

Pan Bedfordshire Voice and lived experience of children and young people guidance for practitioners.

1. Introduction

Sharing daily lived experiences of a child/young person and their family will enable practitioners working with and supporting them, to understand what it is like 'to be in their shoes' for a typical day. If practitioners can understand what life is actually like through their eyes, they will have a clearer picture of the needs that are or are not being met for the child/young person as well as the impact of practitioner concern for the child/young person. This in turn will support practitioners to develop effective and SMART care plans to ensure the family and practitioners can work together to improve the child/young person's lived experience. The daily lived experience of the child/young person and their family helps to inform assessments and reviews being undertaken for Team Around the Family, Child In Need of Care and Support and Child protection. For Children Looked After lived experiences will inform Care and Support Planning and reviews. It is important that the child/young person and their family understand why their lived experience is being captured, as well as what the information will be used for and who will have access to this. Having an honest and transparent approach will help the practitioners to build a trusted relationship with the child/young person and their family.

2. Definitions.

2.1 **Child and young person's voice** – listening and responding to the voices of children/young people is a duty of all practitioners. This links to Article 12 of the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#) which states that

“Children have the right to give their opinion freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.”

It is essential that their voice should not just be captured at the start of their journey when receiving support; their views should continually be sought, listened to, and acted upon in a timely and meaningful way throughout all our work with them. This not only refers to what children/young people say directly, but to many other aspects of their presentation. Children/young people cannot always put feelings into words, so listening includes seeing their behaviour as communication (often identified as verbal and non-verbal communication). Non-verbal communication is significant in all communication and for many is the most important aspect. Children/young people who are unable or unwilling to verbalise (e.g., due to young age, physical impairment or active decision) communicate through body language and actions about how they feel and think. For example, a young baby cannot say who she sees as her parent figure, but her reactions to her parents and other adults can show us how she feels towards particular individuals. A primary school pupil may not feel able to talk about what is going on for them, but they may be acting out in class or showing other behaviours that are out of character for them. Arguably for some cases of abuse practitioners are more likely to see this through changes in presentation and behaviour, as opposed to a child/young

person coming to them and saying, "I am being neglected". It means seeing their experiences from their point of view.

2.2 **Lived experience** – the voice of children/young people is more than just listening to them about their wishes. It is also about their feelings in what they see, feel, hear, and think about themselves, others, and the environment in which they are living, spaces and places that affect their physical, social, and emotional welfare. When working with children/young people practitioners need to not only listen to them, but also observe what their life has been like and what it is like right now. This includes capturing the thoughts of family members, trusted adults, carers, and other practitioners within their lives. It is essential that practitioners give regular feedback to children/young people in a format that is accessible and easy to understand. This must evidence that their wishes and feelings have been listened to and how they have influenced the decisions that affect their lives. Practitioners need to ensure that information is gathered with a purpose and shared in a coherent and consistent way.

2.3 **Participation** – is engaging, empowering, enabling, and equipping children, young people, and families with skills to have a voice and to be actively involved with decisions that affect them and the services they receive. This can be at different levels:

- Individually with children/young people – they will be listened to, and their voice captured about what their choices are, decisions about their life, in their plans, and assessments.
- As a family or group – all family members will have their voices captured either together or individually, to help shape their support, and influence decisions that affect them as a family or group.
- Service – involved in shaping services that they need or evaluating support they have had to help redesign services they are currently accessing. Enabling them to have an active role in decision making.
- Strategic – influencing and shaping the priorities for services with senior managers, supporting implementation, or evaluating how effective these have been.

3. Legislation

3.1 The **Children's Act 2004** emphasises the importance of speaking to the child/young person as part of any assessment. The importance of speaking to a child/young person and gathering their views has been consistently highlighted in lessons learned from serious case reviews. In too many cases local and national reviews have found:

- A child/young person was not seen frequently enough by the practitioners involved, nor was asked about their views or feelings.
- Agencies did not listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of the child/young person and who had important information to contribute.
- Parents and carers prevented practitioners from seeing and listening to the child/young person.
- Practitioners focused too much on the needs of the parents or adults, especially vulnerable adults and overlooked the implications for the child/young person.
- Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child/young person.

