

Tips For Talking With Children And Young People

Understanding Children's Rights

Building relationships with children and young people (child) is really important in helping them to feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings. Every child and young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and their views considered and taken seriously. This is in accordance with the [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

Meaningful Participation

Children are experts in their own lives. They can participate from a very early age. For a young child, this may be through play or art. As children grow, they are able to participate more and more. To participate in a meaningful way, children must be involved in decision making about their lives. By doing so they can help you understand their needs, what was not safe in their past, what isn't safe right now and what we can do to help them have a safe future.

Tip: The child needs to see the outcomes of their participation. Update them regularly about the progress that has been made towards achieving their goals and show them they have been listened to through your actions.

Advice For Uncomfortable Conversations

When we talk to children about their experiences of abuse or neglect, they need to feel safe. We have the opportunity to reassure them that what happened to them was not their fault. This helps reduce feelings of shame and personal responsibility. This can empower the child and contribute to their healing. By supporting a child to talk about their experiences we can break down the culture of secrecy that is often used by perpetrators to isolate and exploit them.

Reasons Why Children or Young People May Not Engage.

A child may:

- not know who to talk to
- not understand what they are going through isn't normal
- be embarrassed or ashamed
- be worried something is their fault
- not trust adults to help
- have had bad past experiences

Tips For Caseworkers

- Look for what are they telling you verbally and non-verbally about their experience.
- Be flexible and creative. Consider using play including drawing, painting, song writing, or photography. Be prepared before you see them.
- Find different ways of getting to know the child. What are their interests? Follow their lead.
- Support children to take the lead in conversations.
- Check you have understood them correctly so they feel heard.
- Show the child they are important, always address them when they are in the room and talk to them directly. Be authentic.
- Be transparent and clear about the things you can or cannot provide
- Schedule meetings around the child and avoid rescheduling visits
- Remember if a child chooses not to engage this is also their right. But try to understand why and give them multiple opportunities.

Tips for after the conversation

What you do afterwards is crucial. This is when your actions can show you have taken their views seriously and that you are reliable and trustworthy.

Reflect on your interaction with the child. Did they participate in a meaningful way? Did they feel safe, heard and valued? What worked well? What can you improve or do differently?

Useful Tools

Family Safety Circles

[Family Safety Circles](#) is a practical and visual cue to identify a child's safety network and discuss with the family why this network is important.

The Safety House

Use the [Safety House](#) to help children make meaningful decisions about their future safety.

The Three Houses

[The Three Houses](#) tool helps families and children make positive change. Use it to gather and verify information during an assessment and when you're making a safety, case or restoration plan.

Words and Pictures Storyboard

This storyboard creates a picture narrative which helps children and adults talk about difficult information.