

Early Childhood Participation Toolkit



Engaging with and listening
to babies and young children



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Forewords

Deputy Louise Doublet

Minister for Early Years and Families

Even the very youngest child has a voice. This is something I learnt as an Early Years Teacher and then again, as a mother. We live in a society that historically has expected children to be 'seen and not heard' and we also focus heavily on teaching our children to be 'good listeners'. It is absolutely vital that we encourage infants and children to communicate with us, and that we in turn are also good listeners. As professionals working with our youngest citizens, you have an important role in hearing and amplifying their voices. My aim is to keep working towards a Jersey that truly values the rights and voices of babies, children and young people and places them at the heart of our culture and decision making. You can help with this by reading this toolkit and using it with the children in your care. I am always interested in hearing what they, and you, have to say.



Dr Cathy Hamer

Independent Chair of the Best Start Partnership

Some years ago a child asked me 'Why am I not special too?' when I was talking to him about his brother with special educational needs. This changed my practice as an Educational Psychologist forever. The need to listen to, hear and act on the voice of a child was staring me in the face.

My keen interest in listening to babies and young children developed through working with the Young Children's Voices Network, run by National Children's Bureau, bringing together early years settings and services. We broke new ground in promoting a listening culture which enabled young children's views to not only inform day-to-day practice, but to influence priorities and planning at a strategic level.

As Chair of the Best Start Partnership in Jersey, it was to my great delight that partners took the decision to develop a toolkit to share their passion for giving children a voice right from the start. It has been a pleasure, and a privilege, to work alongside highly dedicated and skilled colleagues in Jersey. Seeing the world through the eyes of babies and young children has opened up new perspectives and ways of working. Increasingly there are examples of listening and engagement that show what works in informing policy and practice.

This toolkit is a treasure trove of tools, techniques, ideas, hints and tips. It's accessible to everyone in promoting early childhood participation and children's rights, focusing on what matters to Jersey's youngest citizens and ensuring their views are heard at all levels. Whether you read it end to end, or dip in and out, every turn of the page offers new insights and methods.

Just imagine what a difference Jersey's children will make to the future of the island knowing they have a voice. Every child is special and has a contribution to make. I wish I'd had this toolkit all those years ago.

By using the toolkit, you'll find yourself on an exciting adventure with tantalizing glimpses into the lives of babies and young children. Enjoy the journey, have fun – and look out for the Listening Bear.



SECTION 1

The Voice of the Baby and Young Child: A toolkit

Listening to young children and involving them in decisions is important for their personal development and well-being. Their unique perspectives can lead to more effective and inclusive solutions.

Involving children in decisions doesn't just benefit them; it enriches families, early years' settings, and society as a whole.

This toolkit has a collection of fun and engaging participation activities designed for babies and young children. They will help you to collect, understand and use their preferences, reactions, ideas and opinions in all kinds of ways.

Your involvement in this area has the potential to make a lasting impact in their lives and in how services are delivered in Jersey.

In this toolkit, '**babies**' refers to children aged 0-12 months and '**young children**' aged 1-5 years.

The activity ideas and tools in this document may well work for older children too, depending on their stage of development.

This document sits alongside the Children, Young People, Education and Skills (CYPES) Participation Standards (2022) and Activity Toolkit (2022), which may also be useful in supporting the voice of young children.

Aims

This toolkit aims:

- to help people understand how important it is for parents, carers and professionals to listen to babies and young children and make sure their voices and opinions are heard and their rights are respected.
- to give people the tools, techniques, activities, and resources they need to make listening to babies and young children a normal part of their lives. This can be done by giving children real opportunities to say what they think and by letting them have a say in decisions that affect them.
- to make sure listening to babies and young children shapes policy, practice, and service delivery and gives people local examples.
- to support the development of rights respecting practice in the early years.

Why it is important to listen to babies and young children



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides values and principles that underpin our work.

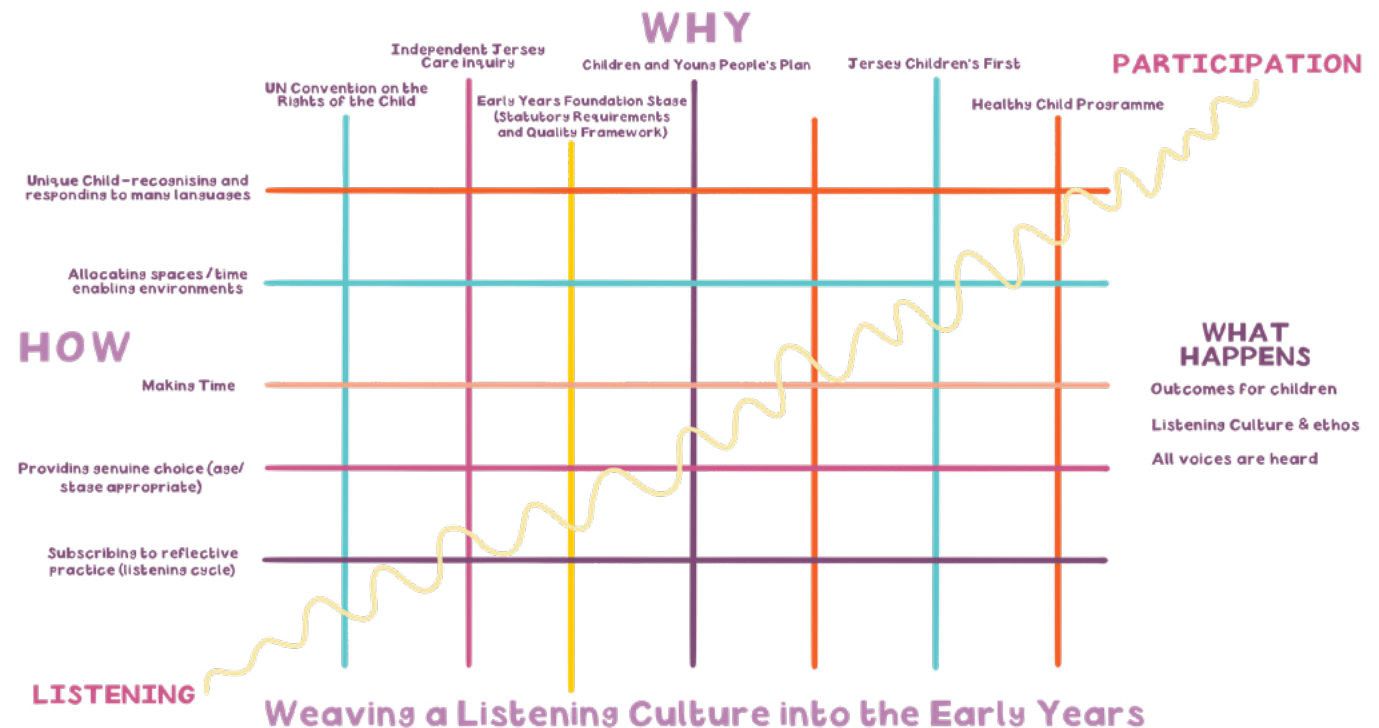
In particular, **Article 12** states:

Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

In Jersey, the rights of young children are espoused in:

- **Legislation:** Education Law 2002; Day Care of Children 2002, Children and Young People (Jersey) Law 2022, Commissioner for Children and Young People (Jersey) Law 2019, Early Years Statutory Requirements 2023.
- **Policy and Practice:** CYPES Participation Standards and Toolkit; Children's Law Statutory Guidance, Rights Respecting Schools Programme.
- **Plan:** Children, Young People and Families plan 2024 – 27.
- **Frameworks:** Jersey's Children First 2018, Early Years Matters Quality Framework, Childhood Matters Quality Framework.
- **Appraisal:** Independent Jersey Care Inquiry.
- **Health:** Healthy Child Programme, Public Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

All of these together make sure children's rights are clear. They start from the idea that children are people and citizens with rights that they can and should use. They make it clear that we should listen to children. The following diagram shows how threading these together weaves a listening culture into the early years:



The application of the UNCRC articles is mapped below against the Early Years Statutory Requirements and Quality Frameworks to demonstrate the direct relationships with children's learning and development.

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage provides four guiding principles:

