



## Hearing the Voice of The Child and Understanding their Lived Experience - Guidance

### Scope of this chapter

The views of children and their families are essential to good practice across all agencies working with and providing services for children and young people. Everyone working with children and families in North East Lincolnshire must ensure they seek, actively listen to and respond to the voice of the child which includes an understanding their lived experience (what they see and feel and how they respond to the world around them). Practitioners should ensure that the voice of the child and their assessment of the child's lived experience informs all aspects of their work both on a single and inter agency basis. This is rooted in legislation and good practice.

### 1. Introduction

North East Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (NE LSCB) safeguarding reviews and practice assurance activity have evidenced some good examples of agencies capturing the voice of the child. However often it is not captured or recorded and the experiences of what 'is life like for the child or young person' (life is like for the child or young person is) are not recorded, analysed or understood. Children can tell us so much about their experiences which effectively informs single and inter agency and informs the appropriate level of support for them.

The rights of children and young people to be heard is included in the UN Convention of Rights and the Children's Act 2004 emphasises the importance of speaking to the child or young person as part of any assessment.

UN Convention of Rights [UN Convention On The Rights Of The Child | Save the Children UK](#)

Children's Act 2004 ([Children Act 2004](#)) Our aim should be (is) to share and practice positive approaches to effective communication and listening through active learning (training, workshops and putting in place actions from learning events) We are committed to communicate clearly, purposefully and honestly with children & young people. We should remember to consider identity, diversity, culture, language, disability, delayed speech, low confidence and trust.

This guidance is for use by all professionals (the term includes managers, staff and volunteers) who have direct and indirect (i.e. may work with parents/families) contact with babies, children and young people; and who therefore, have responsibilities for safeguarding and promoting their welfare.

Everyone who works with children and young people in NEL should commit to seeking and recording the voice of the child and taking appropriate action for every child they work with.

The SCP need to be assured through the Voice and Influence Strategy and action plan that services have a process for hearing the voice of the child, they are listening and improvements are made to service delivery and practice as a result.

## **2. What Children have said that (say) they need**

- Vigilance: to have adults notice when things are troubling them;
- Understanding and action: to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon;
- Stability: to be able to develop an on-going stable relationship of trust with those helping them;
- Respect: to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not;
- Information and engagement: to be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans;
- Explanation: to be informed of the outcome of assessments and decisions and reasons explained when their views have not met with a positive response;
- Support: to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family;
- Advocacy: to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views.
- To be and feel heard. Including being involved in the decisions in a way that is comfortable and realistic.

## **3. Key Messages from National and Local Practice Reviews and Line of Sight Practice Events**

In too many cases:

- The child was not seen frequently enough by the professionals involved or was not asked about their views and 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 professionals from seeing and listening to the child;
- The child's voice not being acted upon despite making disclosures of harm;
- More weight given to the voice of the adult than the child;
- Practitioners focused too much on the needs of the parents, especially on vulnerable parents, and overlooked the implications for the child;
- Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child;

- Not having a shared inter agency understanding of what life is actually like for the child.

#### **4. Understanding the Meaning of Voice of the Child and Lived Experience**

The voice of the child not only refers to what children say directly, but to other aspects of their presentation, how they interact with others around them and what they are communicating through non-verbal communication and behaviours. It means seeing their experiences from their point of view or seeing the world through the child's eyes. Being able to incorporate observations of all of the above into assessments means that work is much more child focused, children feel listened to, plans are more successful when children feel involved in them, and prompt decisions are made about safeguarding when necessary.

The child's voice is a phrase used to describe the real involvement of children and young people. It means more than seeking their views, which could just mean the child saying what they want, rather than being really involved in what happens.

The 'lived experience of the child' is what a child sees, hears, thinks and experiences on a daily basis that impacts on their personal development and welfare whether that be physically or emotionally. As practitioners we need to; actively hear what the child has to say or communicate, observe what they do in different contexts, hear what family members, significant adults/carers and professionals have said about the child, and to think about history and context. Ultimately, we need to put ourselves in that child's shoes and think 'what is life like for this child right now?'.

#### **5. Talking with Children and Young People**

Even initial discussions with children should be conducted in a way that minimises any distress to them and maximises the likelihood that they will feel enabled and supported in sharing their own information with the practitioners provides a helpful guide for professionals on how to respond and what steps to take next when a disclosure is made. Children may need time and more than one opportunity in order to develop sufficient trust to communicate any concerns they may have, especially if they have a communication impairment, learning disability, are very young or are experiencing mental health problems.

Practitioners are encouraged to:

- Explain your own role, to listen openly and to seek the views/voice of the child without advising or judging;
- Remember to consider explaining to parents and carers in advance and seek consent where necessary;
- Ensure you have understood by reflecting back with the child or young person to check what you have heard is what they want to share.
- Consult with other practitioners working with the child to ensure that confusing messages are avoided and the child is not asked to repeat their information unnecessarily;

- Avoid professional jargon and be clear about facts and opinion;
- Allow time for the child to ask questions;
- Be clear about next steps.