3.2 The **Equality Act 2010** which puts a responsibility on public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. This applies to the process of identification of need and risk faced by the individual child and the

process of assessment. No child or group of children must be treated any less favourably than others in being able to access effective services which meet their particular needs. To comply with the Equality Act 2010, safeguarding partners must assess and where appropriate put in place measures ahead of time to support all children and families to access services, overcoming any barriers they may face due to a particular protected characteristic. Legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 must be complied with, including putting special provision in place to support dialogue with children/young people who may not be able to convey their wishes and feelings as they may want to. This might include, for example, those who have communication difficulties, unaccompanied children, refugees, those children who are victims of modern slavery and/or trafficking and those who do not speak English or for whom English is not their first language.

3.3 The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) recognises that a child/young person is a victim of domestic abuse in their own right if they see, hear or experience the effects of domestic abuse and are related to either victim or perpetrator of the abuse, or either the victim or perpetrator of the abuse has parental responsibility for that child.

3.4 The [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) is statutory guidance that sets out the purpose of children's social care as existing to support children and families, to protect children by intervening decisively when they are at risk of harm and to provide care for those who need it, so they grow up and thrive with safety, stability, and love.

3.5 [Human Rights Act 1998](#);

3.6 [Children and Families Act 2004](#) (Children with SEND).

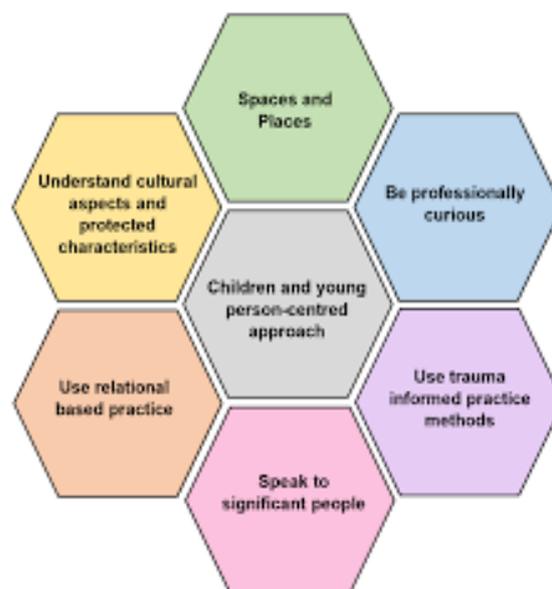
3.7 [Working Together 2023](#) (page 12) children have said that they need:

- **vigilance**: to have adults notice when things are troubling them.
- **understanding and action**: to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon
- **stability**: to be able to develop an ongoing stable relationship of trust with those helping them • **respect**: to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not.
- **information and engagement**: to be informed about, and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns, and plans.
- **explanation**: to be informed of the outcome of assessments, and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response.
- **support**: to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family.
- **advocacy**: to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views.
- **protection**: to be protected against all forms of abuse, exploitation, and discrimination, and the right to special protection and help if a refugee.

NSPCC Briefing: [Voice of the Child, Learning from Case Reviews.](#)

4. Principles

The principles of good practice when capturing the voice of children and young people and their lived experience are shown in this diagram.



5. What should practitioners do?

Key points to consider:

- **Who will have the conversation?** Identify which professional has a trusted relationship with the child and the care giver. NB: the conversations will be captured separately so the person feels able to share their lived experience from their own perspective.
- **How will the conversation be captured and recorded?** Example: through play, pens, and paper, using a resource sheet, recorded on a phone, during a journey with the person in the car etc.
- **Where will the conversation take place?** Ideally give the child and care giver the opportunity to choose where they would like to talk to you. Be mindful of the space being quiet with no interruptions, confidentiality whilst information is shared and comfortable.
- **When will the lived experience be captured?** Ideally give the child and care giver the opportunity to choose when is best for them to have the conversation. Consider factors such as not taking the child out of their favourite lesson or in front of peers, the time of day best for the care giver i.e. avoid when the children are just in from school or morning times if the mother has a poor sleep pattern and will be tired first thing in the morning.

There are many ways to ensure records include a strong sense of what life is like for an individual child/young person at a particular time.

