

Listening to the voices of young children

Resource sheets

Early Childhood Unit



Resource Sheet 1

Aims and Objectives

Aim

An introductory course to inspire and enable those working with young children and their families, through every day practice, to listen to young children and to involve them in decisions which affect their lives.

Objectives

- to explore the benefits and identify the importance of listening as part of everyday practice
- to examine the concept of a listening culture and the skills required to support its development
- to explore the different 'languages' through which children communicate and ways to help them express their ideas, feelings and preferences
- to explore opportunities and barriers in embedding listening and gain skills to support others
- to reflect on current practice and begin to identify the support, changes and actions needed in order to take work forward

Outcomes

By the end of the training participants will

- identify why listening is important and state the benefits
- describe what is meant by a listening culture and identify the skills required to support its development
- describe the different 'languages' through which children communicate and identify ways to help them express their ideas, feelings and preferences
- identify opportunities and barriers in embedding listening and state ways to support others
- action plan next steps in implementing effective listening strategies



Resource Sheet 2

What do we mean by listening?

A set of principles, developed by Alison Clark, underpins NCB's work on listening to young children. This is based on the following views or understanding of young children and childhood:

Young children as experts in their own lives

Young children are experts in their own lives and it is important that they are regarded as important sources of information about their own lives – their feelings, thoughts, views, needs, interests and preferences are sought and inform the decisions that affect their daily lives.

Young children as skilful communicators

Children may have different ways of communicating depending on a range of factors including their age, special needs, culture, interests and personality. This principle starts with the understanding that all children are viewed as able to communicate their experiences. Adults need to find ways of enabling all children to communicate in ways that is appropriate for individual's children's needs and preferences.

Young children as rights holders

This view of the child was upheld by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It is an active view of children and childhood which sees children not only as those waiting to be adults but as people with rights now. These rights include the freedom of expression (Article 13) which acknowledges children's rights to be able to receive information and to express themselves 'either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.'

Young children as meaning makers

This view of the child sees young children as active participants in their own learning. This acknowledges that young children need opportunities to 'think what they think' rather than seeing listening and consultations as a quick way to take children's ideas. Most children, in a similar way to adults will benefit from having different opportunities, using a range of resources to reflect on their views and experiences.

'Listening' in this training is defined as:

- 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 in matters that affect them, as well as parents and staff.
- An ongoing part of tuning in to all young children as individuals in their everyday lives.
- Sometimes part of a specific consultation about a particular entitlement, choice, event or opportunity.



Resource Sheet 3

Statements: Reasons we might listen to young children

A.
It is the UN Convention
on the Rights of the
Child that we should

B.
It's how we find out
what is important to
them and what they
are capable

C.
It's a requirement
under the EYFS

D.
It will impact on
children's learning and
educational outcomes

E.
It will ensure that we
work across services to
meet children's needs

F.
It is how we show that
we value and respect
young children

G.
It improves
relationships between
families and settings

H.
It will impact on
children's mental
health and emotional
wellbeing

I.
It is part of our
child protection/
safeguarding
procedures

J.
It will impact on
meeting the needs of
vulnerable children

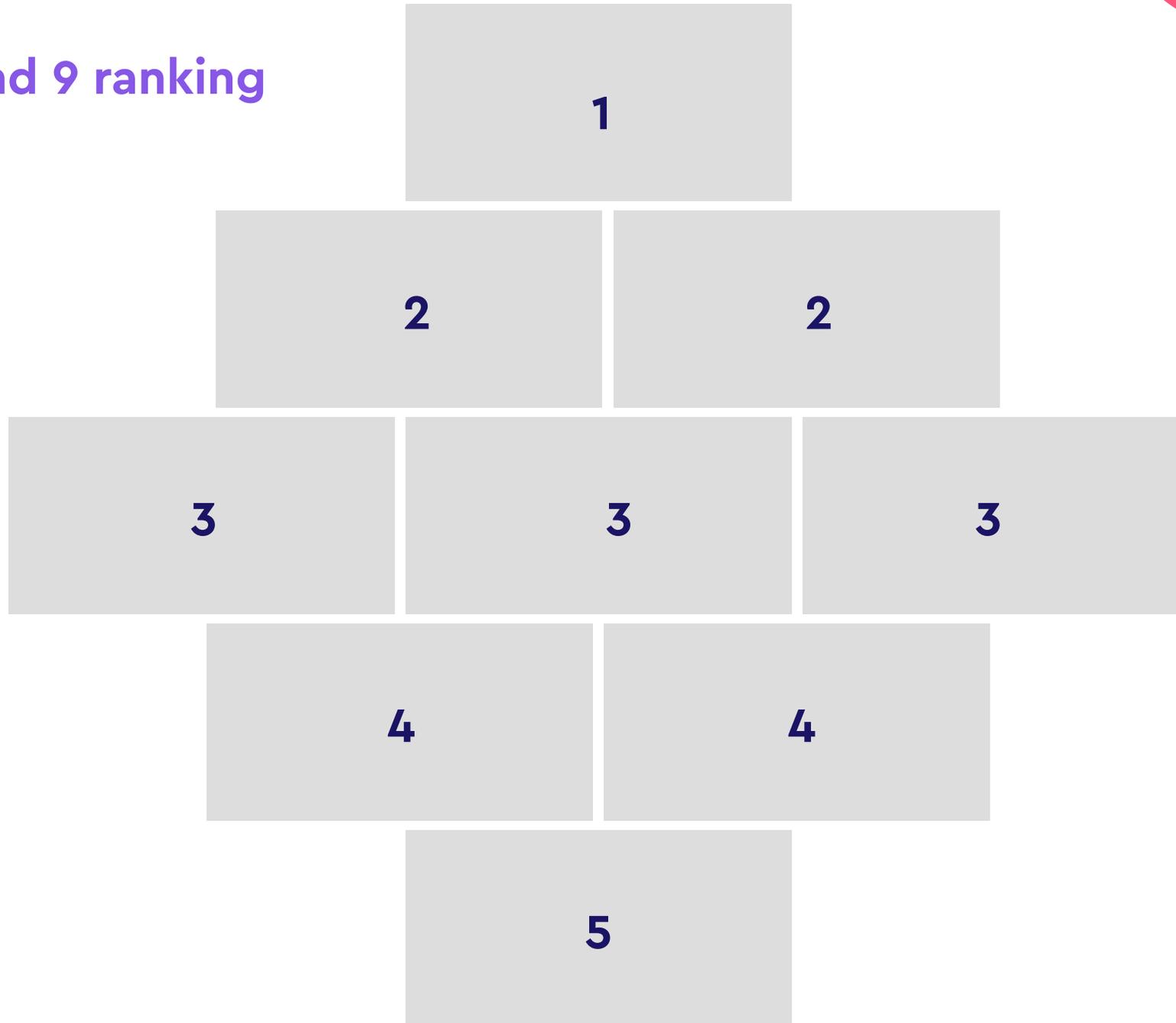
K.
It is how we make
opportunities for them to
learn to express their views
and hear those of others

L.
They are our service users
and we are accountable
to them for the quality of
what we offer

M.
It will support social
mobility

Resource Sheet 3

Diamond 9 ranking



Resource Sheet 4

Why do we listen to young children?

