**Key questions for social workers**

**Methods**

Suitable for self–directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor.

Learning Outcome

Review how you develop relationships with children to ensure their views are taken into account.

**Time Required**

Two sessions of 45 minutes – one to review the questions below and make actions, and one as follow-up.

**Process**

Thinking of your current approach, answer the following questions:

* How do you ensure that children’s rights are upheld?
* How can you be confident that you have a good knowledge and understanding of child development and children’s communication at different ages? (see Briefing 3 on Child development theory and research)
* How do you make sure you have a sound understanding of the impact of maltreatment on children’s development and communication? (see Briefings 4 and 5 on Early brain development and maltreatment and Early childhood trauma and therapeutic parenting)
* What steps do you take to build a trusting relationship with each child?
* What steps do you take to ensure opportunities to talk with each child on their own?
* How do you listen actively to the child’s wishes and feelings?
  + What steps do you take to ensure that your ways of engaging with children and young people are age appropriate?
* How do you ensure that the child is provided with information in a sensitive and timely manner?
* How do you provide support to the child regarding their identity (including life story work) and contact with birth family?
* How do you deal with complaints made by children?
  + How do you know whether this approach is effective?
* What steps do you take to seek out and take part in relevant training and development opportunities to address gaps in knowledge in relation to communicating with children?

## Key questions for social work managers

**Methods**

Suitable for self–directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor.

Learning Outcome

Review how you support your staff to effectively communicate with children and young people, and identify possible areas for improvement.

**Time Required**

One session of 45 minutes

**Process**

Thinking of the systems and processes currently in place, answer the following questions:

* How do you use regular supervision to ensure that social workers are using a range of methods to communicate with children?
* What systems are in place to manage caseloads so that social workers have sufficient time to spend with children and birth parents?
* What systems are in place for effectively managing complaints made by children against carers?
  + How do you know whether these are effective?
* What steps do you take to actively encourage social workers to seek out and engage in relevant training and development in this area?

## Key questions for independent Reviewing Officers

**Methods**

Suitable for self–directed learning or reflection with a colleague or supervisor.

Learning Outcome

Review current systems for ensuring children’s wishes and feelings are considered in care planning, and identify any gaps or areas for improvement.

**Time Required**

Two sessions of 45 minutes - one to review the questions below and make actions, and one as follow-up.

**Process**

Thinking of your current approach, answer the following questions:

* How do you monitor each child’s care plan to ensure their rights, wishes and feelings have been considered?
* What steps do you take to ensure that the child’s wishes and feelings are reviewed on a regular basis?
* How do you bring areas of poor practice in relation to engaging children in families to the attention of senior managers?

## Case study for social workers– Dillon

**Methods**

Suitable for a small group discussion. Individuals will need a copy of the case study for Dillon.

**Learning Outcome**

To identify appropriate communications styles and methods to support Dillon.

**Time Required**

30 minutes for discussion plus 15 minutes for feedback

**Process**

Give each group a hand-out of the case study for Dillon and ask each group to appoint someone to feedback their ideas.

Ask the group to read the case study and answer the following questions.

1. What communication methods would you consider using with Dillon to make sure that he is able to express his wishes and feelings, given his developmental delay?
2. How will you support the foster carers in managing Dillon if he becomes upset about seeing his birth mother?
3. What steps would you take to gather information effectively from Dillon’s birth mother?
4. How would you convey this information to Dillon?
5. How will you support Dillon if contact goes ahead?

## Case study for foster carers and adopters– Dillon

**Methods**

Suitable for a small group discussion. Individuals will need a copy of the case study for Dillon.

**Learning Outcome**

To identify appropriate communications styles and methods to support Dillon.

**Time Required**

30 minutes for discussion plus 15 minutes for feedback

**Process**

Give each group a hand-out of the case study for Dillon and ask each group to appoint someone to feedback their ideas.

Ask the group to read the case study and answer the following questions.

1. What communication methods would you consider using with Dillon to make sure that he is able to express his wishes and feelings, given his developmental delay?
2. How will you support Dillon?

**Emotional work with young people**

**Methods**

Suitable for a facilitated workshop.