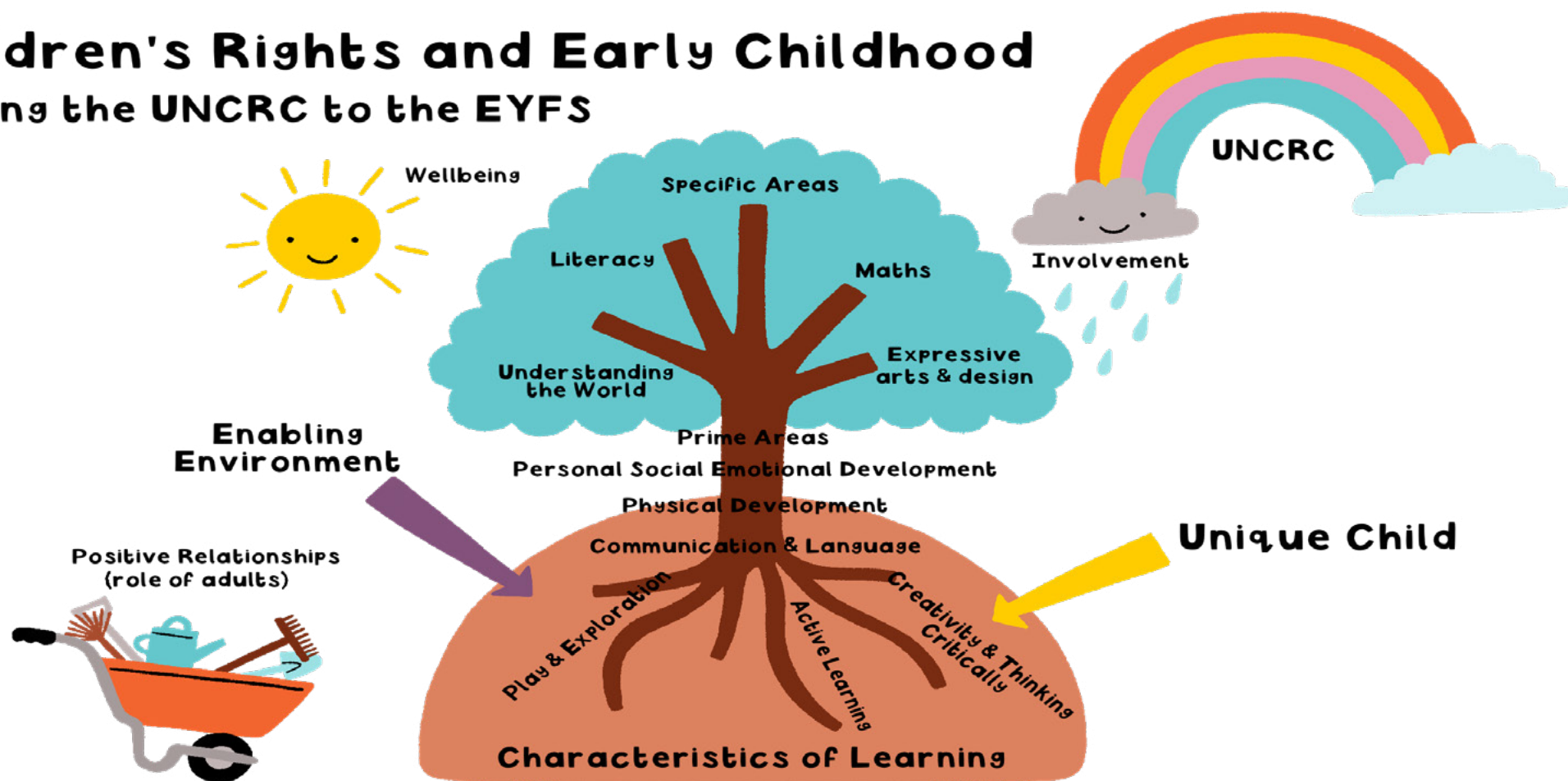
- every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident, and self-assured.
- children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships.

- children learn and develop well in enabling environments with teaching and support from adults, who respond to their individual interests and needs and help them to build their learning over time. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers.
- the importance of learning and development. Children develop and learn at different rates.

The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision, including children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

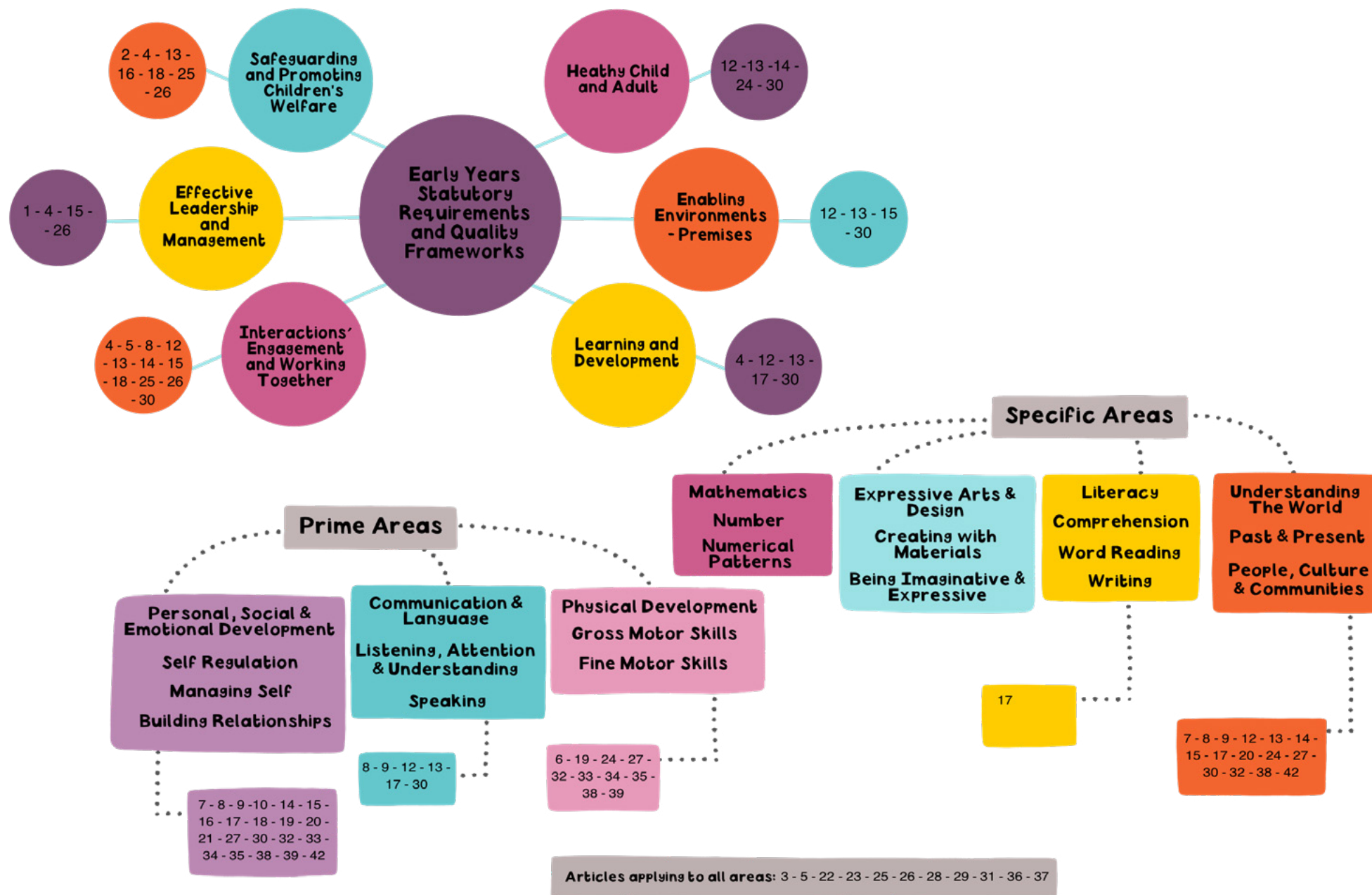
Children's Rights and Early Childhood

Linking the UNCRC to the EYFS



Early Years Quality and Compliance Frameworks

UNCRC articles applying to each standard



What do we mean by listening?

Listening is:

- an active process of receiving (hearing and observing), interpreting, and responding to communication. It includes all the senses and emotions and is not limited to the spoken word
- a necessary stage in ensuring the participation of all young children, as well as parents and staff, in matters that affect them
- an ongoing part of tuning in to all young children as individuals in their daily lives
- sometimes part of a specific consultation about a particular entitlement, choice, event.

Young Children's Voices Network (NCB)

Babies and young children make choices and share their thoughts, feelings, and desires in numerous ways, long before they can use spoken or written language.

Listening must not wait until children are able to join in adult conversations. It should begin at birth and be adapted to their developing capacities for communication and participation in their social world.

Tolfree and Woodhead

Listen. It takes time and respect to build a listening process. Listening to and engaging with babies, young children and their families promotes and encourages their participation in decisions that affect their lives.

Document. Evidence of listening to babies, young children and families is demonstrated in how their views and observations are documented and how their perspectives and ideas are displayed and presented to them and to others.

Reflect. This Thinking about what's been observed and recorded and what implications this has.

Take action. Responding to what's been heard and observed.

Feedback. It's important that children and families get honest and responsive feedback when their views have been acted on, and when they haven't.

This continuous listening cycle enables participation:



Children communicate with the world around them from the moment they're born. They're always communicating with us if we're willing to stop, look and listen.

Listening to babies and young children helps us build trusting, respectful relationships and supports children to feel valued and respected. As we know, children have a right to a voice in things that affect them. Through listening we can hear their perspectives. This approach will support a culture of participation, produce better outcomes for children and empower a confident and reflective workforce.

Listening is a culture, not just a one-off activity. We don't just listen but act together to create change in a reflective and ongoing way.

A model of baby and young child participation



Lundy's model puts Article 12 of the UNCRC in an order:

Space: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view

Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their view

Audience: The view must be listened to

Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate

Space — What does this look like in practice?

Babies and young children meet lots of people; Health Visitors, GP's, Paediatricians', early years, and social care professionals, in a variety of settings; home, clinic, nursery and hospital.

Some spaces like baby clinics or nurseries, are designed with children in mind and are more likely to naturally encourage participation. Other spaces might need some adapting.

It's important to think about how to make the space more baby and child-friendly. It will vary according to their age and stage, but could include having appropriate communal space, minimising unnecessary noise and other distractions, and providing appropriate materials to promote or facilitate baby communication (for example, furniture and toys). Getting down on the floor or sitting on cushions or low chairs with babies and their carers will support communication.

Elizabeth Jarman (2009) The Communication Friendly Spaces™ approach focuses on the role of the environment in supporting speaking and listening and emotional wellbeing.

What makes a communication friendly space?

1. **Physical environment:** Creating spaces to help children to feel comfortable, secure, relaxed and able to talk.
2. **Resources:** Interesting and unusual resources that are worth investigating. Resources should encourage children to voice their own ideas about what they like, do and think.
3. **Adult input:** Nurture a culture where children are seen as researchers, commentators and developers and their observations, opinions and ideas are welcomed.

When adults create calm inviting spaces, children have space and time to share their views. The process of being listened to in a planned space increases self-awareness and self-confidence and an understanding that their voice and their ideas matter. Jarman, E (2009) Communication friendly spaces™.

Adults meet babies and young children with their parents or caregivers, whose interests and concerns may or may not be the same. These adults often bring valuable insights, for example, about the baby's character and routines. Appropriately, they may try to 'speak' for the baby. These contributions may help professionals understand a baby's experiences. However, it is also important to assess this relationship and look beyond it to see the baby themselves. Babies' communications are easily overlooked even when they are the subject of a meeting. Helping the adults to see things from the baby's perspective may help overcome this.

