

Voice and Lived Experience of Children and Young People Guidance for Practitioners

When working with children/young people it is essential to gain a clear picture of their wishes, thoughts and feelings. It is good practice to ask the child/young person who they would feel most comfortable talking to.

The right of a child/young person to be heard is included in the [UN Convention of Rights](#). The [Children's Act 2004](#) emphasises the importance of speaking to the child/young person as part of any assessment. The importance of speaking to a child/young person and gathering their views has been consistently highlighted in lessons learned from serious case reviews.

In too many cases local and national reviews have found:

- A child/young person 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/young person and who had important information to contribute
- Parents and carers prevented practitioners from seeing and listening to the child/young person
- Practitioners focused too much on the needs of the parents or adults, especially vulnerable adults and overlooked the implications for the child/young person
- Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child/young person.

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

This not only refers to what children/young people say directly, but to many other aspects of their presentation. It means seeing their experiences from their point of view.

Why is the child's voice important?

Assessments & plans which include the voice are more child focused work meaning child/young people feel listened to, plans are more successful when they are involved and prompt decisions are made about safeguarding when necessary.

What should practitioners do?

There are many ways to ensure records include a strong sense of what life is like for an individual child/young person at a particular time:

- Talk to the child/young person about their life, likes & dislikes, hopes & dreams, worries & fears;
 - Talking to children/young people is dependent upon their age and level of understanding
 - If children/young people are able to talk there are a variety of ways of hearing their voice through direct work techniques such as 'signs of safety'
 - Record what children/young people say in 'direct quotes' (e.g. 'I feel sad/happy/worried when...') as this is more powerful than something interpreted by a practitioner.
- Children/young people must be seen alone as they may be inhibited to talk openly about their experiences by the presence of their parent or carer.
- Consider the location – children/young people may feel less inhibited about speaking if they are in a safe neutral setting.
- Even if children/young people are too young to speak it is still essential that workers convey a sense of what life is like for them;
 - This can be done in a variety of ways – 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.

- Children/young people may have means of 'speaking' other than verbal speech such as Makaton or signs and symbols; be creative;
 - Encourage them to draw or write about themselves and their lives.
 - Use a range of ideas; start off non-specific such as 'draw your favourite food, favourite pop star' then be more directive such as 'draw where you live, who lives there, draw a picture of a happy day, a sad day, what do you wish was different, who is special' etc.
- Describe a child/young person's physical appearance, do they appear thin, pale, dark shadows under their eyes, listless, or do they appear curious, 'smiley' or active.
- Observe the interactions between a child/young person and their parents or carers – is there any difference in their interactions with other people.
- Describe the child/young person's interactions with professionals;
 - What is your hypothesis about this behaviour?
 - Does the child/young person appear relaxed, wary, or overly familiar?
 - Does the child/young person respond as you would expect a child/young person to respond in that situation?
- Ensure you include the views of other significant people in the child/young person's life who may have contributions to make about their experiences;
 - for example, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, neighbours and teachers
 - Research has found that these people often had a unique insight into the lives of children/young people yet their views were given less weight than the views of professionals.
- Include the views of fathers; they may have useful information to share, even if there are concerns about them.
- Use independent advocates to ascertain children/young people's views as sometimes they can bring valuable context to their experiences.
- Encourage children/young people to participate in plans drawn up about them – they can do this directly by attending meetings or contribute by putting something in writing or drawing a picture or giving someone a 'message' from them.

Fraser guidelines

The **NSPCC** have published Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines to help people who work with children/young people to balance the need to listen to their wishes with the responsibility to keep them safe. This can be downloaded from their website at learning.nspcc.org.uk/gillick-competency-and-fraser-guidelines.

Help seeking behaviour

Help seeking behaviour is a fundamental skill for all children/young people. This is something they learn through their early attachment relationships and through their contact with adults over time. It is a developmental skill that is essential for survival and needs support to develop; early experience of adversity, abuse and can have a negative effect. Practitioners recognising, responding to and validating the help seeking behaviour of children/young people is essential.

