



Direct Work with Children and Young People

Practice Guidance



Children's Social Care

This Practice Guidance has been written in consultation with Coventry Voices of Care Council, and practitioners from across Coventry Children's Services.

The voice of the child should be heard in all of the work that we do with children, young people and their families in Coventry. It is fundamental that we gain an understanding of the child's world and what it is like to be that child; getting to know them and listening to them, as well as talking to the significant adults who know them best.

This practice guidance is designed to be used by practitioners across Coventry Children's Services, in order to help them communicate effectively with the children and young people that they are working with. Practitioners should really get to know children, gain their views, wishes and feelings, and involve them in all of the decisions that are being made about their lives.

Children have many different ways in which they communicate and it is our responsibility, as adults working with children, to find ways in which we hear them and capture their voices. All children, regardless of their age, first language, or disability, have a voice and should feel listened to. Practitioners, and indeed parents/ carers, need to understand the child's experience from their point of view, seeing the child's world through their eyes.

In Coventry our practice is guided by Signs of Safety. Signs of Safety is based in relationships, and using simple and straight-forward communication with children and their families. The Signs of Safety Framework has numerous child-friendly tools to support practitioners in gathering the wishes and feelings of children (i.e. Three Houses, Wizard and Fairy, Safety House). Signs of Safety also has methods of supporting parents/ carers to inform their children of why Social Care are involved with the family, in a way that they will understand (i.e. Words and Pictures).

Children and young people are at the heart of everything that we do, and should feel listened to and fully involved in all of their assessments and care plans.

What do children and young people want from Social Care Practitioners?

- Be there for us. Go the extra mile and show us that you care.
- Have a human approach. We are people, not cases.
- Be yourself and be fun.
- Treat us as individuals. Don't judge us, and respect who we are. Build quality relationships with us by taking the time to get to know us. Have conversations with us, rather than firing questions at us, and don't rush your time with us.
- Take an interest in what we do. Engage in fun activities and play with us. If you can, take us out.
- Don't touch our things without asking. Be respectful of our home and belongings.
- Ask us if we are happy for you to write notes whilst you are talking with us, or explain to us if it is necessary. Your laptop can create a barrier when we are talking, and make us feel that you are just form filling.
- Remember our conversations from previous visits. Do not repeatedly ask us the same questions.
- Explain confidentiality to us and understand this yourself. If we ask you not to tell our parents/ carers then don't, unless you have to. If you do need to pass information on then tell us.
- Be organized, and consistent, as this helps us to feel more secure about the decisions that are being made.
- Listen to us, and find out our wishes, feelings and aspirations, so you are able to demonstrate how they have influenced your decision making.

- Keep us informed, even when things haven't moved on, explain the situation to us. Tell us the things we need to know, when we need to know them.
- Be a good communicator. Respond to our e-mails and phone us back. Make sure that we are given the correct information, and that information is given to our parents/ carers.
- Be creative, and work through issues with us in a variety of ways. Don't come up with problems, come up with solutions.
- Be up-to-date, regarding cultural awareness and the latest trends influencing children and young people.
- Keep your promises and stick to what has been agreed in our plans in a timely way. Where changes have to be made, explain the reasons to us as soon as possible.
- Turn up on time and visit us regularly. If you are delayed then contact us to apologies.
- Have high aspirations for us. Support us to achieve our goals, encourage our personal development and help us to reach our full potential. Attend our achievements, celebrate our successes with us, and show us that you are proud of us.
- Use your position responsibly, and your power to influence others. Be a voice for us and fight for us so we can improve our lives.
- Show us that you are committed and passionate about your work.
- When making decisions and plans for us, ask yourself if this would be good enough for your child.
- Keep us safe but give us the freedom to make mistakes.
- Do not give up on us.

- Help us to understand why Social Care are involved in our lives, and help us to understand our past through life story work.
- Write down what we say in your recordings, and use quotation marks. When you record the voice of the child, record how we are feeling about our situation, not just what has happened.
- If you have to leave, tell us in advance. Say a proper goodbye, and introduce the new worker to us.
- When Social Workers change, ask us if we want you to read our story, or if we want to tell you all over again. Some of us do not want to repeat ourselves, others like to tell our workers directly what has happened in the past.
- Give us the opportunity to discuss and provide feedback on the quality of care and services we receive.