- Talk to the child/young person about their life, likes & dislikes, hopes & dreams, worries & fears.
 - Talking to children/young people is dependent upon their age and level of understanding.
 - If children/young people can talk, there are a variety of ways of hearing their voice through direct work techniques such as 'signs of safety.'
 - Record what children/young people say in 'direct quotes' (e.g. 'I feel sad/happy/worried when...') as this is more powerful than something interpreted by a practitioner.
- Where possible, children/young people should be seen alone. Where a child requests to be seen with a trusted adult, this should be supported. As they may be inhibited to talk openly about their experiences in the presence of their parent or carer.
- Consider the location – children/young people may feel less inhibited about speaking if they are in a safe neutral setting.
- Even if children/young people are too young to speak it is still essential that workers convey a sense of what life is like for them.

- This can be done in a variety of ways – describe their presentation, how others interact with them and how they respond, comment on whether you consider they are functioning at a developmentally appropriate level.
- Children/young people may have means of ‘speaking’ other than verbal speech such as Makaton or signs and symbols; be creative.
 - Encourage them to draw or write about themselves and their lives.
 - Use a range of ideas; start off non-specific such as ‘draw your favourite food, favourite pop star’ then be more directive such as ‘draw where you live, who lives there, draw a picture of a happy day, a sad day, what do you wish was different, who is special’ etc.
- Describe a child/young person’s physical appearance, do they appear thin, pale, dark shadows under their eyes, listless, or do they appear curious, ‘smiley’ or active.
- Observe the interactions between a child/young person and their parents or carers – is there any difference in their interactions with other people.
- Describe the child/young person’s interactions with practitioners.
 - What is your hypothesis about this behaviour?
 - Does the child/young person appear relaxed, wary, or overly familiar?
 - Does the child/young person respond as you would expect a child/young person to respond in that situation?
- Ensure you include the views of other significant people in the child/young person’s life who may have contributions to make about their experiences.
 - for example, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, neighbours, and teachers
 - Research has found that these people often had a unique insight into the lives of children/young people, yet their views were given less weight than the views of practitioners.
- Include the views of fathers; they may have useful information to share, even if there are concerns about them.
- Use independent advocates to ascertain children/young people’s views as sometimes they can bring valuable context to their experiences.
- Encourage children/young people to participate in plans drawn up about them – they can do this directly by attending meetings or contribute by putting something in writing or drawing a picture or giving someone a ‘message’ from them.
- Triangulate and check information held with other practitioners, especially where a child is non/ pre-verbal, or where parents/ carers are speaking for children/ young people. EG: talk to Health Visitor/ School Nurse/ other practitioners who engage with the child/ family. [Pan Bedfordshire Information sharing guidance](#).

[NSPCC Poster: Let Children Know You are Listening](#)

6. Recording the voice of the child or young person

Regardless of the method or toolkit used, when capturing the voice of the child/young person, **recording** their voice needs to **provide everyone with a clear picture** and overview of **what life is like for them**.

Language is powerful, and it is critical when recording the voice of the child/young person to **write in a style that the child would understand, using their own language and vocabulary**. Capturing their voice **using direct quotes** and highlighting this in **bold font**

helps to ensure a true reflection of the conversation is recorded, rather than interpreting what was said.

Include the wider picture, not just the 'there and then' when capturing the lived experience of a child and young person. Describe in the recording their physical appearance, such as if they appear curious, 'smiley' and active, or thin, pale, with dark shadows under their eyes. This also includes capturing the environment in which they are living. As a trusted practitioner, consider in your recording their journey and **the impact for the child/young** person since you began working with them and during your work with them.

Always share back what you have captured with the child/young person, and record what the actions are. This may include feeding back to the child/young person in a format that has been agreed by them, for example 'you said, we did.' Providing children/young people with feedback that is fast, full, friendly, and followed up is key to a child/young person-centred approach resulting in children/young people feeling valued and listened to.

