



Swindon Safeguarding Partnership



Capturing the Voice of the Child in Records

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Developed by SSP BSU

Voice of the child



What do we mean by ‘the child’s voice’? This refers not only to what children say directly, but to many other aspects of their presentation. It means seeing their experiences from their point of view.

Ask yourself:

***'Do I understand what this child's life is like, what do they do each day?
What do they feel about their lives, how would they want things to change?'***

Why is the child’s voice important? Child focused work means children feel listened to, plans are more successful when they are involved and prompt decisions are made about safeguarding when necessary.

When working with children/young people it is essential to gain a clear picture of their wishes, thoughts and feelings. It is good practice to ask the child/young person which practitioner they would like to gather this information from them.

Research highlights that there are many barriers for children/young people in asking practitioners for help and to talk about their worries and concerns so they can be addressed.

Children/young people also report that when they do ask for help, they are often not heard or their worries not acted upon.

The consequence of this highlight in a report by the [Children’s Commissioner \(2015\)](#) found that only 1 in 8 victims of abuse felt able to ask for help. If children are not responded to appropriately by practitioners, their concerns not listened to or addressed, this is likely to impact on their self-esteem and resilience; their short and long term developmental outcomes; and their ability to seek help about things that are worrying them.



Why this is important?

Children's right to be heard:

- the right of a child/young person to be heard is included in the [UN Convention of Rights](#)
- the [Children's Act 2004](#) emphasises the importance of speaking to the child/young person as part of any assessment

The importance of speaking to a child/young person and gathering their views is a theme highlighted in local audits and is consistently identified in lessons learned from serious case reviews. These findings include:

- a child was not seen frequently enough by the professionals involved, nor was asked about their views or feelings
- agencies did not listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of the child and who had important information to contribute
- parents and carers prevented practitioners from seeing and listening to the child
- practitioners focused too much on the needs of the parents or adults, especially vulnerable adults and overlooked the implications for the child
- agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child

For further information regarding the lessons learned – [Voice of the Child](#)

Video clip



To view please click on the image below.



4 minute video clip developed by children on behalf of Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership

Top tips for practitioners recording



There are many ways to ensure records include a strong sense of what life is like for a child at a particular time:

Talk to the child about their life, likes & dislikes, hopes & dreams, worries & fears:

- ✓ talking to children is dependent upon their age and level of understanding
- ✓ if children are able to talk there are a variety of ways of hearing their voice through direct work techniques
- ✓ record what children say in 'direct quotes' (e.g., feel sad/happy/worried when...) as this is more powerful than something interpreted by a practitioner
- ✓ It is good to check back with children that you have understood what they have said correctly, for example repeating what they have said and just ask if you are right? This allows the child to correct you if you are wrong and prevents incorrect interpretation

Children must be seen alone as they maybe inhibited to talk openly about their experiences by the presence of their parent/carer.

Consider the location – children may feel less inhibited about speaking if they are in a safe neutral setting. Also, when are you speaking with them for example, children may be tired after school.

Even if children are too young to speak it is still essential that workers convey a sense of what life is like for them and this can be done in a variety of ways:

- ✓ describe their presentation
- ✓ how others interact with them and how they respond
- ✓ comment on whether you consider they are functioning at a developmentally appropriate level



Top tips for practitioners recording

Children may have means of 'speaking' other than verbal speech such as Makaton or signs and symbols; be creative

- ✓ encourage children to draw or write about themselves and their lives
- ✓ use a range of ideas; start off non-specific such as 'draw your favourite food, favourite pop star' then be more directive such as 'draw where you live, who lives there, draw a picture of a happy day, a sad day, what do you wish was different, who is special' etc.

Describe a child's physical appearance, do they appear thin, pale, dark shadows under their eyes, listless, or do they appear curious, 'smiley', active

Observe the interactions between a child and their parents /carers – is there any difference in their interactions with other people

Describe the child's interactions with professionals

- ✓ what is your hypothesis about this behaviour
- ✓ does the child appear relaxed, wary, or overly familiar
- ✓ does the child respond as you would expect a child to respond in that situation

Top Tips for practitioners recording: Voice of unborn babies

When a family is expecting a new baby, complexities in the antenatal period can become a priority and this can sometimes lead to the unborn babies voice not being heard. Therefore, practitioners must use their skills to interpret what life is like in the womb and how this may impact on them when born. Things to consider include

- ✓ Are parents attending for appointments? If not, what does this mean for their unborn baby?
- ✓ How do the parents interact with their unborn baby? Do they talk to them and stroke their bump? What is their body language like when discussing their baby?
- ✓ What is the environment like for the unborn baby? Babies can hear in the womb, what are they hearing?
- ✓ Are parents preparing for their baby? Do they have the equipment they need? Is the home environment safe for a baby to live in?