Children have a right to express their views, have them taken into account and be involved in decisions that affect them. This right is supported by [Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), [Children Act 2004](#), [Childcare Act 2006](#), [Health and Social Care Act 2012](#), [Children and Families Act 2014](#).

The benefits

- Children have unique insights and information to offer. They are experts in their own lives. Listening to them can challenge assumptions, provide insights into their capabilities and raise expectations.
- Children feel they matter. Their confidence grows when their ideas, feelings and abilities are treated with respect.
- Children learn to understand and communicate what they feel, want and need. Once they are able to do this they can begin to consider other people's feelings, needs and wishes, they learn to negotiate and compromise and to balance their needs with the needs of others.
- More 'sustained shared thinking' occurs when children and adults work together to solve a problem, clarify a concept, extend a narrative or evaluate an activity.
- Listening provides time and space for children to identify and talk through their emotions and feelings, giving opportunities for children's self-regulation to be supported through co-regulation with an appropriate adult.
- They learn to think of the consequences of actions: what happens if....?
- They learn what is possible, what is not, and why, e.g. safety considerations, time, practicalities.
- Adults can learn from children how to work more effectively with them.
- Working in a more democratic way with young children can relieve adults from the burden of needing to know all the answers and reveal new ways of looking at things.
- Children are more likely to talk about things that worry them, including child protection and safeguarding issues, if listening is part of everyday practice.
- Family relationships improve when parents listen to their children and take their views seriously.
- Services that children have helped to plan are more likely to meet their needs and be successful. Listening to children helps improve the effectiveness of provision and increases children's stake in the services and settings they access.
- Documented listening provides evidence for self-evaluation, quality assurance and improvement.



Resource Sheet 5

Listening and links to EYFS

Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the [Rights of the Child](#) (UNCRC), in particular Article 12; states that "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." The UNCRC was ratified in England in 1991 and strongly represents universal values and principles that underpin good practice in working with children and young people.

The Early Years Foundation Stage

The [Early Years Foundation Stage](#) (EYFS) sets the standards for the learning, development and care of children from birth to 5 years old. The need to ensure that children have a voice (verbal and non-verbal), are listened to and able to participate is embedded throughout the EYFS:

Examples include:

The **Overarching Principles of the EYFS**, which resonate with the ethos of effective listening to children throughout.

- 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**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers (pg 6)
- The **learning and development requirements** also reference giving opportunities for children to express themselves in a range of situations, as well as to listen to others (see p7-12)

Effective listening underpins the Characteristics of effective teaching and learning:

- **playing and exploring** – children investigate and experience things, and 'have a go'
- **active learning** – children concentrate and keep on trying if they encounter difficulties, and enjoy achievements
- **creating and thinking critically** - children have and develop their own ideas, make links between ideas, and develop strategies for doing things (pg. 10)

EYFS reforms 2021 policy context

The current EYFS reforms sit firmly within government's social mobility agenda, specifically the ambition to reduce the proportion of children who do not achieve at least expected levels across all Early Learning Goals in the 'communication & language' and 'literacy' areas of learning at the end of Reception year by half by 2028. Effective listening to children and enabling them to have a voice and participate is key to the success of this agenda. Listening to children continues to be an important element in the [revised statutory EYFS framework](#), which comes into force in September 2021 (please note this is currently an Early adopter version of the new EYFS).



Resource Sheet 5

Development Matters

[Development Matters](#) (September 2020) is non-statutory guidance material that supports practitioners in implementing the statutory requirements of the EYFS. Seven key features of effective practice underpin the guidance, and the guidance shows how these principles work together for children in the EYFS. It helps practitioners understand how the prime and specific Areas of Learning and Development are all interconnected and how the characteristics of effective teaching and learning weave through them all.

Development Matters sets out the pathways of children's development in broad ages and stages, with the main purpose of this being to help practitioners assess each child's level of development and help adults to understand and support each individual child's development pathway by closely matching what they provide to a child's current needs.

The guidance highlights how listening and participation underpins effective practice, as shown by the following examples:

- Young children "will need lots of stimulating experiences to help them develop their communication. That's why the time you spend listening to them and having conversations with them is so important" (pg 4)
- "it is vital that we get to know and value all young children" (pg 4)
- "The child's experience must always be central to the thinking of every practitioner". (pg 5)
- "Effective practitioners are responsive to children and babies. They notice when a baby looks towards them and gurgles and respond with pleasure". (pg 5)
- "Young children's learning is often driven by their interests. Plans need to be flexible". (pg 6)
- "This includes listening regularly to parents and giving parents clear information about their children's progress". (pg 7)

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

The [EYFS Profile](#) (EYFSP) provides guidance to help practitioners make accurate judgements about each child's attainment at the end of the EYFS. Consistent messages throughout the document refer to the need to listen to children.

Examples include:

"Observational assessment – Practitioners can use observational assessment to understand children's learning. Practitioners watch, listen and interact as children engage in everyday activities, events and experiences, and demonstrate their specific knowledge, skills and understanding. (Pg 11)

"Practitioners may include the following to support their judgements:

- knowledge of the child
- materials, which illustrate the child's learning journey, such as photographs
- observations of day-to-day interactions
- video, tape, audio or electronic recordings
- the child's view of his or her own learning
- information from parents or other relevant adults



Resource Sheet 5

An EYFS profile completed by a practitioner alone only offers a partial picture of a child's attainment. Practitioners must actively engage children, their parents and other adults who have significant interaction with the child in the assessment process" (pg 16)

The guidance regularly refers to child-initiated activities providing the best observational assessment opportunities as this is when children have opportunity to fully express themselves using all methods of communication. It refers to practitioners needing to recognise children's verbal and non-verbal communications, therefore truly listening to children. This point is reiterated in regard to children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) (see pg 18)

Early years inspection handbook (September 2019)

The [inspection handbook](#) clearly directs Ofsted Inspectors to observe how practitioners effectively demonstrate that they listen to children, staff are also expected to be able to explain how this impacts on children's learning and development outcomes.

Examples from the handbook include:

"65. When observing interactions between staff and children, inspectors should consider how well staff:

- engage in dialogue with children
- watch, listen and respond to children
- model language well
- encourage children to express their thoughts and use new words
- support independence and confidence
- encourage children to speculate and test ideas through trial and error
- enable children to explore and solve problems
- behave as an excellent role model for children

Ofsted inspectors expect practitioners to really know their children – they will not be looking at internal data and tracking, but expect staff to be able to talk about the children in the setting, their starting points, their needs and interests and how practitioners are providing for/helping children progress and develop in their knowledge and skills.

Cultural Capital:

"Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to prepare them for their future success. It is about giving children the best possible start to their early education. As part of making a judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider how well leaders use the curriculum to enhance the experience and opportunities available to children, particularly the most disadvantaged.



