



Cheshire East Safeguarding  
Children's Partnership

## How we capture the voice of children and young people and their lived experience

**Background** – This guidance has been written as a partnership with over 24 teams contributing to the research and writing of the document. These teams were from across Children Services, Health, Police and Youth Justice Service by request of the Quality Impact Board of the Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership. Together the guidance is to support service in capturing the voice of children and young people and their lived experience with a focus on Contextual Safeguarding. To ensure their voices are listened to and acted upon.

**Contextual Safeguarding** - The exploitation and abuse of children, and young people is not new, but we need to develop more effective and coherent ways of capturing and recording the voice and lived experiences of children and young people who are at risk of or are being exploited to ensure we work together as a partnership to help reduce children and young people being exploited.

Contextual Safeguarding is where the exploitation and abuse of children and young people come from outside the home. It includes child sexual exploitation, missing children, gangs, county lines, radicalisation, modern slavery and all forms of criminal exploitation. There are clear links across these areas, and it is vital that people, whether professionals or members of the public, know what to look out for and how to respond.

It recognises that the different relationships that children, young people and vulnerable adults form in their neighbourhood, schools and online can feature violence and abuse.

## Introduction

We know that **capturing the voice of children and young people** and **understanding their lived experiences** reduces the risk of harm and **improves outcomes for children and young people**.

Within all our services the voices of children and young people are listened to, respected and acted upon to safeguard them, improve their outcomes and influence the development of services they access. The Children's Act 2004 emphasises the importance of listening to the child or young person as part of any assessment.

As a partnership, we have a variety of toolkits we use for capturing the voice of children and young people and their lived experience at all stages and ages. This guidance aims to:

- ensure that we all consistently work to the same set of standards
- give professionals confidence and guidance in recording the child's voice effectively.

## Definitions

**Child and young person's voice** – listening and responding to the voices of children and young people is a duty of all professionals. This links to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child ([UNCRC](#)) which states that "*Children have the right to give their opinion freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.*" It is essential that their voice shouldn't just be captured at the start of their journey when receiving support; their views should continually be sought, listened to and acted upon in a timely and meaningful way throughout all our work with them.

**Lived experience** – the voice of children and young people is more than just listening to them about their wishes. It is also about their feelings in what they see, feel, hear and think about themselves, others, and the environment in which they are living, spaces and places that affect their physical, social and emotional welfare.

When working with children and young people we need to not only listen to them, but also observe **what their life has been like** and **what it is like right now**. This includes capturing the thoughts of family members, trusted adults, carers and other professionals within their lives.

It is essential that we give regular feedback to children and young people in a format that is accessible and easy to understand. This must evidence **that their wishes and feelings have been listened to** and **how they have influenced the decisions that affect their lives**.

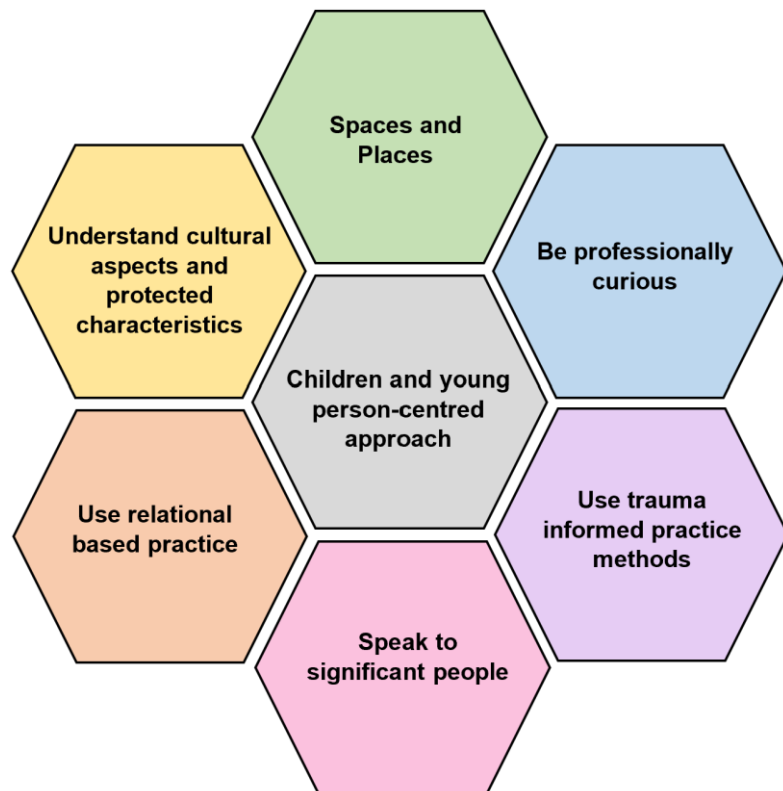
We need to ensure that information is gathered with a purpose and shared in a coherent and consistent way.

