

CAPTURING THE 'VOICE ' OF THE CHILD IN SOCIAL WORK ASSESSMENTS - NOTE: WHEN, WHY AND HOW MUCH OF FOLLOWING IS USED WILL DEPEND ON CASE TYPE.

Recording when appropriate, start the recording with the statement "voice of child" in bold. *All the following examples can be used and recorded as 'voice of the child'.* When recording parents' 'voices' start with "(name of) parent/carer's views" in bold. All this can be done on case records and in reports.

Using Edit - Find function to check voice of the child in case records and reports are you sure you/relevant professionals are seeing/hearing the child enough? Click Edit-Find in recording/reports enter parents'/carers' names in 'find next' box. Count how often their views are captured in relevant period. Do same for child and compare. Is the child's voice being heard enough? Managers can do the same pre-supervision.

What counts as the Child's 'voice'? It's not just what's said! Non-verbal communication counts too eg facial expressions, demeanour and posture. Some children use signs and symbols as well as speech eg Makaton. Physical appearance can communicate eg an apparently emaciated baby or a suspicious bruise. Behaviour can mean as much as words, including in very verbal children. Learn behavioural indicators of abuse. For non-verbal babies and toddlers - *observe their interaction with parents carefully*: how they approach or respond to parents says a lot about how *they* see their parents. Adult relatives or acquaintances who express concern for the child are, often, giving a voice to the child. Don't ignore such concerns, including when expressed by ex-male partners. *A less obvious but potentially powerful way is to **always** put yourself in the child's shoes and ask 'what might the child be thinking or feeling in this situation?'* What verbal children *don't* say can be important. If a child is known to have the ability to discuss something but won't, this can be important eg if non-verbal cues indicate wariness or fear is the reason. Children's writings and drawings count as the 'voice' too. How a child smells can count. A 10 yr old with no physical cause for her soiling or wetting could be communicating distress. *Combine your observations with other relevant people's to catch the 'voice'. This can include siblings' views.* None of the above should be taken in isolation or over-interpreted but all can be used **and recorded** as the 'voice' of the child. Whenever you consider what parents say about children's needs or concerns, always contrast it with children's 'voices' captured as above. But, remember that hearing the child's 'voice' doesn't always mean doing as they ask eg 14 yr old girl wants to keep her 40 yr old 'boyfriend'.

MISSING THE VOICE OF THE CHILD - 5 KEY PITFALLS - LESSONS FROM SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS RE VOICE OF THE CHILD (OfSTED SCR EVALUATIONS TO END 2010)

The following led to the child's voice being missed in many serious cases. Periodically check you're not falling into these traps *especially when analysing information*.

1. Children were not seen *alone* OR *frequently* enough and even when seen were *not* asked about their wishes and feelings (including disabled children).
2. Agencies didn't listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of children and who had important knowledge of the child.
3. Parents/carers prevented professionals from seeing or listening to children NB this doesn't just mean physically barring workers. It includes missing appointments/saying 'she's asleep', 'at my Mum's/friends' etc, a small but significant number of SCR children were 'removed' from school for home education.
4. Practitioners listened too much to the parents' 'voice' ie focused too much on parents' views and needs *especially genuinely vulnerable parents* and overlooked the implications for the child.
5. Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child. This included missing the importance of what children said or did.