

# ENGAGING CHILDREN'S VOICES IN THE EARLY YEARS

## PRACTICE GUIDELINES



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges Elders and Traditional Owners of the lands and seas across Australia. The Brotherhood of St Laurence developed Children's Voices Practice Guide for use across programs that engage children.

**Brotherhood of St Laurence**

Level 1, 219 Johnston Street

Fitzroy VIC 3065

Australia

**p** 61 3 9445 2400

**e** [hippyaustralia@bsl.org.au](mailto:hippyaustralia@bsl.org.au)

**w** [hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au](http://hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au)

Copyright © Brotherhood of St Laurence 2020

The author of this report, and creator of the Engagement framework is Sharon Sparks.

BSL also acknowledges the leadership of Sharon Sparks in developing the BSL's Voice of the Child practice over the past four years. The HIPPY Australia Team within the BSL and the HIPPY Network is supporting this action research.

The funding for the development of the Children's Voice practice was provided through the Warrawong Foundation and the Australian Department of Social Services.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges the support of The Association of Graduates in Early Childhood Studies (AGECS) and the Australian Government in creating this Guide.

The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or officers of the Department of Social Services.

# CONTENTS

## 01 INTRODUCTION

1a. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989).	6
1b. Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (ELYF) for Australia (DEEWR, 2009)	6
1c. National Quality Standards in Early Childhood Education and Care	7
1d. State legislation and National child safety principles (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018)	7

## 02 ENGAGING CHILDREN'S VOICES: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

What is agency?	9
Why we engage	9
Agency and participation	9
Treseder – Degrees of participation	10
Lundy's model of participation	11
Ethical considerations	12
Duty of care	13
Transparent process	13
Voluntary participation	13
Inclusivity and cultural considerations	13
Relevant participation	14
Safe (environment and risk sensitive)	14
Creating a safe environment	14
Privacy	14

---

## 03 FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGING CHILDREN'S VOICES

Plan	18
Train	20
Engage	22
Analyse	25
Recommendations	26
Feedback and implementation	27

## 04 ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN TOOLKIT

HIPPY toolkit	30
Recruitment	30
Tutor training	31
Home visits	32
Group meetings	33
Quality assurance	34
Templates for feedback	35
Appendix A: Feedback from your child: home visits template	36
Appendix B: Survey for families	37
Appendix C: Survey for children	38
Appendix D: What should I do if a child discloses?	39

## 05 CONCLUSION 41

## 06 REFERENCES 43

# 01

## Introduction

• INTRODUCTION • INTRODUCTION • INTRODUCTION • INTRODUCTION • INTRODUCTION • INTRODUCTION • INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

---

Children's human rights and voice must be considered in the development and implementation of programs that will effect their lives and opportunities. Both internationally and in Australia, conventions, laws and frameworks mandate that the rights, agency and voice of children be heard. The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) is committed to ensuring the voice of the child is heard and respected in operational practice and in the delivery of services and programs involving or impacting on them.

Since 2016, BSL has focussed on engagement with children to improve service delivery and outcomes for children and families. The aim of this guide is to provide best practice principles to ensure that the practice of listening to children is embedded into BSL programs. BSL is also seeking to encourage other children and family programs to use this guide to ensure children have agency, their voices are heard and influence on operational practice.

**'Children are key informants and experts on their own lives and, indeed, are our best source of advice for matters affecting them.'**

*(MacNaughton, Smith & Laurence, 2003).*

This guide will provide a framework that outlines the steps required to meaningfully engage with young children. It will also provide practical tips and tools to embed children's voices and child agency in your program.

BSL in developing this guide has utilised its flagship children's program - HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) to undertake action research required to conform with four mandates detailed below and provide a practical example of practice guides application including a toolkit. While this guide has a focus on Australian requirements, BSL believes it has international application.

## **1A. UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD (UNCRC) (1989).**

Australia ratified the convention of the rights of the child in 1991. As part of its obligations, Australia committed to the principles of the convention. At BSL, we take this obligation seriously and work hard to ensure that children have their human rights; and in relation to this guide, have a voice. Article 12, states that 'Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account'.

