

Voice of the Child – Ofsted Findings:

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/voice-of-child-learning-lessons-serious-case-reviews>

Report summary

The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews

A thematic report of Ofsted's evaluation of serious case reviews from 1 April to 30 September 2010. This report covers the evaluations carried out between April and the end of September 2010 of 67 serious case reviews. The main focus of this report is on the importance of listening to the voice of the child. Previous Ofsted reports have analysed serious case reviews and identified this as a recurrent theme. This report provides an opportunity to explore this key issue in more depth and draw out detailed practice implications.

Key Findings:

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.

So, what can we do.....

Practical ways to gain the voice of the child:

Pre-birth

- Ensure mother engaged with midwifery service
- Consider and record impact of Mothers lifestyle on health & development of unborn
- Check if birth father actively involved
- Check if extended family members/friends offering or can offer support to Mother during pregnancy
- How does Mother present emotionally and physically. Is mother eating properly, keeping medical appointments etc. Observe mothers mood and body language when she discusses the un-born. What does this indicate for the unborn?
- Are parents preparing for the birth of the child, do the home conditions suggest they are ready for birth of child i.e. basic baby equipment evident/purchased, hygiene in home adequate etc. How might this impact on the unborn child – consider, record, share any concerns with parents and relevant professionals, make a plan of action.
- If parents are difficult about allowing entry to the home, refuse or frequently miss appointments; think about how you can address this. Be open and honest with the parents about impact on unborn. If parents do not respond to home visits or calls, write to them and be clear why non-engagement causes concern and how it will impact on the unborn. Consult with other agencies as to whether they can try to gain access to the home.
- Look to see if any historical concerns re parenting ability. Be honest and open with parents about this. Ideally with parents consent check with Childrens Advice Team (childrensadvise@york.gov.uk, tel: 551900, option 2) as to history of concerns and other service involvement. If concerns possibly reach child protection level, check with Childrens Social Care (childrensfrontdoor@york.gov.uk, tel: 5551900, option 3).
- If prior concerns re parents ability to parent other children, consider this in relation to unborn and make adequate safety and support plan.
- Co-ordinate support and visits with other agencies. If unsure who is involved with the family, most importantly ask the family first and if still unsure, check with the Childrens Advice Team.
- Pre-birth – you are the voice of the child.

0 to 3 years

- Assess the child's basic ability to talk and communicate feelings. Can they answer simple questions? Make language and questions age-appropriate.
- Use visuals and feelings cards/pictures to help the child explain to you ways they feel.
- Purchase appropriate materials/resource books and games to help the child express a feeling or opinion, (see additional resources list)
- Observe the child in play –what does this tell you? Is the play age appropriate, does the child appear confident in play, what feeling is expressed by the child when they see a familiar adult, does the child act differently and in a more negative or positive way with different adults –record examples. Ensure observations are factual and if opinions are given, make clear what these are based upon.
- If parents are difficult about allowing entry to the home, refuse or frequently miss appointments; think about how you can address this. Be open and honest with the parents about impact on the child. If parents do not respond to home visits or calls, write to them and be clear why non-engagement causes concern and how it could impact on the child. Consult with other agencies as to whether they can try to gain access to the home.
- Look to see if any historical concerns re parenting ability. Be honest and open with parents about this. Ideally with parents consent check with Childrens Advice Team (childrensadvise@york.gov.uk, tel: 551900, option 2) as to history of concerns and other service involvement. If concerns possibly reach child protection level, check with Childrens Social Care (childrensfrontdoor@york.gov.uk, tel: 5551900, option 3).
- If prior concerns re parents ability to parent older children, consider this in relation to younger child and make adequate safety and support plan.
- Co-ordinate support and visits with other agencies. If unsure who is involved with the family, most importantly ask the family first and if still unsure, check with the Childrens Advice Team.
- With very young children and those with a learning difficulty/disability, your observations are a big part of representing the voice of the child.

