



One minute guide

Talking with Children and Young People



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We know our children well: principles for building and maintaining relationships with children and young people

- Children and young people have important things to say and listening to them helps to keep them safe.
- They need safe, welcoming spaces which are right for them to be able to share what is on their minds.
- Strong relationships are built on honesty, trust and respect.
- Every child communicates in their own way – through talking, playing, drawing, signing, or using other tools or technologies. Sometimes observing a younger child while they play will tell a story.
- Children should feel heard, understood and believed. Workers need to be confident, kind and attentive.
- Each child and young person is unique, with their own thoughts, feelings, hopes and dreams. Their culture and experiences help shape the way they grow, learn and build resilience.

Doing direct work with children

When practitioners talk to children and young people one-to-one this is often called 'direct work'. It needs specific skills that include: active listening, sensitivity and an ability to make quick connections. This also includes learning about the child's identity and what matters to them. Workers should be clear about the purpose of the conversations and how they plan to work together. Being creative is encouraged, and having a toolkit ready—like pens, paper, small toys, puzzles, or playdough—can make the experience more engaging and accessible especially for younger children or those with additional needs or disabilities.

Older children and young people may choose to communicate using different resources. Ways to engage them should suit their needs and abilities, such as animations, videos, electronic devices like phones or tablets, conversations or games. Using a YouTube clip or app may spark an interest or help to share information. With all children and young people relationships should be built on honesty and respect.

Careful consideration should be given to where is best to speak with each child, according to their age and wishes: children have told us that they can feel stigmatised being withdrawn from classes in school. They should feel safe and comfortable in a space where they will not be overheard.

Why do practitioners do direct work?

- **To listen and understand:** Direct work gives children a safe space to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It helps practitioners understand what life is like from the child's point of view.
- **To build trust and connection:** Spending time one-to-one helps children feel valued and builds a relationship where they can express themselves openly.
- **To support identity and strengths:** Practitioners learn about what matters to the child—their interests, culture, relationships, and strengths—so they can support them in ways that feel meaningful. This can form part of life story work to help them understand their journey.
- **To help children make sense of their world:** Through play, conversation and creative tools, children can explore their feelings, understand changes in their lives, and develop coping strategies as well as process traumatic events.
- **To inform decisions and planning:** What children share during direct work helps shape care plans, support strategies, and decisions that affect their lives.
- **To empower children:** Direct work helps children feel involved in their own journey. It gives them a voice and helps them understand their rights and choices.

'Time For Me' Tools for practitioners in Nottinghamshire:

Nottinghamshire Children and Families have developed their own practice toolkit: 'Time for me' tools. This is the place to find links to principles, training, tools and resources that will help make connections with children and young people of various ages and abilities. There is an expectation that all time spent with children will be carefully planned. If practitioners need support with this they can speak with their line managers, a practice consultant or advanced practitioner.

Further Resources:

1. Tree of Life is a tool to enable someone (adult or child) talk about the past in a non-traumatising way, help to build a positive identity and find people who can have a positive influence [Tree of Life - YouTube](#) and [The Tree of Life: A Simple Exercise](#)
2. Free resources to use with parents and children www.socialworkerstoolbox.com
3. More information about trauma <https://beaconhouse.org.uk>
4. More information about safeguarding [NSPCC | The UK children's charity | NSPCC](#)

Additional resources for Nottinghamshire County Council practitioners:

1. [We Know Our Children Well - Relationships and Direct Work With Children.](#)
2. Nottinghamshire Children and Families practice guidance: [Virtual and Remote practice | Nottinghamshire County Council Intranet \(nottsc.gov.uk\)](#)