- Allow the child/young person to go at their pace and be led by them.
- Ask the child/young person what is important to them, what their worries are, and if more suitable ask them to draw their day to capture their voice.
- Support them to identify what help they would like, and who from, and make an appropriate referral.
- Ask their views on the support they receive – how is their life different? What would they like to happen? What has worked and not worked?
- Listen to and act on their views.
- Evidence what difference listening to the child/young person has made to your decisions or their support.
- Build trust, positive relationships and gain a better understanding of the child/young person to best support their needs.
- Help the child/young person explore who is important to them and what is most important to them within their lives.
- Identify which relationships are closer to them than others and why.
- Recognise and respond to trauma.
- Be curious when questioning and create a safe place to engage children/young people.
- Consider and ask if the child/young person would benefit from the support of an advocate or an interpreter.

7. Analyse from the recording what the child/young person's voice is telling you.

The child/young person's voice gives a clear overview of their feelings and wishes and their lived experience – helping you to develop a plan of support.

- The child/young person has been able share what is working well for them, what worries or concerns they have. The child/young person should be able to identify goals, hopes and strengths.
- The child/young person should be able to identify what has helped or not helped.
- The practitioner should be able to identify where support is required, and this should inform any next steps and/or future referrals/assessments, with clear actions and timeframes.

- Reference any emerging patterns or traits practitioners need to escalate.
- The practitioner should have a better knowledge and understanding of the child/young person.

8. Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines

8.1 The NSPCC have published Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines to help people who work with children/young people to balance the need to listen to their wishes with the responsibility to keep them safe. This can be downloaded from their website at learning.nspcc.org.uk/gillick-competency-and-fraser-guidelines.

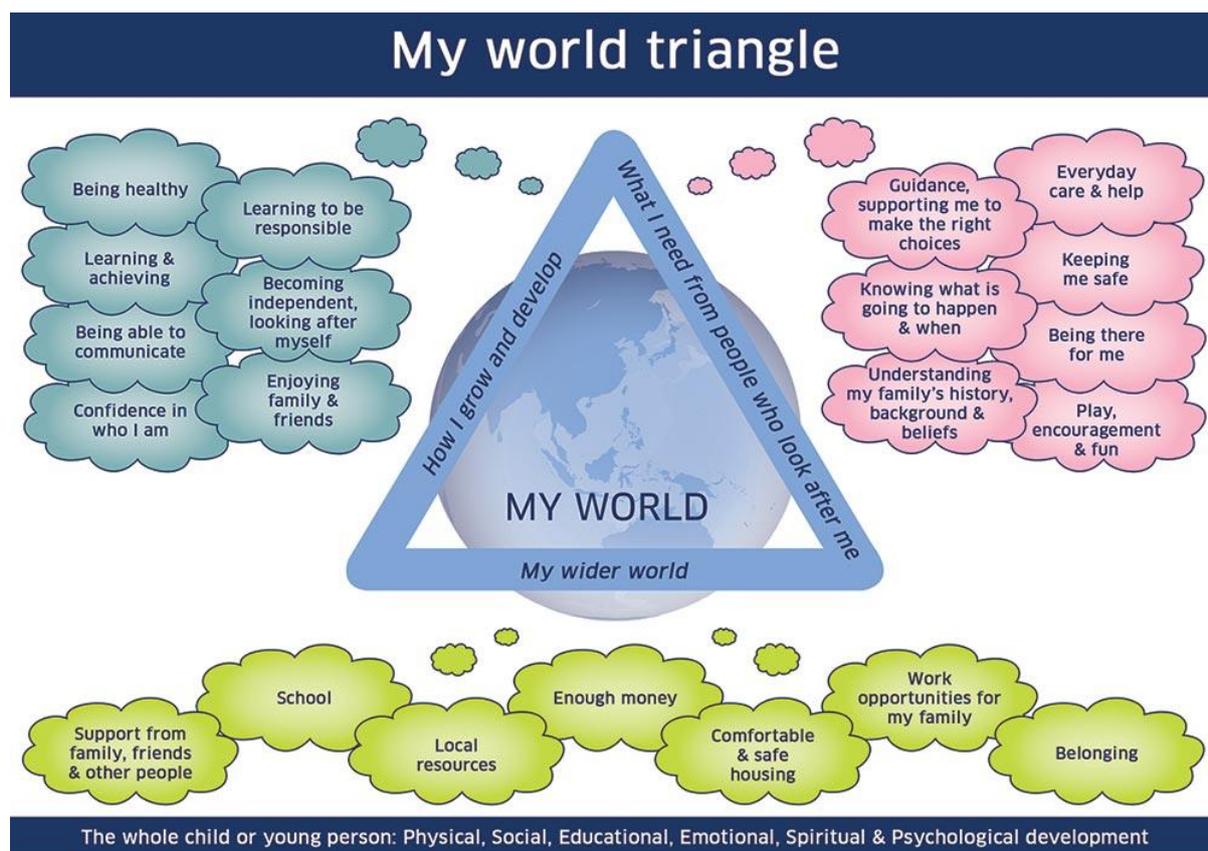
9. Help seeking behaviour.