## **6. What Effective Ongoing Action to Keep the Child in Focus Includes**

- Listening to the child's wishes and feelings - about their situation now as well as plans and hopes for the future;
- Providing children with honest and accurate information about the current situation, as seen by practitioners, and future possible actions and interventions;
- Involving the child in key decision-making processes;
- Providing appropriate information to the child about his or her right to protection and assistance;
- Inviting children to make recommendations about the services and assistance they need and/or are available to them;
- Ensuring children have access to independent advice and support (for example, through advocates) to be able to express their views and influence decision-making;
- Sharing regular feedback or updates on what is happening, what has happened and check how this is impacting on the child or young person from their perspective.
- Record the views and experiences effectively to aid communication and understanding for those working with them and reduce the need to repeat their story.
- Considering with them, issues arising in relation to identity, diversity, culture, faith, sexual orientation language, disability, low confidence and trust.

7. How to Seek the Views of Children (/chapter/hearing-the-voice-of-the-child-and-understanding-their-lived-experience-guidance#how-to-see-the-views-of-children)

## **7. How to Seek the Views of Children**

The voices of children and young people must be recorded and taken into account no matter what their age or ability to communicate directly.

This can be done by:

- Direct engagement;
- Observation;
- Discussion with parents, family members, carers or agencies;
- Analysis of information held to consider what the impact might be on the child.

A good start is to explain your own role, to listen openly and to seek the voice of the child without advising or judging.

Remember to consider explaining to parents and carers in advance and seek consent where necessary.

There are some guides and leaflets to give to parents and young people to assist with explanations and participation. It can be helpful to give people some written material to take away and consider and then offer another opportunity to talk again later.

## **8. Where to Reflect the Voice of the Child**

- Agency child case records;
- Referrals;
- Assessments;
- Support provision;
- Strategy discussion meetings, S47 enquiries;
- Child in Need, Child Protection and Children Looked After Care Plans;
- Court statements and care plans;
- Supervision records.

## **9. Recording**

This should be embedded in practice and in records and should be updated regularly particularly when circumstances change for the child or there is a change of plan. We should record the voice of the child or the child – for the current plan to be evidence based and for the future children should be able to access a good record later in their lives. The voice of the child should be recorded within documents and exemplars in the electronic records. They can also be attached or scanned into records where the child has written their own views or tools have been used which are handwritten or completed by the child.

## **10. Using Tools**

Many workers use tools to enable them to seek the views of children or to aid participation in enabling children to draw or write their views more freely than in open conversation.

Useful examples are available to assist workers but not intended to replace other good practice. Workers should plan ahead and adapt tools to suit particular children and young people or circumstances. There are no right answers to how to do this, just opportunities in the available tools and resources such as books, dolls and figures, drawing materials, and games.

A wide range of tools is available to encourage us all and help with direct work. Please take care and exercise professional judgement as they do not fit all children or all circumstances. They are intended as a guide and can be adapted for individual use. There are many more available and in use. Please share what you use yourself among teams and services.

## **Examples of Tools**

This takes the 3 assessment questions from the Signs of Safety Model – what are we worried about/what is working well/what needs to happen – and puts them in the 3 houses drawn to engage children in filling in their worries/good things/dreams.

This is a basic sheet to capture the views of children in short encounters or assessments and should be used as a starter not as an end in itself. It contains just a few questions to assist children to express their views. It can be completed by or with a parent or carer or

based on observation and behaviour where a child is unable to communicate or too young to do so.

This is detailed and useful for seeking views of looked after children or those with Child Protection or Child In Need Plans.

- On my desert island – three islands;
- How do you feel today?
- Feelings – the alien;
- Graffiti Wall;
- I don't like it when...
- A Risky Business;
- Why did I go into care?
- My Fabulous Dream;
- The Bag of Worries;
- The Story of the Worry Ball;
- Review - When? Where? Who? What will we talk about?
- Getting to know you;
- It's My Life!
- Time Line with Children & Young People relating to Issues of Neglect + pictorials – choose some of the pictures or find your own to suit a particular child – or use the idea for neglect and to ask the child to tell you about a day in their life;
- The Change Balloons – balloons can also be used to represent people.

## **11. Further Information**

Children Act 1989- the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned, considered in the light of his age and understanding

Children Act 1989 [Children Act 1989](#) The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A child-centred system

The Munro Review of Child Protection: Final Report, A child-centred system [Munro-Review.pdf](#)

Working Together to Safeguard Children [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)

Learning from Serious Case Reviews [Learning from practice | NELC](#)