



# **The Voice of the Child**

**Ensuring the voice of the child is included  
in all referrals, assessments and plans:**

## **Practice Guidance**



## Early Help and Children's Social Care

'Children and young people are a key source of information about their lives and the impact any problems are having on them in the specific culture and values of their family' (Munro, 2011).

Ofsted (2010) completed a report, compiling the findings of serious case reviews. Ofsted found that in too many cases:

- The child was not seen frequently enough by the professionals involved, or was not asked about their views and feelings
- Agencies did not listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of the child and who had important information to contribute
- Parents and carers prevented professionals from seeing and listening to the child
- Practitioners focussed too much on the needs of the parents, especially on vulnerable parents, and overlooked the implications for the child
- Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child

In Coventry Children's Services, we recognise the importance of children's views, wishes and feelings. All of our practice should be child-centred, and it is essential that the voice of every child that we work with is included in all of the referrals, assessments and plans that we write, in all of the services that we provide.

When we talk about the voice of the child, it is important that we recognise that we are talking about all forms of communication. All children have a voice. Children have a voice pre-birth, when they are pre-verbal, if they are non-verbal, and if they do not speak English as their first language. 'There is a danger that we only listen to those children and young people who can easily tell us their views' (Research in Practice, 2016). 'Staff... need to be able to notice signs of distress in children of all ages, but particularly amongst very young children who are not able to voice concerns' (Laming, 2009).

Working Together (2015) states that 'every assessment must be informed by the views of the child as well as the family. Children should, wherever possible, be seen alone and local authority children's social care has a duty to ascertain the child's wishes and feelings regarding the provision of services to be delivered'. It is imperative that in Coventry Children's Services we:

- See children and young people away from their carers
- See children and young people in an environment that is familiar to them (i.e. home, nursery, school etc.)

- Talk and listen to all the children that we work with, including babies
- Adapt our communication so that children and young people are able to express their voice (i.e. use interpreters, pictures, play, toys, feelings cards, communication aids etc.)
- Record the child's voice, wherever possible in their own words
- If a child is non-verbal then use observation, assessment of risk and safety, speaking with others involved in the child's life, imagine what it would be like to be that child. Record the voice of the child, making it explicit that this is your words and not theirs.
- Find out what the child likes and dislikes, what are their interests etc, and include this in assessments and plans.
- Always recognise the impact of domestic abuse on unborn children
- Use direct observations of babies and young children, by a range of people, and make sense of these observations in relation to risk factors (i.e. what attachment behaviours are we observing etc?)
- Consider the risk of harm to children in situations where we have concerns for our own safety (i.e. if we feel unsafe doing a visit to a home alone, how may the child be feeling, what is the risk of harm to them etc?)
- Recognise children's behaviour as a means of communication (i.e. why might a child be behaving in that way?)
- Understand and respond to behavioural indicators of abuse
- Recognise the importance of talking to the adults around the child — including fathers, and male figures. Their views are important and can tell us a lot about the child.
- Be aware that the needs of parents, particularly vulnerable parents, can mask the needs of the child.
- Recognise the emotional impact of capturing the child's voice on practitioners, and manage these impacts through reflective practice and reflective supervision
- Record the child's voice in all referrals and assessments, making this explicit.
- Listen, respond and record what is being communicated verbally and non-verbally.
- Have empathy for any thoughts and feelings being expressed.

Ensure that all of the actions that we make take into account the views of the child or young person.

- Ensure that the child's voice is in all of the plans that we write. Demonstrate that due consideration has been given to the child's wishes and feelings, and how these wishes and feelings have helped to develop the plan.
- Sensitively balance children and young people's views with safeguarding their welfare. Where we are unable to put a child's wishes into action in their plan, ensure that we clearly explain why, and inform the child in a way that they understand.