9.1 Help seeking behaviour is a fundamental skill for all children/young people. This is something they learn through their early attachment relationships and through their contact with adults over time. It is a developmental skill that is essential for survival and needs support to develop; early experience of adversity, abuse and can have a negative effect. Practitioners recognising, responding to, and validating the help seeking behaviour of children/young people is essential.

9.2 Public inquiries, research, inspections, and case reviews have highlighted the way in which children/young people can become invisible to practitioners in their work across the safeguarding continuum. This is despite a legislative framework which makes it clear that children/young people should be fully involved in decisions about their lives and that their views should routinely be sought regarding their own understanding of their circumstance. Research highlights that there are many barriers for children/young people in asking practitioners for help and to talk about their worries and concerns so they can be addressed.

9.3 Children/young people also report that when they do ask for help, they are often not heard or their worries not acted upon. The consequence of this is that a recent report by the Children's Commissioner has found that only 1 in 8 victims of abuse felt able to ask for help. If children/young people are not responded to appropriately by practitioners, their concerns not listened to or addressed, this is likely to impact on their self-esteem and resilience; their short and long term developmental outcomes; and their ability to seek help about things that are worrying them and engage with future services that they need later in life.

9.4 A child/young person's developmental needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors are dimensions within the assessment framework triangle which practitioners utilise to help to 'assess' a child/young person's experiences and current home situation. The 'My World' triangle (below) builds on the assessment framework in a format which can be used directly with children/young people. A child/young person's developmental needs, parenting capacity and family and environmental factors are dimensions within the assessment framework triangle which practitioners utilise to help to 'assess' a child/young person's experiences and current home situation. The 'My World' triangle builds on the assessment framework in a format which can be used directly with children/young people.



10. Establishing a day in the life of all children/young people

10.1 Finding out about the lived experience of the child/young person.

Practitioners need to be confident and competent when working to safeguarding children/young people and their families. Research, locally and nationally, provides areas of practice which support finding out about 'the lived experience of the child/young person.' Some of the more salient ones listed here include, for practitioners to have:

10.2 **Professional Curiosity:** practitioners need to understand what is happening within a family rather than making assumptions or accepting things at face value. In other words, they need to **ask questions** and observe the child/young person's surroundings. Ask them 'What is life like for them living at home?' 'What is it like for the family?' 'How does the child/young person react to parents?'

10.3 **Respectful Uncertainty:** A term initially used by Lord Laming (2003) [Victoria Climbié Serious Case Review and for Baby P] meaning that practitioners must remain sceptical of the explanations, justifications or excuses they may hear. Practitioners should always **'check out'** with other agencies and sources of information about what is being said.

10.4 Marion Brandon et al (2016) added further elements that practitioners need to:

- Be aware of 'silent' ways of telling through verbal and non-verbal emotional and behavioural changes in children/young people.
- Explore creative ways of engaging with children/young people with regards to their age, communication skills and personal history to enable them to share their experiences.

- Follow up concerns within families by ensuring each child/young person is given an appropriate opportunity to talk.
- Practitioners need to recognise young people aged 16-17 years as still being vulnerable and to use appropriate children's services and follow safeguarding procedures.

Both Brandon and Munro advocate that practitioners need to be 'attuned to the child/young person's world' and to pay attention not only to what the child/young person says but also what they are **not saying**.

