



TEA-BREAK GUIDE



What do we mean by Voice of the Child (VoC)?

Listening and responding to the voices of children, young people and their families is a shared responsibility of all practitioners in the wider children's workforce. Whether you work every day with children, young people and families or only have irregular contact, incorporating their voices is a vital part of your work. This approach allows our services to be reflective of the needs of those we work with, making us more effective, more responsive, more informed, and provides us with a good base for children, young people, and their families to engage with us to achieve the best outcomes we can.

Respect for children's views is integral to all evidence-informed practice with our families. Respecting a child's experiences is fundamental to our partnership's values and ambitions for practice, as we aim to secure the most effective intervention we can from our workforce.

'Voice of the Child' is a generic term, used to express how we create meaningful engagement with children, ensuring they are at the heart of everything we do. Our work should focus on listening and responding to what children say. We should all seek and acknowledge children's views, wishes, hopes, and the plans for their lives.

VoC can be gained from all children - verbal, non-verbal and children with additional needs. It's important to remember that our approach meets the individual child's needs. As children get older, we must consider their ability to give consent (Gillick/Frazer competence) and their plans are fully informed by their wishes and feelings.

Why is VoC important?

VoC underpins all our practice. It is embedded throughout all our assessment and planning processes for children and their families. Focus on VoC aims to improve the quality of decisions made by professionals in their day-to-day work, with the ambition to improve outcomes for children and their families.

It's important to remember that the VoC is not always gathered in verbal exchanges. We can work with non-verbal children and young people and observation is a key tool when seeking the VoC. Observations tell us a great deal about what a child is thinking, feeling and what they want; how does the child or young person interact with people? Who do they seek comfort from? Do they look happy and content, or anxious and uncomfortable? Do they need an Advocate to help them express their VoC?

Northamptonshire Police developed the 'AWARE' acronym to help us think about VoC. There's more detail in a poster you can access in this guide's resource section:

- Appearance
- Words
- Activity and Behaviour
- Relationships and Dynamics
- Environment

Who can gain VoC?

Anyone can seek and gain the VoC. It is often best to gain the child's voice from a person they have built a relationship with - this may be a Class Teacher, a Teaching Assistant, Social Worker, Family Support Worker, School Nurse, PCSO or any other professional involved in their lives. If a child has an allocated Social Worker, they may not have the longest established relationship with the child, and they may ask others to gain the VoC to inform assessments and planning; this is completely appropriate and is a child-centred approach.

How can I gain VoC?

There are lots of ways to make sure records include a strong sense of what life is like for an individual child at a particular time:

1. Talk to the child about their life, likes and dislikes, hopes and dreams, worries and fears.
Talking to children depends on their age and level of understanding. If children are able to talk, there are a variety of ways of hearing their voice through direct work techniques like 'Signs of Safety'. Record what children say in direct quotes (for example, 'I feel sad/happy/worried when...') as this is more powerful than something interpreted by a practitioner.
2. Children must be spoken to alone, as they may be unable to talk honestly about their experiences in front of their parent or carer.
3. Think about the location – children may feel more able to speak if they're in a safe, neutral setting.
4. Even if children are too young to speak, it's still essential that workers give a sense of what life is like for them. This can be done in a variety of ways, including:
 - describing their presentation, describing how others interact with them and how they respond or commenting on whether you think they're functioning at a developmentally appropriate level
5. Children may have ways of 'speaking' other than verbal speech, like Makaton or signs and symbols – be creative.
Encourage children to draw or write about themselves and their lives. Use a range of ideas. Start off non-specific, for example, draw your favourite food or favourite pop star. Then be more directive, for example, 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.
6. Describe a child's physical appearance: do they appear thin, pale, listless, with dark shadows under their eyes, or do they appear curious, smiley, active?
7. Observe the interactions between a child and their parents or carers – is there any difference in their interactions with other people?
8. Describe the child's interactions with professionals:
 - what is your hypothesis about this behaviour? does the child appear relaxed, wary, or overly familiar? Or does the child respond as you would expect a child to respond in that situation?
9. Make sure you include the views of other significant people in the child's life who may have contributions to make about their experiences.
For example – grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, neighbours, teachers. Research has found these people often have a unique insight into the lives of children, yet their views are given less weight than those of professionals.
10. Include the views of fathers – they may have useful information to share, even if there are concerns about them.
11. Use independent advocates to get children's views, as sometimes they can bring valuable context to children's experiences.
12. Encourage children to get involved in plans drawn up about them. They can do this directly, by attending meetings, or contribute by putting something in writing or drawing a picture or giving someone a 'message' from them.

Useful Resources



THE VOICE OF THE
CHILD POSTER.pdf

Professor Eileen Munro (2011) [The Munro Review of Child Protection – final report: A child-centred system](#)

Debbie Allnock and Pam Miller (2013) [No one noticed, no one heard: A study of disclosures of childhood abuse](#)

[Voice of the Child: 20 sheets to gain child's wishes, feelings & views - Free Social Work Tools and Resources: SocialWorkersToolbox.com](#)

[Our resources for professionals | Cafcass](#)

[Microsoft Word - The voice of the child.doc \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[TACT-Language-that-cares-2019_online.pdf \(tactcare.org.uk\)](#)

[Creative ideas for capturing the voice of the child – Innovative Resources](#)

[Supporting effective participation with children and young people | Research in Practice](#)

[FINAL VOICE OF CHILD BOOKLET \(filesusr.com\)](#)

[One-page profile templates - Helen Sanderson Associates](#)

[Free Resources Archives - Elsa Support \(elsa-support.co.uk\)](#)