

Bury Safeguarding Partnership



7 Minute Briefing: Voice of the Child

1. The 'child's voice' is a phrase used to describe the genuine involvement of children and young people in decisions about their lives. It means more than simply seeking their views but is about enabling them to take as active a role as possible in decision making. It also means we should consider children and young people's behaviours as potential ways of communicating distress, especially in those for whom communication is difficult.

"Children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account." (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12)

2. Local and National reviews following serious incidents where children have died or suffered serious harm have regularly shown that a failure to engage children and young people in decisions and assessments has a negative impact on their outcomes. Whilst involving those with parental responsibility in decision making is also important, the child's wishes, feelings and best interests are paramount. Focussing solely on parental opinions can lead to adult focussed plans and support, leaving the child's needs unmet.

Consider **'VOICE'** in all interactions with Children and Young People.

3. Value the opinions of the Children and Young People of Bury.

When developing, reviewing and re-designing services for children, seek their advice, opinions and experiences, recognising that participation improves outcomes.

Seven Minute Briefing



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4. **O**pen, honest and accessible services and professionals lead to trusted relationships, supporting Children and Young People to share their hopes, fears, wishes and feelings. Services should endeavour to build trusting relationship with the Children and Young People



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5. **I**nvolve Children and Young People in **ALL** assessments, plans and decisions made about them.

The wider partnership across Bury should ensure that

‘Nothing about me, without me’

is a culture embedded across the children’s workforce.

Where children are non-verbal, services should ensure that consideration is given to ‘what a day in the Children or Young persons life’ is likely to be like.

This includes involving Children and Young People in decisions to cease service involvement e.g. when a child is not brought to appointments or there is no access to home visits or following parental/carer refusal of services or a move out of formal education.



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6. **C**apture the voices of the individual Children and Young People clearly in records.

Services should ensure that record keeping supports and encourages the capture of the clear wishes and feelings of the Children and Young People involved.

Good practice in this area should be shared and celebrated across the partnership to support other agencies to develop.

‘Voice’ is one of the six Bury commitments which is part of improving our practice for our children and families. To gain the voice of the child it starts with forming a trusted relationship with our children and young people and understanding what their lived experience is like through home and school visits as well as direct work. For our cared for children and young people there are forums which exist to represent their voice such as In Care Council and Care Leavers Forum.



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7. **E**nsure that intervention remains child focussed throughout involvement by constantly revisiting the wishes and feelings of individual children.

Ask Children and Young People at every contact for their input. Also consider the opinions, concerns and input of adults that are important to the Children and Young People but ensure all actions (or inactions) are based on the best interests of the child involved.

It is important that children are seen and spoken to alone, especially if they are subject to Child Protection Plans. Children should be referred to independent advocacy where appropriate in order that they have an independent person to speak to in order to share their voice. This can be organised through our Children’s Rights Service.

The workforce should also understand that, often, behaviours are another way of communicating for some Children and Young People and these should be considered when agreeing further activities and interventions. For children who are pre-verbal or where communication may be an issue, play with a child and observation of their body language is really important to gain an insight into their lived experience.