Emotional space is needed as well as physical space. Babies pick up on the emotions their parents or carers are feeling. These emotions might stop the baby from feeling at ease, or responding to attempts to engage them. In therapeutic encounters, it's important to try to attend to everyone's feelings and create this emotional space. During home visits, it may be necessary to talk about this with the adults. Services for babies and young children need to provide a safe and supportive environment for babies as they let us know about their perspectives and experiences, and have their voices heard.

Voice — What does this look like in practice?

Babies and young children must be listened to. Their voice is heard and seen in the noises and movements they make, their response to the environment and in their interactions with the people with them. Their silence is also a communication and it's important to understand this in the context of their history and relationships. Baby voices are present in how they make us feel. Drawing out a baby's voice requires close observation and facilitation.

In specialist services, you may be able to have two professionals present, so one can focus entirely on the baby. When this isn't possible, creating space in the meeting that's dedicated to paying quiet attention to the baby can help to include their voice.

Babies have things to tell us. It's our responsibility to create an environment that facilitates and supports them to make a meaningful contribution. Giving information to adults and older children present about how babies communicate can help them to see and hear what's happening, and leave space for the baby to respond.

Back and forth communication with babies is called 'reciprocal' interaction and it's essential for healthy brain development. "Baby cues" are those subtle signals and behaviours they use to communicate their needs, emotions, and states of being. Understanding these cues is essential for listening to babies and for responding effectively to their needs. Every baby is unique, and their cues vary. Babies and young children with little or no speech express their needs and preferences through facial expressions, signs and gestures, eye contact and movement, pointing, reaching out and grasping, moving towards and moving away. They gurgle, cry, sigh and make other expressive sounds. We need to be responsive to their messages – and find ways of asking questions or offering choices they can respond to.

Strong, positive relationships are crucial for effective engagement and listening. Healthy relationships with caregivers, family members, educators, and peers, provide a supportive environment where babies and young children can develop and exercise their voice. These positive relationships create a sense of emotional safety and trust for children and means they can be a facilitator for adults who are new to the baby or young child.

When children feel emotionally secure, they're more likely to openly express their thoughts and feelings. So, it's important to consider the continuity of relationships. Keeping the adults around the child consistent 'establishes an environment in which meaningful and lasting relationships can develop' Theilheimer, R. (2006).

With this in mind, professionals and caregivers should have a shared curiosity towards a baby's communications. The adults can describe aloud what the baby is doing, wondering together what it means and being open to different interpretations. It also gives feedback to the baby. Interpreting 'the language of the baby' into words is meaningful, but it won't always capture the baby's full experience and sometimes people don't get it all right.

Different kinds of training, tools, and methods may be useful for professionals in different settings and roles to support a baby's voice. Some are specifically used to help parents and caregivers see and appreciate their baby's strengths and their communications about their wellbeing and needs.

Audience — what does this look like in practice?

In clinical and early years settings, the baby has an immediate audience, and it's important communications don't get missed. The baby should be actively listened to. Professionals should acknowledge what they're seeing and hearing both to the baby and their carer. This can be done in words to the adults. Babies are more likely to understand the tone, facial expressions and movement that accompanies the words spoken to them. This lets them know we're listening to them. The Leuven Adult Participation Scale can help us figure out how to act around babies and young children to show them that we are paying attention and actively listening (see appendix 7).

Audience infers that everyone has a duty to respond to and share what has been learned from the baby. At a very basic level, they may let us know that the environment is unsuitable or not ideal. For example, they may cover their ears or cry if they find the room too noisy. We must take note of and act on their feedback. Modelling that we value what a baby or young child tells us and take it into account can be done when we meet their caregivers. This may be reflected in our follow-up work with others.

Influence — what does this look like in practice?

We have a duty to make sure that we act on what we learn from babies and young children.

Gathering, and considering the views of babies and very young children about the service they receive and about the design and development of services can be challenging but must be done to make sure their right to express their views is upheld.

Also, once their views have been interpreted, they must be considered by those with the power to make decisions. Services and organisations working with babies must show their commitment to being informed and influenced by their views and have a process where relevant decision makers and those responsible for influencing change, are identified, and involved in this process.

When making decisions about physical care, treatment or emotional wellbeing, it's the professionals' responsibility to consider both babies' best interests and present findings about a baby's perspective. Taking a co-production approach means working alongside service users and/or their representatives and valuing everyone's input equally. A commitment to influence should be embedded from the start. Integral to this approach is the responsibility to give feedback to those whose views have been collected. As with drawing out a baby's voice, feedback requires careful consideration of the context and method of communication.

For babies and young children to be prioritised in this process, it's good practice for someone to specifically represent their views about the services they're receiving. Staff in all settings welcoming babies must take responsibility to listen and make sure their views reach the decision makers. Formalising mechanisms that facilitate this should be mirrored at every level including the development of government policy.

An ethical framework for working with babies and young children: The values and principles of listening to babies and young children.

When working with babies and young children, it's essential to have a robust ethical framework that prioritises their well-being, safety, and development. While different roles may have their own ethical frameworks, there should be some clear non-negotiables:

- **Child-Centred Approach:** Always prioritise the best interests of the child. Their well-being, safety, and healthy development should guide all decisions and actions.
- **Respect for Autonomy:** Recognise and respect the individuality and autonomy of each child. Involve them in decisions that directly affect them, such as offering appropriate choices.
- **Non-Maleficence:** Do no harm. Make sure all actions are in the child's best interests and don't cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm.
- **Beneficence:** Act in ways that promote the child's well-being, growth, and development.
- **Informed Consent:** When working with parents or guardians, make sure they have clear and comprehensive information for anything involving their child. Get informed consent whenever necessary.
- **Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity:** Acknowledge and respect the cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds of the children and their families. Create an inclusive environment that embraces diversity and avoids any discriminatory practices.
- **Professional Competence:** Maintain a high level of expertise in child development and appropriate communication methods. Continuously update your knowledge and skills.
- **Boundaries:** Maintain appropriate boundaries between yourself and the children you are working with.
- **Collaboration and Communication:** Foster open and honest communication with parents, guardians, and colleagues. Regularly share observations, progress, and concerns where data sharing allows.
- **Reflection and Continuous Improvement:** Regularly reflect on your practices and decisions to make sure they align with ethical principles and the best interests of the children. Seek feedback from peers, supervisors, and families to improve your caregiving approach.

- **Advocacy for Children:** Be an advocate for children's rights and well-being, both within your immediate work context and in the broader community.
- **Professional Integrity:** Uphold honesty, transparency, and accountability in all interactions related to your work with babies and young children.

Children need time to ask questions, seek clarification of information and to make their decisions. They have a right to change their initial decision. Gaining informed consent of babies and young children may require negotiations on a moment-by-moment basis through ongoing negotiation. In addition, it is important to provide information in ways that are appropriate for the child's age and stage of development about why they are being observed along with the benefits and impact for them. Save the Children (2021) provide nine basic guidelines for meaningful and ethical participation:

1. **Transparent and Informative**
2. **Voluntary**
3. **Respectful**
4. **Relevant**
5. **Child friendly**
6. **Inclusive**
7. **Supported by training**
8. **Safe and sensitive to risk**
9. **Accountable**

(See Appendix 8)

Langston et al (2004) demonstrate that very young children and babies can give or withdraw their consent in a variety of ways, such as:

- Refusing to engage
- Becoming abnormally quiet
- Turning away and crying (or sounding distressed)
- Refusing to engage with any materials.

Sensitivity to the moment is therefore required to pick up on a child's cues. In addition, the insights of parents, carers and practitioners who know the child are invaluable.

It's important to consider The Leuven Scale of Wellbeing and Involvement when considering babies and young children's readiness to engage or participate. The Leuven Scale is a vital tool in child development and comprises five levels of engagement to evaluate a child's emotional well-being and involvement. Emotional well-being encompasses children's feelings of comfort, spontaneity, and ease in their environment whilst Involvement evaluates the quality and potential of involvement in children's learning experiences (see appendix 6).

The Baby and Young Child's Voice in Safeguarding

Settings and workplaces working with children will have their own safeguarding policies and procedures which should be adhered to at all times. The Children and Young People (Jersey) Law 2022 supports the wellbeing of children and young people in Jersey. Statutory guidance has been drafted to explain how people should carry out their duties and responsibilities under the law and should be used by all adults working with children. Additional documentation, such as the Early Years Statutory Requirements (2023) provide support for those registered as an Early Years Setting. It's the responsibility of the adult to understand their workplace safeguarding procedures, including how and when to report a concern at organisational and Island level.

Some strategies to consider when engaging with babies and young children in order to fulfil and inform safeguarding practices, whilst not exclusively, are:

- The baby and young child's voice should be included in all documentation.
- Anyone working with babies and young children needs an understanding of children as individuals, taking into account their age and stage of development and any additional needs.
- Tools to support babies and young children to communicate should be considered based on the above.
- Appropriate record keeping and documents are upkept relevant to place of work and adhering to own workplace guidelines.
- The ranges of ways in which children express themselves, including their emotional and behavioural presentation are considered.
- The interaction between parent and child is considered, where appropriate.
- Other professionals have been consulted on the child's views, wishes and feelings, including non-verbal presentation, where appropriate.

Our relationships with children develop through interactions and observations. During our time with babies and young children, we might notice something that seems unusual or out of the ordinary for them. We might notice a change in their behaviour or presentation. Perhaps they have become more withdrawn, are struggling to self-regulate or seeking more attention than usual. Are they presenting as hungrier than usual? Reflecting on what we are seeing, and hearing, helps us to keep the child in mind. The child could be telling you something, so it is important to be open to their voice, seeing things from their perspective. Jersey's Safeguarding Partnership Board provides Continuum of Needs guidance which describes potential indicators of concern for children and their families and can be used to enhance and support collective understanding of risk (see Appendix 8).

