

Voice of the Child and Lived Experience

September 2024



**Guidance
document**

Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to set out a shared understanding and meaning of the lived experience and voice of a child across the partnership. It is the responsibility of all agencies to ensure that the 'Voice of The Child' is central to everything we do within our daily practice. Problems can arise when we lose sight of the needs and views of children. Hearing the voice of the child is an essential part of safeguarding. It helps practitioners to develop an understanding of the lived experience of the child, and what needs to happen to keep them safe from harm.

The Munro Review of Child Protection (2010) sets out 8 principles which together make a good child protection system. One key message was that everyone involved in child protection should focus on children and young people, respecting them as individuals with rights, including having a say in decisions about them whenever they can give their views.

Working Together 2023 further emphasises that one of the core principles of effective safeguarding practice is a child centered approach which aims to understand children's lived experiences and seeks their views about their lives and circumstances (Department for Education, 2023)

Children and young people should have the opportunity to describe things from their point of view. They should be continually involved, and have information fed back to them in a way that they can understand. There should always be evidence that their voice has influenced the decisions that professionals have made.

Top Tip:

It is essential that we give regular feedback to children and young people in a format that is accessible and easy to understand. This must evidence that their wishes and feelings have been listened to and how they have influenced the decisions that affect their lives. We need to ensure that information is gathered with a purpose and shared in a coherent and consistent way.

Voice of the child, lived experience and participation

Child and young person's **voice** – listening and responding to the voices of children and young people is a duty of all professionals. This links to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states that “Children have the right to give their opinion freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.” It is essential that their voice shouldn't just be captured at the start of their journey when receiving support; their views should continually be sought, listened to and acted upon in a timely and meaningful way throughout all our work with them.

Lived experience – the voice of children and young people is more than just listening to them about their wishes. It is also about their feelings in what they see, feel, hear and think about themselves, others, and the environment in which they are living, spaces and places that affect their physical, social and emotional welfare. When working with children and young people we need to not only listen to them, but also observe what their life has been like and what it is like right now. This includes capturing the thoughts of family members, trusted adults, carers and other professionals within their lives.

Participation – is engaging, empowering, enabling and equipping children, young people and families with skills to have a voice and to be actively involved with decisions that affect them and the services they receive. This can be at different levels:

- Individually with children and young people – they will be listened to, and their voice captured about what their choices are, decisions about their life, in their plans, and assessments.
- As a family or group – all family members will have their voices captured either together or individually, to help shape their support, and influence decisions that affect them as a family or group.
- Service – involved in shaping services that they need or evaluating support they have had to help redesign services they are currently accessing. Enabling them to have an active role in decision making.
- Strategic – influencing and shaping the priorities for services with senior managers, supporting implementation, or evaluating how effective these have been.

Adultification

Adultification: Adultification refers to the societal perception or treatment of children, especially belonging to marginalised and racialised groups, as more mature, older, or responsible than they actually are. This often results in these children being held to higher standards of behaviour, discipline, or responsibility compared to their peers, potentially depriving them of their childhood and leading to various negative consequences, including biases in the education system or the criminal justice system. There may also be a misconception that the risk of harm is reduced or not evidenced around this child, which could lead to the child being at a heightened risk of harm.

When working with children and young people we need to ensure you:

- are using appropriate language when talking to, discussing, or recording about a child.
- Have conscious consideration of culture and ethnicity in the provision of services or the understanding of experiences.
- Consider the whole family and ensure there are effective joint working practices when your organisation is working with members of the same family.
- Be professionally curious in your practice and confident to challenge other practitioners when they use language that is associated with an adult.
- Be mindful of the power of our language and the different ways words and behaviour can suggest a child is older or more mature than their chronological age.

Top Tip:

- Practitioners need to be mindful of the information they are recording about a child or young person, they may access their records, and this may be the only information they have to understand decisions made about them. Everything recorded on the child's record should be purposeful and factual.

What should practitioners do?

When working with children or young people it is essential to gain a clear picture of their wishes, thoughts and feelings. It is good practice to ask the child or young person which practitioner they would like to gather this information from them.

