

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board

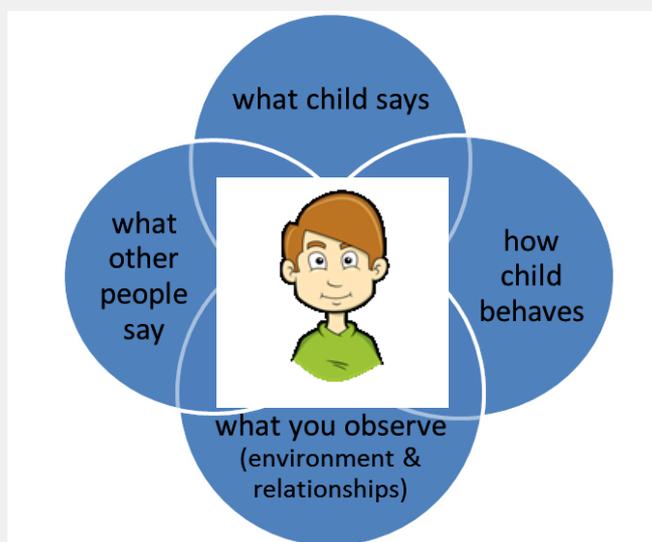
Learning & Improvement Briefing Sheet 8

Voice of the Child – do you know what it's like to be me?

It is not possible to deliver effective services to children and young people without listening to what they have to say about their experiences. That does not just mean professionals asking them if they are feeling ok between meetings and ticking a box to say that they have 'seen' the child. It means understanding the child or young person's lived experience using whatever means are available to practitioners and checking this out over time. It means gaining a sense of what it feels like to be that particular child or young person living in that specific family situation.

What do we mean by Voice of the Child?

Understanding the child's lived experience regardless of whether they are able to give a verbal account to professionals (it is not just about talking). What is it like being that child living in that family situation? Is it like that all of the time or does it change depending on circumstances?



Practitioner Prompts

- Scene setting and managing expectations
- Listening (not just hearing)
- Watching
- Being curious and testing things out
- Checking out your understanding
- Responding
- Taking Action

What Young People Say

Speak to me on my own at a time and place which feels right for me

Let my parents/carers know you will be doing this at the beginning of your involvement so it does not come as a surprise and it is seen as normal practice when working with families who have children. Give me a break if I need one.

Test out what I am NOT saying

I might leave out information about particularly difficult things (e.g. Sexual Abuse). Give me the opportunity to talk more than once as I may have to build up over time to telling you.

Make sure I can understand what you're saying to me and that you understand what I say

Make sure you take into account my level of understanding, how I communicate, how my experiences might have impacted on how I interpret things, check back with me at different points what you think I have said using my words. Don't say anything which might make me look or feel stupid.



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Remove any barriers

Think about language (consider the need for interpreters where spoken English is not my first language), jargon, the attitudes of my parents/carers to professionals speaking to me (I would like their permission), environment (I need to feel comfortable and my home might not be the best place), taking my fears or anxieties into account. Give me the option to write my feelings down or draw a picture rather than having to say the words. Please do not immediately reach for your pen.

Triangulate what I say with how I behave and react to others

Am I telling you what I have been told to say? Am I being coerced or controlled? Do I say everything is ok and then behave as though it isn't? Do I change what I say depending on who is there, where I am, what has happened? Do I say different things to different people?

Test out what I am saying

Have you asked other people what I have said to them? Do I say different things to professionals than to friends and family? Am I consistent or do I change what I am saying? Have you asked the people who know me best (friends, neighbours or family members) and have you given proportionate weight to what they say?

Show me that you have heard what I have said

You may have heard what I have said and have considered it, but you may not have made that clear to me. I need to know that I have been listened to otherwise it may feel as though no-one cares what I think. Make sure you can show me that you have heard what I have been trying to say, even if I have not been able to express myself verbally.

Do not dismiss what I have said just because my family members say something different

You may need to do more testing out

Manage expectations

What are you going to do with the information I have given you? Did you tell me before I said it? Have you been honest with me? Will what I have said make a difference? If so, how?

Some Final Thoughts

In some families it can be difficult for professionals to keep the focus on the child or young person. Parents may be demanding of attention or have particular needs of their own, they may be experiencing a cycle of crises with which they require constant support, or they may work hard to block access to the child or young person.

These are challenges which need to be addressed by setting out expectations early on that children and young people will be seen and given the opportunity to talk to professionals away from their parents or carers as part of the service being provided. When this is established as standard (rather than exceptional) practice, parents are likely to be more accepting of it.

There is an expectation that you will listen to and give due consideration to the voice of the child in your work with children and young people regardless of the setting in which you work. How you achieve this will be dependent on your role. Seek advice from your line manager if you are unclear about how to do this.