How to listen to babies and young children

How we listen to young children will depend on why we are listening. We may be wanting to:

- tune in to children as part of their everyday lives
- listen as part of a specific consultation about a particular entitlement, choice, event or opportunity
- find out about their thoughts and feelings.

Young Children's Voices Network, 2011

Creating enabling environments: allocating spaces

UNCRC Article 13 states:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Creating an environment which allows children spaces to communicate in as many ways as possible includes a range of media as well as emotional warmth to support children in expressing their feelings. Further information on this can be found above see 'Spaces'.

Making time

Involves making time for talking and listening and for children to explore their thoughts and become absorbed in what they are choosing to do. Adults need to make time to 'sit with' children and give them full attention, finding the time and space to position themselves at the child's level and making appropriate eye contact. Give children time to say what they want to, through actions or words. Try not to interrupt or finish their sentences for them and don't feel that every silence needs filling.

Being able to communicate is not just about talking. Along with getting your own message across, being able to listen, pay attention, interact, play, and understand what's being said are the fundamental building blocks of communication.

Listen Up, 2012

Providing genuine choice (age/stage appropriate)

Choice can be provided through resources, opportunities, daily routines, and choices about whether to participate.

However, it is key that methods of engagement recognise children's developmental capacities. Appendix 1 includes a chart from Ready to Listen (2016) which gives a guide to what can be expected of children at different ages. While this may help to inform planning of appropriate engagement activities, it is recognised that there is a need to emphasise that these capacities relate to developmental norms and cannot be assumed to apply to individual children, who vary enormously.

Valuing all forms of communication equally requires us to be open, receptive, willing to learn and responsive to children's chosen methods of communication. Equity means working with children of all abilities, backgrounds, and ages, including babies and those children who may be regarded as having communication or other difficulties.

Subscribing to reflective practice (listening cycle)



The listening cycle encourages reflection and the sharing of reflections on what children have expressed, to inform decision making, activity and feedback. Honesty in feeding back the outcome of listening is vital to ensure children understand their views are valued, taken seriously, and acted upon with explanation about when and why, if a change hasn't been possible.

The above are adapted from the RAMPS framework developed by Lancaster, YP and Broadbent V. (2003).

The Jersey Participation Standards (2023) provides guidance as to what can be put in place to ensure that children are engaged and listened to:

- There is a culture of listening to children, reflected in vision, values and plans
- There are inclusive structures for a range of children's voices to be heard
- Participation by children is acknowledged and rewarded
- Adults are skilled in engaging, in listening and responding to children and developing children's skills to contribute meaningfully
- Children have opportunities to get to know decision-makers
- The impact of participation on the setting/service and children's lives is measured and recorded.

Seeking the voice of the child

"Seeking the voice of the child" is the process of actively and genuinely involving children in decisions, discussions, and matters that affect their lives. It recognises the importance of including children's perspectives, opinions, and input in various aspects of their well-being, such as family decisions, education, social services, legal proceedings, and policies that impact them.

Capturing the voice of the child

This can happen at different levels:

Individual – The extent to which babies and young children's voices are valued, listened to, heard, and acted upon as part of their journey through the system both to build professionals' understanding of their lived experience and the influence over, and participation in, decisions which affect them.

Service development – The extent to which babies and young children participate in or can influence the planning, design, delivery, monitoring and/or evaluation of services because of the expertise they have owing to their individual experiences.

Strategic level – The extent to which baby's and young children's participation is embedded into the aims and values of organisations and then reflected in plans, strategies, policy, workforce, and performance management systems.

We can use a range of ways of listening to young children, a selection are listed in Section 2 of the toolkit. Different tools have strengths and limitations. More than one approach can be used at the same time. Choosing which to use will depend on our skills, those of the children we work with and their ages, and the time, space, and resources available. Several tools use the arts, whether visual arts or performing arts, as a means of listening.

What happens when adults listen?

The Benefits of Listening to Babies and Young Children

Listening is important for the babies and young children who are being listened to, but also for the adults who are listening, whether at home or outside the home, in an Early Years setting, a school, at Parish or Government level.

Through listening to babies and young children we are:

- acknowledging their right to be listened to and for their views and experiences to be taken seriously.
- supporting them in becoming acquainted with a culture of democratic decision-making, in which children and adults are equal.
- keeping their voices at the heart of practice by helping us to understand their interests and priorities as well as their thoughts, feelings, and concerns.
- enabling children to make positive contributes to their settings and communities.
- supporting children to shape their futures.
- providing opportunities for children to have genuine choice.
- enabling respectful relationships.
- supporting an increase in confidence, self-esteem and empowerment enhancing their wellbeing and feeling of belonging.
- creating accurate assessments, plans and sharing of information to place the child at the centre of decision making, leading to better outcomes for children.
- empowering children to contribute towards better outcomes.
- helping to improve the effectiveness of provision and increasing children's stakes in the services and settings they access.
- making babies and young children's voices the drive to give all children the best start in life in Jersey.

An important note to make is that participation and listening must be a meaningful two-way process, where views can be freely expressed and heard.

Whilst the benefits to listening to young children are clear for their benefit, there are also benefits for the adults working with the children. Listening to young children can challenge assumptions and raise expectations. Seeing and hearing children express their interests and priorities can provide unexpected insights into their capabilities (Clark, 2011).

- Listening practice offers more opportunities for children to make choices and express their preferences, in line with the flexible child-centred approach recommended by the EYFS. Practitioners will therefore be better able to support children's learning and development.
- A listening culture reinforces better relationships with families, enabling staff to support parents as children's first educators and partners in their children's learning. According to the EPPE (Effective Provision of Pre School-Education) project report (2014), the most effective settings share child-related information between parents and staff, and parents are often involved in decision making about their child's learning programme. Parents have insights to share that can support planning.

The role of the setting and service manager

A listening culture demands an open style of management where the power to make choices and decisions is negotiated and shared, tasks are delegated effectively, and change is viewed as an opportunity rather than a threat. Rodd (2006) argues that supporting the development of relationships between all members of early childhood communities, and teamwork, are vital if leadership in early childhood settings is to be effective.

It is the role of the manager to audit practice and evidence the impact of listening to babies and young children and their participation, linked to outcomes. When monitoring and evaluating outcomes, it is especially important that data are triangulated from different sources and methods. Also, wherever

possible, it is useful to compare findings with baseline data. Let's Listen (2010) provides a useful tool to produce a profile of the ways in which a setting or service listens to young children. It can be used as a planning resource to support the development of action plans, as well as a tool to promote young children's voices in planning and policy development. It is designed to support the development of a listening culture in early childhood services offering benefits to key stakeholders in the following ways:

- **Babies and young children** feeling respected, able to express themselves and knowing that their perspectives are valued.
- **Parents and families** knowing that they, and their children, are listened to and that they are valued as partners in their children's learning and development.
- **Practitioners**, supported in reflective practice, becoming confident that they know how best to recognise, record, and respond to the views and perspectives of babies and young children.
- **Services** having the evidence to maximise outcomes for babies and young children through continuous improvement.



Another tool that managers might use is Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation. This checklist provides questions for managers to ask of their setting and practice.

SPACE

HOW Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

VOICE

HOW Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

AUDIENCE

HOW Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

INFLUENCE

HOW Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Where the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Questions for practitioners to reflect on:

- How are children supported in pursuing their own interests rather than following the adult's agenda?
- Do adults observe what children are trying to achieve for themselves before stepping in?
- In your setting, how are children prepared for what might happen next, therefore avoiding unnecessary distress?
- How are children's needs prioritised over other tasks, such as preparation or administration?
- Is sufficient time given to really get to know about a child's family and what is important in their lives outside of a nursery?
- How responsive are the adults in the setting to the variety of ways children communicate?
- Are there sufficient opportunities for parents/carers and practitioners to share children's chosen methods of communication?

Influencing policy and practice

Where there is meaningful participation from babies and young children, there can be meaningful change to policy and practice. To be meaningful it must be a two-way process where views can be freely expressed and heard, it refers to the active and engaged involvement in a process, decision-making, or activity that has significance and impact. It goes beyond mere involvement or inclusion; it implies that babies and young children's contributions are valued, respected, and considered in shaping outcomes or decisions. When we do this, their voices can:

- Provide opportunities to change services making them more tailored to babies and young children's needs.
- Increase understanding of organisations and how to influence them.
- Departments will represent babies and young children's views better in plans to support them, following consultations with them.
- A listening culture can encourage a sense of ownership by the families who use the setting. A place where people feel welcome and involved means they will want to be there, improving attendance and therefore helping services to be more sustainable.
- Service planners and commissioners can be better informed about what works for children and families and make decisions based on what babies and young children want and needs.

Further, the experiences of babies and what we learn from them about what is important should inform the development of policy and practice. Services and organisations may not have previously considered barriers to and facilitation of baby participation. Where services are routinely working with babies, explicit review is encouraged to overcome issues impeding baby access and inclusion. They should be co-producers of our services, contributing their views to design and implementation. This requires a mechanism whereby their input is formally presented to and evaluated by managers who are responsible for service development and ongoing improvement.

Exploring human rights with babies and young children

Rights are for all children, regardless of age. Babies and young children first learn about their rights through their experiences. Before young children can understand the concept of children's rights, they can develop a sense of their own agency through their relationships and through the environment in which they are.

UNICEF (2021) state that by using fun and creative age-appropriate techniques, very young children can learn about their rights. Young children can understand and use the language of rights in context. Children as young as 2 years old can identify some rights, such as the right to clean water and healthy food, to have a home, to play and to express their views.

Babies and Toddlers 0-3 years:

Before young children are able to understand the abstract concept of 'having rights' or talk about rights, they need direct experience of their rights being met, enacted and prioritised within their everyday interactions, spaces and experiences.

The most important relationship in a baby's life is the one with their parents or carers. A child's survival and growth depend on the care and nurturing the child receives within the family. Love and responsive care, accepting relationships and being involved in everyday routines are important for babies. This is how they begin to make sense of the world.

