

## Voice of the Child

The right of a child or young person to be heard is included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 emphasises the importance of eliciting and responding to the views and experiences of children.

The importance of speaking to a child and young person, gathering and acting on their views has been a recurrent theme in lessons learned from national and local serious case reviews.

### What do we mean by the ‘Voice of the Child’?

For all professionals, a principle of good practice is to ensure that children’s feelings, thoughts and views are heard and recognised. Capturing the ‘voice of the child’ is more than simply seeking their views; it is about enabling them to take an active role in any decision-making concerning them and their future. It does not only refer to what children say directly but to many aspects of their presentation.



How to capture the ‘Voice of the Child’?

Age and disability are no barrier to capturing the 'child's voice'. Even a very young child or baby can display their emotions and well-being through their demeanour or behaviour.

Capturing the 'voice of the child' can be achieved by:

- ✓ Working directly with the child
- ✓ Observing the child
- ✓ Seeking the views of other significant people in the child's life such as family members and teachers



## Where to reflect the 'Voice of the Child'?

All professionals should ensure that the 'voice of the child' runs through everything they do and the child's viewpoint is included in any assessment that affects them and any work undertaken.

- ✓ Action Plans
- ✓ Assessments e.g. Rochdale's Graded Care Profile
- ✓ Child in Need, Child Protection and Looked After Child Care Plans
- ✓ Court Statements
- ✓ Family Support Records
- ✓ Fostering and Adoption Records
- ✓ Planning for a Meeting or Review
- ✓ Referrals
- ✓ Residential Records
- ✓ Supervision Records
- ✓ Support Provision



## Why is the 'Voice of the Child' important?

- ✓ Children feel listened to
- ✓ When children are involved, interventions are more successful
- ✓ We can see their experience, from their point of view
- ✓ Children can develop their own story about what is happening in their lives
- ✓ It will help you to avoid misplaced assumptions

## What happens when Children and Young People are not listened to?

- ✓ Children are less safe
- ✓ Children are less happy and their wellbeing is lower
- ✓ Children become less visible; adult needs can dominate
- ✓ Assumptions are made about children's lives
- ✓ Knowledge about children is limited to their relationships with adults



## Learning from Serious Case Reviews

OFSTED's thematic report into learning lessons from Serious Case Reviews (2010) found that not enough importance is given to listening to the 'voice of the child'.

Five main themes were identified with regard to professionals not listening to the 'voice of the child':

1. **Seeing and Hearing the Child** - The child was not seen frequently enough by the professionals involved, or was not asked about their views and feelings

**Practice Implications:** Practitioners should:

- ✓ Use direct observation of babies and young children by a range of people and make sense of these observations in relation to risk factors
- ✓ See children and young people in places that meet their needs e.g. in places that are familiar to them
- ✓ See children and young people away from their carers
- ✓ Ensure that the assessment of the needs of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities identifies and includes needs relating to protection

2. **Listening to Adults who speak on behalf of the Child** - Agencies did not listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of the child and who had important information to contribute

**Practice Implications:** Practitioners should:

- ✓ When assessing risk and gathering information needed to make an assessment, routinely involve fathers and other male figures (whether absent or living in the family home), as well as teachers, other professionals and the views of all adults involved in the child's life

3. **Being alert to Parents and Carers who prevent access to the Child** - Parents and carers prevented professionals from seeing and listening to the child

**Practice Implications:** Practitioners should:

- ✓ Consider the implications of risk to children where practitioners themselves have concerns for their own personal safety when meeting families or on home visits
- ✓ Ensure that respect for family privacy is not at the expense of safeguarding children

#### **4. Focusing on the Child rather than the needs of Parents and Carers -**

Professionals focused too much on the needs of parents, especially vulnerable parents, and overlooked the implications for the child **Practice Implications:**

Practitioners should:

- ✓ Recognise the specific needs of children and young people who have a caring responsibility for their parents and carers
- ✓ Always consider the implications of any domestic abuse for children and young people including unborn babies
- ✓ Be alert to how acute awareness of the needs of parents and carers can mask the needs of the child

#### **5. Interpreting what Children say in order to protect them -**

Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child **Practice**

**Implications:** Practitioners should:

- ✓ Ensure that actions take account of children and young people's needs and views
- ✓ Recognise any behaviour in the child or young person as a means of communication
- ✓ Understand and respond to any behavioural indicators of abuse and/or neglect
- ✓ Sensitively balance children's and young people's views with safeguarding their welfare

## **Skills required to effectively engage with Children and Young People**

In order to communicate effectively with children and young people, professionals need to be confident and have a range of skills. These include:

- ✓ From the outset, establishing ground rules, being clear on professional boundaries; effective contracting.
- ✓ Explaining the boundaries of confidentiality
- ✓ Developing trusting relationships
- ✓ Building rapport

- ✓ Empathising with the child's point of view
- ✓ Understanding non-verbal communication
- ✓ Active listening
- ✓ Explaining, summarising and providing information
- ✓ Giving feedback in a clear way
- ✓ Working at the child's pace

## Using Tools

There are a range of free tools that can be used to capture the feelings, thoughts and views of a child and young person; to aid engagement. There are different tools appropriate for children and young people of different ages, level of need or understanding: visual – toys and puppets; activity-based – writing, drawing, colouring and games; and fun – physical activity. Practitioners should plan ahead and adapt tools to suit particular children and young people or circumstances.



## Examples of Tools

The tools below are intended as a guide and can be adapted for individual use. There are many more available and in use.

['Animal Talk' Activity: Using animal pictures to get to know children and discuss their views and feelings](#)

[Autism Toolbox](#)

[Children's Participation Toolkit for Social Workers \(Activities and Worksheets\)](#)

[Getting to know a child's routine activity tool](#)

['Say it your own way'- Children's participation in assessment resources DfE / Barnardo's](#)

## Further Resources and Reading

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[Listening to Children in Serious Case Reviews](#)

[The Munro Review of Child Protection: A Child-Centred System](#)

