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Childrens Social Care and Lifelong Learning

Education, Schools and Inclusion, SEND Team

**Capturing the Child’s Voice in the Early Years**

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child states:

*“Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.”*

Birth to 5 Matters states:

*“Listening to children’s voices and recognising these are expressed in a range of ways, including non-verbally is central to inclusive practice.”*

**Practical Tips:**

Listening to children and consulting with them is not a one-off event, it involves engagement over time. We must ensure that all children have a right to privacy and confidentiality: they have a right to their engagement with adults being worthwhile, respectful, and enjoyable. As practitioners, we must respect the child’s right to withdraw from interactions, ensuring that any interactions are through voluntary participation.

Observation – practitioners need to ‘tune in’ to the child using all their senses and listen to what the child is communicating. Communication is more than speech, consider the child’s body language, eye gaze, eye pointing, blinking, crying, laughing, humming, smiling, hitting, kissing, touching, running away, intonation, volume of voice. Value any communication aids which may be used, for example, signing, visuals. Tune into how the child communicates through their emotions and mood. How do they demonstrate their communication through behaviours?

**Consider:**

• How the child separates from their parent/carer

• How they engage and interact with their peers and practitioners

• How they engage in different environments

• Follow their lead, what are their likes/dislikes.

• When does the child rest?

• How they develop their independence and autonomy

• Does the child present any schemas?

• Consider the **[Characteristics of Effective Learning](https://birthto5matters.org.uk/overview-characteristics-of-effective-learning-and-areas-of-learning-and-development/)** .

• Consider the [**Leuven Scales**](https://learningjournals.co.uk/what-is-the-leuven-scale-and-how-to-use-it/) to indicate a child’s wellbeing and involvement.

• Journals can be used as a way of recording their development over a period of time showing how they learn.

• Talking – ensure time is given for children to talk valuing their responses through genuine active listening. Remember to listen more than we talk!

• Writing – Write what the child says exactly as they say it.

• Photographs – these can capture play, choices, and creations. Remember to take the photograph from the child’s level, use photographs to initiate conversations. Consider body cameras as they can provide an insight into the child’s world.

• Provide opportunities for children to express themselves through art or other creative ways including role play, dance, singing, musical instruments. Observe the child’s expressions, communications, their stories in pictures.

***“Try listening with the heart and not just the ears, there is a voice that doesn’t use words.”***

Carol Hughes