- Make the child or young person central to the story being told.
- No child is too young to have a voice - involve the child regardless of age, developmental stage or ability to communicate directly.
- Think about creative methods used to involve the child or young person, i.e. communication aids or tools such as the 3 houses.
- Observe and record the child's behaviour and experiences.
- Have a real understanding of what makes the child or young person's day good or not so good.
- Focus on what you are hearing or seeing mean for a child.
- Recognise and acknowledge that whatever is bothering them is a big deal to them at that time.
- Think about impact and potential outcomes for the child.
- Observe the interactions between a child and their parents or carers – is there any difference in their interactions with other people.
- Describe the child's interactions with professionals, does the child appear relaxed, wary, or overly familiar.

Check out what has happened from different people's perspectives without being confrontational.

Agencies whose roles are predominantly working with adults also have a role in safeguarding children and reflecting on the child's lived experience.

- Think about what you know and how this might impact upon a child.
- Consider parental behaviours and the impact these have on the child.
- Explore the impact of the worries on a child during conversations with the parents/carers.
- Don't make assumptions on information provided on face value, check out what has happened.

Recording

Sharing information is vital to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. To keep children safe, it is essential that all agencies record and share appropriate information in a timely way. Good recording supports good decision-making for children and families and ensures practitioners are accountable for their work.

- Evidence the child's voice through all recordings
- Think carefully about your own reflections or hypothesis without evidence.
- Describe a child's physical appearance, do they appear thin, pale, dark shadows under their eyes, listless, anxious, worried or do they appear curious, 'smiley', active.
- Remember to avoid judgmental and subjective language.
- Is there a difference in the child's presentation than normal?
- Ensure you include the views of other significant people in the child's life who may have contributions to make about the child's experiences.

Learning From Case Reviews

The NSPCC published a briefing in May 2024 looking at learning from Child

- understanding the different ways children communicate

Resource: [The voice of the child: learning from case reviews | NSPCC Learning](#)

What we want to achieve across the partnership

Each agency will provide assurance that to the partnership that measures are in place to record the voice and lived experience of a child focused on this shared understanding.

Measured Outcome:

1. Each agency should consider ways to engage children in meaningful ways to feed back on their experiences, with a particular emphasis on how the service is helping to improve their wellbeing.
2. Each agency should ensure that the lived experience and voice of children is embedded within all single agency audit activity.
3. The lived experience and voice of children will be embedded within multi-agency and partnership improving audit activity.

The voice of our children

Top Tips from Children and Young People Living in County Durham

1. *Talk to us using our language.*
2. *Share with us what you are doing with our suggestions.*
3. *Professionals should keep promises.*
4. *Always tell the truth to young people, what you tell the parents you tell the young person. Let people take it at their own pace to talk and get better. Being consistent with young people, making them feel comforted and listened to.*
5. *Professionals to be open minded, you do not know everything straight away, take time to learn this. We do not need someone to fix everything, but we do need them to listen and to help. Look underneath what is happening on the surface and treat everyone with kindness.*

(voices taken from children/young people within DSCP)

Resources

DSCP tools:

- [Three Houses Guideline.pdf](#)
- [Adolescent Three Houses Guidance.pdf](#)
- [Voice Of The Child – Wizards and Fairies.docx](#)
- [Voice Of The Child – 3 Houses useful questions.docx](#)
- [Voice Of The Child – 3 Houses blank template.docx](#)
- [A day in the life of a child.pdf](#)
- [The Gingerbread Exercise.pdf](#)
- [Shield against shame diagram.pdf](#)
- [Queen Or King Of The Island Exercise.pdf](#)
- [Language That Cares Guide.pdf](#)
- [The Developing World of the Child – Seeing the Child.pdf](#)

[The voice of the child: learning from case reviews | NSPCC Learning](#)

[Child Exploitation Language Guide | The Children's Society
\(\[childrenssociety.org.uk\]\(http://childrenssociety.org.uk\)\)](#)

[Information Sharing – How we share information in Durham](#)

Health agencies should refer to their own 'Was Not Brought' Guidance