

Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

Please speak to the Designated Safeguarding Lead:
Hannah Pallôt or Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead:
Rachel Heffer immediately with any concerns.
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Voice of the Child

What do we mean by the 'voice of the child'?

Since the adoption of the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, Article 12](#) – the provision that children have a right to express their views and have them taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity – has proved one of the most challenging to implement. Time and again, experience shows that children, even very young children, given the time and opportunity, demonstrate not only that they have views, experiences and perspectives to express, but that their expression can contribute positively to decisions that affect the realisation of their rights and wellbeing.

Why does it matter?

The 'Childs Voice' does not only refer to what children say directly, but to many other aspects of their presentation. It means seeing their experiences from their point of view. 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. Ultimately we need to put ourselves in that child's shoes and think 'what is life like for this child right now?' It is essential when completing or reviewing an assessment, statutory review papers or care plan to gain a clear picture of a child's wishes, thoughts and feelings. It is a good practice to ask the child or young person which professional they would like to gather this information from them. We must also see the child alone so they are able to communicate their thoughts and feelings freely without duress.

Questions to consider

How creative can we be when capturing the voice of the child? Would talking to the child whilst playing be more appropriate? How do we capture what's not being said, and how do you know? Are we the best adult to talk to the child? Have we chosen the right location to talk to the child?

Useful resources:

[Say it your way](#); 40+ worksheets facilitating children's participation in assessment;
[Solution-focused practice](#) – A toolkit for children & young people (44 tools, games, activities, exercises)
[Shedkids](#)—a range of useful worksheets for opening discussion with children

How does this look for schools in everyday practice?

Talking to the child – this may be dependent on age and level understanding. Ensuring the actual words and wishes of the child are present and are highlighted in assessments such as annual SEN reviews so that they stand out from the page. Consider the location of where you have your conversation. A more neutral environment could be more productive.

The right of a child or young person to be heard is included in the UN convention of rights and the [Children Act 2004](#) emphasises the importance of speaking to the child or young person as part of an assessment. This has also been highlighted in lessons learnt 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

Children who are silenced cannot challenge violence and abuse perpetrated against them. The capacity to learn is restricted without the chance to question, challenge and debate. [Save the Children](#) believe that children have a unique body of knowledge about their lives, needs and concerns, together with ideas and views which derive from their direct experience. Decisions that are fully informed by children's own perspectives will be more relevant, more effective and more sustainable.