**Voice of the Child**

Capturing the voice of the child is integral to positive working with children and young people but is also a significant element of our statutory safeguarding responsibility. Some of the reasons are obvious, but it is worth reflecting on the power of listening and the impact of effective listening on children’s lives. Having a culture where children feel listened to as individuals provides a safe and nurturing environment.

We should focus on listening to and responding to what children and young people say is important to them, take their views into account and consider their wishes. Every professional working with children and young people should ensure that the child’s voice is heard.

 ‘Where there is a safeguarding concern, governing bodies, proprietors and school or college leaders **should ensure the child’s wishes and feelings are taken into account** when determining what action to take and what services to provide.

**Systems should be in place for children to express their views and give feedback**. Ultimately, all systems and processes should operate with the best interests of the child at their heart’.

**Keeping Children Safe in Education – Sept 2019 (page 26)**

No one Noticed, No one heard: A study of Disclosures by the NSPCC, sets out some key factors that children raise as the barrier to making a disclosure.

Within the study of 60 young people who had experienced abuse in childhood, the time taken to disclose the abuse ranged from one week to eighteen years, with the average being seven years. Many of the children had attempted to tell someone, ‘66 per cent attempted to disclose when the abuse was happening. However, just like many high-profile cases, not all of these disclosures were “heard” or acted upon.’

[**NSPCC No one noticed no one heard**](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2013/no-one-noticed-no-one-heard/)

Why should we listen to children?

* **To enable all children, including those with SEN, to be able to effectively share their wishes, feelings and lived experience.**
* **To give all children, including those with SEN, the skills to communicate their wishes, feelings and lived experience.**
* To get to know them
* To capture their lived experience
* Identify what is going well
* Identify what is not going well
* To make them feel valued
* To give them agency – have an impact on their own lives
* To understand how they feel – sometimes we all need to ‘talk it out’
* To give them the language and tools to express their emotions
* To give them the skills to regulate their emotions
* To spot any changes in their mood or presentation
* To build trust
* To establish a relationship so that they know we will listen when it really matters

All children have the right to be listened to and have their opinions heard. Children with SEN are no different and we should see the child as the expert in his or her own life.

The views of children and young people can be effectively captured if they are approached at the right level and in a way that is reflective of their ability to understand.

There is also a wealth of current legislation which enforces that the child’s voice is heard such as:

**United Nations Conventions articles 2,3,6 and 12 states that:**

the right of the child to express their views freely in all matters affecting them should be assured.

**SEN Code of Practice:**

Children have a right to receive and impart information, to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them from the Early Years. Their views should be given due weight according to age, maturity and capability.

How to listen so children will talk……

Some children will already be skilled communicators, used to being asked their opinions and having a sense of agency. Some will find talking and being listened to more difficult and it may need careful planning.

Some ideas….

* Conversations! But you may need to plan the time and the place
* Distraction – some children are much more comfortable if the ‘talk’ is not the focus. Asking them to do a job with you, going for a walk, giving them colouring, Lego, a low threat activity and a well-placed open question can work wonders
* Prompts/Scaffolds – resources such as Three Houses. There are lots of different tools and children may prefer a variety of different formats (Life Maps, Good Day Bad day, My Magic Wand, My Anger Map……. Three houses
* Talk cards, Conversation cubes, Conversation starters – lots available online or make your own
* Having allocated key workers – named person a child knows they can go to. Planning in keyworker sessions for the most vulnerable children.
* Small group social games
* Role playing with puppets
* PECS
* Using Communicate in Print
* Communication books
* Makaton or appropriate signs and symbols for your children.
* Communication buttons
* Music
* Giving the child access to a camera/table to make a photo story
* Completing and regularly reviewing a one-page profile – All about me tool
* Know your Normal – Ambitious about Autism.
* Voice recording – recording stories, questions
* Starting from how they communicate – you might be looking at responses in body language and behaviours – humming, laughing, blinking, crying, kicking, pointing. Start from the perspective that behaviour is a form of communication
* Use techniques such as Emotion Coaching
* All About Me tool (For use with autistic children and young people) – CAT (Communication and Autism Team) Birmingham - the tool can be purchased by emailing a request to CAT@birmingham.gov.uk
* Using technology - <https://mindofmyown.org.uk/>

BCC are also running pilot groups looking at Rix Wiki <https://www.rixwiki.org/>

Positive communication, however it occurs, means that we are enabling respectful relationships, taking children’s views seriously and hearing their interests, priorities and concerns.

Prompts, downloads and Resources.

[Social Workers Toolbox](http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/childrens-participation-toolkit-for-social-workers/)

[Sheffkidds printable resources](http://www.sheffkids.co.uk/adultssite/pages/resources.html)

[Know your Normal - printable resource from ambitious about Autism](https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/know-your-normal)

[Voice of the Child Resources form Manchester Safeguarding Board](https://www.manchestersafeguardingboards.co.uk/resource/voice-of-the-child-resources-for-practitioners/)

[Signs of Safety Toolkit](http://www.lscbbirmingham.org.uk/early-help/signs-of-safety-and-wellbeing/toolkit)

[Resources from Hope 4 Hurting kids](https://hope4hurtingkids.com/)

Emotional Regulation and learning the language of expressing ourselves

[Zones of Regulation](https://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html)

[Emotion Coaching](https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com/)

[Attachment Aware Schools Approach](https://www.bathspa.ac.uk/schools/education/research/attachment-aware-schools/)

Books and websites

[Adverse Childhood Experiences](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHgLYI9KZ-A)

[NSPCC – No one Noticed, No one Heard 2013](https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2013/no-one-noticed-no-one-heard/)

[Communication Cookbook](http://www.talkingpoint.org.uk/directory/communication-cookbook)

[The Communication Trust](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/early-years/)

[How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish](https://www.amazon.co.uk/How-Talk-Kids-Will-Listen/dp/1848123094/ref%3Dsr_1_2?adgrpid=52672054269&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI1piXwKXu5AIVRcjeCh0ymgO5EAAYASAAEgIXqPD_BwE&hvadid=259074200145&hvdev=c&hvlocphy=9045529&hvnetw=g&hvpos=1t1&hvqmt=e&hvrand=4430740420703944948&hvtargid=kwd-301548305433&hydadcr=28213_1821155&keywords=how+to+talk+so+that+kids+will+listen&qid=1569494222&sr=8-2)

[UNICEF Rights of the Child](http://www.unicef.org.uk)

[DFE Guidance – Listening and Involving Young Children and Young People](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/listening-to-and-involving-children-and-young-people)