## **1B. BELONGING, BEING AND BECOMING: THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK (EYLF) FOR AUSTRALIA (DEEWR, 2009)**

The EYLF is aligned to the UNCRC and supports children's rights in early years services with particular emphasis on the following outcomes:

- Children have a strong sense of identity.
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
- Children are confident and involved learners.
- Children are effective communicators.

## 1C. NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

These Quality standards establish the baseline for the provision of quality services in early childhood education and care. They state:

- Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and to influence events and their world (Quality Area 1)

**Further information for each state can be found here:**

<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/australian-child-protection-legislation>

**National child safe principles:**  
<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights/national-principles-child-safe-organisations>

## 1D. STATE LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL CHILD SAFETY PRINCIPLES (AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, 2018)

At a federal and state level, governments have enacted various legislation to ensure children are always kept safe and their rights are protected in early years work. When engaging with children under the age of 18, you must comply with your Australian state or territory's relevant legislation and National Child Safe Principles. See links below for further information.

**ACT:** Children and Young People Act 2008

**NSW:** Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)

**NT:** Care and Protection of Children Act 2007 (NT)

**QLD:** Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)

**SA:** Children's Protection Act 1993 (SA)

**TAS:** Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997 (Tas)

**VIC:** Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)

**WA:** Children and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)

• ENGAGE • ENGAGE • ENGAGE • ENGAGE • ENGAGE • ENGAGE

# 02

## Engaging children's voices: why it's important

Deliberately involving children in decision making can have a significant effect on things like service delivery, local council matters, government or world issues that affect them, as well as their personal agency.

## What is agency?

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) defines agency as 'being able to make choices and decisions to influence events and to have an impact on one's world'. Children should be active participants at home and in the community. This means they can make age appropriate decisions, have some control over their lives, learn to get along with others, and express themselves in a range of ways. This also means we value their contributions and dignity as a person, listening to their thoughts and feelings.

## Why we engage

All children and young people have a right to participate in decision-making about their own life. This is not limited by ability, age, ethnic background, personal circumstances or behaviour. (G Force, 2015). Article 12, of the UNCRC states that '**Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account**'.

Allowing children to have a voice fosters the development and understanding of:

- social development,
- democracy,
- independence,
- resilience, and
- self-esteem and confidence.

Agency fosters a sense of empowerment and ownership, and most importantly it aligns with their rights.

Children's participation can also lead to outcomes for services. It can:

- Increase service effectiveness (improve policy, practice and service);
- Increase attendance and usage;
- Build a culture of child safety and listening to children within the organisation;
- Build staff development; and
- Build stronger connections within communities.

*Clark & Moss (2001)*

## Agency and participation

Agency underpins participation. In the context of children's voices, what do we mean by participation? Participation is a deliberate process put into place giving children the opportunity to express their views, influence decision making and achieve change.

While there are multiple models that describe different participation methods, two that are relevant and user-friendly are **Treseder's 'Degrees of Involvement'** model and the **Lundy Model of Child Participation**. Treseder's model examines different degrees of participation while Lundy examines the considerations necessary for effective participation. Both are important to understand in the context of quality children's participation practices.

## Treseder – Degrees of participation



Treseder's model demonstrates non-hierarchical levels of participation which promotes the view that a single type of participation is not necessarily better than another—it all depends on the situation. This model can be also used as an assessment tool to reflect on how participatory an activity was.

*Treseder acknowledges his work was also influenced by David Hodgson's *Participation of Children and Young People in Social Work* (1995).*

## Lundy's model of participation



The Lundy model of participation 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. Lundy's model informs the decision-maker of the important aspects to keep in mind when planning children's participation.

We suggest using a mix of both models. When planning participatory activities, we assess what level of participation is required (Tresseder), then factor in Lundy's quadrants to ensure we are acting ethically, respecting children's rights and being inclusive and transparent throughout.

## Ethical considerations

As early years professionals, we have a responsibility to ensure our engagement methods are safe, respectful and genuine. Ethics can be a daunting word for many professionals, but simply put, it is about being considerate and safe. We always want to respect children and respond in ways that empower and maintain their dignity. Some examples of everyday ethical behaviour look like:

- using names properly;
- respecting how children see the world;
- being kind and empathetic;
- role modelling good behaviour;
- stopping and listening carefully;
- using eye contact; and
- sitting and making time for a child.