4 – 18 years

- Assess the child's basic ability to talk and communicate feelings. Can they answer simple or more complex questions? Make language and questions age-appropriate or at the level of their learning. Consider adapting materials if a child has a learning difficulty or disability.
- Use visuals and feelings cards/pictures to help the child explain to you ways they feel.
- Purchase appropriate materials/resource books and games to help the child express a feeling or opinion, (see additional resources list)
- Observe the child in play or in different situations - what does this tell you? Is the play, conversations or interactions age appropriate, does the child appear confident in these situations, what feeling is expressed by the child when they see a familiar adult, does the child act differently and in a more negative or positive way with different adults – record examples. Ensure observations are factual and if opinions are given, make clear what these are based upon.
- If parents are difficult about allowing entry to the home, refuse or frequently miss appointments; think about how you can address this. Be open and honest with the parents about impact on the child. If parents do not respond to home visits or calls, write to them and be clear why non-engagement causes concern and how it could impact on the child. Consult with other agencies as to whether they can try to gain access to the home.
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- If prior concerns re parents ability to parent older children, consider this in relation to younger child and make adequate safety and support plan.
- Co-ordinate support and visits with other agencies. If unsure who is involved with the family, most importantly ask the family first and if still unsure, check with the Childrens Advice Team.
- With young children and those with a learning difficulty/disability, your observations are a big part of representing the voice of the child.

Voice of the Child Resource List and Direct Work ideas:

Direct work:

- 1) 'Our House' – either draw or print off two or four identical houses, really simple square shape with a triangle on top to represent a house. Check with child/young person if they live with both parents or spend time between different address/carers/parents/extended family etc (this will inform how many houses you need).

Explain you want to know how things are for them. Suggest they either draw or write on one sheet how home feels for them now and who is there. On another sheet ask them to draw or write how they would like home to be; who would they like to be there and why?

Either task the child/young person to do this independently or offer to write and draw with them. Make it clear there is no pressure to use correct spellings or have high levels of artistic talent!

Offer the child/young person age appropriate reassurances you will only share their work and conversations with people they are happy for it to be shared with - unless what they share indicates they are at risk of significant harm.

If appropriate, explain child protection policy in a child friendly/age appropriate way e.g. "Sometimes children have told me things that worry me and I know if they don't get help they might not be safe/could come to harm. I have had to talk to other adults to help protect the child and keep them safe. If this happened with you, I would tell you why I was worried and who I was thinking about talking to."

This exercise can also be used to explore children's feelings about attending school or any particular setting e.g. explain to me how school feels for you now, in the second picture show me how you would like it to be.

- 2) 'Feelings faces' – draw round circles with feelings words underneath. Common feelings to use – Angry, Sad, Afraid, Worried, Happy, Excited, Confused etc. Explore with the child if they can draw expressions on the faces to represent the feeling and ask if they ever feel like this and when. Cut out the faces and write on the back of them the associated feeling. Place one face over the top of the over and explain to the child sometimes

people put on pretend feelings to hide real feelings. This is sometimes referred to as putting on a mask to hide feelings. Ask the child if there are some feelings they don't like to show. Name and draw some of the feeling masks the child might want to use. To simplify this exercise, draw feelings face cards in advance or buy sets of feelings cards (cheap and readily available feelings cards on websites such as Amazon and in larger book stores)

- 3) 'What makes me pop' – Dependent on happy you are with messy activities either bring a bottle of fizzy water/drink or draw a picture of a fizzy drink. If using a bottle of fizzy drink demonstrate to a young person if you shake it the bubbles in-side build up, get bigger and bigger as the pressure builds. If you open the bottle suddenly the drink will explode and cause a big mess (if you are feeling up to it, open the bottle and let the water explode – an exercise ideally done outside!). Relate this to feelings and if people keep them bottled up the pressure builds and eventually they will explode and cause a big mess. Show how if the bottle is left to settle and air released slowly and carefully, there is no mess – again relate this to talking about feelings and getting help to ease pressure rather than waiting for an 'explosion' of anger/feelings. A practical/visual task often has more of an impact on children/young people with poor concentration and focus. Explore with child/young person what situation or people build up pressures and feelings that lead them to 'pop'.