Resource Sheet 5

Some children arrive at an early years settings with different experiences from others, in their learning and play. What a setting does, through its EYFS curriculum and interactions with practitioners, potentially makes all the difference for children. It is the role of the setting to help children experience the awe and wonder of the world in which they live, through the seven areas of learning". (Ofsted inspection handbook, pg 31)

Rather than thinking of cultural capital as a thing that must be 'given' or 'taught', it might be more helpful to think about the cultures, languages and traditions that children and their families bring, how we might value and celebrate this. Getting to know children and families through effective listening is a crucial part of this.

Part of 'Cultural Capital' is recognising that children arrive at the setting with different experiences, in their learning and play. The focus should be on knowing individual children, to give each child the best start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their full potential. It is important is to feel confident explaining why a particular activity has been chosen and how it will benefit the child's learning and development. Effective listening enables children's individual needs, interests and experiences to truly be known and understood.



Resource Sheet 6

Listening to young children and emotional health and wellbeing (EHWB)

Supporting young children's EHWB is central for all those who work in early years, helping children to develop a strong foundation both now and for the future. Listening to young children has the following benefits for EHWB:

- Enables children to develop a sense of their uniqueness, self-worth and that their contributions are important and matter
- Encourages children to identify and talk about their emotions
- Supports children to develop self-regulation skills, as they partner and co-regulate with familiar adults
- Provides opportunities for children to talk about issues or things that concern or worry them
- Provides time and space for children to share about their own experiences, good and bad, and how they feel about them
- Enables adults working with young children to understand from the child's perspective and how an event/activity/experience may be affecting them, including experience of trauma
- Encourages children and adults to reflect on and see things from different people's viewpoints
- Supports children's safety and wellbeing in the setting and helps children to discuss and understand issues around keeping safe and well
- Helps children to talk through problems or difficulties they encounter in activities and to develop skills such as perseverance and determination
- Helps children to understand that it is ok to 'have a go' and try something new, and that making mistakes or failing is part of learning
- Promotes confidence and skills in self-expression, listening, problem-solving and decision-making
- Underpins the drive to give all children the best start in life and to build strong foundations for future success.



Resource Sheet 7

Safeguarding and Listening

Increasing our capacity to listen to young children, increases their opportunity to communicate with us. Building children's trust so that they understand that they will be listened to and taken seriously, is a vital element of safeguarding practice. As such it is important that we understand how to appropriately respond to safeguarding disclosures.

When a disclosure is made, there may be a temptation to try to open further communication with a child to get more details, however at this stage it is not important that the person the disclosure is made to has all the information. In fact, asking further questions; if not done appropriately, may lead to increasing the risk to the child and/or cause a delay or breakdown in any potential investigation case.

It is important not to question or interrogate a child and not to pre-empt or impose your thoughts or words on them. Children need to be allowed the freedom to express what they want to. Full investigation is the role of specifically trained professionals who have expertise in doing so.

Always ask children open questions, ensuring you don't ask any leading questions. A simple technique to do this is to use the initials 'TED' as a prompt – Tell me, Explain to me, Describe to me.



What to do if you have a concern about a child or a child makes a disclosure

- Stay calm
- Ensure that your response is child centred and appropriate
- Listen, believe and take seriously what the child is saying to you
- Be honest and clear about confidentiality (remember, you can't promise not to tell anyone)
- Allow children / young people time and space to talk to you, avoid interrogating, investigation or examining them
- If you see a child with an injury, always ask them how they sustained the injury. Seek an explanation from their parents/carers unless you consider that the injury requires immediate medical attention or if you feel doing so would put the child at further risk (i.e. don't discuss it with anyone you suspect might be the perpetrator of abuse)
- Always record details factually, records should say what the child says in their own words along with any parental explanation. You should sign and date the record
- Discuss your concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- If you have serious Child Protection concerns, do not delay in seeking advice and support
- Seek support and advice for yourself at an appropriate juncture. Child protection issues are always stressful!

Resource Sheet 8

Approaches to listening

The following frameworks are ways of helping practitioners think about how to help children express their views and how to encourage listening as an effective, active process and part of everyday practice.

These frameworks are useful to think through and reflect on how you listen to the voices young children. It is important to note that these cycles do not need to be lengthy and should not create excessive paperwork or documentation, but can be embedded as at of everyday practice.

The Listening Cycle

Listen

An active process of receiving (observing and hearing), interpreting and responding to communication. The way in which you show you are listening is important – encourage through tone and body language, give time for children to express their views and ask questions to develop conversation.

Document

Recording children's preferences and views helps practitioners ensure continuity of care - information can be shared more easily with parents and other practitioners which is essential during transitions between groups and settings.

Reflect

Once in receipt of children's views practitioners can reflect on their practice and consider how what they do and say affects children's responses and experience within the setting.

Take action

It's important for practitioners to act on their reflections to enhance children's experiences within the setting and for children to see that their views have been listened to and valued. Children's views that can inform improvements to the setting need to be incorporated into planning and delivery.

Feedback

The difference between being listened to and feeling listened to – even if children's wishes cannot be met, honest feedback is essential. Remember to share with children how their views have informed changes to the setting and celebrate their contribution.

[More info about the Listening Cycle here](#)



Developed by NCB as part of Young Children's
Voices Network, NCB 2009

Resource Sheet 8

The RAMPS Framework

RAMPS Framework

R ecognising children's many languages

Using as many ways of listening and possible, and perhaps more than one way at a time.

A llocating communication spaces

Creating an environment which allows children spaces to communicate in as many ways as possible, including emotional warmth to support children in expressing their feelings.

M aking time

Making time for talking and listening, and for children to explore their thoughts and to explore and become absorbed in their play.

P roviding choice

Through the resources, opportunities, daily routines, and choices about whether to participate.

S ubscribing to reflective practice and sharing reflections

On what children have expressed and the potential impact of what they have expressed on their lives.

Adapted from Lancaster, YP and Broadbent, V (2003) Listening to Young Children. Buckingham: Open University



Resource Sheet 8

Lundy model of child participation (2007)

This model was developed by academic Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast. Her model, detailed in a 2007 publication in the British Educational Journal, provides a way of conceptualising a child's right to participation, as laid down in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



The four elements have a rational, chronological order:

1. SPACE:

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

2. VOICE:

Children must be facilitated to express their view

3. AUDIENCE:

The view must be listened to

4. INFLUENCE:

The view must be acted upon as appropriate

[More info about the Lundy model here](#)



Resource Sheet 9

Ways of listening

Observation

Watch and note what children show interest in and what they avoid, where they like to play – and with whom, how they behave in particular situations, at particular times of the day and with different people. These observations will tell you much about children's abilities, needs and interests.

Sharing knowledge with parents and other carers

By establishing good relationships with parents and other carers you will be able to find out much more about individual children: how they express themselves, their likes and dislikes, and what is important for them. This is particularly important when you are caring for babies and children with speech, language and communication difficulties. You will need to establish the child's means of communicating 'yes' and 'no' and to use a range of familiar objects of reference, such as toys and photographs. You can share knowledge through using profiles/journals, either using a book, folder etc or online.