**'When determining whether a decision or action is in the best interests of the child, the need to protect the child from harm, to protect his or her rights and to promote his or her development (taking into account his or her age and stage of development) must always be considered'.**

*Victorian Children Youth and Families Act, 2005.*

**When working with young children in community services, always consider the: Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics:**  
<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-of-ethics/code-of-ethics-core-principles/>

**and the Australian Community Workers Code of Ethics:**  
<http://www.acwa.org.au/resources/ethics-and-standards>

## DUTY OF CARE

Duty of care is a general legal duty on all individuals and organisations to avoid causing injury to persons. It requires everything ‘reasonably practicable’ to be done to protect the health and safety of others at the workplace. The principles of duty of care are supported by the Early Childhood Association (ECA) Code of Ethics as well as external service standards including the National Quality Framework. When ethically engaging with children’s voices the following principles should be followed:

## TRANSPARENT PROCESS

Children and parents need to be informed of any process whereby you are seeking their child’s participation:

- use age appropriate language;
- outline the purpose of the activity (why you want to hear their opinion on such matters);
- outline how the activity will work: what role will they have, will the staff have; and
- ensure consent forms for both child and parent are in simple language and are age appropriate (pictures help on child friendly consent forms).

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Children’s participation should always be voluntary without any pressure to express their views. As you would with any adult who is offering feedback or opinions, you would give them information and time to decide whether they wish to participate and consent.

Communicate to children that they can decide to leave the process at any time.

## INCLUSIVITY AND CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Participation must be inclusive and avoid any type of discrimination. It is important to understand the environment children have come from and what they deem as safe and accessible spaces.

- When engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, seek advice from the local community, elders or family members about the best ways to be culturally safe, relevant and respectful. Ensure you have translators, if required, and tools (stories, surveys, toys etc) that are culturally relevant.
- When engaging with children whose first language is not English, ensure you have translators and use tools (stories, surveys, toys etc) that are culturally relevant.
- Ensure the space you are working in is accessible and suitable for all children (mobility, sign language, developmentally appropriate, less stimulation for children with autism etc).
- Ensure all language is respectful, inclusive of all races, sex, gender, age, sexual identity and religion.

### RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN

**When undertaking research where children’s participation is required, an ethics application must be submitted to ensure the safety of the methods and of the children.**

**Consult your provider’s research centre or seek advice from an academic body.**

## RELEVANT PARTICIPATION

Children are the experts of their lives. When engaging with children, participation should build on their personal knowledge: knowledge of their lives, their communities and issues that affect them.

## SAFE (ENVIRONMENT AND RISK SENSITIVE)

Engaging with young children requires a safe environment; an inviting physical space; sensitive trained staff; and developmentally appropriate activities. This will support children to voice their views and communicate openly.

## CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

A safe environment is a place where children feel comfortable and safe to play, talk, or relax. A safe environment is also a place that is safe from neglect, physical, sexual or emotional harm or abuse. When engaging with children's voices, the following ideas will assist in establishing a safe environment:

- Using a space that children are familiar with (community centre, playgroup venue, library etc);
- Ensure the space is inviting (age appropriate furniture, cushions, toys, etc) and free of any hazards;
- Where possible, having familiar people involved will assist in supporting children's comfort;
- Always talk to children at their level (avoid standing or sitting above them);
- Show interest and play or read together to build a bond of trust;
- Create boundaries (children thrive on boundaries) creating group rules together instils a sense of ownership;

- Listen intently: children have amazing things to say. Creating a sense of safety and trust can open the door to protect them from harm.

Sometimes, children may express comments or views that are considered high risk or concerning, particularly children from vulnerable communities. This is a voice we must hear. If a child feels safe enough to confide in us, they want to be heard. We need to be the advocate for the child and see things from their perspective. Children's rights are paramount here.