If not happy with mess, draw fizzy bottle and discuss as above.

- 4) 'My Body, My Feelings' - Draw a basic outline of a persons body, leaving face blank. Explain feelings are something we all feel in our body. Give some examples of how if embarrassed a lot of people feel their cheeks get hot, if they feel worried they feel cold in their stomach. Explore with the child how and where they feel their feelings. Give them coloured crayons/pens with a colour chart of feelings/colours. E.g. Sad = blue, Afraid = black, Guilty = brown, Angry = red, Jealous = green, Nervous = orange, Happy = yellow. Ask them to colour in on the body picture the places they feel these feelings. Explore with the child what colours they would like to see more of and what ones they would like to see 'rubbed out'. How can you or others help with this?

Summary: With all these exercises, after establishing what people or situations affects their feelings, draw up a support plan, with specific actions and targets and revisit the exercise in a few weeks time. Has the picture changed? Explore with the child what if anything has changed and why.

Resources:

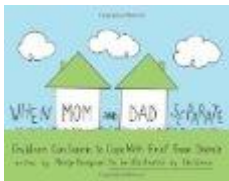
- Parlons avec Ploum – ‘Ploum gets us talking’ game.
Age range 2-5years. 64 picture cards and giant puzzles to develop self expression and imagination. Ploum is a yellow bear. There are 6 ploum bear heads with different expressions to help children express feelings. 64 cardboard picture cards depict scenes at home, outside and in the community to promote discussion and story telling about life events. There are an array of similar feelings cards advertised on-line and available in larger book stores.
- ‘What Makes Me Happy?’. A story book by Catherine & Laurence Anholt. Age range 2-6 years. A simple story book with lots of visuals to help children express different emotions such as happiness, sad, jealousy, anger, shy, bored, cry, scared, excited etc. **ISBN-13:** 978-1406303469
- ‘Communication’. Author – Aliko. Age range 5-8 years. A picture book to help explain communication to young children, promotes listening skills, recognises communication is verbal and non-verbal and explains it all in a simple, age-appropriate way. **ISBN-13:** 978-0688105297
- Ring a Ring of Roses – The hand in hand domino game.
Age range 4 and up. 1-5 players. 30 simple stand up figures with different coloured mittens. Each figure is added to make a big circle to play Ring a Ring of Roses, matching mitten colours like one would normally match numbers in a game of dominoes. The game can be adapted to help children express feelings i.e. by asking who would they like to be in their circle, who would they like to hold hands with/who wouldn’t they like to hold hands with and why, if they were at the centre of the circle and could invite people to be in the circle around them to keep them happy and safe, who would be there and why? This game can be purchased or simple cardboard figures drawn and prepared in advance to replicate this type of game.
- ‘Pictures of home’ by Colin Thompson .Age range 5-12 years.
- The pictures in this book are the artist Colin Thompsons interpretations of different homes; some magical, some strange, some cosy, some a bit scary looking! The pictures have been linked to poems, verse and comment by children. What ‘home’ means to children is very different from child to child. This is a great book to gently explore with children what home means to them. **ISBN-13:** 978-1742750903
- Marge Heegarrad – work books. Very useful A4 work books to explore various feelings with young people, age range 8 to 14 years. Easy to photocopy and use time and time again! Very cheap, approx £5-£6 each. The Childrens Advice Team have copies of all the Marge Heegarrad books and professionals can request to view them to make an informed decision on

whether a useful resource for their agency to purchase; unfortunately they can not be loaned out.



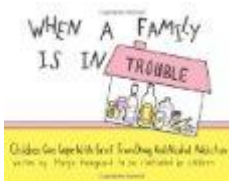
[When Something Terrible Happens: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief \(Drawing Out Feelings\)](#)

ISBN-13: 978-0962050237



[When Mom and Dad Separate: Children Can Learn to Cope with Grief of parents separation/divorce \(Drawing Out Feelings\)](#)

ISBN-13: 978-0962050220



[When a Family is in Trouble: Children Can Cope with Grief from Drug and Alcohol Addiction](#)

ISBN-13: 978-0962050275