Body language and preverbal sounds

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 that they will be able to respond to using these means of expression. It is important to be aware that behaviours are a means of communication for children and to know and understand what different behaviours mean for individual children.

Pictures and visual means of expression

Children can take photos, draw or paint pictures, create models and make books to show what is important to them about their setting and what they like or dislike. They can select photos, pictures or objects that are important to them. They can use 'feelings faces' to show what makes them happy, sad, scared or angry. They can use sticky dot labels or happy/sad stickers with pictures to record their preferences, likes and dislikes.

Story and drama

You can explore particular topics by telling or reading a story which focuses on an issue that you'd like to discuss with children and asking how they think the characters in the story might feel, or what they would like. Children's own stories reveal what is important to them. You can also invite children to act out stories, either themselves or with puppets. Sometimes children will talk more readily through an intermediary, telling what is important to teddy, a puppet or doll. Such intermediaries can make it feel safer for children to talk critically about situations they find themselves in. Persona Dolls and Empathy Dolls can be used to develop empathy and explore issues of discrimination and exclusion.



Resource Sheet 9

Music and dance

Children can explore and express different moods and feelings by making music or responding to music through movement and dance. They can also gain confidence in leading 'conversations' with adults through music and dance.

Imaginative play

Children's spontaneous imaginative play will give many insights into what is important to a child at that moment, how they deal with things and how they have observed others' responses to situations.

Focussed discussions

A short list of questions can be posed to children, either one-to-one or in small groups, e.g.

- "What do you like best at nursery?"
- "What don't you like about being here?"
- "Who are your favourite people?"
- "Who don't you like?"
- "Where is your favourite place at nursery?"
- "Which part of nursery don't you like?"
- "What things are you good at?"
- "What do you find difficult?"
- "Is there anything you'd like to change at nursery?"

Some questions will work better than others and we need to be prepared to adapt our questions in the light of children's responses.

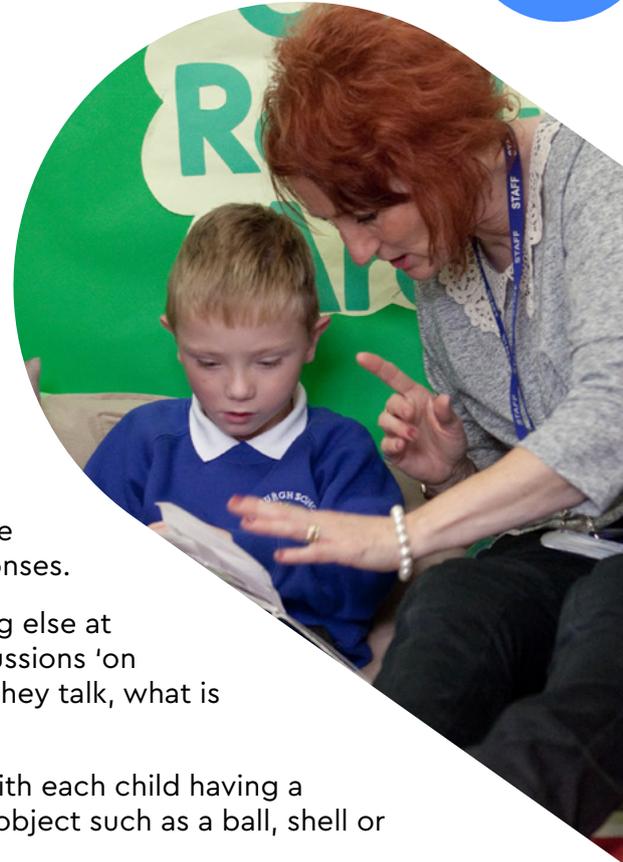
Some children will talk more readily if they are doing something else at the same time, such as drawing or cooking. You can have discussions 'on the move', as in child-led tours, with children showing you, as they talk, what is important to them.

Small group discussions can follow a 'Circle Time' approach, with each child having a chance to speak, or pass, on a particular topic and holding an object such as a ball, shell or microphone to indicate that it is their turn to speak.

You can record what children say by making notes or using a digital device, such as a tablet or camera, to record audio/video.

Mosaic Approach

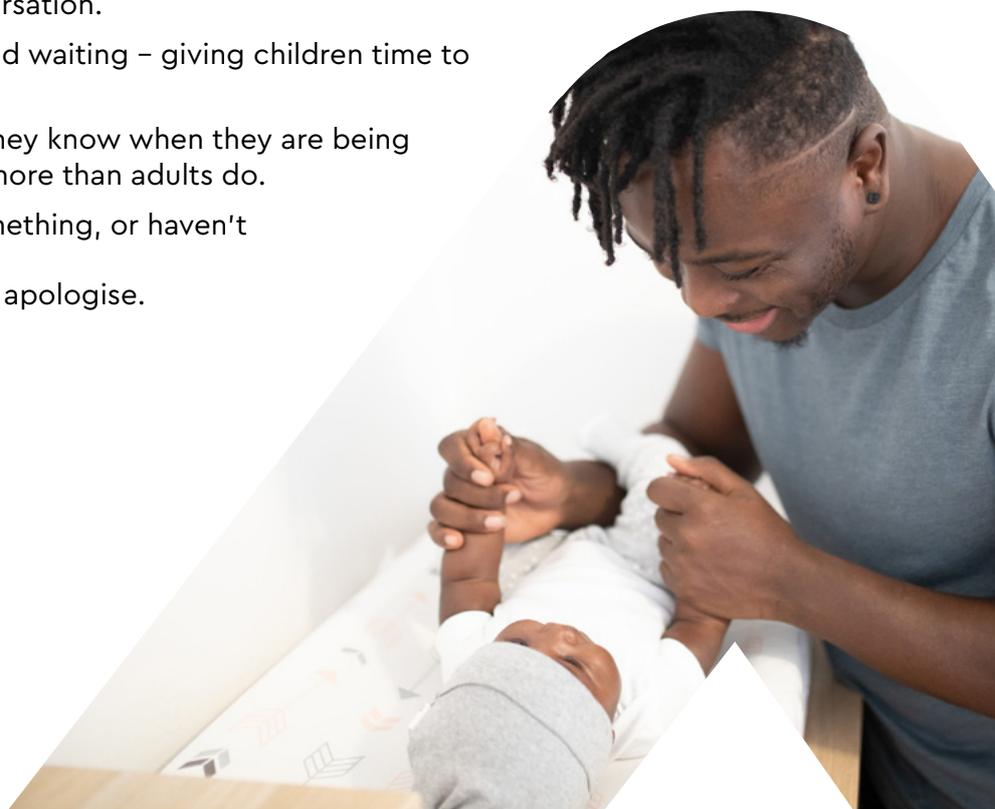
This approach fits together a number of different ways of listening to children. It uses observation, interviews, child-led tours, drawings and photos taken by children to build up a picture, or map, of what is important to them. This map is reviewed and discussed with the children and any additional comments they make are added to it. It has been used to find out what children think of their outdoor space and is being used to inform the design of new settings.