Adults always need to take appropriate actions to provide protection to children. You should have safety protocols in your plans, and trained and knowledgeable staff available who can assist if a statement is made that you are concerned about. See Appendix D for tips that can assist you if a child discloses abuse.

Issues such as child protection have both legal and ethical implications. Please follow your state's legislation and manage this situation with respect for all involved. Making a child protection notification is meeting the legal responsibilities of duty-of-care, and it also has ethical implications, including the importance of maintain respectful relationships with the child's family after the notification (*Barblett et al., 2008*).

## PRIVACY

It is essential to respect children's privacy.

Ensure any documentation with the child and family's details are kept safe following your organisations privacy policy.

All photographs, video, recordings should have clear protocol on how they will be used and permission sought from both child and parent/carer.

**For more information: <https://www.oaic.gov.au/privacy/australian-privacy-principles/>**

# 03

Framework  
for engaging  
children's  
voices

• FRAMEWORK • FRAMEWORK • FRAMEWORK • FRAMEWORK • FRAMEWORK • FRAMEWORK



# 03

The framework below was developed by Brotherhood of St Laurence to ensure our practice is safe and consistent when engaging with young children. This framework has been tried and tested within the HIPPY network and will assist in planning engagement in your program or service.





How will you ensure children's voices are heard? There are a range of ways you can engage with children. It is vital when planning your process, that you have covered all ethical considerations and your event or activities are age appropriate.

### **Things to think about:**

- What do you want to find out about? What are your objectives?
- What is the age and ability of the children involved?
- What is the timeline from beginning to final implementation?
- What adults/staff are required to assist and what roles will they have?
- What tools, resources or event will you use to engage children?
- What resources will you require?
- What is the budget?
- How will you document and collect the feedback/data?
- Is this research? Do you need ethics approval?
- How will you feedback to children?

## **BSL used this framework to inform a children's voices listening tour event.**

## **We will use the tour as an example throughout this guide**

BSL's HIPPY Australia team tested the practice guide by listening to children's opinions on the HIPPY curriculum. We engaged children through three different activities at a one-day events. Across 15 sites in Australia, 15–25 children participated at each event. This required a lot of staff, planning, budget considerations, logistics, and collaboration with site staff. As this was a research project it also required formal ethics approval.

The planning for this project required one year.

The following steps were taken:

- ethics application (three months);
- planning the activities and logistics of three activities running at the same time;
- training staff in engagement strategies and the importance of children's voices;
- giving staff an overview of the event and allocating roles; and
- briefing staff on how data will be documented (transcripts, drawings, photos and commentary) and final implementation plans that came from any recommendations.

**When planning an event with children always consider:**

- **a large enough, child-friendly space**
- **the time of the day for children**
- **more than one way for children's voices to be heard**



When planning to engage children's voices in your program, it is vital that you have advocates for children's voices; adults who see children as capable citizens who can contribute to the program, the community, the service and the world. Adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively. Training is an opportunity to create advocates!

Specific skills and processes are required to facilitate the participation of the most vulnerable children in our services including the very young; children with intellectual disabilities or communication difficulties; children from cultural and linguistically-diverse backgrounds; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (*G Force, 2015*).

## **When training staff for children's participation, ensure that you:**

- Highlight why children's voices and their rights are important.
- Highlight participation theories briefly, this informs staff of the importance of the space, the audience, power imbalances and the power of voice and influence.
- Explain the engagement activities and provide opportunity for staff to engage with the activities and resources.
- Establish cultural and inclusive practices.
- Talk about age-appropriate language and safe ways to engage (ethical principles).
- Work out the logistics of the event or activity.
- Determine the roles and responsibilities of each staff member.
- Decide how information will be collected and stored.

## Children's Voices Listening Tour: Training

HIPPY Australia wanted to hear children's opinions on the curriculum. We engaged children through three different activities at a one-day event and 15–25 children participated at each event, across 15 sites in Australia.

Following this practice guide, we:

- Highlighted the importance of children's voices and children's rights;
- Showed the benefits of engagement;
- Shared participation theories;
- Gave an overview of the event;
- Worked out the logistics of staff, travel, equipment and communication with sites across Australia;
- Modelled engagement methods: staff trialled all methods and role-played scenarios;
- Determined staff roles; and
- Decided how to collect data (how information would be collected: writing; conversations; photos; transcripts of children's drawings etc).