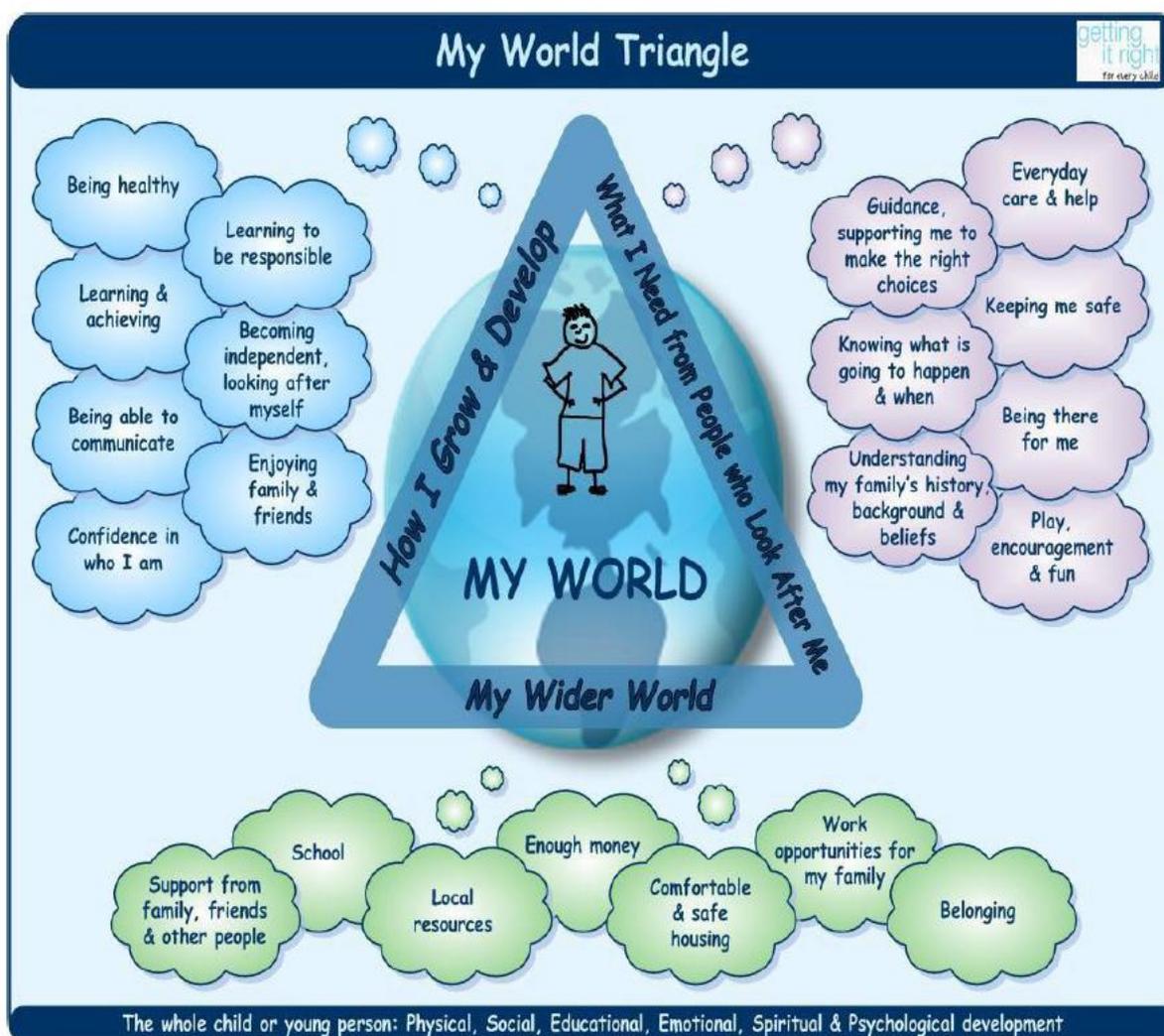
Public inquiries, research, inspections and SCRs have highlighted the way in which children/young people can become invisible to practitioners in their work across the safeguarding continuum. This is despite a legislative framework which makes it clear that children/young people should be fully involved in decisions about their lives and that their views should routinely be sought regarding their own understanding of their circumstance. Research highlights that there are many barriers for children/young people in asking practitioners for help and to talk about their worries and concerns so they can be addressed.