Babies and young children can begin to understand their human rights through being given opportunities to make decisions and to express themselves as they begin to realise their rights. They can do this through exploration and play, by being offered and making choices and by being allowed to participate freely. They need to develop a sense of their own agency and show their individual personality (CYPES Scotland, 2023).

3 - 5-year-olds

At this age young children are involved in discussions to increase awareness of their own rights. They can learn how to build relationships, become responsible, manage their moods, develop a feelings vocabulary, make good choices, solve problems and feel that they and others belong.

Play is an important part of any very young child's life. It can help them learn to move, share, negotiate and to take on board others' points of view. It can give them a chance to make decisions, express themselves, develop a sense of agency and show their individual personality. Article 31 of the UNCRC says that children have the right to relax, play and take part in artistic and cultural activities. Play is essential to the health and wellbeing of children and is the main way that very young children can engage with their rights. (CYPES Scotland, 2023).

An additional resource to support exploring human rights with 3-5-year-olds is 'First Steps to Human Rights' which is aimed at engaging children in discussion and raising awareness of their own rights in a fun and interactive way. In First Steps there are five themed lesson plans with activities so that children can learn how to build relationships, become responsible, manage their moods, develop a 'feelings vocabulary', make good choices, solve problems, and feel that they and others belong.

The UNCRC's Rights Respecting Schools Programme (RRS), see appendix 1, sets out four key areas of impact for children at a Rights Respecting school; wellbeing, participation, relationships and self-esteem. The difference that a Rights Respecting School makes goes beyond the school gates, making a positive impact on the whole community. RRS state that:

- Children are healthier and happier
- Children feel safe
- Children have better relationships
- Children become active and involved in school life and the wider world.

SECTION 2

Tools and techniques for listening to babies and young children

Using a multi-method approach to listening to babies and young children ensures that we are involved in the listening process. By using a range of approaches, children's ideas, views and expressed interests can be captured. Imagination and creativity are key in using all our senses to listen to children and being creative in developing fun and varied ways in which babies and young children can express their thoughts and feelings, considering the range of ages and abilities.

The Mosaic Approach

The mosaic approach, developed by Alison Clark and Peter Moss, views children as:

- experts in their own lives
- rights holders and active participants
- meaning makers
- skillful communicators.

Best Start Listening Bear

The Best Start Listening Bear is a teddy designed to hear the voices of babies and young children by encouraging whatever forms of communication the child uses to express themselves. In their play children have opportunities to share their voice through, or with, the bear. The adult is present, engaging when appropriate but primarily listening and observing. The bear can be used alongside any of the tools suggested in this section of the toolkit.

Babies and young children who are engaged in participating in the work of the Best Start Partnership receive a bear as a 'Thank you'.



Mosaic approach

Communication is how we develop relationships, express our thoughts and feelings, make choices and take part in society.

Mosaic is a multi-method approach that lets babies and young children and adults get involved in 'making meaning' together as we listen to their perspectives of their daily lives.

A range of tools are used as 'tiles' which create a mosaic or picture of the child.

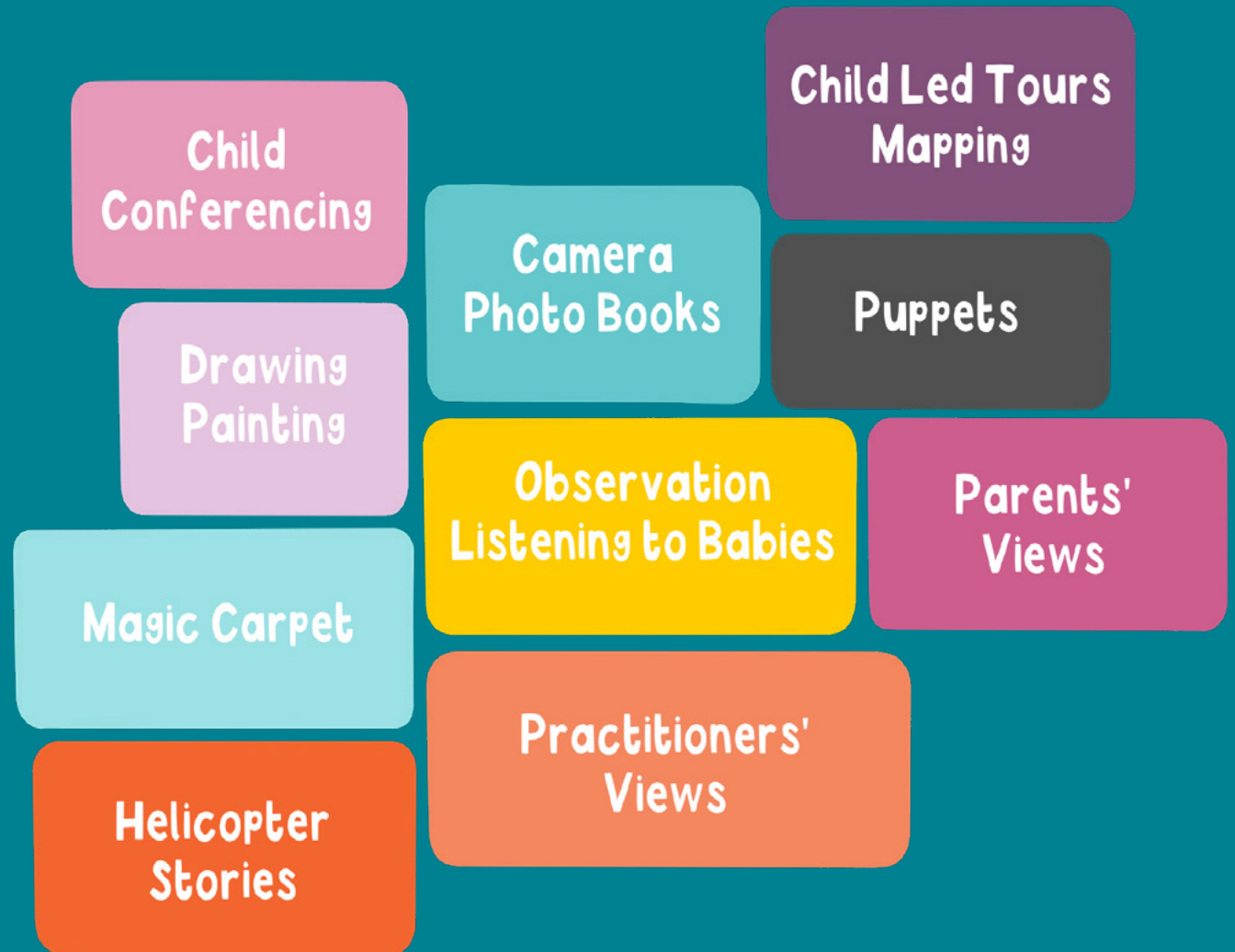
Stage One: Children use the tools to gather materials together with the perspectives of practitioners and parents.

Stage Two: Children and practitioners review, discuss and reflect on the findings.

Stage Three: Children and practitioners decide on how to follow listening with action.

Listening to babies and young children using the Mosaic approach can create opportunities for sustained shared thinking and for the co-construction of meanings i.e., creating opportunities for children to 'think about what they think'.

Clark emphasises that this is 'slow knowledge' meaning that repeated engagement with children slows down the adult journey to deciding on meanings, to think about what the child is saying and listen again or differently and offers the potential for new interpretations.



Observation Listening to Babies



We all listen to babies, they attract our attention by actions such as gurgling, smiling, crying. It helps us to get to know them as individual people, facilitates the development of the caring relationships and helps ensure their needs are met. By listening to babies, we are demonstrating our respect for them as individuals and contributing to their sense of wellbeing and self-esteem.

Listening to babies begins with the recognition that children, from birth are confident and skilful communicators. Babies communicate all the time through the sounds they make, their movements, actions and signs. The role of the adult is essential to 'tune in', recognise, document, interpret and act upon each child's communication. This can be through observing body language, facial expressions, movements, different cries and watching how children spend their time. By using observation, adults can follow what a baby is doing, making decisions about how best to respond to them based on skills of interpretation – trying to see the world through the child's eyes.

Babies learn about the world around them using their senses – touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing. Providing play materials, such as treasure baskets, encourages stimulation of their senses and provides opportunities for babies and young children to participate and express their voice through different ways of communication, other than verbal, such as noises and laughing, reaching out, rolling over and time spent exploring.

Key points to consider:

- Sustained observations can reveal patterns of the individual baby's learning and threads of thinking. There is often a pattern to children's activity – these are called 'schema' e.g., Connection – exploring ways of joining things, and people together or Transporting – Moving self and objects from one place to another.
- Sustained quality interaction with adults promotes relationships that help babies to feel listened to, understood, kept safe and included.
- Talking to, and playing with babies helps them understand what is coming next and means adults understand what they are interested in.
- Sensitivity to the environment means accommodating babies' needs both for stimulation and tranquillity.



Child Conferencing

Child conferencing involves the use of a short interview schedule around key themes. You are an expert on the children you work with – use your knowledge to tailor questions appropriately and interpret their responses, drawing on the unique relationships you have.

You could introduce the following questions by telling the children you need their help to find out what it's like being a child in the context of the setting/space/situation and if there is anything that could make it better.

- **What do you like doing / playing?**
- **Is there anything you would change about...?**
- **Who are your favourite people at...?**
- **What do you like doing with the grownups at...?**
- **What are you good at?**
- **What are you still learning to do?**
- **What do you like eating when you are at...?**
- **What has been your best day ever at...?**
- **Does anything worry you/what are your worries?**

To provide visual support to stimulate responses you can make use of existing resources:

- Photos of adults/other children in the setting, parents/carers/other significant people. These will act both as a 'memory trail' for children, enabling them to talk about anyone who's not in sight and as a means of communication for children with little or no language, who can respond to some questions by pointing at, or picking up a photo, or show you, by length of eye gaze, who is important to them.
- Move around and encourage the child to physically show you who the important people are for them and the places in the setting they like, and don't like, to be in.