**Always highlight the children's rights (UNCRC) and the value of hearing children's voices.**

**Role playing scenarios in groups is good to highlight inclusion, bias, active listening to give the foundation of ethical engagement principles and brainstorm inclusivity and engagement methods.**



When children actively contribute to the program, they are more likely to be engaged as the program and activities will be designed to respond to their interests, abilities and strengths.

Engaging children means consulting with them in ways that are developmentally appropriate and meaningful to the child. This requires adults to provide children with opportunities to express their views and be genuinely listened to in caring and responsive ways.

## Engagement principles

The key principles underpinning ethical interactions with children are:

- age-appropriate methods;
- transparent communication process;
- participation is optional and children can choose to stop at anytime;
- consent from both child and parent/carer;
- culturally-appropriate and relevant resources (interpreter, community members involved etc);
- safe, friendly environment (familiar environment where they are comfortable is ideal); and
- the person should build or have relationship with the child.

**Avoid tokenism. Featuring child speakers at large conferences, usually fails to shape policy or practice. The more effective participation for children starts at the local level, where it is more meaningful for everyone. Children need to be listened to by adults and receive a response from adults to their ideas, ways of play and learning. This will build a positive view of citizenship and public service. Otherwise, children can become disillusioned or angry (IAWGCP, 2007).**

When adults working in early childhood settings provide children with opportunities to express their ideas and views in ways that are meaningful, children become active participants in the planning of their experiences.

## Engagement methods for participation

Below are popular examples of participatory methods to hear children's opinions. It is not an exhaustive list. When using these methods, it is important that you give children clear outlines of how their thoughts will be captured.

Most of the methods below use a combination of background information and questions to engage children. For example, favourite space in the service; favourite community space; things they like; things they don't like and want to change about any subject; I wish for; things that are important to me, etc.

- Group discussion
- Voting
- Photography
- Visual arts
- Puppets
- Children interviewing children
- Role play
- Music
- Dance
- Song
- Storytelling
- Survey
- Simple questions

**EXAMPLES:** 'We want to hear your thoughts about our service. You will be talking to a puppet today. His name is Kenny. He will ask you about things you like and don't like about our service. This is so that we can make sure we are doing the best job we can when you are here. Is that ok? If you feel uncomfortable at any time, or don't want to talk to Kenny, that's ok, let us know and we can do something else.'

## Strategies to use while engaging

- Active listening with eye contact.
- Do not interpret what you think children mean, ask what it is about and what it means. When documenting: take their words down as they literally say them.
- Be curious, probe and clarify children's views, ask questions: 'What do you think?' or 'Why do you want?' This will lead to more of a story about their opinion.
- Don't pressure a child for answers, give them time to feel safe and secure with you, particularly if you are a new person in their world.
- If a child doesn't have an answer as to why they have stated something: this does not matter, it is more about giving them the opportunity to have a say. When documenting: simply note eg. 'child X did not explain their drawing'

## Embedding childrens voices into everyday activities

You can show children that you are listening by:

- **Daily voting on activities to do in an early years service**
- **Daily question: 'What is your favourite activity to do here?'**
- **A parent or service giving children two or three options of toys, food, activities to choose from.**

### CHILDREN'S VOICES LISTENING TOUR:

#### Activities to engage:

1. Voting on the HIPPY curriculum (placing a smiley face or sad face on pictures of activities and stories from the HIPPY curriculum)
2. Drawing something about HIPPY (these drawings indicated favourite books, activities and types of learning)
3. Magic wand activity (children wished for things they wanted in HIPPY).

