



# The Child's Voice

*Try listening with the heart and not just the ears, there is a voice that doesn't use words." Carol Hughes*



## United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRC: Article 12 all children have a right to have their voices heard and taken into account.

### What do we mean by 'The child's voice'?

'A child's voice' is their expressions of their meaning through talk, non-verbal communications, visual art, dance, movement, song, music, poetry, drawings, their imagination, play, photography and recordings.

Through whatever means a child uses it is the child's voice that matters when talking to them and asking them about issues that affect them.





## Important things to remember.

- ❖ Children have a right to their privacy and confidentiality; they have a right to their engagement with adults being worthwhile and enjoyable. They have the right to withdraw from interactions and it is key that it is a voluntary participation.
- ❖ It is important for practitioners to 'tune in' using all their senses, to listen to the child.
- ❖ Listening to children and consulting with children isn't a one-off event. It involves engagement over time.

## Why is the child's voice so important?

- To gain a child's perspective.
- To fully engage with a child.
- To value their communications, views, wishes and feelings.
- To value their contributions.
- To have equal citizenship.



# The child's voice tells us many things ....

My preferences and what I like to do.

My emotions, feelings, and non-verbal communications

My dreams and aspirations

How I like to play and access experiences



My interests and fascinations

What I am proud of

What I am good at

What is important to me.

What I find difficult to do

What a **good** day looks like?

What a **bad** day looks like?

## What is the key outcome to the purpose of the consultation with the child to gain their voice?

- ✓ Developing their experiences and their play environments.
- ✓ **Reviewing practices and rules.**
- ✓ Improving their strengths and supporting their differences.
- ✓ Improving their health and wellbeing and to keep them safe.
- ✓ The importance of things in their daily life including, food animals, visits, relationships.
- ✓ A viewpoint about their community, family, and friends.
- ✓ To understand the child aspirations, wishes, emotions and feelings in relation to decisions which will affect them.
- ✓ To ensure they have a voice in forums where practitioners and parents are typically consulted.



When we are capturing the child's voice, we need to observe a child when....

- ✓ They separate from the parent/ carer.
- ✓ They communicate with and engage with their peers and practitioners.
- ✓ They go on trips, forest school and outdoor learning.
- ✓ They access and engage in different play environments.
- ✓ They make relationships with peers and practitioners.
- ✓ They communicate through their body language, emotions, and moods.
- ✓ They demonstrate their communication through behaviours.

## How can you capture the child's voice?



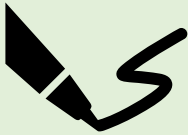
**CAMERAS** - child or practitioner capturing play, choices, creations.

Taking photos from the child's eye level can initiate and support communications use reflective questions 'I see you took lots of photos outdoors, is that because you like doing things outdoor?'

Body cameras on the child can give you an insight into their world.



**ART / CREATIVE** - using natural and creative materials, role play, music, and dance for children to show their expressions, communications, their stories in pictures.



**WRITING** - observations and annotating children's communications as they say it to ensure.

Writing what children say verbatim, in large print exactly as they say it.



**TALKING** - use language that invites the child to talk and values their expressions. E.g., 'Tell me what you think about...?' 'what do you like about...?'



**NON- VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS**- tune into body language, facial expressions and signing. Write down their communications, some children may use communication aids and eye pointing. Children may not have the same experiences or the understanding to have a viewpoint. It is important this is broken down or differentiated for children, so they have a deeper understanding.



**JOURNALS**- practitioners need to show genuine interest in what they are recording. Tune into their play, their schemas, their comments, their gestures as they engage and learn, when they rest and how they develop their independence and autonomy. Recording their development over time to show how I learn.

*Young children are wiser than many might think; under the appropriate circumstances they have the capacity to express their views powerfully and often simply.*

*Christensen and James 2000*

# Case studies from South Glos Early Years Settings

## Case study 1

This child is 4 years old and attends Apple Tree Preschool. He has speech and language delay and he is requiring a high level of support to access the curriculum.

The SENCO and key person have observed him over a period of time to capture his voice.

The extract is taken from 'The child's view' on the Inclusion Fund application.

**(The parents and preschool have kindly consented to it being used)**

I appear to benefit from combining physical movement with the creation of speech sounds when engaging with the Jolly Pop language resource. I like firm hugs and placing weighted cushions around my neck and on my lap as this appears to help me centre and ground myself. It also appears to assist with my ability to maintain attention and focus.

Visual timers help me to focus longer on adult led activities when I am expected to sit on a chair at a table. Sensory movement breaks help me to refocus on activities that are not of my choosing. I delight in physical, boisterous play in the outdoor area where I gravitate to the spinners and bouncy hopper resources. I like the lolling area with the soft blocks; I frequently cover myself with the blocks or balance them on my shoulders or head. I can follow instructions, listen attentively to stories that capture my interest and can answer simple questions about them. I like adults to play with me, although I rely heavily on the adult to support my play and scaffold play scenarios through Identiplay scripts.



## Case study 2

This child is 4 years old and he attends Baker Street Nursery. He has significant social communication differences. He isn't able to communicate his needs and wants and only uses occasional single words to label objects.

The SENCO and key person have observed him over a period of time and collated his voice for an Education, health and needs assessment referral.

**(The parents and nursery have kindly consented to it being used)**

Child A loves to be out and about. He displays a massive smile every morning at nursery saying "hello, hello, hello" over and over whilst coming through the front door. He happily waves "bye bye" to Mum or Dad at the door, has assistance undressing from his coat and bag, and enters the playroom. He also enjoys running away from Mum and Dad when they arrive to pick him up!

He loves interactions that are initiated by an adult, especially enjoying activities that are tailored to his interests. He loves sensory play (especially water and sawdust) and small world toys. He will remain focused on water and small world for an extended period of time, enjoying the sensory experience of his hands in water and the lining up of people along a unit or along the nursery windowsill.

Child A also loves being outside. The sensory experiences we offer in the garden always appeal to him as he loves to engage in the mud, water and sand play as well as having the space to run around stamping his feet. We know that he loves being outside as it is the only time of day where he will be willing to put, and keep, his shoes on.

Child A also loves visiting our sensory room where he spends most of his time in the dark tent using a spinning, light up windmill.

He enjoys doing things on his own terms and is beginning to struggle to follow routines without lots of support. This was something he was always able to do previously but since increasing his hours, he is finding it more of a challenge. Having adults around him that know how to motivate him as an individual and offer him support at these times is important to him as they directly impact how he gets through the day at nursery.

Child A is beginning to interact with his peers during simplistic games such as chase. He can be quite straight faced throughout the day, but this is one of the times where the joy radiates out of his body, as he laughs and smiles continuously.



## [Useful further reading and links](#)

Learning to listen – consulting children and young people with disabilities.

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/learning-listen-consulting-children-and-young-people-disabilities>

How to involve children and young people with communication impairments in decision -making

<https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachemnt/index.pdf>

[A Celebratory Approach to SEND Assessment in the Early Years | Pen Green Children's Centre](#)

Promoting the voices of autistic children – University of Southampton

<https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2019/10/promoting-the-voices-of-autistic-children.page>