Children/young people also report that when they do ask for help, they are often not heard or their worries not acted upon. The consequence of this is that a recent report by the Children's Commissioner has found that only 1 in 8 victims of abuse felt able to ask for help. If children/young people are not responded to appropriately by practitioners, their concerns

not listened to or addressed, this is likely to impact on their self-esteem and resilience; their short and long term developmental outcomes; and their ability to seek help about things that are worrying them.

A child/young person's developmental needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors are dimensions within the assessment framework triangle which professionals utilise to help to 'assess' a child/young person's experiences and current home situation. The 'My World' triangle builds on the assessment framework in a format which can be used directly with children/young people. A child/young person's developmental needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors are dimensions within the assessment framework triangle which professionals utilise to help to 'assess' a child/young person's experiences and current home situation. The 'My World' triangle builds on the assessment framework in a format which can be used directly with children/young people.

According to Scotland's Government website <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/People/Young-People/gettingitright/national-practice-model/my-world-triangle> (where triangle and additional prompts can be found), the triangle can be used to 'gather more information from other sources (some of it possibly specialist), to identify the strengths or wellbeing concerns in the child/young person's world' and that it 'supports practice that considers the child/young person's needs and risks, as well as the



Establishing a day in the life of a school age child/young person

Finding out about the lived experience of the child/young person

Practitioners need to be confident and competent when working to safeguarding children and families. Research, locally and nationally, provides areas of practice which support finding out about ‘the lived experience of the child/young person.’ Some are the more salient ones listed here include, for professionals to have:

Professional Curiosity: practitioners need to understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. In other words they need to **ask questions** and observe the child/young person’s surroundings. Ask them ‘What is life like for the child living at home?’ ‘What is it like for the family?’ ‘How does the child/young person react to parents?’

Respectful Uncertainty: A term initially used by Lord Laming (2003) [Victoria Climbié Serious Case Review and again for Baby P] meaning that professionals must remain sceptical of the explanations, justifications or excuses they may hear. Professionals should always **‘check out’** with other agencies and sources of information about what is being said. Marion Brandon et al (2016) added further elements that professionals need to:

- Be aware of ‘silent’ ways of telling through verbal and non-verbal emotional and behavioural changes in children/young people.
- Explore creative ways of engaging with children/young people with regards to their age, communication skills and personal history to enable them to share their experiences
- Follow up concerns within families by ensuring each child/young person is given an appropriate opportunity to talk
- Professionals need to recognise young people aged 16-17 years as still being vulnerable and to use appropriate children’s services and follow safeguarding procedures

Both Brandon and Munro advocate that as professionals we need to be ‘attuned to the child’s world’ and to pay attention not only to what the child/young person says but also what they are **not saying**.

This following tool supports professionals to gain a good understanding of a child/young person daily routine. It should help to identify positives or strengths in the child/young person’s daily routine, as well highlighting areas where there may be concerns. The sheet is also available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/establishing-a-day-in-the-life-of-a-school-age-child-sheet/

Question	Factors to Consider
Do you get yourself up in the morning?	<p>Is the child/young person expected to get themselves up?</p> <p>Is there a regular routine or does it depend on the motivation of the carer?</p> <p>Does the child/young person have to take responsibility for carers and/or siblings in the morning?</p> <p>Is an alarm clock/mobile phone used to make sure the child/young person is up in time for school /play school etc?</p>
Do you have anything to eat?	<p>Is there usually food in the house?</p> <p>What is available to the child/young person?</p> <p>Does an adult/sibling or the child/young person themselves take</p>