Resource Sheet 10

Effective listening

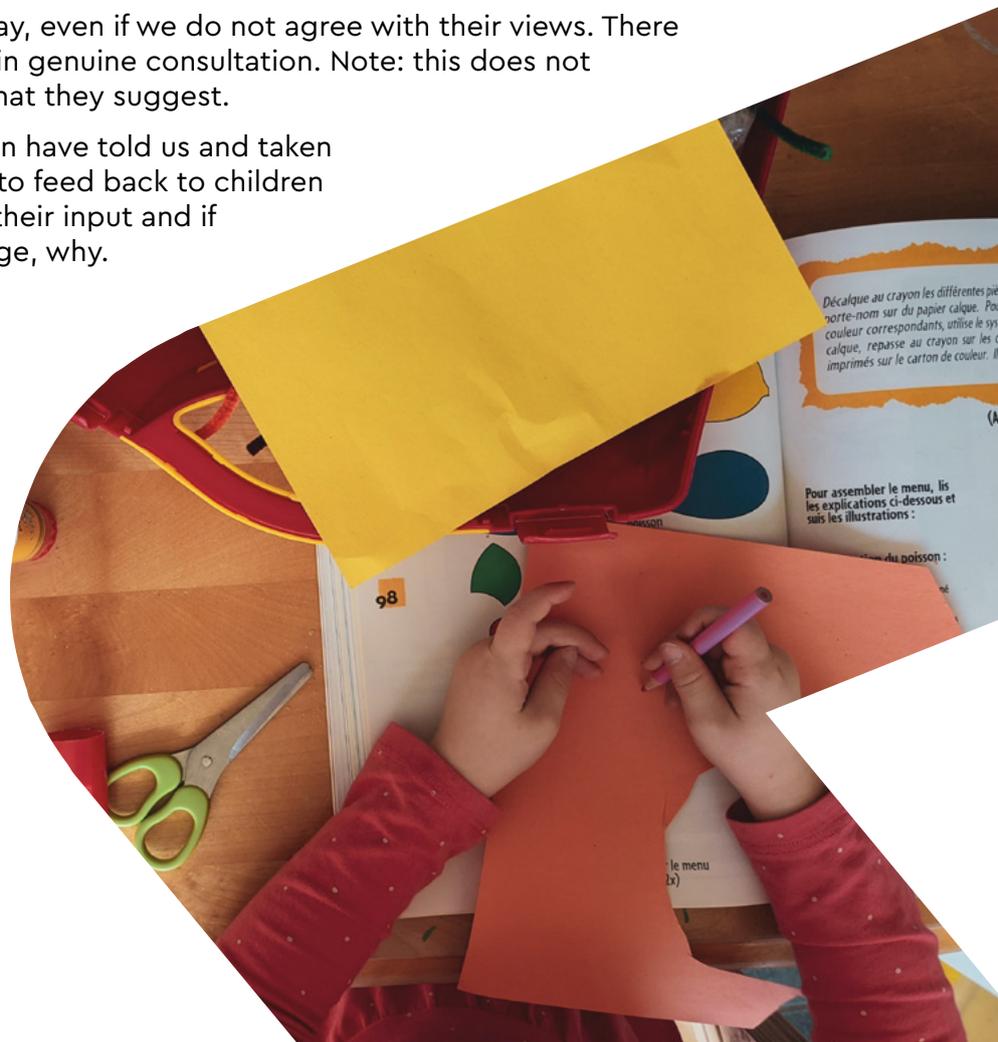
- Make time to listen. 'Sit with' children.
- Give children your full attention. Position yourself at their level and make appropriate eye contact.
- Listen as if you are going to hear something important.
- Give children time to say what they want to. Try not to interrupt or finish their sentences for them. Don't feel that you have to fill every silence.
- Accept what children say. Encourage exploration and let children know it's OK to make, and learn from, mistakes.
- Acknowledge children's feelings.
- You can use reflective listening – repeating some of what a child has said – to check that you have understood their meaning and to show that you have heard them, or noticed feelings they have shown. This kind of listening helps you to concentrate on what the child is saying, not on what you are going to say next. It can also help you feel more confident when talking to a child about painful experiences such as a parent leaving home or someone dying. Instead of avoiding such topics because you don't know what to say, or how to make things better, you can, by reflective listening, let them know that it is OK to talk and to have the feelings they have.
- Be aware of the difference between closed and open questions. Closed questions tend to have yes/no or correct answers. They can help you to introduce a topic or check that you have understood what a child said, but they mean that you, not the child, do most of the talking. Open questions, e.g. "Tell me what you like at nursery," encourage the child to talk and lead the conversation,
- Remember that 'why' questions can make children feel put on the spot – they are often used when children are being told off or asked to justify their actions. General overuse of questions can make children feel like they are taking part in an interrogation rather than a conversation.
- Recognise the value of silence and waiting – giving children time to respond
- Talk respectfully with children. They know when they are being patronised and don't like it any more than adults do.
- Be honest. If you don't know something, or haven't understood, say so. If you've made a mistake, apologise.



Resource Sheet 11

General principles for consultation

- Consultation should be informed: children need to understand what they are being asked and why, and how any information they give will be used.
- Consultation should be voluntary and children should be able to withdraw from it at any stage if they become unhappy with the process. Photos should only be taken and used with the children's and parents' consent.
- Make sure that processes are in place to deal with any disclosures that children might make.
- Use consultation methods that are participatory, enjoyable and negotiable. Give children time to become familiar with equipment such as digital devices.
- There must be an environment in which it is all right to explore, experiment and make mistakes. Not all methods of consultation will prove successful with all children.
- The earlier that children are involved in helping to decide which issues should be consulted on, and how, the more relevant and successful the consultation is likely to be.
- There must be the intention that the children's views will have some impact on services provided. If consultations are carried out just to confirm decisions already made, children will feel used or betrayed and less likely to offer their views in future.
- It helps to know in advance of any practical constraints such as space, resources, time and finance. Everyone needs to be clear about what is negotiable and what is not. Also, children should be told how much impact their views will have: are they being given the say or a say?
- Listen carefully to children's views and check that you have understood what they want to say – do not interpret for them.
- We must accept what children say, even if we do not agree with their views. There are no right and wrong answers in genuine consultation. Note: this does not mean we will necessarily do all that they suggest.
- Having reflected on what children have told us and taken action where possible, we need to feed back to children what has changed as a result of their input and if there are things we cannot change, why. So, follow this 'listening cycle':
- **Listen – document – reflect – take action – feedback.**



Resource Sheet 12

Examples of real-life participation

Outdoor choice at Anansi

Case study taken from Starting with Choice

Staff at Anansi Nursery consulted the children to identify their preferred outdoor play activities, plan the physical layout of the outdoor provision and provide the best outdoor environment for all the children. The nursery has two gardens.

