

A Guide to Capturing and Responding to the Child's Voice for Out of School Clubs

The Leicestershire County Council 'Out of School Inclusion Funding' Application Form requires the child to be consulted and listened to regarding how they feel about attending your Club and how they would like to be supported. This is captured as the 'Child's Voice.'

What do we mean by the child's voice?

The voice of the child refers to the ways children communicate their experiences, feelings, thoughts, and views, including both verbal and nonverbal communication. It's not just about hearing what they say but actively involving them in decisions that affect them and taking their perspectives into account.

When you offer a child with SEND a place at your Club and apply for additional support, you are making a decision which affects them. You therefore have a duty to consult with them and to listen to how they feel about this. By involving them, you will get to 'hear' their view and will gain a sense of what you need to do to prepare for them coming and be proactive to address any potential difficulties before they happen.

Legal duties/obligations

We all have a legal responsibility to listen to the voices of children, and for their opinions to be heard and taken seriously when decisions are being made about them. This is enshrined in [Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: 'The Right to be Heard'](#).

In addition, the [Children Act 2004](#), [Children and Families Act 2014 Part 3](#), [SEND Code of Practice 2015](#) and the [Early Years Foundation Stage 2025](#) makes it clear that Local Authorities when carrying out their functions under the Act in relation to children and young people with SEND must have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person.

Why is the child's voice important?

The voice of the child is crucial because it empowers them, builds confidence, and ensures their needs are met. When children feel heard and valued, they develop a stronger sense of self-worth and are more likely to engage actively in their own lives and learning. This practice also enhances communication skills and can lead to better outcomes in various settings.

Here's why the voice of the child is so important:

- **Empowerment and Self-Esteem:** When children feel their opinions matter, they develop a stronger sense of self-worth and confidence. This can positively impact their participation in activities, their ability to express themselves, and their overall well-being.

- **Improved Communication:** Encouraging children to express their thoughts and feelings helps them develop effective communication skills, which are essential for success in various aspects of life.
- **Better Decision-Making:** When children's perspectives are considered, decisions that affect them can be more effective and tailored to their needs. This is particularly important in situations like safeguarding or family law, where children's experiences are vital to understanding the situation.
- **Positive Relationships:** Feeling heard and valued fosters trust and positive relationships between children and adults, whether they are parents, teachers, or other professionals.
- **Enhanced Learning:** Active participation in learning environments, where children feel comfortable expressing their ideas, leads to more engaged and effective learning.
- **Safeguarding:** In safeguarding contexts, the voice of the child can be critical in identifying potential risks and ensuring their safety and well-being.

Benefits of listening to the children's voices

Listening to children's voices is crucial for their development and well-being, fostering a sense of importance, confidence, and belonging. It allows adults to understand children's perspectives, meet their individual needs, and promote positive relationships. Furthermore, it empowers children, enhances their social and emotional development, and contributes to a more democratic and inclusive society.

Specific Benefits:

- **Enhanced self-esteem and confidence:** When children feel heard and their opinions are valued, their self-worth and confidence grow.
- **Improved social and emotional development:** Children learn to express their needs, manage their emotions, and build positive relationships when they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings.
- **Increased participation and engagement:** Feeling listened to encourages children to actively participate in learning, social interactions, and decision-making processes.
- **Better understanding of individual needs:** By listening to children, adults can gain insights into their unique perspectives, strengths, and challenges, enabling them to provide tailored support.
- **Development of crucial skills:** Listening to children and encouraging them to express themselves helps them develop important cognitive, communication, and problem-solving skills.

- **Fostering a sense of belonging and democracy:** When children's voices are valued, they feel a sense of belonging and learn that their opinions matter, contributing to a more democratic and inclusive society.
- **Effective safeguarding:** Listening to children is essential for child protection, as it helps professionals understand their lived experiences and address any potential risks or concerns.
- **Informed decision-making:** By incorporating children's perspectives, adults can make more informed decisions that are relevant and beneficial to the children involved.