	<p>responsibility for preparing breakfast?</p> <p>Is the child/young person given money to buy something on way to school?</p> <p>If so, what do they tend to buy?</p>
What happens about getting dressed?	<p>Are clothes readily available, clean and in a good state of repair?</p> <p>Does the child/young person have to find their own clothes?</p> <p>Do they have their own clothing?</p> <p>What happens about washing, etc?</p> <p>Does the child/young person wash and brush their teeth in the morning? Is this appropriately supervised?</p> <p>Are there facilities available, e.g. tooth brush?</p>
What happens if you are going to school?	<p>How does the child/young person get to school?</p> <p>Who is responsible for getting the child/young person to school?</p> <p>Is the child/young person responsible for other children/young people?</p>
What happens at school?	<p>What is the nature of the child/young person's relationships with their peers, teachers and support staff?</p> <p>What do they enjoy at school?</p> <p>What do they find difficult?</p> <p>What makes them happy and sad at school?</p> <p>Do they have friends?</p> <p>Are they bullied?</p> <p>What do they do at playtime?</p>
What happens if it's the weekend or school holidays?	<p>Is the child/young person expected to look after other children/young people and/or their parent/carer?</p> <p>Are they expected to do errands, etc. for the carer?</p> <p>How do they spend their time?</p> <p>Do they have any friends?</p> <p>Are they left unsupervised or allowed to undertake inappropriate activities?</p> <p>What happens about food?</p>
What happens after school?	<p>Are they collected from school and, if so, on time?</p> <p>Do they stay for after school activities?</p>

	<p>Are they responsible for other children/young people?</p> <p>Do they have friends that they see?</p> <p>What is the journey home from school like? (Consider opportunities for bullying etc)</p> <p>Is there anyone at home when they arrive back?</p> <p>What happens when they get home?</p> <p>Do they have any caring responsibilities?</p> <p>Is food available when the child/young person gets home from school?</p>
<p>What happened in the evening?</p>	<p>Is there food available?</p> <p>What kind of food does the child/young person eat in the evening?</p> <p>What does the child/young person enjoy eating best? How often do they have this?</p> <p>Does anyone prepare an evening meal? If so, does the family eat together?</p> <p>If not, does the child/young person get their own food and/or get food for others?</p> <p>When does the child/young person usually have their last meal/snack?</p> <p>What happens if the child/young person says they are hungry?</p> <p>Does the child/young person spend their time watching TV? Do they go out - where and with whom?</p> <p>Does the child/young person enjoy games and toys; which ones? Do they have toys?</p> <p>What do the carers do in the evening? What does the child/young person think about their activities?</p> <p>Does anyone talk to the child/young person or give them any attention?</p> <p>Is the child/young person left alone or expected to supervise other children/young people in the evenings?</p>
<p>What happens at bed time?</p>	<p>Does the child/young person have a bedtime?</p> <p>Who decides when the child/young person goes to bed?</p> <p>Where does the child/young person sleep?</p> <p>Do they change their clothes before bed?</p>

	<p>Do they have a wash and brush their teeth?</p> <p>Does the child/young person get disturbed? E.g. carers making a noise, child/young person sleeping on settee.</p> <p>Is the child/young person left alone at night and/or expected to look after other children/young people?</p>
--	--

Cultural Competence as part of the child/young person's lived experience

Cultural competence is being respectful of and responsive to the beliefs, practices and cultural and linguistic needs of a child and their family. Professionals should not make assumptions about a family/child and as part of 'informed practice' should be confident to ask about what their life experiences are in order to meet their needs and to provide the best service.

National and Local serious case reviews have shown us that as professionals we can make the wrong stereotypical assumptions and not check out all available avenues of information. For example one may consider that in some communities it is the norm for a 6 year old to be outside without supervision. One needs to consider the context, expectations but ultimately what are the risks for the child/young person?

Newham LSCB Serious Case Review '**Chris**' August 2018;

"It is acknowledged and understood that culture, and safeguarding concerns, exist in all communities; specific reference is made to the need for cultural competency when safeguarding children of Caribbean heritage as this is how Chris, and his family, identify and during the review process they themselves made reference to some of the cultural and value differences that existed between the family and professional approaches. Best practice acknowledges, explores, reflects on, understands and responds sensitively to these differences."