Staff used several consultation techniques:

- noting children's comments as they watched a video of the gardens;
- offering different practical and natural resources and noting children's spoken preferences and the length of time they spent with particular materials – and how frequently they returned to them;
- visits to other play areas;
- making maps in the gardens on which children placed photos from visits, cut out catalogue pictures and samples of materials and asking children to point to areas which they liked best;
- feedback at circle time and in individual discussion – with graphs, maps and pictures – on their stated preferences and which items they had jointly selected for the garden.

Children were also invited to say which of the nursery's gardens they liked best. One child repeatedly signed 'tree' in Makaton and found the flash card with a picture of the tree, indicating her desire to be taken to the back garden. Staff helped her to climb the tree, where she stayed for half an hour.



What's for tea?

Case study taken from Children as Partners in Planning

Children aged 2–5 in a nursery were asked which food they liked. Using this information, staff made picture menus representing choices available and these were displayed by food group (carbohydrates, fruit and vegetables and so on). The children then chose something from each food group to ensure a balance to their meals. The older children recorded the preferences of younger children and even very young children and those with language difficulties were able to take part. Less popular combinations were occasionally offered, but with alternatives. The nursery reported more interest in food from the children and less waste.

Staff also worked with the children to make a book called 'Teddy's First Day at Nursery' to introduce new children to the nursery.



Dickins, M, Emerson, S and Gordon-Smith, P (2003) *Starting with Choice: Inclusive strategies for consulting young children*. London: Save the Children

Fajerman, L, Jarrett, M, and Sutton, F (2001) *Children as Partners in Planning: A Training Resource to Support Consultation with Children*. London: Save the Children

Resource Sheet 12

Choosing equipment

Case study taken from Never too young

Children aged 2–4 in a creche were given a budget of £30, represented by 30 discs, and a toy catalogue and asked to choose toys for their creche that all children would like.

As they chose, a worker helped them count out how many discs each toy cost so that they could see how much they had left, which cost a lot and so on. Having made their choices they went with 2 workers to buy the toys they had chosen.

Profile Books

Case study taken from Beyond Listening: Children's perspectives on early childhood services

At Fortune Park Children's Centre each child has a profile book. Photos of the child's home, family, favourite objects and toys are put into a blank scrapbook. Added to this are photos taken at nursery showing the child at work and play, their friends, things they have made, drawings and paintings, all annotated in the child's own words. Holidays, hospital visits and other significant events are recorded, representing every aspect of the child's life – one parent describes the books as 'a pictorial autobiography'.

The profile books open up channels of listening between children, parents and staff and are used in many different ways.

- They support the settling in process: children often use them as transitional objects, carry them around and hug them. Staff have observed children under the age of two offering a distressed child his profile book as comfort.
- Children can use them as communication tools.
- They show that the setting values the child's home, family and culture by taking a genuine interest in the child's home life.
- They help staff explain the curriculum to parents and why particular activities and experiences are offered.
- They show parents what their child is doing at nursery and what they are learning.
- Children can look back and reflect on their own learning, as when one child comments, "That was how I used to draw when I was three," and another says, "I called it a 'climbing thing'. I should have called it a climbing frame but I didn't know what it was called then."
- Children have also worked through difficulties in their life, like having to take regular medication, by having their experience represented in pictures and words in their book.



Miller, J (1997) *Never Too Young: How young children can take responsibility and make decisions*. London: Save the Children

Clark, A, Kjørholt, A. T and Moss, P. (2005) *Listening: Children's perspectives on early childhood services*. The Policy Press,

Resource Sheet 12

The tree of feelings

Case study taken from Listening to young children

To explore the role emotion plays in painting or artmaking, children in a nursery painted a branch potted in sand and water to make a 'tree of feelings' – a space that allows children to add or take away photos, drawings and messages about how they are feeling.

First, staff talked about colour with the children. What colours did they like or dislike? Why? What is their favourite colour? Children then chose colours and began painting the tree with these. Some children used a particular colour for what they saw as peaceful branches of the tree, whilst scary parts were painted with another colour.

Staff asked children to think about the feelings they have, and those who wanted to, shared their experiences with the group. Then they drew their own pictures to represent some of the feelings they had discussed and hung them on the 'tree of feelings', such as sad faces were about: 'Someone hitting you', 'When I leave Gramps' and happy faces were about: 'Snowflakes falling on my happy head', and 'Cuddling'. They have spontaneously continued to use the tree to register their feelings.

The Early Childhood Unit is currently updating case studies included in this training and the accompanying Resource sheets.

If you have any examples of case studies involving listening to young children in your setting that you would be interested in showcasing or if you would like to discuss this further, please email ecadmin@ncb.org.uk with the subject line: 'Listening to young children case study'.

Lancaster, Y. P, and Broadbent, V (2003) Listening to young children, Buckinghamshire: Open University Press



Resource Sheet 13

Listening culture

For adults in the setting

For children

For parents

The learning environment

The curriculum

Resource Sheet 14

Statements: Barriers to listening

Listening can only happen when parents and practitioners are listened to and valued as partners

Listening does not sit easily within an outcomes-based framework

Listening can only be introduced gradually into practice

Listening to young children is difficult because of the effect on:

- the practitioner/parent relationship
- the parent-child relationship

Listening is only worthwhile if all the children we work with are enabled to have a voice

We can only listen effectively if we are given enough time

It is only ever worth listening if we can act on what we hear

Everyone working with children will have to give up some of their power if we are to truly listen

Only those with particular skills and abilities are able to obtain the views of babies and children with communication difficulties

Resource Sheet 15

Where are you starting from?

Think about your setting

<p>What decisions can children make or influence?</p>	
<p>What decisions are they not involved in?</p>	
<p>What difficulties or challenges have you met in listening to children and responding to their ideas, feelings and preferences?</p>	
<p>How have you found out what is important to children – what ways of listening work well?</p>	
<p>How is listening to young children prioritised within your team / setting?</p>	
<p>What opportunities do you have for influencing how listening is incorporated into your team/ setting?</p>	

Resource Sheet 16

Practical ideas for listening

Listening to what children like and dislike about their setting

Using Photos

Take photos of the different activities and/or areas of provision offered in your setting. The children can help with this. You could laminate them to make them easier to handle and longer lasting. You could also use a tablet or interactive whiteboard to show the photos if you have these available.

The children can use these to show you:

- what they most like about the setting
- what they don't like
- what they would like to do today or in the future

Methods of using photos: some suggestions

- Put a selection of the pictures face up on a table top and ask each child to point to, or pick up and give you, the pictures they choose in response to what you ask them
- Make a 'fishing rod' by tying a magnet to a piece of wooden dowel with string. Attach a paper clip to each picture. Ask each child to 'catch' the pictures that they like or don't like.
- Put pictures in a photo album or scrap book. Invite a child or small group of children to look through the album with you and talk about or show you what they like and don't like – and why.
- Draw a happy face on one bag or box and a sad face on another. Go through pictures with a small group of children, and ask them to put each picture in the bag/box that reflects how they feel about what is in that picture.
- Fix pictures on a wall frieze or large sheet of card, with space around each. Give each child some sticky dot labels [no more than three] and ask them to put a dot next to their favourite activities. This will give a group picture of the most popular activities.
- Mount pictures on large card, as above. Write, or ask children to write, their names on sticky labels. Invite the children to stick their name labels by each of the activities they like. This helps you record each child's likes.
- Show photos on a tablet or interactive whiteboard. The children can indicate their responses to the questions by pointing or marking the photo with an interactive tool.