Here is an example of an engagement conversation for a drawing activity:

*'Hi Annie, we are going to do some drawing today! Would you like to do that? We are thinking about drawing anything about HIPPY. What would you like to draw?'*

Annie: *'Mmmm, I don't know.'*

Staff: *'What do you think about when I say HIPPY activities?'*

Annie: *'Well, lots of things, I like getting my books, I love the shapes and I love reading!'*

Staff: *'Ok, so if you were going to draw something, would it be one of those things?'*

Annie: *'Yes! I'm drawing the shapes because I've learnt all of their names now!'*

This is a great way to ensure the HIPPY curriculum stays up to date, demonstrates to children that they have influence when they see changes and keeps them engaged.

# 03



Quantitative and qualitative data provide different outcomes, and are often used together to get a full picture. Simply put:

**Qualitative data is:** used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, (eg. What type?)

**Quantitative data is:** number based (eg. how many, how much, how often)

After an engagement activity with children, analysing the information or data you have received from children is very important. This will demonstrate to the children that their voices have been heard and you are taking it seriously.

Analysing the data may be as simple as:

- Putting themes together that have come out of children's stories, photos or drawings.
- Counting votes or common answers to survey questions.
- Documenting observations.
- Themes from transcribed videos.
- It may require the assistance of a researcher if you plan to analyse with statistical software.

## CHILDREN'S VOICES LISTENING TOUR:

### Data analysis:

We asked children to draw 'anything about HIPPY'. We wrote everything the child said word for word when describing their drawing. Children drew their favourite HIPPY activities, the person they like doing HIPPY with, shapes, colours, letters, numbers etc.

### Analysis:

We themed these drawings into 'Favourite activities, learning concepts, reading, time spent with parent/carer'.

We also analysed the most common words or phrases spoken by children to highlight what is most important to them.



After analysing the data, common themes will be identified that will inform any recommendations. You may also hear quality feedback, that doesn't require a recommendation, but gives you a deeper understanding of what children feel about the service or the topic.

#### CHILDREN'S VOICES LISTENING TOUR:

##### **Recommendations:**

We asked children to sit in a circle and one at a time they held the 'magic wand' and made a wish for something that would make HIPPY better. All their answers were written down and themed. We found that children wanted more letters and number activities, more superhero themed activities or stories, and more outdoor activities.

We then took the children's ideas to the HIPPY curriculum redevelopment team.



## Feedback and implementation

If we make the time to listen to children's voices, we need to make the time to feed back to them what we have heard, what we will do with their information, and update them on processes that have come out of their recommendations. Clearly not all ideas or recommendations can be put into practice, but children will value hearing the reasons why this may not be able to happen and that their opinions and ideas are respected.

The feedback phase is very important. It is where trust is built and where teaching can occur. Keeping communication open with children about the processes and where things are up to builds trust, demonstrates that their voice is valued, and reflects the principle of transparent engagement. If children don't hear back from the service, they may be less likely to engage again.

### CHILDREN'S VOICES LISTENING TOUR:

#### **Feedback and Implementation:**

As stated above in the previous example, one of the engagement activities used was the magic wand. We asked children to sit in a circle and one at a time they held the 'magic wand' and made a wish for something that would make HIPPY better. All their answers were written down and themed.

We found that children wanted more letters and number activities, more superhero-themed activities, updated stories and more outdoor activities. We put these recommendations to the curriculum team and **implemented** changes to reflect what the children wanted.

**Feedback: We then fed back to the children and families through a child-friendly report and conference presentation that we heard their voices and they influenced change to the curriculum.**

Participation is about influence. By feeding back changes, which will be implemented, children can see that we have heard them and we see them as valued participants.

You can view the electronic versions of the 2016 Children's Voices Listening Tour reports by clicking on either the adult version or the child-friendly version.



# 04

# Engaging with children toolkit

## Children's voices toolkit

Children's voices are important, to demonstrate our toolkit we use the HIPPY Network.

This toolkit will support HIPPY sites to imbed children's voices into the program in a consistent and thoughtful way. The toolkit provides guidance around educating Tutors and families about the importance of children's rights, child voice/agency, the benefits to children and families and the benefits to the service. The overarching aim is for families to harness an understanding of agency in the home learning environment and to become advocates for children's rights.

The best way to ensure your practice is based around the child's voice is to incorporate children's rights and agency into every aspect of your program. In the example of HIPPY, children's voices should be embedded in the recruitment of families, Tutor training, home visits and group meetings. This is described below.