11. Cultural Competence as part of the child/young person's lived experience

11.1 Cultural competence is being respectful of and responsive to the beliefs, practices and cultural and linguistic needs of a child/young person and their family. Practitioners should not make assumptions about a family/child/young person and as part of 'informed practice' should be confident to ask about what their life experiences are to meet their needs and to provide the best service.

11.2 National and Local serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews have shown that practitioners can make the wrong stereotypical assumptions and not check out all available avenues of information. For example, in some communities it may be the norm for a 6-year-old to be outside without supervision. Practitioners need to consider the context, expectations but what are the risks for the child/young person.

11.3 Newham LSCB Serious Case Review '[Chris](#)' August 2018.

"It is acknowledged and understood that culture, and safeguarding concerns, exist in all communities; specific reference is made to the need for cultural competency when safeguarding children of Caribbean heritage as this is how Chris, and his family, identify and during the review process they themselves made reference to some of the cultural and value differences that existed between the family and professional approaches. Best practice acknowledges, explores, reflects on, understands, and responds sensitively to these differences."

"Despite Chris being described as a chatty young man, Chris's "voice" was rarely truly heard and even more rarely adequately responded to. It took real courage for Chris to tell his mum how scared he was of his 'elders' and how little choice he felt he had. It also took courage to subsequently explore this with professionals. Chris told practitioners where he felt unsafe and still, he was asked to attend those areas for professional appointments, albeit with additional safety measures in place. The courage that it took Chris to confide these things to adults cannot be underestimated."

12. Resources for practitioners

There are a range of tools that can be used to capture the views of a child/young person, different tools appropriate for different ages, level of need or understanding.

There are no factors including age, understanding or level of need that should be a barrier to capturing the views of a child/young person as part of an assessment.

It is recommended that an assessment be undertaken with all family members. However, if a child/young person has a level of competence that enables them to understand the assessment process, an assessment can be undertaken with them without parental consent.

Children/young people should also be given the opportunity to attend and contribute to a 'team around the family' type meeting where appropriate. As the UNCRC states it is a child's right to be involved on decisions that impact them. Should they not attend or not wish to attend, their wishes, thoughts and feelings should still be shared. This can be provided in any format including in written or picture form. Tools which can support in the gathering of this information can also be found in this resource. Any work that reflects their voice should also be submitted as an attachment alongside an assessment or review.

The following are aimed at Social Workers but can be used by other agencies. If you are aware of any other tools that can be shared, then please let us know LSCB@bedford.gov.uk

[NSPCC Podcast: Voice of the Child in Social Work](#)

Children/young person's Participation Toolkit for Social Workers (activities & worksheets);

This resource contains various activities, worksheets and templates assisting social workers and early help workers to involve children/young people in the process of assessments, intervention planning as well as conducting reviews in a positive, supportive, and enabling way. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/childrens-participation-toolkit-for-social-workers/

'Say it your own way': worksheets facilitating children/young person's participation in assessment;

'Say it your own way' has 40+ engaging worksheets facilitating children/young person's participation in assessment. The worksheets help workers to ascertain children/young person's daily routine, likes, dislikes, feelings, wishes as well as their views on their family, friends, helpers, home, neighbourhood, school etc. The booklet also includes two examples of how to explain assessment in a child/young person -friendly manner and is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at; www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/say-way-40-worksheets-facilitating-childrens-participation-assessment/

'Animal talk' activity: using animal pictures to get to know children/young person and discuss their views and feelings;

This tool contains 24 pictures of various animals and suggestions how they can be used to get to know children/young person and discuss their views and feelings in an interactive and fun way. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/animal-talk-activity-using-animal-pictures-get-know-children-discuss-views-feelings/

Getting to know a child/young person's routine activity tool; This tool supports social workers to gain an understanding of a child/young person's daily routine in an engaging way. The document contains 40+ individual slips with various activities/feelings which a child/young person is asked to sort out into three piles – every day, sometimes or never,

depending on how often they engage in this activity/have this particular feeling. The resource is available from the **social workers toolbox** website at www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/getting-know-childs-routine-tool/

Culturagram: A culturagram is a family assessment tool used in the practice of social work which was first introduced by Dr Elaine Congress. Find out more on the websites socialworkculturagram.weebly.com/culturagrams and socialworkculturagram.weebly.com/example

Autism Toolbox website: The Autism Toolbox website is an online resource to support the inclusion of children/young people with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream education services. As well as introducing and describing some of the more common challenges a pupil with autism might face, it provides real life case studies from Scottish schools and practical examples of supports that practitioners can translate and use in their own school setting. It also signposts to other useful websites - visit the website at www.autismtoolbox.co.uk.