The child's voice tells us many things

Children may have a range of different feelings and emotions about attending your Club. They may feel happy and excited, but they may also be anxious, nervous, worried, or even fearful. They may feel reassured about having additional support, or worried about who this will be and whether other children will notice and tease them. Through listening to the child and finding out how they feel about coming to your Club, you can then pro-actively plan how you will support them to be positively supported in your setting.

- My preferences and what I like to do
- My emotions, feelings, and non-verbal communication
- My dreams and aspirations
- How I like to play and access experiences
- My interests and fascinations
- What I am good at
- What I am proud of
- What is important to me
- What I find difficult to do
- What a good day looks like?
- What a difficult day looks like?

Watch the video [Was Not Heard](#) to support your understanding of why it is important to listen to the child's voice and how this will support your practice to be child centred.

Communicating with the child

When you consult with the child, you need to ensure that they understand what they are being asked, and that they have an effective means of communicating back. Without this, you may miss important things that they may like you to know. You therefore need to tailor your approach to the individual child through considering their learning level, attention span, understanding of language and how they communicate. It is helpful to read with their parent's permission their Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) and Speech and Language Therapy Report first to gain an understanding of the child's

communication systems. The child may want to communicate with you using one or a mixture of the following:

- Speech (which may be unclear)
- Use of gestures
- Specific sounds or words unique to them
- A communication aid
- Sign
- Symbols and pictures

The '**Child's Voice**' can also be captured through observation of the following:

- Body language
- Facial expressions
- Their play
- Their behaviour

Just because a child can't speak does not mean they have nothing to say. For a child with SEND who may have limited or no verbal communication, we need to interpret and understand what the signals they are giving. Listening to the voice of a child with SEND who may have limited or no verbal communication takes time and resources to ensure that this is done in a meaningful way, but when captured effectively can empower them to be heard and prepare you for planning how to support them in the most positive way.

For many non-verbal children, the answer lies in their behaviour. For example, stimming is self-stimulating behaviour. It can include arm or hand flapping, finger flicking, rocking, jumping, spinning, twirling or head banging. There is no single reason for this behaviour. For some it may mean excitement, while for others it may mean 'I'm scared' or 'I don't know what to do next.' To understand what a particular child's stimming behaviour means, we need to observe and understand the situation.

Ideas for how you can capture the child's voice

- Take time in a quiet area to communicate with the child using their individual communication systems to gain likes, dislikes, aspirations, worries and fears and how they would like to be supported at the Club
- Use a Choice Board and ask the child to choose the activities they like being careful not to over-whelm with too many choices. Ask them to remove the activities that they don't like.
- Observe the child's body language and facial expressions. Record how they looked and behaved when you communicated with them about coming to your Club.

- Ask the child to visit your setting and observe their reactions and behaviour
- Ask them to draw you a picture to show how they feel about coming to your Club.
- Ask them to choose a facial expression from a 'Feelings Board' to reflect how they feel about coming to the Club
- Speak to the child's parent/carers about how they think the child feels about coming to the Club and how they like to be supported Recording the child's voice Now that you have listened to the child's voice, this can be recorded on the Inclusion Funding Application form in the following ways:
- Use direct quotes from the child verbally or through their own individual communication methods about their likes, dislikes, aspirations, worries and fears and how they would like to be supported at the Club
- Write your observation of the child's body language and reactions when talking about the Club or during their first visit
- Record the details of any pictures which the child drew or used to identify how they were feeling about coming to your Club
- Use direct quotes from parents/carers about how they think the child is feeling about attending the Club and how they would like to be supported.