**Learning Outcomes**

* To develop awareness of the importance of listening and the qualities/skills required to listen effectively.
* To understand the impact of past experience on the ability to listen.
* To develop knowledge and understanding of how to talk with young people about the possibility of seeking additional help.
* To develop an appreciation of both the carer’s relationship with the child or young person and that of others.

**Time Required**

90minutes including:

* 30 minutes individual and paired work,
* 30 minutes debriefing,
* 30 minutes group discussion.

**Process**

**Introduction**

*Placements were less likely to disrupt when carers…were rated as able to respond to the young people in relation to their emotional rather than their chronological age (for example by providing regular opportunities for play and nurture appropriate to a much younger child to meet earlier unmet needs) and the young people said that their carers listened to them and enabled them to talk about their past adverse experiences and current concerns.*

Foster care relies on large quantities of emotional labour. Children and young people in foster placements may never have experienced secure relationships. They greatly appreciate placements where they feel that they are accepted and where others respond warmly to them. Warm close relationships with other adults are also likely to benefit them greatly.

Fostering Now: Messages from Research (Sinclair, 2005: 80)

**Activity set up**

In this exercise, participants are asked to remember details of a hurtful personal experience (guided to recall something that feels safe to remember and share) and then to take turns to speak about it with a partner and to listen to their partner’s experience. (Some groups may prefer to start with exchanging ordinary experiences before moving on to discuss a hurtful experience). Participants are then asked to consider what made it easier or more difficult to talk to a partner about their hurtful experience and what made it easier or more difficult to listen.

**Part 1** (30 minutes)

1. Individual work (5 minutes): ask participants to remember an experience in their life, perhaps as a child:

* When they were emotionally hurt.
* When in their life did this happen?
* What happened?

1. Working with a partner, ask the participants to take turns to discuss the following:

* Did they tell anyone about what happened?
  + If so, who and when?
* Why did they choose to tell that person?
* What was that person’s response?
* Did telling the person affect their relationship with her or him?
  + If so, how?
  + If they didn’t tell anyone, why not?
* What did they fear might happen?
* If they didn’t tell in words, how did they express their feelings?
  + Did they want people to notice their feelings?
* How do they think this experience has affected their ability to:
* Talk about their feelings and experiences
* Help others talk to them about their feelings and experiences?

**Part 2: de-briefing** (30 minutes)

Lead a discussion with the whole group.

Ask participants the questions below about how it felt to talk about their experience and to listen to their partner’s experience. Move the questions on and around the group, drawing out key points. Try to draw out learning points relating to:

* The skills required to listen (verbal and non-verbal).
* The beneficial effect of listening to and containing disclosure about difficult experiences.
* The emotional blocks we may have to listening.
* The importance of the relationship between speaker and listener.
* The rights of people (including children) to disclose only what they feel comfortable and/or ready to disclose and to whom they choose.
* The role of adults in providing support.

**Questions**

* How easy or difficult was it for participants to talk about their experience?
* How did the response of the person they told affect how easy it was to talk?
* How easy was it to listen?
* Did listeners have particular feelings about what was being said?
* When listening, how can one recognise when there is a need to refer on, or when a professional counsellor might be beneficial?
* What made it hard to listen?
* Do participants think this showed in their body language?
* What blocked listening?
* Summarise the factors that affect how easy or hard it is to listen to someone talk about difficult or hurtful experiences.

**Part 3: possible issues to draw out of the discussion** (30 minutes)

Continue the discussion with the whole group drawing out other key issues. For example:

* Children have a right to talk to someone with whom they feel comfortable.
* It is important that counsellors are not seen as the only people with whom young people can talk. Carers (or others) who may feel burdened with confidences and uncertain about how to respond need to be able to talk through the issues with someone with the appropriate skills.
* Foster carers and social workers need information about resources that are available locally. One task could be to find out if local counselling services will offer short-term assessments, support and advice to carers, as well as long-term counselling for young people in stable placements.
* Is it sometimes the case that young people find it easier to bring up a difficult subject with someone with whom they are not living, but then find it useful to talk things through with their carers?
* Are there skills-based workshops that could be organised to help carers and young people make the most of their relationship?
* What support do carers have and need in order to develop or use these skills?
* How would participants explore with a teenager the possibility of seeing a counsellor?
* What would they do if the teenager said they would rather talk to them or to someone who was unqualified?