Consulting with young children:

To explore 'How children are listened to, and responded to, by adults' you could use the following questions as a springboard:

- **Which grownups do you like to be with?**
- **What do you like about them?**
- **Who do you tell if you need help?**
- **Who do you tell if something is wrong/if you're sad or upset?**
- **Do you feel that grownups listen when you tell them things?**
- **How do you know when grownups are listening to you?**
- **Is there anything grownups can do to make better?**

Children's experience of access and equity within the setting can be explored through interaction with other children (and adults) – can everyone join in with all activities and all areas of the setting?

To gain insight into children's sense of fairness and belonging you could use the following questions:

- **Who are your friends? / Who is important to you? (Can be adults or children)**
- **What do you like to do with your friends?**
- **What does it mean if something is fair?**
- **How do you know if something is unfair?**
- **Where do you like to play? Who doesn't play here / can't play here?**
- **Is there anyone who can't join in with.....? (e.g., an activity you are currently doing or one you can point to – sandpit, reading, games)**
- **What happens if someone doesn't have a friend?**

Key points to consider

You will get the most out of these 'interviews' if they flow in the way conversations do, so:

- Follow the child's lead and don't stick rigidly to the question format if the child finds it unnatural or uncomfortable.
- Encourage the child to elaborate on what they've said by 'reflective' or 'active' listening i.e., repeating some of what the child has said and waiting for what they might add – don't feel you have to fill every silence.
- Skip any questions that don't seem relevant or ask them in a different order if that makes more sense within the conversation.
- Sit comfortably – have these conversations in places and at times when the children are relaxed: this might be at snack, lunch time, in the outdoor area, or when children are doing an activity, such as cooking, playing with sand or play dough.



Child-led tours may involve younger children while also ensuring that older children and/or adults are accompanying them. During the child-led tour, children can be asked informal questions relating what they like / dislike in a setting, or where they live, and what is important to them. Questions can be asked about which children are included or left out; about whether they feel safe or face any risks; and about whether adults share feedback with them.

Recording the walk encourages children to think about their surroundings and gives them the time to consider how experiences impact on their lives by offering a mix of verbal and visual ways to tell and show how they interpret their experiences, what their interests and concerns are and their views on how things could be better or different. Recording comments using a Dictaphone helps ensure that adults do not re-interpret a child's meaning.

Making maps, e.g., a child's journey from home to school, a home or nursery setting, can highlight what is important to a child. Maps of the setting, inside and outside spaces, can also be used for children to draw on and give their ideas on what they would like and where.



Camera Photo Books

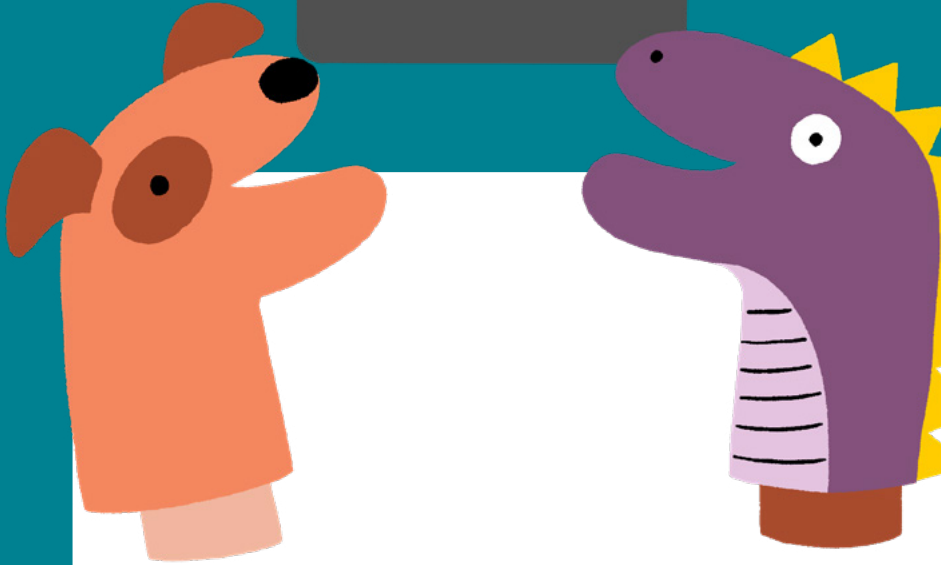


Being in control of a camera means a child decides what is talked about or revealed visually. Consideration should be given to what a child chooses to photograph and what this reveals about their perspectives.

The use of digital cameras means photographs can be talked about immediately so that practitioners can gain an understanding about why the photo was taken and what it represents to that child.

Children can be encouraged to create and develop a photo or scrapbook using drawings, paintings, photos, 'cut-outs' from magazines, etc, to illustrate their views. Gently probing questions can be asked to explore the child's views and experiences. These may relate, for example, to people (friends, family, adults), environmental attributes (trees and flowers, parks, grass/open green spaces, sea, gardens), and cars, houses, shops. Children can photograph areas of nursery they particularly enjoy or activities that happen within the setting. They can select their favourite photos to display, and their explanation scribed by an adult alongside.

Puppets



Puppets are a fun way to explore younger children's views and experiences about how their feelings and experiences. By talking through a puppet, children are more able to say things that they would not feel confident to say as themselves. Some children who find it difficult to tell another person what is happening in their lives may find it easier to talk to a puppet. A puppet will not interrupt, show strong emotional responses, or feel the need to answer back. A child can confide in a puppet and whilst the person who is holding the puppet can acknowledge what the child is saying or feeling without becoming directly involved in conversation with the child.

Ideally, you should have a few puppets so that children can also use them to present their own puppet shows. You can also make puppets out of readily available materials (such as socks with eyes, mouth and hair drawn on) if needed. Puppets can be used with an individual child or with a group of younger children sitting in a circle. In this case, the puppet introduces him/herself "Hello children, my name is... I'm happy to meet you today and to learn more from you about..."

"What is your name?" Encourage the children to introduce their names. In this example the puppet is being used in a Nursery setting.

The puppet can ask children more about their Nursery "I am here today to learn more from you and your friends about your nursery" (Share more local contextual information, giving concrete examples).

Encourage children to tell you about their nursery:

- Which activities do you like most in this nursery? Why?
- Are there any activities you do not like? Why?

The puppet can then explore more about how children express themselves and how adults do or do not listen to them:

- In this nursery, who decides which activities children will do?
- Do adults ever ask you or your friends about what you want to do? How?
- Do adults ever ask you or your friends about what you like or do not like about the activities?
- How does it make you feel when adults listen to you?
- How does it make you feel when adults do not listen to you?
- Do you have any suggestions for adults to listen to you more?

You can give children the puppets and, if they would like to, you can ask them to use the puppets to show you what they like doing in the nursery.

Puppets and drama can also be used with younger children to encourage them to express any changes in their lives (e.g., in their families, pre-schools, nurseries, communities). Toy telephones are also good for this purpose.



Children sometimes find it easier to express themselves in visual rather than verbal ways. Their paintings and drawings can show how they feel about themselves and those around them. In drawings of people, children can show happiness, sadness or anger through a mouth turned up or down, tears on the face, bared teeth and so on. How big or small they draw themselves in relation to others may indicate how children are feeling about themselves, or where they position themselves in the picture e.g., inside or outside the family or group.

Drawing or painting offers children the opportunity to combine all the elements of creative learning and discovery by communicating their thoughts and ideas through colour and mark-making using a variety of tools and techniques. Each mark made is uniquely personal. Painting is a form of communication that can enrich and facilitate conversations that wouldn't otherwise take place. It opens the door for attentive adults to listen and ask questions (talk to me about your painting) that give an insight into children's thinking processes and experiences.

All children have a story to tell. Younger children can be encouraged to make drawings about places where they talk and are listened to by adults. They should be encouraged to explain their drawings and their meanings.

Magic Carpet



Magic carpet is an activity you can use to explore how younger children would like to be listened to and involved in decision-making; and to explore the extent to which they are currently listened to or not listened to.

Encourage younger children to sit together on a rug or piece of carpet. Explain that this is a magic carpet that is going to travel to a world where younger children talk a lot about what they think, and adults always listen to them.

Make some 'flying noises' and flap the rug to further children's imagination of them being on a magic flying carpet.

Explain that your flying carpet has landed in a new land. It may look the same as where they started, but in this land, the adults always listen to young children.

Now that they are in the land where adults always want to listen to children, they would like to listen to the views of children. For example, in this land there is a person called [insert name] ... [insert name] ... always encourages children to express themselves and is happy to listen to children.

[insert name] ... would like to know:

- How do you feel when you are listened to by adults?
- What decisions do you think children your age can make? (e.g., can you decide what games you and your friends play)? Can you decide what clothes you wear? What other things can you decide?
- How should adults listen to young children like you in families/nurseries. For example, what can your teacher do to show that she is listening to your ideas?
- Do you have any other ideas about how adults or your bigger brothers or sisters can listen to you?

Now our magic carpet is going to take us back. Make some 'flying noises' and flap the rug. Now we are back in our original world. – Is this a world where younger children are listened to? If so, how? If not, why not? – Encourage children to share their views and experiences.



Helicopter Stories is an Early Years, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 approach to communication and literacy skills based on the Storytelling and Story Acting curriculum of Vivian Gussin Paley created in 2002.

In its simplest form, Helicopter Stories lets children dictate their stories which are written down verbatim, exactly as they are told, by an EYFS or Key Stage 1 practitioner. The children then gather around a taped-out stage and the stories are acted out.

Alongside the simplicity of this approach is an ethos that is child-centred, creating a culture of curiosity and wonder at the dexterity of children's imaginings during both the telling and the acting out of their stories. This holistic approach uses the power of storytelling to develop key curriculum areas, such as creativity, communication and language, personal, social, and emotional skills in the Early Years and Key Stage 1 classroom, giving children's stories a voice in a safe space.