**Participation** – is engaging, empowering, enabling and equipping children, young people and families with skills to have a voice and to be actively involved with decisions that affect them and the services they receive. This can be at different levels:

- Individually with children and young people – they will be listened to, and their voice captured about what their choices are, decisions about their life, in their plans, and assessments.
- As a family or group – all family members will have their voices captured either together or individually, to help shape their support, and influence decisions that affect them as a family or group.
- Service – involved in shaping services that they need, or evaluating support they have had to help redesign services they are currently accessing. Enabling them to have an active role in decision making.
- Strategic – influencing and shaping the priorities for services with senior managers, supporting implementation, or evaluating how effective these have been.

## Principles

The principles of good practice when capturing the voice of children and young people and their lived experience are shown in this diagram:



To support best practice, professionals should use toolkits and work with a child and young person-centred approach to capture the voice and lived experiences of children and young people.

Talk to the child or young person about their likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, worries and fears. **Record their views in direct quotes wherever possible.**

Meeting children and young people alone, if they prefer in a space or place that they feel comfortable in, will provide the best environment for them to talk openly about their experiences.

Speak to the significant people in the child or young person's life who may have contributions to make about the child or young person's experiences, even if there are concerns relating to that person. **Observe interactions** between the child or young person and the significant people in their lives, such as parents, carers, and other professionals, noting any differences or changes in their behaviour or appearance during these interactions. Working with an independent advocate to gain the views of the child or young person can bring valuable context to children and young people's experiences.

If children and young people are non-verbal, or use other forms of communication, try to capture what life is like for them through observations and creative methods, such as artwork or imaginative play. The child or young person may need the support of an advocate or interpreter when capturing their voice and lived experience.

**It is important to encourage children and young people to participate in their plans –** we need to hear what they want to happen and how well the plan is working for them.

We need to adapt our delivery methods in relation to cultural context and protected characteristics, such as age, gender reassignment, disability, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Be professionally curious considering what life is like for the child or young person. Use trauma-informed principles to ask questions and explore children and young people's experiences in a way that they understand.

## The Lundy Model

The Lundy Model is based around the rights of the child, providing a safe space, the right people listening at the right time, and setting expectations so that children and young people know how much influence they can have on decisions that affect them. It can be applied to individual and collective participation, and involves giving regular feedback even if nothing has changed yet.



## Recording the voice of the child or young person

Regardless of the method or toolkit used, when capturing the voice of the child or young person, **recording** the voice of the child or young person needs to **provide everyone with a clear picture** and overview of **what life is like for them**.

Language is powerful, and it is critical when recording the voice of the child and young person to **write in a style that the child would understand, using their own language** and vocabulary. Capturing their voice using **direct quotes** and highlighting this in **bold** font helps to ensure a true reflection of the conversation is recorded, rather than interpreting what was said.

Include the wider picture, not just the 'there and then' when capturing the lived experience of a child and young person. Describe in the recording their physical appearance, such as if they appear curious, 'smiley' and active, or thin, pale, with dark shadows under their eyes. This also includes capturing the environment in which they are living. As a trusted professional, consider in your recording their journey and the **impact for the child** since you began working with them and during your work with them.

**Always share back what you have captured** with the child or young person, and record what the actions are. This may include feeding back to the child and young person in a format that has been agreed by them, for example 'you said, we did'. Providing children and young people with feedback that is fast, full, friendly and followed up, in line with the Lundy Model of Participation, is key to a child and young person-centred approach resulting in children and young people feeling valued and listened to.

### **When capturing and recording the voice of children and young people:**

- Allow the child or young person to go at their pace and be led by them
- Ask the child or young person what is important to them, what their worries are, and if more suitable ask them to draw their day to capture their voice
- Support them to identify what help they would like, and who from, and make an appropriate referral.
- Ask their views on the support they receive – how is their life different? What would they like to happen? What has worked and not worked?
- Listen to and act on their views
- Evidence what difference listening to the child or young person has made to your decisions or their support
- Build trust, positive relationships and gain a better understanding of the child or young person to best support their needs
- Help the child or young person explore who is important to them and what is most important to them within their lives
- Identify which relationships are closer to them than others and why
- Recognise and respond to trauma
- Be curious when questioning and create a safe place to engage children and young people
- Consider and ask if the child or young person would benefit from the support of an advocate or an interpreter.