"Despite Chris being described as a chatty young man, Chris's "voice" was rarely truly heard and even more rarely adequately responded to. It took real courage for Chris to tell his mum how scared he was of his 'elders' and how little choice he felt he had. It also took courage to subsequently explore this with professionals. Chris told professionals where he felt unsafe and still he was asked to attend those areas for professional appointments, albeit with additional safety measures in place. The courage that it took Chris to confide these things to adults cannot be underestimated."

<http://www.newhamlscb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Serious-Case-Review-Chris-.pdf>

Resources for practitioners

There are a range of tools that can be used to capture the views of a child/young person, different tools appropriate for different ages, level of need or understanding.

There are no factors including age, understanding or level of need that should be a barrier to capturing the views of a child/young person as part of an assessment.

It is recommended that an assessment be undertaken with all family members. However if a child/young person has a level of competence that enables them to understand the assessment process, an assessment can be undertaken with them without parental consent.

Children/young people should also be given the opportunity to attend and contribute to a 'team around the family' type meeting where appropriate. Should they not attend or not wish to attend, their wishes, thoughts and feelings should still be shared. This can be provided in any format including in written or picture form. Tools which can support in the gathering of this information can also be found in this resource. Any work that reflects their voice should also be submitted as an attachment alongside an assessment or review.

The following are mainly aimed at Social Workers but can be used by other agencies. If you are aware of any other tools that can be shared then please let us know

LSCB@bedford.gov.uk

Children/young person's Participation Toolkit for Social Workers (activities & worksheets);

This resource contains various activities, worksheets and templates assisting social workers and early help workers to involve children/young people in the process of assessments, intervention planning as well as conducting reviews in a positive, supportive and enabling way. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/childrens-participation-toolkit-for-social-workers/

'Say it your own way': worksheets facilitating children/young person's participation in assessment;

'Say it your own way' has 40+ engaging worksheets facilitating children/young person's participation in assessment. The worksheets help workers to ascertain children/young person's daily routine, likes, dislikes, feelings, wishes as well as their views on their family, friends, helpers, home, neighbourhood, school etc. The booklet also includes two examples of how to explain assessment in a child/young person -friendly manner and is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at; www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/say-way-40-worksheets-facilitating-childrens-participation-assessment/

'Animal talk' activity: using animal pictures to get to know children/young person and discuss their views and feelings;

This tool contains 24 pictures of various animals and suggestions how they can be used to get to know children/young person and discuss their views and feelings in an interactive and fun way. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/animal-talk-activity-using-animal-pictures-get-know-children-discuss-views-feelings/

Getting to know a child/young person's routine activity tool;

This tool supports social workers to gain an understanding of a child/young person's daily routine in an engaging way. The document contains 40+ individual slips with various activities/feelings which a child/young person is asked to sort out into three piles – every day, sometimes or never, depending on how often they engage in this activity/have this particular feeling. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/getting-know-childs-routine-tool/

Establishing a day in the life of a school age child/young person (sheet);

This tool supports professionals to gain a good understanding of a child/young person daily routine. It should help to identify positives or strengths in the child/young person's daily routine, as well highlighting areas where there may be concerns. The sheet is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/establishing-a-day-in-the-life-of-a-school-age-child-sheet/

Culturagram;

A culturagram is a family assessment tool used in the practice of social work which was first

introduced by Dr Elaine Congress. Find out more on the websites socialworkculturagram.weebly.com/culturagrams and socialworkculturagram.weebly.com/example

Autism Toolbox website;

The Autism Toolbox website is an online resource to support the inclusion of children/young people with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream education services. As well as introducing and describing some of the more common challenges a pupil with autism might face, it provides real life case studies from Scottish schools and practical examples of supports that practitioners can translate and use in their own school setting. It also signposts to other useful websites - visit the website at www.autismtoolbox.co.uk