Reasons for doing it:

- Evidence of progress over time – listening, focusing, turn-taking, socialisation – building a community of story tellers, story listeners and story actors and understanding of early writing.
- Immersion in story language and structure, understanding writing/meaning – transcription and grammatical context, invention – not the teacher's wants and needs but the child's, language development (building on each other's story language).
- Self-monitoring and self-editing, composition, and cohesion.
- Writing for pleasure – making reading and writing irresistible, purposeful, and relevant.
- Understanding of punctuation when composing their own written sentences – a deeper understanding of where the breaks and pauses go based on increased storytelling and hearing it for themselves.

The benefits:

- An inclusive, whole-class approach which values every child's contribution.
- Facilitates high levels of engagement.
- Creates confidence and self-assurance.
- Supports the development of speaking skills as children express and share their ideas.
- Helps to develop accurate, active listening skills and understanding.
- Supports co-operative, collaborative and creative learning.
- Develops positive relationships within a shared storytelling experience.
- Allows children to explore early literacy and the power of words as they see their stories come to life and develop their ability to use and adapt language to communicate.
- Offers children a bridge into the world of creative writing as they begin to see the links between the oral stories they compose and the words on a page.



Parents' Views

Involving parents and carers in the listening process

Parent/carer perspectives on babies' and young children's experiences are an important.

Parents and carers are the people who understand their children the most and are key to 'tuning' into the lived experiences of babies and young children. They can give a unique interpretation of their child's feelings, needs and capacities.

Partnership working with parents is vital in identifying a child's learning and development needs. It's important parents tune in effectively by being patient, interested, available and observant.

Encourage parents to:

- Focus on what their child can do, knows and is learning, and not on what their child can't do, doesn't know, and hasn't learnt.
- Not dismiss a child's emotions as silly or unnecessary.
- Be positive e.g., tell them they can do something, and model it.
- Reflect back what they understand their child to have said to them.

When supporting parents to tune in to what their children are saying, it's important to help them think about whether their home environment encourages talking and listening. For instance, are there times when the television is turned off or the radio turned down? Practitioners can share their imaginative methods in supporting parents to help them identify where, in their often busy and pressured lives, room can be made to have a conversation with their children in all its many forms, be it verbal or non-verbal.

One method is to promote the importance of children's talk. Young children often talk through their problem-solving activities. Their talk helps them to move from the here and now to the past, present, future, or alternative worlds. It's how they make sense of what's going on. Parents/carers' views can be sought in a range of ways, e.g. in-depth interviews, surveys, family participation events with parents and their children. Some questions you might consider using are:

What things are important for your child to develop at the same time as being happy, safe, and healthy? [Probe: What did you hope for your child before they were born? And in the early weeks, months and years of their life.

And what do parents and families need to help their child to develop at the same time as being happy, safe, and healthy?

What play and learning experiences/skills/activities do you think are important for your child to have when they are at the age they are now: e.g.

- in the home (space for toys, imaginative play)
- outside of the home (playgrounds, parks with play apparatus and green space)
- type of places to play (safe, creative, large, where other children go – social mix)
- location (proximity to home, type of area)
- opportunities for the parent to take part in the play (and for the child to play with others and on their own)
- resources, such as toys and books (access, cost)
- different types of play, e.g., physical, creative, imaginative.

How do you feel about your child's ability to play, learn, and socialise with other children and how they are developing – e.g., including child's language, skills, and behaviour?

How easy is it for you to enable these for your child and why? (Explore what the enablers are i.e., what helps).

What are the biggest barriers or challenges? E.g., monetary, and other - affordability, but also time, access, awareness, etc.



Practitioners' views can be captured using the following questions as prompts for a conversation:

- Are babies and young children currently involved in sharing their views? If so, how?
- In what ways do children express their feelings and opinions?
- Who does most of the talking – children or adults?
- Who decides on what decisions children can participate in, how and to what extent?
- What approaches/techniques/tools do you use?
- If children are upset or hurt, who comforts them – other children, adults, both?
- When new children start, who shows them round and looks after them while they settle in?
- Do children help each other with activities and personal needs, such as feeding and dressing?
- Can children choose which adults and children they spend time with – most of the time, some of the time? If they are divided into groups, can they choose which group they will be in?
- Can children help to decide how the rooms are arranged?
- Who decides whether they will play inside or outside?
- Do the children have any choice about whether, and when, they sleep and eat?
- Are they able to decide which activities they take part in and for how long?
- Are they involved in planning activities?
- Can children decide which equipment they would like to have out?
- Who decides what new equipment will be bought?
- Are children involved in choosing menus, shopping, preparing, cooking, or serving food?
- Do you know what children think of the setting? How do you find out?
- How do you involve parents/carers?
- How do you collaborate with other agencies?

Beyond words

All children are communicating with us and are doing so with far more than words. As adults, we tune into these forms of communication, but it can be helpful to think about these modes of communication and how we, as adults, interpret them when thinking about the child's voice. This is of particular importance when working with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

The tool below, The Communication Wheel, developed by Jersey Child Care Trust, can be useful when supporting preverbal children to help build a clear visual picture of how a child is using their voice to make preferences and communicate need.

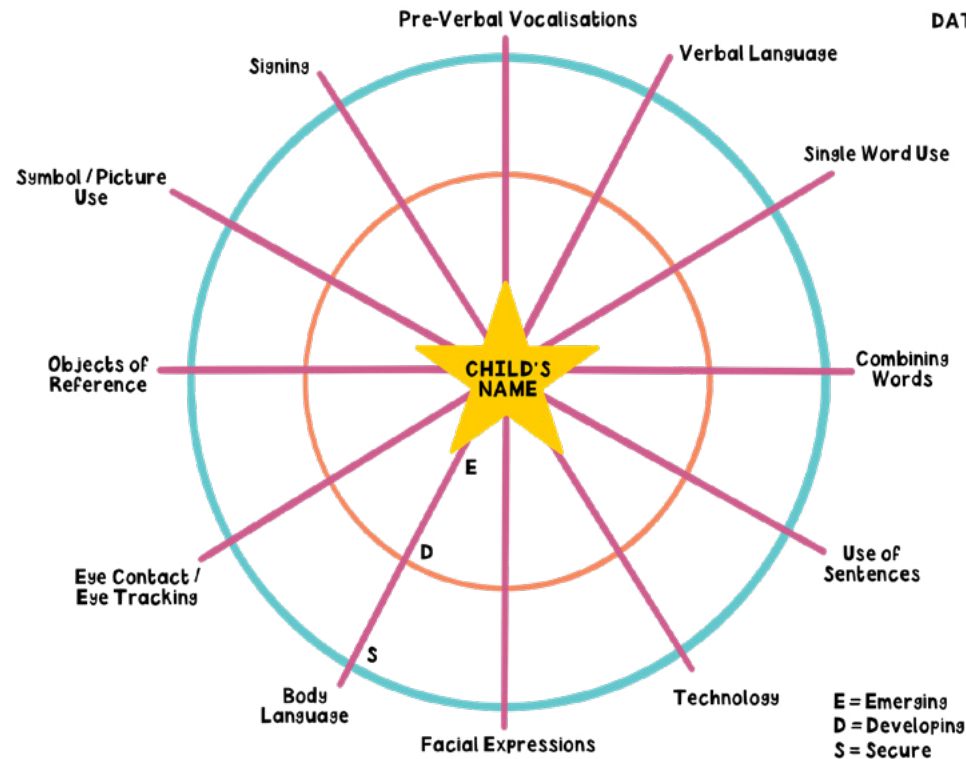
The communication wheel

Key points to consider:

- What is the child's usual method of communication?
- Who knows the child well?
- What information is already available? (Parents want to tell their story once and be heard).
- What do I know about alternative methods of communication?

The need for highly skilled, professional knowledge and understanding is integral to making sense of the child's voice.

THE COMMUNICATION WHEEL



ONE PAGE PROFILE

My name is:

Today's date:

PHOTO

**What makes me
happy**

What people like about me?

How I like to be supported

Visual support

Visual aids are a great support for all young children and for some children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, they are vital. Visual supports can enhance the communication process for all children in early years settings and support us, as adults working with babies and young children, in our attempts to listen, hear and develop a shared understanding. Visual aids are a practical, simple, and inclusive strategy that everyone can use.

Examples of visual aids and support

Objects of reference

Objects of reference are objects that are used alongside spoken language to represent activities, people, places, or events. These objects can support transitions from one activity or place to another.

Examples

- A nappy = changing time
- A coat = to go outside
- A plate = lunch time.

Pictures

Babies and Young children's understanding of language, as well as their memory, develop gradually. Spoken instructions can be too much for young children to take in, but pictures can help. Picture cards may include photos or clip art images of different parts of a child's routine or objects they may use. These can be used to communicate their needs if they are pre-verbal or to help a child associate a word with an image or action.

A one-page profile is a simple summary of who a child is: what is important to them, and how they want to be best supported. They can be used for babies and young children and can include the views of parents and practitioners.

One-page profiles are a useful way to both understand how an individual child communicates, what they like and dislike as well as introduce yourself to a child.

See Appendix 5 for links to further one page profile templates.

Makaton

To some degree we all use natural gesture to support our spoken communication. Signing builds on this by providing a tool which supports communication and interaction. Makaton, or 'key word signing', is a simple and easy form of signed communication. Makaton signing has a place within the Universal level of support but is also an effective tool in promoting communication for children who require extra support in this area.

Putting visual support into practice – an example

A nursery was trying to enable choice into their carpet time for toddlers. Practitioners were initially asking the young children (18-24 months) what they would like to sing. When they did not vocalise their choice, the nursery practitioner said, 'oh Lilly likes Twinkle Twinkle Little Star', recognising that this was one of Lilly's favourite rhymes. Through introducing a song bag (with objects of reference) or a song board with pictures the young children were more easily able to make choices about what song they wanted to sing.



