Hearing the voice of the individual child within the safeguarding system

Recent reviews in Essex have highlighted that the child's voice, wishes, thoughts and feelings are not evident in the records that organisations hold.

Questions to ask the child

"Tell me what it's like for you on a normal day."

"Could you describe what would need to change to make things better?"

"Can you explain your thoughts about the situation?"

Questions to ask yourself

- How do you ensure the child's voice and experience is heard within multi-agency meetings such as team around the family, child in need, core groups?
- How do you as a practitioner remain curious?
- What are the barriers to the safeguarding system not hearing the voice of the child?
- What are the barriers to practitioners not hearing the voice of the child?

ESSEX Safeguarding Children BOARD

Non-verbal communication

An area of practice that has been highlighted in reviews is how non-verbal communication is captured and recorded. This is not just children with communication needs but also how people communicate non-verbally through their behaviours, non-verbal responses. Sometimes advocacy is necessary to help a child express their voice to professionals.

How do you record/make a note of non-verbal communication? What language do you use to describe children's behaviours?

Is there a learning and development offer in your organisation to support you to understand what is being communicated verbally and non-verbally?

Through many of the reviews that are carried out in Essex, what often stands out in the report is the lack of understanding what life was like for that child/ren. This suggests that agency notes/case recordings do not describe this.

Are there any good tools that you use to support children to voice their thoughts?
If you would like to share them let us know and we can think about how we do this.
escb@essex.gov.uk

ESSEX Safeguarding Children BOARD

The language we use

Are you aware of victim blaming language, labels and that how things are written may create a different picture/story to the one intended?

Is what is written in case records understood by colleagues or others working with the family?



Do you use clear, plain descriptive language in your conversations and written communication?



How do you ensure the voice of the child (verbal and non-verbal communication) is evident in your notes/records?



Take the time to talk about this within your teams and discuss how you can make practice changes and share learnings from any additional training you go on.

ESSEX Safeguarding Children BOARD

Did not bring

When a child is not brought to an appointment how is this recorded in your organisation?

Does your organisation use non-engagement as part of it's decision to close cases when the parent or the child is the service user?

Is there any consideration given to recording the specific reason why the case was closed e.g. unable to make contact by phone, tried a number of times, left voicemail, sent a text so that it is clear what attempts were made and why the decision to cease offering a service was made?

If you are working with the parent, is there any discussion about the potential impact on the child if the parent is not in contact with your service?

When a child is brought, do you record who brings the child to appointments and their relationship to the child? Is the child spoken to alone? Do you record who has parental responsibility?

ESSEX Safeguarding Children BOARD

Identity

Are you talking to children and families about their faith, beliefs, family traditions, identity and culture?

How does all the information and insights you gather about the child help you to build that picture of what life is like for that child?

- Learning from reviews has highlighted the need for all practitioners to talk to all children and families about their identity and family traditions. Conversations need to go beyond ethnicity or religion.

- As part of your organisation's assessment process do you ask all families about their identity and family traditions?

- How do you gain your knowledge around different faiths, cultures and beliefs?

- When you are working with a child and family do you ask what their pronouns are? NSPCC Gender identity webpage may be useful.

"If your best friend came to your home what would they find different and new in your home that doesn't happen at theirs?"

CULTURAL COMPETENCY TRAINING

1. Improving your cultural literacy when working with children and families
2. Protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse linked to faith or belief

ESSEX Safeguarding Children BOARD