Top Tips for practitioners recording: Voice of babies and young children

Like with unborn babies, very young babies and children who are unable to verbalise their thoughts and feelings will rely on the skills of practitioners to interpret their voice. Practical ways to gain the voice of these children could be:

- ✓ Observing a child's play – is it age appropriate? How does the child interact with different adults in play? What might the play be showing you?
- ✓ How does the child act around familiar adults? Do they act differently with one compared to another?
- ✓ How does the child interact with unfamiliar adults? Is it appropriate?
- ✓ Are they taken to appointments to ensure their needs are being met?
- ✓ Does the child seek comfort from a care giver when upset/hurt/ tired?

What might these children be telling us?

- An 18 month old freezes during nappy changes
- A two year old draws a picture of herself “me and my holes”
- A three year old draws a picture of his step father with his “hurty fingers”
- A three year old plays “jections” (injections)
- A four year old repeatedly plays bedtime but whispers “Don’t tell or I’ll kill you”

Examples taken from Marchant and Turner’s work with children giving evidence at trial



Top tips for practitioners recording

Ensure you include the views of other significant people in the child's life who may have contributions to make about the child's experiences

- ✓ for example, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, neighbours and teachers
- ✓ research has found that these people often had a unique insight into the lives of children yet their views were given less weight than the views of professionals

Include the views of fathers; they may have useful information to share, even if there are concerns about them

Use independent advocates to ascertain children's views as sometimes they can bring valuable context to children's experiences

Encourage children to participate in plans drawn up about them – they can do this directly by attending meetings or contribute by putting something in writing or drawing a picture, or giving someone a 'message' from them

Useful resources to assist in capturing the voice of the child



Sheffkids website: Useful resource for ‘Voice of the Child’ tools.

Children’s Participation Toolkit for Social Workers:

(activities/worksheets/templates) assists social workers/early help workers to involve children in the process of assessments, intervention planning and reviews in a positive, supportive and enabling way.

‘Say it your own way’: 40+ worksheets facilitating children’s participation in assessment. Helps ascertain children’s daily routine, likes, dislikes, feelings, wishes as well as their views on their family, friends, helpers, home, neighbourhood, school etc. Also includes examples of how to explain assessment in a child-friendly manner.

Solution-focused practice – A toolkit for children & young people:

44 tools, worksheets, games, activities and exercises developed by NSPCC practitioners to be used with children/young people aged 5-19 years old during solution-focused work.

‘Animal talk’ activity: using animal pictures to get to know children and discuss their views and feelings in an interactive and fun way.

Getting to know a child’s routine activity tool. This supports social workers to gain an understanding of a child’s/young person’s daily routine in an engaging way. This contains 40+ individual slips with various activities/feelings.

Culturagram. A family assessment tool used in the practice of social work which was first introduced by Dr. Elaine Congress websites: socialworkculturagram.weebly.com/culturagrams and socialworkculturagram.weebly.com/example

Autism Toolbox website. Online resource to support the inclusion of children/young people with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream education services and signposting to other useful websites.

Helen Sanderson Associates: Online tools for those with additional needs including sheets around relationship circles and good day/bad day.

Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership: **Youth Services (Leicester City Council) - How will you hear me?** A number of useful short video clips to support opportunities for gaining the voice of the child.

To access the resource click on the **bold underlined text**

Recording Additional Information

Findings from a recent Multi-Agency Mental Health Audit (2020) identified that information relating to disabilities and ethnicity were not always known or recorded on children's files.

Practitioners to be reminded of the importance of information relating to children's disabilities and ethnicity is known and recorded on their file.

Please consider this in your interactions with children and families and when recording on your agency records.

This will be monitored via individual agency/service data submissions submitted to the quarterly SSP Performance and Quality Assurance (PQA) meeting.

Other useful resources

NSPCC: [Recognising and responding to abuse - Information Sharing](#)

NSPCC: [Learning from case reviews – thematic briefings](#)

SCIE/NSPCC - Inter-professional communication and decision-making:
[Practice issues from Serious Case Reviews – learning into practice](#)

Swindon Safeguarding Partnership [website](#)