**Analyse from the recording what the child or young person’s voice is telling us.** The child or young person’s voice gives a clear overview of their feelings and wishes and their lived experience – helping us to develop a plan of support:

- The child or young person has been able share what is working well for them, what worries or concerns they have. The child or young person should be able to identify goals, hopes and strengths.
- The child or young person should be able to identify what has helped or not helped
- The professional should be able to identify where support is required, and this should inform any next steps and/or future referrals/assessments, with clear actions and timeframes
- Reference any emerging patterns or traits we need to escalate
- The professional should have a better knowledge and understanding of the child or young person.

## Ofsted advice following serious case reviews

The importance of speaking to a child or young person and gathering their views has been consistently highlighted in lessons learned from serious case reviews. Babies and young people are most featured in case reviews and this is because babies are unable to speak and young people are considered hard to reach or difficult to engage (Brandon et al 2016).

Ofsted reported in 2011 that there are “five main messages with regard to the voice of the child. 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 focused 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.”

Ofsted also found that where serious case reviews featured babies and young children, agencies failed to observe and record their observations of parents interacting with the child (and vice versa) and that practitioners often forgot the other children (siblings) within the family. [2011:9 -10]

When capturing the voice of children and young people, professionals need to avoid making assumptions and **ask curious questions** to understand the whole picture of the child or young person’s lived experience. Professionals **must share information between agencies** to ensure nothing is missed that could lead to significant harm.

Eileen Munro (2011), whilst referring to Ofsted's findings [2011:8], gave a number of helpful suggestions for practitioners to follow when making assessments on children and young people:

- use direct observation of babies and young children by a range of people and make sense of these observations in relation to risk factors
- see children and young people in places that meet their needs – for example, in places that are familiar to them
- see children and young people away from their carers
- ensure that the assessment of the needs of disabled children identifies and includes needs relating to protection and don't forget father figures within the family and about the wider family/friends – what can they tell us about the child?
- actively listen to a child and pay attention to their needs and do not focus too much on the parents, especially when the parents are vulnerable themselves (it is easy to get lost with parental needs at the risk of losing sight of the child)

Marion Brandon et al (2016) added further elements, that professionals need to:

- be aware of 'silent' ways of telling through verbal and non-verbal emotional and behavioural changes in children
- explore creative ways of engaging with children with regards to their age, communication skills and personal history to enable them to share their experiences
- follow up concerns within families by ensuring each child is given an appropriate opportunity to talk
- recognise young people aged 16-17 years as still being vulnerable and to use appropriate children's services and follow safeguarding procedures [2016:Ch6:134]

Both Brandon and Munro advocate that as professionals we need to be 'attuned to the child's world' and to pay attention not only to what the child says but also what they are **not saying**.

## Appendices

### Toolkits and Guidance

Worker profile – complete and share with the child or young person before or on your first visit as an introduction to who you are



Worker Profile.docx

What you can expect from your worker when having your voice heard



What you can expect  
from your worker 28.C

[Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership Screening Toolkit](#)

[Signs of Safety guidance and resources including the 3 Houses and Safety House tools](#)

[Early Help Assessment](#)

SCiES Voice of the Child Toolkit developed with Cheshire East Schools



SCiES.zip

Youth Focus North West - Approaches to Participation, further detail about The Lundy Model



Lundy Training Pilot-  
Handouts 1.0.pdf

The Children's Society - Child Exploitation Appropriate Language Guide



Child Exploitation  
Appropriate Language

[Free social work resources and tools for direct work with children and adults \(socialworkerstoolbox.com\)](#)

[Child Exploitation Disruption Toolkit](#)



[United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[Voice of the Child Toolkit](#) - shared with permission from Buckinghamshire Early Help

Cheshire Police AWARE Video – <https://youtu.be/EHKCgekrO0M>

## Training Plan



Participation Team  
Training Plan 2023-24

## Further Reading

Links to policies and strategies from across the partnership both single agency and as a partnership:



Child Centred  
Policing Strategy 2022

## [TOGETHER](#)

[Cheshire East Children and Young People's Trust and Children and Young People's Plan](#)

[Cheshire East's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy](#)

[Youth DRG Toolkit 3 models Roger Hart Ladder | YouthPower](#)

## References

Brandon, M et al (2014)(2011)(2010)(2009)(2008)

Munro, E. (2011b). *The Munro review of child protection: Final report – a child-centred system*. London: Department for Education.

Ofsted (April 2011): *The voice of the child: Learning lessons from SCR: A thematic evaluation of SCR from 1 April to 30 September 2010*