

Voice of the Child – Approaches to adopt during Interventions to facilitate Effective Engagement with Children and Young People

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 such as observing a child's behaviour when the child is too young to express their feelings in words or when the child has communication difficulties.

Practitioners 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. When the 'voice of the child' is captured, children feel involved, listened to and ultimately this leads to more successful interventions.

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 eg family members and teachers

Approaches to adopt to facilitate effective communication with children to capture their feelings, thoughts and views include:

- Be flexible and use professional judgement; no one tool suits all. Every child is different. Plan ahead, adapt and have a variety of tools to hand to suit particular needs, learning styles and purposes. There are no factors that should be a barrier to capturing the child's voice.

- From the outset, establish ground rules, be clear on your professional boundaries; effective contracting. Make sure the child understands your role; what you can and cannot help them with; and that referrals to other appropriate agencies can be made if support needs are identified outside your professional remit.
- Develop trust and rapport. If you say you will do something, in a certain timeframe, make sure you do and if you are unable to do so explain the reasons why. Respect confidentiality however be sure to highlight and explain exceptions and the reasons for these.
- Take the time to get to know the child you are working with, their likes and dislikes, worries and aspirations; get to know them as a person.
- Assist the child to feel at ease. Consider potential barriers to communication and ways to overcome these e.g. meeting in a safe, neutral setting.
- Facilitate communication by the use of good body language: effective non-verbal communication e.g. eye contact, posture, nods, tone of voice and verbal cues.
- Give the child the opportunity to share their views with you without family members and others being present; the presence of others may inhibit the child from sharing their views fully.
- If the child is too young to speak: 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
- If the child is unable to express their thoughts verbally consider other ways the child can express their thoughts e.g. Makaton Signs and Symbols. Encourage the child to draw or write about themselves.

- Jointly agree assessments, reviews and plans following interventions; promotes joint ownership.
- Make accurate records of all interventions and ensure these are reviewed prior to meeting the child so that the child does not have to keep repeating their story over and over again.

Further reading:

[Voice of the Child: Learning Lessons from SCRs 2010](#)