Resource Sheet 16

Choosing new equipment for the setting

Children from the age of two have successfully taken part in choosing new equipment for their setting using a method such as this one described below:

- Print pictures of a range of equipment, each piece of which fits within your budget/area you wish to resource.
- Mount these pictures on individual cards, leaving some space around each picture.
- Tell the children you want them to help choose new toys for the setting.
- Show them the pictures of the toys and explain that there will not be enough money to buy all of them, so you will buy the ones that most children want.
- Give each child a sticky dot label and ask the child to stick it next to the picture of the toy that they would most like. The toys that have the most dots on them will be the ones you buy.

Listening to how children feel about given situations

Using 'Feeling faces'

- Draw/print simple faces showing different feelings/emotions, e.g. happy, sad, angry, scared. You can also buy emotion cards, puppets at a reasonable price.
- Show each face picture/puppet to the children and find out what names they would give to the feeling shown, for instance 'scared' or 'frightened', 'angry' or 'mad'. Ask the children to show how they would look if they were feeling like that.
- Give a situation – either verbally or using pictures.
- Ask each child to point to the face that shows how they would feel in that situation.
- Here are some examples of questions you could ask.

How do you feel when:

- you're coming to nursery/playgroup/kids' club
- you can play outside
- it is dinner time
- it's noisy
- grown-ups shout
- you can choose what to do
- it's story time
- your best friend won't play
- it's time to go home

- With children who are able to talk, you could ask what makes them feel like that in these situations. And, if they feel sad or scared, what might make them feel better.

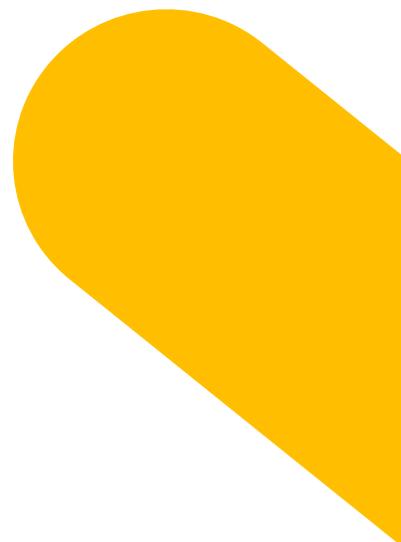


Resource Sheet 16

- Once introduced to the idea of 'feelings faces', as well as being used at specific times to support children's EHWP, these can be made accessible all of the time to support children to express how they are feeling during or about a situation.
- You could also provide mirrors to enable children to see their own facial expressions.

Encouraging children to vote to express their opinion

- Use a 'story voting station'
- Set up an area with a choice of 2 books – this could be to be read at the end of a session/day or the end of a week.
- Place 2 containers (basket, small box, jar etc), one in front of each book and objects that can be used as counters e.g. Duplo bricks, pebbles, or any other counting objects you have.
- Show the books to the children and explain that they are going to vote for their favourite, which will then be the story chosen to be read to the group. Explain that they can only vote once and must place only one counter in the box/basket for the book of their choice.
- When the time comes to share the book, the children can help count the objects in each basket/box/jar and work out which book won the vote. This book is then shared with the group.
- This idea works well with reception children, and younger children can be supported in this activity. It can be adapted for other activities within the setting where there is a choice, for example, which songs to sing, which role-play children would like etc



Resource Sheet 17

Developing a listening culture

Encouraging reflective practice to embed listening in everyday practice.

This has been adapted from 'Let's Listen'¹ which is a profiling and planning resource which can be used to record, evidence and plan for listening to young children.

The aim of this is to encourage reflective practice with regards to listening to young children in your setting. There are 4 areas, based on the overarching principles of the [EYFS](#), with a series of statements relating to listening and enabling children to participate.

Each section is arranged in 3 levels of listening practice, from emerging (1-3) through to listening being truly embedded within a setting (7-8). You can use these statements as a basis for professional discussions with colleagues to enable you to consider the current approach and opportunities for listening in your setting, and reflect on what needs to be/can be changed to improve practice.

It is underpinned by the following values and principles:

Listening practice is an integral part of effective everyday practice: It is central to a pedagogic approach that focuses on developing positive relationships based on mutual respect. Listening is incorporated into all daily routines and learning opportunities.

Listening is an ongoing process: The process starts with listening within a respectful relationship. Children's perspectives are documented and adults engage in reflection about what has been shared. Practitioners take appropriate action and feed back to children and parents. This continuous cycle enables young children's participation in children's services.

Listening with familiar adults: It is vital that children are listened to by adults who know them well. Children need to be comfortable and able to trust that what they share is valued and respected. Familiar adults will have knowledge about the child's language and development to enable them to reflect on meaning with children.

Listening requires learning from children: Reflective practitioners use what they see, and hear, from young children to inform their interaction and planning with children. Assumptions may need to be challenged in recognising children's capabilities, with practice changing as needed.

There are many ways to listen: Listening is a process which can be supported by different techniques, activities and equipment incorporated into daily play opportunities. Consultations with children often work well using a multi method approach with consideration of children's ages, interests, capabilities and consent.

Listening to children, practitioners and parents: Respectful relationships are central to listening and enabling meaningful and ethical participation. Parents' and practitioners' perspectives are considered alongside those of children to get a holistic sense of children's experiences.

Listening is made visible, shared and celebrated: Practitioners reflect and talk about children's perspectives with children and may record these, for example, through children's profiles and displays.

Listening to young children is part of a listening culture: A listening culture and ethos can be developed by valuing the voices of young children, parents and all staff, so that everyone's views are taken into account to inform quality improvement.

Listening and belonging: Active and empathetic listening enables children to be open about feelings of inequality or isolation. Practitioners who are aware of children whose voice may be unheard, are more able to support all children's rights.

Leadership for listening: Valuing, and responding, to the voice of the child requires an open style of leadership where the power to make decisions is negotiated and shared in relation to all relevant members of staff, parents and young children.

¹ Hamer, CW and Williams, L (2010) Let's Listen: Young children's voices – Profiling and planning to enable their participation in children's services. London: NCB.

Resource Sheet 17

Unique child

Every child is a unique child, who is constantly learning and can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured.

Tuning into babies' and young children's views and experiences helps us to understand their daily lives and empower them as individuals.

1. The individual ways in which babies and young children communicate with other people are recognised by all practitioners.
2. All children are valued and treated with respect through the celebration of individual similarities and differences.
3. Practice is in place which ensures that children know what to do if they don't feel well or safe.
4. Every child's interests, preferences and methods of communication have been identified and shared with their family.
5. Every child is encouraged to communicate their needs, views and wishes as an integral part of day-to-day activities.
6. Practitioners have opportunities to use and develop their observation and listening skills.
7. A range of approaches are in place that encourage, and enable, the participation of every child on their own terms, in ways in which they feel comfortable, and in their own time.
8. Young children know that they are listened to, that their views are taken seriously and acted on or they know why not.