## Recruitment

When recruiting families, we want to highlight the fact that HIPPY values children's agency and children's rights. Sharing this concept with families at the beginning of their HIPPY journey is a consistent approach that will support families to gain an understanding of agency and value the voice of their children.

### Example script to use when introducing child agency at recruitment:

'HIPPY is a program that supports you as your child's first teacher over two years. We value children as citizens with important things to say. Listening to what children have to say develops child agency. Child agency is a child development term that means helping your child learn about decision making. When you offer simple choices to your child, that you approve of, you help them develop this agency. In HIPPY, we will encourage you to hear your child's opinion (voice) at home to help them learn about decision making. We will also provide opportunities to hear your child's voice in regard to the curriculum, activities, group meetings and their community to ensure our program is supporting your child.'

## Tutor training

Children's voices and child agency are one in the same. Agency is about giving children a voice to make decisions. Child agency is an integral part of the HIPPY curriculum framework. A 'child agency and participation thread' is woven through all learning areas and imbedded within the HIPPY activities.

Examples of this are:

- an activity where you take turns,
- where the child decides what will happen next, or
- where the child takes the lead.

**Coordinators should support Tutors to learn about child agency so that this can be incorporated into conversations at home visits and group meetings, which will build on families knowledge.**

**Agency can be used in every HIPPY activity by giving children the opportunity to express their opinion, choose what resources they want to use and asking different questions.**

At the site, coordinators should incorporate children's voice into Tutor training. We recommend discussing aspects of agency and how a child's voice can be heard at the end of each role-play so that Tutors can learn can learn strategies to share with families. Tutors should continually talk about child agency at each home visit to imbed child voice and rights into family life.

To incorporate children's voices into Tutor training, we recommend enrichment topics that:

- use the Children's Voices LMS module;
- include the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and
- brainstorm ideas of how children's voices can be heard at your site.

The UN Convention child friendly versions are:

<https://www.unicef.org/sop/convention-rights-child-child-friendly-version>

<https://plan-international.org/child-friendly-poster-convention-rights-child>

Coordinators will be supported in doing this through:

- Enrichment topics in 2020 that will see the introduction of a child agency Tutor training enrichment topic.
- Tutor training resources which highlight those that link to agency and the concept of everywhere learning (see some examples below).
- LMS Module: Children's voices: discuss agency

Agency can be used in every HIPPY activity by giving children the opportunity to express their opinion, choose what resources they want to use and asking different questions.

---

Here are some examples of agency from the curriculum that Tutors can use with families:

**Age 4:**

- Blue 4, Communication/social emotional: **Talking about feelings:** use the stories to ask why questions, and encourage voice and opinions.
- Blue 6, Social and Emotional: **Drawing things I like to do**
- Yellow 3, Social and emotional: **Make a card for a friend:** decisions about how the card will look, voicing opinions about friendship
- Yellow 6, Reflecting on HIPPY (Tutor resource: reflecting on children's voices)
- Purple 5, **Reflection on HIPPY learning**
- Purple 6, **Reviewing your HIPPY Storybooks**

**Age 5:**

- Purple 1: Family and Community: **My family sustainability plan**
- Purple 3, **Thinking about HIPPY:** Writing a letter, reflecting on family and community.

## Home visits

Home visits are an opportunity for:

- Tutors to take their learning from Tutor training and support families development of child agency;
- Families to practice listening to their child's voice;
- Families to share what they are learning about their child; and
- Families to feedback to HIPPY what their child is saying.

### Script for introducing more information about agency to parents

'Child agency is a child development term that means helping your child learn about decision making. Children develop agency when they have choices. When you offer simple choices to your child, that you approve of, you help them develop this agency. Here are some examples

- Where do we put the HIPPY box?
- Which colour do you want to wear today: blue or red?
- Banana or orange?
- Which side of the table would you like to sit at?

