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Background:

The child's voice is a phrase used to describe the genuine involvement of children and young people. It means more than simply seeking their views but is about enabling them to take as active a role as possible in decision making.

“Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account.” (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12)

Children have said that they need adults to: listen, avoid making assumptions and notice when things are troubling them; treat them with the expectation that they are competent and can make effective decisions about their own lives; be honest and explain things in a way that they can understand; keep them informed of the outcome of assessments and decision making; support them as individuals and assist them to put forward their views.

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What to do?

- Remember that research has shown that only 7% of communication is verbal! Being observant is very important as children may say one thing but their body language & behaviour may signal something different.
- Give sufficient time, be patient and insist that children's voices are not only heard but also used to inform our practice.

Questions:

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?

Do we effectively capture the voice of the child and their lived experience in assessment, planning and records?

If I have concerns about my own personal safety, have I considered the level of risk for children in this household?

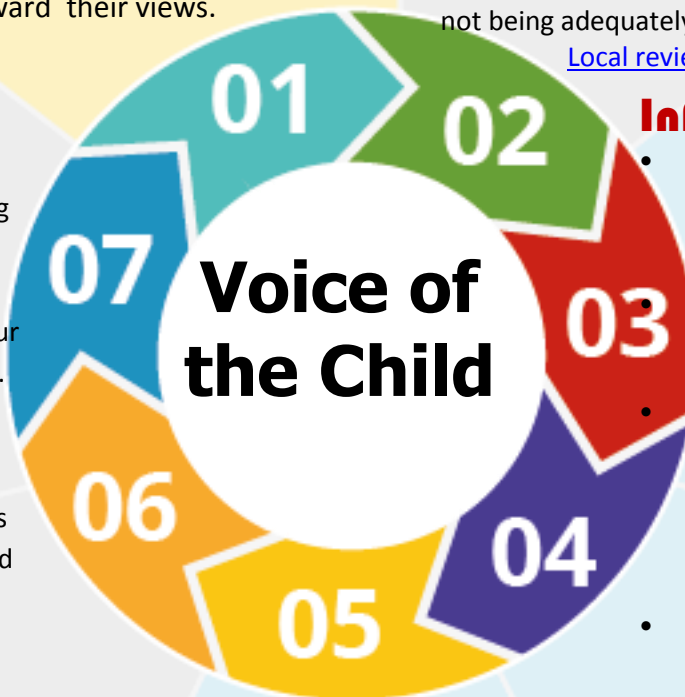
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Why it matters:

The dangers of not engaging children directly are well established. The [Laming report](#) (2003), which considered the circumstances of Victoria Climbié's death, concluded that "the authorities charged with her care almost without exception failed to talk to Victoria directly but addressed their concerns to those responsible ultimately for killing her". The failure to listen to children was also highlighted in an [Ofsted report](#) of 67 serious case reviews (2010). The report indicated that: professionals did not see the child frequently enough or did not ask the child about their views and feelings; did not listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of the child and that parents and carers often prevented professionals from seeing and listening to the child. In her review of child protection in England [Professor Eileen Munro](#) highlighted "Children and young people are a key source of information about their lives & the impact any problems are having on them.... It is therefore puzzling that the evidence shows that children are not being adequately included in child protection work" [Local reviews](#) reflect similar findings

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Voice of the Child

Information:

- Children must be seen alone. They may not be able to talk openly about their experiences in presence of a parent/carer
Children may feel less inhibited about speaking if they are in a safe, neutral setting
- Talk to children about their lives, their likes & dislikes, hopes & dreams, worries & fears. There are a variety of ways of gaining their views through [techniques](#) such as 'Three Houses'.
- Record what children say in direct quotes (e.g. 'I feel sad/happy/worried when...'). This is more powerful than something interpreted by a professional
- Even if children are too young to speak it is still essential to convey a sense of what life is like for them. 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
- Include the views of other significant people in the child's life who may have contributions to make about the child's experiences, e.g. grandparents, aunts, uncles & neighbours.
- Include the views of fathers; they may have useful information to share, even if there are concerns about them.

Information:

- Observe interactions between children & parents/carers.? What is your hypothesis about their behaviour?
- Encourage children to participate in meetings, including Child Protection Conferences. They can do this directly by attending or by putting something in writing, drawing a picture or asking someone to speak on their behalf.
- Use the 'About Your Conference' booklets to engage children in the process.

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