What should practitioners do when completing direct work with children and young people?

- Always get consent from a parent or carer, to meet with the child or young person; unless the child or young person is mature enough to consent to meeting with you, or it would put the child or young person in danger to gain consent.
- Think carefully about where you complete direct work with a child or young person, and ask them where they would like sessions to take place. Will the child or young person feel safe talking to you when their parent or carer is in the next room? Will it make them feel more secure to know that their parent or carer is close by? Remember that a child or young person's bedroom is their space, and they may, or may not want to complete direct work in there. Recognise the importance of children's education. Do not take them out of their lessons unnecessarily. Does the child or young people want you to visit them in school? Will the child

or young person feel safer talking to you in school than at home? If so, what time is best for the child or young person?

- Keep your appointments and do not be late.
- Consider your own appearance and what you are wearing but stay true to who you are. Formal clothes may create barriers.
- Use fun activities as ice-breakers at the start of sessions.
- Be clear about why the direct work is being undertaken, and make sure the child or young person is clear about this also.
- Explain confidentiality to the child or young person in a way that they understand. Respect their right to confidentiality, but make it clear that concerns for their safety, or the safety of another, overrides any confidentiality request they may have asked for. Revisit this in all direct work sessions with the child or young person.
- Any disclosures, issues or concerns need to be referred to the relevant professionals. The child or young person's parents or carers should be informed unless it is unsafe to do so.
- Never rush time with a child or young person. Even if you only have a limited time, make sure you focus on them. A child or young person should never know how busy you are or how many other visits or meetings you have that day.
- Take time to get to know children and young people. Make enough time to meet with them and spend time having fun with them. Being involved in a play activity with a child is valuable, fun and will give you more information about the child to aid your assessment.
- Treat all of the children and young people that you work with as individuals. Show a genuine and active interest in them, and where ever possible tailor the direct work to the individual. Be observant and remember things they have told you about them for next time you see them. This will show them that you have listened to them, and that you care.
- Make every effort to make sure children and young people with communication difficulties can express their views. Picture cards could be used. Interpreters should be used when needed.

- Speak to the child or young person alone.
- Keep children and young people involved in all assessments and plans age appropriate way.
- Be realistic and clear with the child or young person. Let them know that it is the adults who need to make the decisions that are best for them, but that it is important that the adults know their thoughts, wishes and feelings. For example, the child or young person may not be able to go home but could be involved in other decisions. Children and young people should be informed about all of the decisions that are being made about them, and what impact their wishes and feelings have had in the decision making process.
- Be honest and do not make promises you cannot keep.
- Use good quality equipment to value the views of the child or young person i.e. colour printed worksheets, nice crayons etc.
- Keep a selection of activities ready to hand and give the child or young person a choice of what to do.
- Never make assumptions about what a child's drawings mean. Ask children about their drawings.
- Never use leading questions.
- Never start an activity that you cannot finish.
- Be mindful about how you take notes in direct work sessions with children and young people. Computers and note pads may act as a barrier to communication. If you need to take notes, explain this to the child or young person.
- Manage how a child or young person is left after a difficult direct work session. If you are at school let the teacher know etc.
- Observe and record the child or young person's behaviours in different settings (home, school, nursery), and their interactions with different people (siblings, parents, carers, teachers). Make sure these observations are done at times that are appropriate for child. Observations are extremely important especially with younger children, and children with additional needs, who

have not developed verbal communication. Behaviour can be considered as a means of communication and tells us a lot about the child.

- The child or young person has the right to know what you are recording about them.
- Record the activities that you do with the child or young person to get to know them.
- Document the child or young person's journey clearly, in language that the child will understand.
- Record the child or young person's wishes and feelings using the child's words – never change what they said.
- Speak to other professionals involved in the child or young person's life – they need to be involved in recording the child's voice.
- Let children and young people know that you are proud of them. Find out about their achievements and congratulate them. Remember children and young people's birthdays, and give them a card.
- Practitioners need to read what has already been written about the child or young person. Children and young people should not have to tell their story over and over. This can be very traumatic for children and young people. However, some children or young people may want to tell you directly what has happened in the past. Ask the child or young person if they want to do this.
- Endings are important and need to be planned and well managed. You may be really important to this child. Do not just leave them without saying goodbye.
- Children and young people should be offered an independent advocate for Child Protection Conferences etc.