

## Children's Services

### Mind of My Own: guidance for practitioners

#### 1. Introduction

1.1 Children's Services encourages children and young people to use the Mind of My Own apps, so that it can fulfil its pledges to them in the [Dorset Promise](#), in particular our promise that we will listen to and include them. Mind of My Own produces a range of apps and other resources for children and young people. Their aims are:

- Using children and young people's lived experience to improve safeguarding, early intervention, and crisis aversion.
- Making the child's voice central in understanding their identity and their wellbeing.
- Promoting a strengths-based approach that is inclusive and can be accessed by all children and young people.<sup>1</sup>

1.2 Dorset Children's Services has commissioned Mind of My Own's One and Express apps, which are designed for children and young people to share experiences, feelings and views on topics that reflect important moments in their lives. They offer a safe digital space where young people can be confident that their information is private, secure and will be seen by the person it is meant for.

**One app** is visual, with simple pictures and child-friendly words, designed for children and young people to share experiences, feelings and views on topics that reflect important moments in their lives. Any child or young person who can read simple language, from around age 8, is able to use One app. It is available on the app stores and can also be used on a web browser.

**Express app** is a digital tool to ensure that young children and those with additional needs are heard and included. Express helps them share their views, wishes and feelings in a fun way that is easy for practitioners to understand. The app is downloaded to their practitioner's work mobile phone, so that the practitioner can use the app collaboratively with them.

Express is easily accessible and inclusive software that can be used by young children and those of any age with additional needs, with the support of an appropriate adult.

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<sup>1</sup> This and other material in this section is drawn from [Home - Mind Of My Own](#) and [One app - Mind Of My Own](#), viewed Feb. 2023.

- 1.3 The apps help practitioners to support the capturing of the children's and young person's voice in a timely manner, save time and evidence their views. Practitioners can respond quickly and effectively to the wishes and needs of the child, in turn supporting early intervention, positive wellbeing and timely safeguarding.
  - 1.4 Mind of My Own is an addition to, and not a replacement for, our existing ways of engaging with children and young people. Whilst it will be up to individual young people how they use the apps, we hope they will help them to engage more effectively in the planning and review of their care, so that their voice is always the most important influence in their lives.
  - 1.5 **We recognise that the success of Mind of My Own depends less on the amount of information posted through the apps, and much more on the ways in which we use that information.** By following this procedure, practitioners can help to ensure that young people have confidence in the apps, and use it widely, and have better outcomes as a result.
2. **Mind of My Own and Dorset**
    - 2.1 Dorset Children's Services already has many excellent routes to engagement with children and young people. Family Workers, Social Workers, QAROs and many others hold the child's lived experience at the heart of their practice day in, day out. Youth Voice is a successful engagement and co-production venture, through which young people become leaders in peer support, service design and improvement, and local democracy. Finally, the Families First for Children Pathfinder will see us engage with children and families to redesign our services around the principle of 'doing with, not to.'
    - 2.2 Not all children and young people have access to a mobile phone. Some lack the capacity to use one, and a number of children in our care have restrictions on their mobile phone use or internet access or use these facilities under supervision. These young people may still benefit from the Express app.
    - 2.3 We will need to tailor our messages about Mind of My Own to the different circumstances of the young people we work with. Where a child cannot have access to Mind of My Own, or has only limited access, practitioners should offer advocacy to them as an alternative means to developing their voice and engagement.
  3. **How does Mind of My Own help us to keep the Dorset Promise?**
    - 3.1 The Promise was co-produced with children and young people in Dorset, reflecting what is important to them and aligning with our corporate parenting principles. The words below are from some of our children and young people. They show why keeping the Promise is important:

“We take the Promise literally. Would make us happy because people are promising us nice things and it feels nice to know people care about us.”

“I would highlight to newly qualified social workers that communication including body language is key in working with children. Playfulness and creative activities help a child in a difficult situation. I want Empathy not Sympathy. Sometimes you can't fix everything, but you can help.”

“You can't appreciate what someone is doing for you if you don't know what they are doing.”

- 3.2 Offering the Mind of My Own apps helps us towards keeping the following parts of the Promise:

**Keeping our word, telling the truth, being kind, reliable and people you can trust** – The apps give us another way to respond to news and concerns from young people and so we become people they can trust.

**Listening to you and including you** – The apps give a way for children and young people to share their news and opinions with us instantly, outside of more formal ways of communicating with us. Using a digital way to communicate that is familiar to young people should help young people to feel included.

**Helping you to be safe and to feel safe** – The apps are another way for children and young people to communicate with those who seek to support them. We anticipate that the quick response rate and the quality of the responses should help those young people who reach out in a crisis to feel safe.

**Supporting you to be who you are** – We hope the apps will help children and young people share all their news more easily and more instantly. In particular we hope it will be a way that we can hear the achievements of our young people more easily and develop an understanding of what feels important to them. This will help us to both celebrate and understand everyone's individuality.

