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## **The Child's Voice: Practice Guidance**

“Spending time with children, talking to them, and making sure that you are actively listening and taking seriously what they say is an essential safeguarding activity.”

NCB Communicating with Children 2006

### **Why is the Child's Voice important?**

- Children feel listened to
- When children are involved, plans are more successful
- We can see their experience, from their point of view
- Children can develop their own story about what is happening in their lives

### **What Children and Young People have told us?**

- Get to know us; spend time with us and give us your attention
- Don't get us to repeat our story over and over again
- Keep us at the centre of the decisions you make
- Be honest with us and explain in a way we can understand
- Let us make some decisions about our own life
- Don't make assumptions about our thoughts and feelings

### **What happens when Children and Young People are not listened to?**

- Children are less safe
- Children are less happy and their wellbeing is lower
- Children become less visible; adult needs can dominate
- Assumptions are made about children's lives
- Knowledge about children is limited to their relationships with adults

### **What should practitioners do?**

- **Take time to know the young person you are working with, what they enjoy, what are their concerns and what are their ambitions and aspirations**
- **Document the child or young person's journey from needing help, to receiving help**
- **Record the child or young person's wishes and feelings**
- **Observe and record their behaviour and experiences**
- **Ask other professionals for their knowledge of the child or young person as they may have significantly more contact with the child**
- **Evidence the Child's Voice throughout Single Assessment (Social Work assessment section pg.5); throughout Section 47 Assessment (social work**

**assessment pg.6; reason for service pg.3 and pg. 7); throughout CIN Plan Review (plan and review section) and throughout Children in Care Plan Review**

- **Thread the Child's Voice through all recording; creative activities used to listen to children and young people can be held on Documentum**

## **The Child's Voice: Quality Standards**

- Record how **rapport** has been built with children and young people and the activities you have done together; relationships matter
- Record the child or young person's **journey** through Social Care.
- Gather **Feedback** from children and young people throughout an intervention, and not just at the end of an intervention.
- Keep children and young people **appropriately involved** in a realistic way. Age and stage needs to be taken into account.
- Acknowledge the **reality of the child's life**, with the child directly. For example, it may not be possible for the child to return home, but they can be involved in other decisions about their life, including the important day to day decisions (which increase a child's agency helping them to regain some control, and develop resilience skills). "For children who need additional help, every day matters." (WT13). The little things can really matter.
- Demonstrate an **active interest in the child** or young person's life, their views, aspirations interests and activities, and **undertake those activities** with the child.
- Identify what is important **to** the child or young person, and what is important **for** the child or young person.
- Record how the child or young person **interacts** with other people, in different settings and at different times (of day, before and after placement). At times appropriate to the child.
- Record a child's **development needs**.
- The **difficult and painful issues** need to be recorded, along with how these issues can be addressed.
- **Adult fears** and expectations around involving children and young people are acknowledged and managed.
- The **context and challenges** for evidencing the Child's Voice is recognised; it can be harder to implement consistently in crisis work.

## **The Child's Voice: What Does Good Look Like? (practice-led)**

- Making the child or young person central to the story being told. Ensuring they feel important.
- The child or young person should "jump off the page".
- Child centred thinking.
- No child is too young to have a voice. Involve the child regardless of age.
- Creative methods used to involve the child or young person, meeting their learning and development needs, and their preferences.

- Co-production of plans, assessment and reviews; children and young people can participate in producing essential documents about their lives.
- Involving the child or young person is a continual process that needs reviewing as the child changes and develops.
- The child or young person shouldn't have to tell their story over and over again. Practitioners need to read what has already been written.
- Ownership and commitment across the structure through managers, social workers and assistants.
- Sharing understanding and meaning of the Child's Voice across agencies. Other agencies will spend more time with the child and they need to be involved and recording the Child's Voice.
- Not rushing contact with the child; even if you only have limited time, focus on them. Children and young people should not know how busy you are, or how many other meetings you need to attend.
- Managing how you leave a child or young person after a hard moment.
- Drawing a picture of the child or young person's day to capture what their day is like.
- 1 Page Profile format including what the child looks like, their likes and dislikes, their personality, their fears and what makes their day good. This format is more than a form to fill in.
- Having a real understanding of what makes a child or young person's day good or not so good. What is a good start to their day? This links to their specific likes and dislikes.
- Enabling choice for the child or young person. Where do they want to meet their worker?
- Feedback from the child or young person on the value of being included and involved is essential. This can also support professional and practice development.
- Recording the journey travelled; achievement and attainment is more than standard (national) indicators.
- Endings are important and need to be planned for.
- With the Child's Voice well evidenced, handover between social workers is improved.