain the complexity of human lives.

Instead, Momentum is offered as a developing framework that will continue to evolve through research, reflective practice, lived experience and constructive challenge.

If future evidence suggests a better way of understanding engagement, Horizons will adapt. If professionals identify improvements, we will listen. If individuals tell us that something does not work, we will learn from it.

The willingness to refine our understanding is not separate from Momentum; it is part of Momentum. After all, progress applies to organisations just as much as it applies to people.

## An Invitation

Momentum asks us to notice the small pressures and quiet decisions through which connection is either maintained or gradually lost. Not only the appointment itself, but everything that happens afterwards: the ordinary hours, the quiet decisions, conversations over coffee, a difficult Tuesday afternoon, an unopened letter or a small success that nobody else sees.

It is often within these moments that engagement changes direction. The Horizons Project exists because they can shape whether support continues, weakens or quietly slips away. That is why they deserve our attention.

Understanding why people disengage is only part of the picture. The next publication asks a different question: how can relationships help protect Momentum before disengagement occurs?

## Continue Exploring

Continue exploring with the next publication.

### **HP-004 — Holding the Thread**

*The next publication builds on this by asking how relationships can help protect Momentum before disengagement occurs: not by replacing existing support, but by strengthening continuity around it.*

## Publication Information

**Publication:** HP-003 – Why People Disengage

**Version:** 1.0

**Status:** Publication Edition

**Publication Date:** July 2026

© 2026 Adrian Pietro Vittorio Abate, trading as The Horizons Project.