

Voice of the Child

As part of the SEND 0-25 Pathfinder it is essential that a clear picture of the child's or young person's wishes, thoughts and feelings are gathered and recorded and the following information has been put together to support in doing this.

Why is the Child's Voice important?

- ◆ Children feel listened to
- ◆ Helps develop a person centred approach – knowing what's important to the child and identifies both their strengths and current help that is effective
- ◆ When children are involved, plans are more successful
- ◆ We can see their experience, from their point of view – understand the impact
- ◆ Children can develop their own story and understanding about what is happening in their lives

What Children and Young People say:

- ◆ 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 should practitioners do?

- ◆ Take time to know the CYP you are working with, what they enjoy, their concerns, ambitions & aspirations
- ◆ Record the CYP wishes and feelings
- ◆ Observe and record their behaviour and experiences
- ◆ Ask other professionals for their knowledge of the CYP as they may have had significantly more contact
- ◆ Evidence the Child's Voice throughout assessments, reports, plans and reviews
- ◆ Creative activities used to listen to children and young people can be scanned and held on Documentum
- ◆ Consider alternative communication methods e.g. signs, symbols, PECS, BSL, Makaton.
- ◆ Non-verbal communication counts too e.g. facial expressions, demeanour and posture.

The Child's Voice - 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 about their lives
- ◆ 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
- ◆ 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
- ◆ Having a real understanding of what makes a child or young person's day good or not so good - this links to their specific likes and dislikes
- ◆ Enabling choice for the child or young person
- ◆ 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

Getting started:

Key factors to consider when eliciting the Voice of the Child / Young Person:-

1. Prepare children for change and consider what skills / understanding they may need to participate effectively in decision-making.
2. Use everyday interactions and natural encounters - eliciting views does not have to be a 'special event' - can be collected by more than one person/source but careful to avoid duplication, interpretation or people projecting/"speaking" on behalf of the child
3. Plan ahead – Why are you asking? What information do you need? How are you going to find out? What actions are you going to take as a result of finding out the information? How are you going to feedback to the child regarding the impact of their communications?
4. Match tools / methods to the purpose and to the needs of the child
5. As far as possible, present the true voice and avoid adapting the language or communication for adult purposes.
6. Carefully consider the best conditions for participation e.g. a familiar physical and social environment.
7. Give children opportunities to share their views without their parents/carers present.
8. Sensitively balance children's and young people's views with safeguarding their welfare.

Resources: there are a range of tools and resources available on Salford's Children and Families web pages: [Supporting Tools](#)

Salford Safeguarding Board offer a [communicating with children](#) course that can help to enhance skills in communicating with children when undertaking assessments.

In addition the The [Sheffkids website](#) also has some very good tools you can use as well.