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Background

A child-centred approach is supported by:

[The Children Act 1989](#) requires local authorities to give due regard to a child's wishes with determining what services to provide and before making decisions about action to be taken to protect individual children.

[The Equality Act 2010](#) which declares that no child or group of children must be treated any less favourably than others in being able to access effective services which meet their needs.

[The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) protects the rights of children and provides a child-centred framework for the development of services to children.

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Why it matters

Voice of the child is a phrase which is used to describe the real involvement of children and young people. It includes what they say and other aspects of their presentation. It means seeing the child's life from their perspective and considering their daily lived experience. It means more than just seeking their views. It's about enabling them to take an active role in decision making. Discussions with children should be conducted in a way that minimises any distress to them and maximises the chance that they would feel enabled and supported to share their own information.

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Information

Everyone working with children and families must seek the voice of the child and reflect and respond to it in all aspects of work. This is rooted in legislation and good practice.

Practitioners should:

Explain their role, listen openly, and seek the views/voice of the child without advising or judging.

Remember to consider explaining to parents and carers in advance and seek consent where necessary.

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Consult with other practitioners working with the child to ensure confusing messages are avoided unnecessarily and so the child is not asked to repeat information.

Avoid professional jargon and be clear about facts and opinion. Allow time for the child to ask questions.

Be clear about next steps. Present the true voice of the child and avoid adapting language for adult purposes.

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Questions to consider

- How can you include the child's voice creatively, for example through their own writing, pictures, or play?
- How can you involve the child or young person in procedures and decisions?
- How can you help the child in putting forward their views?
- Is English the child's first language? If not, can their voice be obtained through the use of interpreters?
- Does the child have learning difficulties? How can their views be obtained?

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What to do

Talk to the child, how you do this will depend on their age and level of understanding.

Consider the location of your conversation. Is the environment supportive?

Keep accurate records, separating fact, opinion, and professional judgement.

Consider non-verbal observations for younger children e.g. how do they interact with their family members?

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Children have said that they need:

Vigilance, understanding and action, stability, respect, information and explanation, support and advocacy.

Children may need time and more than one opportunity in order to develop sufficient trust to communicate any concerns they may have, especially if they have a communication impairment, learning disabilities, are very young or are experiencing mental health problems.