Positive Relationships

Children learn to be strong and independent through positive relationships. Children benefit from a strong partnership between practitioners and parents/carers.

Listening is a vital part of establishing respectful relationships with young children and their families.

1. Every child has a named key person who is known to the child and family. The key person listens to the child and communicates with the child and family.
2. Parents are respected as the people who know their child best and who have the ability to communicate their needs. Their views are sought on a regular basis.
3. Young children are encouraged to be aware of the needs of others and are enabled in developing positive relationships.
4. Practitioners show their ability to tune into young children, taking their lead and direction from observations of what the children say and do.
5. Parents and practitioners share information about young children's means of expression, interests and views through regular communication.
6. There is commitment to ensuring active participation of babies and young children through building respectful and caring relationships.
7. Parents and practitioners are partners in young children's learning and development.
8. Children's and parents' views influence the development of practice.

Resource Sheet 17

Enabling Environments

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.

Listening environments help all babies and young children feel confident, safe and powerful, ensuring they have the time and space to express themselves in whatever form suits them. It ensures practitioners know their children well and are able to respond appropriately to individual needs and interests.

1. The setting acknowledges the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognising Article 12's central role in giving babies and young children an entitlement to be listened to and have their views taken seriously.
2. All children, and their families, are welcomed in a personalised manner.
3. Children continually have opportunities to make choices throughout the day. Schedules and routines flow with the child's needs.
4. Environments in the setting reflect the interests, needs and cultural backgrounds of current children
5. Children influence decision-making about the selection of resources and equipment.
6. Children's views help shape the design and layout of the indoor and outdoor environment.
7. Transitions are planned with partners to promote continuity, social and emotional well-being.
8. A listening culture is evident in all aspects of provision.

Learning and Development

Children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.

Sustained shared thinking is crucial in enabling learning and development, a process dependent on listening to young children.

1. Personalised approaches, giving time and space, are used to support every child's learning
2. Young children are provided with opportunities to express their ideas in a variety of ways to allow them to be actively involved in issues that affect them.
3. Practitioners extend and develop children's communication in their play through sensitive observation and appropriate interaction.
4. Young children's preferences and views influence the way in which their learning and care is planned.
5. Practitioners promote sustained shared thinking through their awareness of children's interests, critical thinking and meaning making
6. Young children's, and parents' perspectives, are used to inform regular evaluation of the setting, and families are able to make connections between their participation and the outcomes of their involvement.
7. Leaders, practitioners, parents, and young children work together to develop ideas and specific projects.
8. Listening to young children's voices leads to improved well-being and outcomes.

Resource Sheet 18

Action plan

This is to help you to reflect on your learning from the training and identify what you want or need to do next.

What action?	
Who will do it?	
When should it be done by?	
What resources / support are needed?	

Resource Sheet 19

Resources and further reading

Resources

First Steps (Amnesty International, 2018) Activities to introduce and explore human rights with 3 – 5 year olds.

First Steps to Rights (Unicef) Resource pack with activities for children aged 3 – 7 years. Please note there is a charge for this pack

RCPCH & Us – for children, young people and families

Participatory practices in collaboration with children, young people, their families, communities and professionals, for example:

- [Covid-19 and us](#) – RCPCH&Us is working with young people to reflect on their experiences of COVID-19 and the lockdown. This will help inform future planning for times of national crisis such as a natural disaster, another pandemic, terrorist incident or other cause of nationwide disruption.
- [Being me – supporting children and young people](#) – What keeps children in care happy, healthy and well? Care-experienced children and young people worked with RCPCH &Us to create these free resources, including 'health and wellbeing passports', a poster and games to help share who they are, how they are feeling and what support they would like – as well as top tips for doctors.
- [Recipes for Rights – children and young people in the lead](#) – This booklet takes you through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the five articles that children and young people have told RCPCH are important to their healthcare.

Involving children and young people with SLCN (The Communication Trust, 2016)

This is a toolkit for education settings on involving children and young people with Speech Language and Communication Needs. These are free online resources for staff to help understand, review and shape their approach to involving children and young people as part of everyday good practice.

The Reggio Emilia Approach to Early Education (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2006) A useful free document outlining the Reggio Approach

Te-Whariki Early Childhood Curriculum (Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 2017)

Ready to listen: involving young children and their families in local decisions about health and wellbeing (NCB, 2016) This resource aims to support discussion with children aged 0 – 7 and their parents/carers about health and wellbeing, and to facilitate their involvement in decision-making about local health structures, systems and practice.

Listening as a way of life – series of 8 leaflets.

Developed by NCB and YCVN, as part of the DfE funded Young Children's Voice's Network. Please note: whilst there is a lot of useful information on these leaflets and definitely worth a read, some of the references and websites are now out of date

- [Introduction to how and why we listen to young children](#)
- [Developing a listening culture](#)
- [Supporting parents and carers to listen](#)
- [Listening to babies](#)
- [Listening to young disabled children](#)

Resource Sheet 19

- [Leadership for listening](#)
- [Are equalities an issue?](#)
- [Listening and responding to young children's views on food](#)

The EYFS progress check at age two – A Know How Guide (NCB, 2012)

This guidance document was commissioned by the Department for Education and produced by the Early Childhood Unit (2012). The document re-emphasises core values around listening to young children, and makes explicit the need to take into account children's views in the review of their development.

Developing communication friendly spaces (Elizabeth Jarmen)

Further Reading

Alexander, R. (ed; 2009). Children, their World, their Education: final report and recommendations of the Cambridge Primary Review, Oxford: Routledge.

Clark, A. (2019) 'Quilting with the Mosaic approach: smooth and striated spaces in early childhood research', *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*; Vol 8(2), p. 236–251. Open Access <https://jecer.org/quilting-with-the-mosaic-approach-smooth-and-striated-spaces-in-early-childhood-research/>

Coleyshaw, L., Whitmarsh, J., Jopling, M. & Hadfield, M. (2012) Listening to children's perspectives: improving the quality of provision in early years settings: Part of the Longitudinal Study of Early Years Professional Status. (Full text) <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DfE-RR239b%20report.pdf>

Dex, S. & Hollingworth, K. (2012). Children's and young people's voices on their wellbeing. Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre, Institute of Education, London. (Full text) <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/CWRC-00108-2012>

Gray, C. & Harcourt, D. (eds, 2012). *The International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(3) 2012. Special Issue: Children's participatory research in action: challenges and dilemmas.

Lancaster and Kirby on behalf of Coram. (2010). *Listening to Young Children*, second edition. London: Open University Press. <http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/openup/listening/index.html>

La Valle, I., Payne, L. & Jelacic, H. (2012). The voice of the child in the child protection system. London: NCB Research Centre. (Full text) http://ncb.org.uk/media/756988/research_summary_7.pdf

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