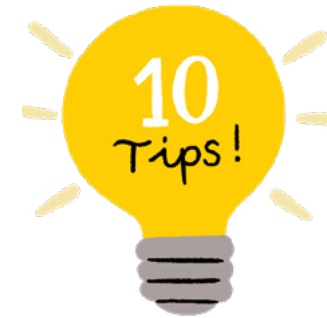
Digital stories

'I am' Digital stories are short 3 – 5-minute videos designed to provide a strengths-based representation of a child. They put the child's voice and views at their heart and are a way of sharing information with others from a child's perspective. They can be supportive, for example, for autistic children. Further information and a guide are available on the Autism Transitions Website, see appendix 3.

Additional ways of promoting babies and young children's participation through encouraging them to express their views:

- Providing babies with a selection of resources within baskets and allowing them to make the choice as to which resource they would like to select, looking carefully at their gurgles, gestures, and eye movements as cues.
- Observing babies and young children over a length of time to understand their schematic play patterns.
- Encourage babies to use pointing as a means of making choices, modelling this as a strategy. Pointing is thought to form an early part of what is known as 'joint attention'. This is a social activity in which babies learn to follow the line of their caregiver's eyes to where the caregiver is looking. It's called joint attention because the baby is 'joining' the adult in looking at something by following their gaze.
- Reflect babies and young children's interests in the environment.
- Using a Wish Tree to include children verbally discussing their wishes with other children and adults. Recording their wishes by drawing/mark making, cutting images out of catalogues or an adult scribing what the child has said on a 'leaf'. Once all reasonable wishes have been granted the children can re-visit the tree and evaluate what has come true and what hasn't happened and why. They can evaluate how effectively their wishes would have been followed and whether there are any follow up wishes as a result. Throughout the process, photos can be taken and hung on the tree alongside wishes to record progress. An alternative is to cut out cloud shapes and a Wishing Net.
- Using Circle time, when children and adults come together at certain points in the day, for evaluation and suggestions for planning.
- Involving children in the Compliments and Complaints procedure using images of happy and sad faces followed up by asking for their comments.
- Involving children in choices and asking their views through an individual learning plan.
- Taking children to a supermarket or book shop with a small amount of money to purchase items of their choice.

- Looking in mirrors, drawing round each other's bodies can encourage opportunities for looking at, and discussing, facial features, discussion around similarities and differences and creative representation of body/facial features as well as promoting self-esteem, empathy, and confidence in expressing their voice.
- Involving children in recruitment – expressing the qualities they think a candidate for a particular role should have (what kind of person would you like to have in our setting), devising questions in advance for the interview, asking questions and/or listening to the answers of the applicant during the interview. Questions such as, 'What does a X do?', 'Is there anything you would like to ask a new X?', 'What kind of person would you like?', 'What would you like to ask them?' provide starting points and show that children's contributions are valued and important.
- Designing garden/outdoor areas can involve children in what they would like to have and see, making plans, selecting, and purchasing resources, e.g., seeds, equipment, taking before and after photos.
- Taste sessions and menu planning enable children to decide what foods they would like to taste and express their likes and dislikes towards the foods tasted and their preferred menu choices.
- Creating a Child's Special Book gives children opportunities to select images and to share and talk about the people, animals and events that are important to them.
- Encourage making choices through a Lego voting system. For example, as the children come in, they are invited to choose which book they would like to share that day and show their preference by adding a Lego block to a tower. The book with the tallest tower is read.
- Making booklets together to give to new children coming into the setting. Talk about how they felt when they first arrived. Find out what they think the new children need to know. Ask the children what photos or pictures they would like to take/draw of the setting to be included in the booklet. Use their words in the booklet.



Ten top tips for finding out babies and young children's views:

1. **Stop, look and listen** – Use all the senses (Observation is key). Work in partnership to bring together views of families and key persons who know the child best.
2. **Keep an open mind** – Listen to the silence and hear the behavior.
3. **Give the child some control** – See the child as the expert.
4. **Start from where the child is** – Their physical level (the child's eye view), the words they use, their preferred means of communication.
5. **Ask open questions** – and avoid direct questions.
6. **Offer prompts and triggers.**
7. **Use play based and child-centered approaches** – always allowing the opportunity to opt out at any time.
8. **Provide information, explanations, and genuine choice** – in fun and creative ways.
9. **Recognise the importance of initial responses to children trying to share a concern** – they may only try once.
10. **Check out understanding.**

Adapted from McLeod, A. (2008)

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Series 1:

1. Why and how we listen to young children. Clarke, A.
2. Listening to babies. Rich, D.
3. Listening to young disabled children. Dickens, M. and Williams, L.
4. Are equalities an issue? Finding out what young children think. Road, N.
5. Listening and responding to young children's views on food. McAuliffe, A.M. and Lane, J.
6. Supporting parents and carers to listen: a guide for practitioners. Larnon. J.

Series 2:

1. Developing a listening culture. Williams, L.
2. Leadership for listening. Dickens, M.

NCB.

Appendix

Appendix 1:

[amnesty.org.uk/resources/first-steps-resource-pack](https://www.amnesty.org.uk/resources/first-steps-resource-pack)

First Steps – Activities to explore human rights with 3 – 5 year olds, Amnesty International

First Steps to Rights – Activities for children aged 3 – 7 years, Unicef.

Appendix 2:

Methods of engagement – Children’s developmental capacities, NCB (2016), Ready to Listen.

Children’s capacity to listen and express themselves depends upon their stage of development which varies from child to child. Therefore, awareness of developmental capacities will help to determine the most suitable tools and techniques to use and how to interpret the child’s responses.

Appendix 3:

A tool kit for Involving children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication needs, The Communication Trust.

Appendix 4:

Digital Stories : [autismtransitions.org](https://www.autismtransitions.org)

Appendix 5:

One-page profile templates - Helen Sanderson Associates

sheffkids.co.uk/resources

Appendix 6:

The Leuven Scale of Wellbeing and Involvement

Appendix 7:

The Leuven Adult Participation Scale

Appendix8:

Jersey Safeguarding Partnership Board

Continuum of Needs

safeguarding.je/document/continuum-of-needs

Leuven's Scales for Well-being (taken from A Process Orientated Self-evaluation Instrument for Care Settings)

Well-being Signals	Level	Level Description	Involvement Examples
The child clearly shows signals of discomfort: Whines, sobs, cries, screams Looks dejected, sad or frightened, is in panic Is angry or furious Shows signs such as feet wriggles, throws objects, hurts others Sucks thumb, rubs eyes Doesn't respond to the environment, avoids contact, withdraws Hurts himself, bangs head, throws himself on the floor The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time	1	Extremely Low	The child hardly shows any activity: No concentration, staring or daydreaming Absent or passive attitude No goal-orientated activity, aimless activity No signs of exploration and interest
The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signals indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.	2	Low	The child shows some degree of activity but which is often interrupted: Limited concentration, looks away during the activity, fiddles Is easily distracted, action only leads to limited results
The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction. However these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity as level 5	3	Moderate	The child is busy the whole time but without real concentration: Routine action - attention is superficial Not absorbed in an activity - short lived attention Limited motivation, dedication, does not feel challenged The activity does not address the child's motivation
The child displays the following: Looks happy and cheerful, smiles, beams, cries out of fun, Talks to themselves, plays with sounds and hums or sings Is relaxed, does not show signs of tension or stress Open and accessible to the environment, is spontaneous / expressive Lively, full of energy Expresses self-confidence and self-assurance	4	High	There are clear signs of involvement but not always present. The child is: Engaged in the activity without interruption Most of the time there is real concentration The child feels challenged and mostly motivated Capabilities and imagination are mostly addressed
	5	Extremely High	The child is completely and continuously engaged in the activity: Absolutely focused, without interruption Highly motivated and perseveres Shows attention to details and precision Constantly addresses capabilities and imagination Obviously enjoys being engrossed in the activity

Appendix 9:

Individual examples as approaches to listening within Early Years Settings

Reggio Emilia, Italy

The Reggio Emilia approach talks about children having multiple symbolic languages (100 languages of children) which are there for the adult to see. They use long term-projects as vehicles for learning and hands on discovery learning allows children to use all their senses and all their languages (ways of expressing themselves) to learn. There is a high focus on community involvement and emphasis is placed on the environment as the third teacher. They say that defining the voice of the child is complex. The 100 languages are a metaphor for the extraordinary potentials of children. The Reggio Emilia approach emphasises hands-on discovery learning that allows the child to use all their senses and all their languages to learn. It is based on 4 principles:

- **Emergent curriculum** – Curriculum topics are derived from talking to children and families about what's interesting to children.
- **In-depth projects** – Introduced to children as adventures with teachers acting as advisors.
- **Representational development** – The presentation of new ideas and concepts in multiple forms – print, art, drama, music, puppetry, etc.
- **Collaboration** – Problem solving using dialogue, comparisons, negotiations, interpersonal skills. Each child's voice is heard to promote a balance between a sense of belonging to the group and a sense of self.

Te Whariki, New Zealand

Te Whariki means 'the woven mat'. It is underpinned by a vision for children who are competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society. It is based on 4 broad principles:

- **Empowerment** – children will be empowered to learn and grow.
- **Holistic development** – children learn and grow in a holistic way. Their intellectual, social, cultural, physical, emotional, and spiritual learning is interwoven across all their experiences.
- **Family and community** – a child's family and community are recognised as part of the learning experience.
- **Relationships** – children learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places, and things.

Early Childhood Education (ECE) services and Kōhanga Reo (a nursery where lessons are conducted in Maori) use the curriculum's principles and strands to weave a learning programme for each child. Each child's strengths and interests, all the things they learn as part of their family, and the ECE service's learning opportunities are woven together to contribute to a child's unique learning story.

The four principles are interwoven with these learning areas:

- **Wellbeing** – Can I trust you?
- **Contribution** – Is this place fair for us?
- **Belonging** – Do you know me?
- **Communication** – Do you hear me?
- **Exploration** – Do you let me fly?

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You can find out more information about engagement and participation with children of all ages at: gov.je/yoursay