A useful resource to help practitioners when talking about the role of social care and also to help promote children/young person's voice/ feelings/ wishes within the decisions made about them [An Illustrated Guide to the Children's Social Care National Framework](#).

This following tool supports practitioners to gain a good understanding of a child/young person daily routine. It should help to identify positives or strengths in the child/young person's daily routine, as well highlighting areas where there may be concerns. The sheet is also available from the [social workers toolbox website](#).

Question	Factors to Consider
Do you get yourself up in the morning?	<p>Is the child/young person expected to get themselves up? Is there a regular routine or does it depend on the motivation of the carer? Does the child/young person have to take responsibility for carers and/or siblings in the morning? Is an alarm clock/mobile phone used to make sure the child/young person is up in time for school /play school etc?</p>
Do you have anything to eat?	<p>Is there usually food in the house? What is available to the child/young person? Does an adult/sibling or the child/young person themselves take responsibility for preparing breakfast? Is the child/young person given money to buy something on way to school? If so, what do they tend to buy?</p>
What happens about getting dressed?	<p>Are clothes readily available, clean and in a good state of repair? Does the child/young person have to find their own clothes? Do they have their own clothing? What happens about washing, etc?</p>

	<p>Does the child/young person wash and brush their teeth in the morning? Is this appropriately supervised? Are there facilities available, for example tooth brush?</p>
<p>What happens if you are going to school?</p>	<p>How does the child/young person get to school? Who is responsible for getting the child/young person to school? Is the child/young person responsible for other children/young people?</p>
<p>What happens at school?</p>	<p>What is the nature of the child/young person's relationships with their peers, teachers, and support staff? What do they enjoy at school? What do they find difficult? What makes them happy and sad at school? Do they have friends? Are they bullied? What do they do at playtime?</p>
<p>What happens if it is the weekend or school holidays?</p>	<p>Is the child/young person expected to look after other children/young people and/or their parent/carer? Are they expected to do errands, etc. for the carer? How do they spend their time? Do they have any friends? Are they left unsupervised or allowed to undertake inappropriate activities? What happens about food?</p>
<p>What happens after school?</p>	<p>Are they collected from school and, if so, on time? Do they stay for after school activities? Are they responsible for other children/young people? Do they have friends that they see? What is the journey home from school like? (Consider opportunities for bullying etc) Is there anyone at home when they arrive back? What happens when they get home? Do they have any caring responsibilities? Is food available when the child/young person gets home from school?</p>
<p>What happened in the evening?</p>	<p>Is there food available? What kind of food does the child/young person eat in the evening? What does the child/young person enjoy eating best? How often do they have this? Does anyone prepare an evening meal? If so, does the family eat together? If not, does the child/young person get their own food and/or get food for others? When does the child/young person usually have their last meal/snack?</p>

	<p>What happens if the child/young person says they are hungry?</p> <p>Does the child/young person spend their time watching TV?</p> <p>Do they go out - where and with whom?</p> <p>Does the child/young person enjoy games and toys, which ones? Do they have toys?</p> <p>What do the carers do in the evening? What does the child/young person think about their activities?</p> <p>Does anyone talk to the child/young person or give them any attention?</p> <p>Is the child/young person left alone or expected to supervise other children/young people in the evenings?</p>
<p>What happens at bedtime?</p>	<p>Does the child/young person have a bedtime?</p> <p>Who decides when the child/young person goes to bed?</p> <p>Where does the child/young person sleep?</p> <p>Do they change their clothes before bed?</p> <p>Do they have a wash and brush their teeth?</p> <p>Does the child/young person get disturbed? E.g. carers making a noise, child/young person sleeping on settee.</p> <p>Is the child/young person left alone at night and/or expected to look after other children/young people?</p>