Recording how you will respond to the child's voice

The application form also asks how you have responded to the child's voice. Examples of this are:

- How you will support the child to transition into your Club in response to their anxiety, fears, and worries
- How the child will be supported at the Club in response to what they have told you and your observations
- What activities you will offer and avoid in response to their likes and dislikes

Examples

Example 1

Freddie is 8 years old and has autism. He uses verbal communication. The child's voice: Freddie seems really worried about coming to the Club. He had an anxious look on his face when we talked about it. He has been to visit but stayed at the side of the room with his arms folded looking anxious and just watched. His Mum told me that he is worried about coming and who will be supporting him in case they make him play with other children and eat vegetables. When I talked to Freddie he said 'I'm worried that it will be too noisy and I don't like other children touching my things' "Will I have to eat tea? I don't like vegetables, they taste funny." He told me "I like Lego and computers" How we will respond to the Child's Voice: Freddie will meet his 1-1 support before coming to the Club who will give him the opportunity to tell her his

worries so she can reassure him. We are going to use a Feeling Board so that he can show us how he is feeling. We will have Lego at the Club. Freddie will have a choice of foods at teatime, and we will gradually introduce new foods once he has settled. We will write a one-page profile for him and record his dislikes/triggers on his Positive Behaviour Support Plan. We are planning a quiet area ready for Freddie to go to if the Club gets too noisy.

Example 2

Mohammed is 6 years old and has Down's Syndrome. He has limited verbal communication and uses Makaton. The child's voice: Mohammed seems excited about coming to the Club. When he came for a visit, he smiled and clapped his hands. He ran in and played with the cars. His Mum said that he is very sociable and loves being with his friends at school. She said that he loves water and sand play and bikes, but he can't yet ride one independently. I asked Mohammed what he liked, and he said "Car" and used the Makaton sign and showed me one. We introduced Jenny who will be Mohammed's support. Mohammed pointed at the dressing up and took her hand to take her to it. He also saw a child from his class and went up to them and hugged them. He was relaxed and happy the whole time. How we will respond to the child's voice: Jenny will support Mohammed to play and interact with the other children and support him with his communication with them. She will try to support from a distance as much as possible to encourage his independence. Jenny is learning Makaton and is going to teach key signs to all the children. We will have cars available at every session and will give Mohammed lots of opportunities to ride the bikes outside.

Example 3

Sophie is 9 years old and has Cerebral Palsy. She uses a wheelchair and is non-verbal. She uses an iPad to communicate. The child's voice: Sophie's Mum brought her to visit the club. When I said "hello" Sophie gave a little smile. Sophie used her iPad to say "Hello." When we showed her the toys, she reached for them, and I gave her a choice of which she would like. Sophie chose a doll. I asked her if she liked dolls and she nodded her head. I asked her what else she liked to do, and she used her iPad to say "painting" and smiled. I asked if she didn't like anything, but she didn't answer. Her Mum told me that she doesn't like being left on her own. She is very sociable and likes to be part of a group. I asked her if she was happy to come to the Club and she nodded her head and smiled. How we will respond to the child's voice: Mum has given us permission to speak to the Speech and language therapist so that we can support Sophie with her iPad to be able to communicate with us and her peers. We will ensure that we adapt activities so that Sophie can join in everything so that she is not left on her own. We will regularly provide dolls and painting but also offer lots of new experiences through a Choice Board. We will write a One Page profile so that all the staff will know Sophie's likes and dislikes and how she likes to be supported.

Example 4

Natalia is 8 years old and has ADHD. She has been going to the After School Club for a year. The Child's Voice: Natalia told me "I like Club, it's fun." "I like jumping on the trampoline and going on the scooters, but I don't like it when Amy, Sophie and Nishma don't play with me." Natalia is usually happy at the Club, but she can get cross and unhappy if other children don't include her. Her Mum says that she talks a lot about what she has done at the Club and thinks that she enjoys it. How we will respond to the child's voice: Sarah who supports Natalia will continue to support Natalia with her interactions with other children to help her to maintain friendships and to make new friends. She will also support her with her emotions when she is unhappy.

Further Reading:

[The Communication Trust: 10 Top Tips for making Communication Successful](#)

[The Communication Trust: Involving Children and Young People with SLCN](#)

[Learning to listen – consulting children and young people with disabilities](#)

[Voice, Influence and engagement guide](#)

[A Celebratory Approach to SEND Assessment in the Early Years | Pen Green Children's Centre](#)

[Promoting the voices of autistic children – University of Southampton](#)