



# How do we gather the child's voice?

## Build relationships

Effective relationships need:

- Trust
- Compassion
- Understanding
- Respect

The effectiveness of the direct work you complete with children will depend on the relational context.

When building the relationship you need to be:

- Led by the child
- Go at their pace
- Make reference to the observations that you have made
- Trust your gut

## Talk to the child

Consider these tips to support you in talking to the child.

- Develop trust and a rapport through non-intrusive questions.
- If children are able to talk there are a variety of ways of hearing their voice through direct work techniques (WSP Voice of the Child Toolkit).
- Use open-ended questions or T.E.D questions to give them the opportunity to share.
- Talk to the child about their life, likes & dislikes, hopes & dreams, worries & fears.
- Identify what is important to the child or young person.
- Ask the child to draw a picture of the child or young person's day to capture what their day is like.



- Seek 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.
- Children must be seen alone as they may be worried about talking openly about their experiences if their parent or carer are present.
- Consider the location – children may feel less worried about speaking to you if they feel that they are in a safe space.
- Use a range of ideas; start off non-specific such as 'draw your favourite food, favourite pop star' then be more directive such as 'draw where you live, who lives there, draw a picture of a happy day, a sad day, what do you wish was different, who is special' etc.
- 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). The little things can really matter.
- Use independent advocates to ascertain children's views as sometimes they can bring valuable context to children's experiences.
- Some children may have means of 'speaking' other than verbal speech such as Makaton or signs and symbols; be creative by encouraging children to draw or write about themselves and their lives.

Even if children are too young to speak it is still important that practitioners create a sense of what life is like for them. Describe their presentation, how others interact with them and how they respond.

## Observe them

Whilst you are talking to the child or spending time with the child and their parents and carers there are many non-verbal communications that you can observe to understand what life is like for that child.

Consider these tips for your observations:

- Observe the interactions between a child and their parents or carers – is there any difference in their interactions with other people.
- Does the child appear relaxed, wary, or overly familiar?
- Does the child respond as you would expect a child to respond in that situation?
- Does the verbal/non-verbal communication contradict each other?
- Do you notice any changes in presentation when you talk about specific people or situations?
- How is the situation making you feel?



Children communicate difficult feelings through their behaviours and emotions.

Children require the support of adults to help them regulate their emotions. Through calm transactions, led by the child/young person and taken at their pace, we may find more opportunities for connection. Such transactions may well create opportunities for hearing the child's story from their perspective. It is important that we listen and watch!

Trauma or exposure to prolonged, severe or unpredictable stress in early childhood leaves the brain in a state of fear-related activity that impacts on emotional, cognitive and behavioural functioning. It impacts on the developing brain's ability to:

- Regulate emotions
- Learn new things
- Form relationships
- Read non-verbal cues
- Manage anxiety
- Physically thrive
- Curb impulsiveness

The child's '**Window of Tolerance**' is narrowed by trauma which leads to heightened states of hyper or hypo arousal. The [video linked here](#) explains more about the 'Window of Tolerance' and the impact of trauma.

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