**Help you have goals for the future and celebrating your achievements** – The app will give us an instant way for children and young people to communicate with us and hear their news. Experience tells us that using digital messaging is often an effective way to communicate with children and young people who may struggle to share their thoughts face to face. Having another way to communicate with young people when discussing potentially difficult topics such as future aspirations will be a useful too.

#### **4. How does Mind of My Own work?**

- 4.1 Mind of My Own has been co-produced with children and young people and is easy to use, with simple navigation. It is available online from the Google, Android and iOS app stores, and young people can simply download it to their phones. Once they have the app, they can post messages to their allocated worker. Mind of My Own is free to use and meets the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Information Commissioner's Office Code.
- 4.2 Statements received via the app will be monitored by Business Support and assigned to the correct worker within 3 working hours of when they were sent by the young person.
- 4.3 If a worker is away from work, Business Support will re-assign the statement to the named person providing cover or the worker's line manager within 24 hours.
- 4.4 If a worker does not download the assigned statement within 24 hours, the statement Business Support will re-assign the statement to the person's line manager. Where the Team Manager does not download the statement within a further 24 hours, Business Support will raise the matter urgently with their Service Manager, who will direct a response on the same working day.
- 4.5 When a young person's statement is assigned to a practitioner, the practitioner should download the PDF statement and add it to the young person's Mosaic record. They should then respond appropriately to the young person's statement; this could be a text thanking them for their contact and acknowledging their views, it could be an offer of a follow up call or visit, depending on the circumstances. Both the Mosaic recording and the response to the young person should be completed as soon as practicable (and in case within one working day).

#### **5. Safety Link feature**

- 5.1 Where a young person using One app includes emojis or phrases in their statement that suggest they may be at risk of harm or in crisis, the app dashboard monitored by Business Support will categorise this as a Safety Link statement requiring an urgent response.
- 5.2 Business Support will prioritise Safety Link statements when conducting 3-hourly checks of the dashboard. When they receive a new Safety Link statement, Business Support will assign this as for other statements, but will

also download the statement and email it to the child's locality duty Social Worker for immediate response. The locality duty Social Worker will contact the child's Social Worker, who will arrange the appropriate response. If the child's Social Worker is not available, the duty Social Worker will contact the relevant team manager.

## **6. Monitoring the quality of our response**

- 6.1 Practitioners will review the content of their response to Mind of My Own statements with their supervisor as part of their normal casework supervision.
- 6.2 Business Support will report any exceptions (such as delayed or incomplete responses to statements) to the Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships (the Mind of My Own Administrator) on a weekly basis.
- 6.3 Mind of My Own provide an audit tool to enable scheduled reporting of service performance in relation to Mind of My Own. The Head of Quality Assurance and Partnerships will add this to our schedule of assurance reports. They will also devise a means for capturing the views of children and young people regarding the performance of the apps.

## **7. When will the app be useful?**

- 7.1 Any young person we are working with can use it to engage with us at any time. This will strengthen and add value to our existing forms of engagement; the app does not replace them.
- 7.2 We should encourage children and young people to use the apps whenever this suits them and when they have any news or want to share and celebrate successes or activities they have particularly enjoyed. Just as importantly, the apps can be an easy and accessible way for young people to share any concerns they have, including any mental ill-health they are experiencing.
- 7.3 The app may also help practitioners understand young people's thoughts ahead of key meetings, such as:
  - Family Network Meetings
  - Family Group Conferences
  - Team Around the Family
  - Child in Need Meetings/Reviews
  - Child Protection Conferences
  - Child in Care Reviews

- 7.4 For many if not all these meetings, practitioners will have a preparation meeting with the young person to understand their views. The app can help the young person to think about what they want to say at these preparation meetings, so they do not have to remember everything at the meeting itself. They can also use the app to send through thoughts that they forget to mention at the meeting, or which have occurred to them since.

## **8. How can practitioners encourage young people to use the app?**

- 8.1 Young people are most likely to adopt the app if they feel it is ‘the right thing at the right time.’ The period before one of the meetings described in the previous section is a time when young people may wish to gather their thoughts and share and discuss them with their Social Worker.
- 8.2 If the young person knows someone else who is already using the app, that person could offer them peer support as they learn to use the app. During this adoption phase, it will be especially important that the Social Worker responds promptly and thoughtfully to the young person’s messages.
- 8.3 The following will all help to build young people’s confidence in the app:
- sharing success stories
  - making clear it is voluntary
  - giving assurance of a prompt and effective response
  - affirming young people's use of the app

## **9. Reviewing use of the app with children and young people**

- 9.1 Where a practitioner is aware that a young person in our care is using Mind of My Own, they should offer them the opportunity to discuss their satisfaction with the app. Do they find it easy to use? Are they happy with the speed of the responses they receive? Are they happy with the actions taken in response to their messages? Could anything improve the app’s value to them?
- 9.2 Young people’s feedback should be recorded in their case notes. Where their feedback contains wider learning about the app, it should also be shared, in anonymised form, with the Head of QA and Partnerships.
- 9.3 Children’s Services will also conduct service level reviews of the app’s effectiveness, seeking feedback via Youth Voice and from carers and practitioners, and share the findings with all.