

Background:

Listening and capturing the voice of the child is central to effective safeguarding practice. It is a key element of understanding children's lived experiences, hear their views about their lives and take effective action to support or safeguard them.

The term "voice of the child" refers to the real involvement of children in expressing their views, opinions, and experiences. It includes both verbal and nonverbal communication and goes beyond simply seeking their views to actively including them in decision-making processes (NSPCC 2024).

Pay attention!

The voice of the child can include both what is said and unsaid, verbal and non-verbal indicators, and the child's behaviour as a whole. Take time to understand what is behind children's behaviour, ask questions and don't assume that verbal disclosure is the only threshold for action. Some children may not disclose verbally unless asked directly, while other children may be pre- or non-verbal.

Ask yourself...

- Are there other professionals who could give me insight into the lived experience of the child?
- Does this information tell me anything new about the child's experience or the support they need? If it does, have I considered the implications of this?
- If I am having difficulty communicating with the child, are there others with the necessary skills or knowledge who could help?
- Is there information I have that I need to share with others to effectively safeguard and support the child?
- What are some examples of non-verbal communication that I might be missing?



One Minute Guide

'Understanding the voice of the child'

July 2025



Why is the voice of the child important?

The voice of the child is crucial because it ensures children's perspectives, feelings, and opinions are not only heard but are actively considered in decisions that affect their lives. It will also benefit and support with:

- Empowerment and self-worth
- Better understanding of their needs
- Improved communication and social skills
- Positive relationship development
- Enhanced well-being
- Effective safeguarding
- Informed decision making
- Development of a sense of belonging
- Supporting emotional well-being

Learning from safeguarding reviews:

Practice reviews emphasise the importance of the Voice of the Child, highlighting that 'empowering children to express their views and learning to listen to what children may be telling us about their experiences are crucially important issues in safeguarding practice.

- × the child was not seen frequently enough by the professionals involved, nor were they asked about their views or 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 stopped practitioners from seeing and listening to the child
- × practitioners focused too much on the needs of the parents or adults, especially vulnerable adults, and overlooked the implications for the child
- × agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child

“Professional understanding of the child’s lived experience was limited when the voice of the child was not prioritised. There was a lack of consistency in how the child’s voice was sought, heard and recorded, particularly among very young children”

Child Friendly Cov

All children and young people in our city should be and feel valued, be and feel safe, have opportunities, to be and feel healthy and to be and feel loved. Helping young people to share their voice is an underappreciated skill. Using this to better understand the young person’s experience alongside our professional judgement to ensure we continue to keep children and young people at the heart of what we do!



Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) establishes a child's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them and to have those views considered. It is a cornerstone of child rights, affirming that children are not passive recipients of care but active participants in decisions that impact their lives.

- **The Right to Express Views Freely:** All children able to form views have the right to express them freely. This includes decisions in family, school, healthcare, and legal settings.
- **Views Given Due Weight:** A child’s views must be taken seriously, based on their age and maturity. Even very young children can express views non-verbally. Older or more mature children may have more influence in decisions.
- **Implementation in Practice:** Children should be included in decision-making processes. Use child-friendly language and age-appropriate methods. Support may be needed to help them express their views.
- **No Obligation to Express Views:** Children have the right to be heard — but also the right not to speak if they choose.
- **Broader Implications:** Article 12 recognises children as active rights-holders, not just passive recipients of protection. It promotes dignity, respect, and empowerment
- **Practical Applications:** Family: Asking children’s views during separation or moving. Education: Involving pupils in school rules or policies. Healthcare: Considering children's views on treatment options. Legal/Policy: Letting children express views in court or public decisions
- **Challenges:** Adults may underestimate children’s ability to contribute. Cultural attitudes may limit children's participation. Note: Article 12 is part of domestic law in Scotland.

Please click [here](#) to find out more.