### Ideas for families to capture children's voices

Tutors talk to families about:

- asking their child about favourite things (toys, activities, places, books etc)
- giving their child choices to build agency
- adapting activities around child's voice: everywhere learning
- taking photos of favourite places at home, in the community, favourite toys, things to do,
- offering feedback to HIPPY: things to improve delivery (group meeting, activities, excursions)

## Group meetings

Group meetings are an opportunity for social interaction, learning, reflection and fun. We encourage you to incorporate enrichment topics on child agency and child rights early in your year to show families the benefits, discuss misconceptions and build ideas to incorporate voice/agency at group and at home.

### ENRICHMENT

- Take from Tutor training and focus it toward families.
- Talk about child's rights and seeing children as valued citizens with great ideas.
- Brainstorm with family's different ways that children's voices can be incorporated into HIPPY.

**Group meeting where children are consulted** about a topic (favourite community activity, place, where they'd like to go on an excursion, best things to do in the holidays, group rules etc). Children could do drawings, or vote, etc. This is a great opportunity to role play collaboration with children, democracy, 'not always getting what you want' and a transparent process.

**Asking families to bring feedback from their children** during the week about their favourite activity or their least favourite activity and brainstorming ways at group to adapt these activities.

# 04

---

## Quality assurance

As part of a quality assurance process, we suggest you collect evidence of how you have embedded child's voice and rights into your practice. In the example of HIPPY, some tips are provided.

### GATHERING EVIDENCE–TIPS:

- Write down children's feedback from home visits.
- Take photos of children participating in activities (particularly, children's voices events, activities they have voted for, children's drawings of their favourite things etc.).
- Take photos of children's activities that link to agency.
- Tutor training plans where you are brainstorming children's voices ideas, planning activities or teaching Tutors about child rights.
- Group meetings: take photos of child-led activities at group, children's voices events, save group meeting plans for enrichment topics about agency.
- Family surveys: include a question asking families about child agency, what they are hearing from their child.
- Child surveys: ask children's opinions about HIPPY, about the community, about likes and dislikes.
- Journey form: when recruiting and talking to families about agency, document families understanding as a baseline and ask this again at graduation. This is great evidence to show that your Tutor training and enrichment are building on family's knowledge.
- Evidence of providing feedback to children of what has changed following their voice/ agency.

## **TEMPLATES FOR FEEDBACK**

**APPENDIX A:**  
Feedback from your child:  
home visit template

**APPENDIX B:**  
Survey for families

**APPENDIX C:**  
Survey for children

**APPENDIX D:**  
What do I do if a child  
discloses?

## APPENDIX A: FEEDBACK FROM YOUR CHILD: HOME VISIT TEMPLATE

---

What activity pack did you do this week?

---

---

What was your child's favourite activity? (Ask them why, and write their answer word for word.)

---

---

---

Was there an activity your child did not enjoy? (Ask them why, and write their answer word for word.)

---

---

---

What would make the activity better? (This is an opportunity to learn how we can adapt activities for your child and others.)

---

---

---

Is there anything your child would like to say about HIPPY?

---

---

---

## APPENDIX B: SURVEY FOR FAMILIES

---

How has HIPPY helped you learn about your child's agency and voice?

---

---

Are you incorporating choices for your child at home to encourage agency?

YES     NO

If yes, how so?

---

---

---

What have you learned while doing HIPPY?

---

---

---

What's the best thing about HIPPY?

---

---

---

Is there anything HIPPY Australia can improve?

---

---

---

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY FOR CHILDREN

---

You could give children one question each week, or ask all questions at a group meeting.

What kind of things do you do when you do HIPPY?

---

---

What is your favourite HIPPY activity?

---

---

What is your favourite toy?

---

---

What is your favourite place to visit?

---

---

If you had a magic wand and you could wish for anything to make HIPPY better, what would you wish for?

---

---

## APPENDIX D: WHAT DO I DO IF A CHILD DISCLOSES?

---

There are some general tips for responding to disclosure:

- Give the child or young person your full attention.
- Maintain a calm appearance.
- Don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing, simply listen as much as possible.
- Reassure the child or young person that it is right to tell.
- Accept the child or young person will disclose only what is comfortable and recognise the bravery/strength of the child for talking about something that is difficult.
- Let the child or young person take his or her time.
- Let the child or young person use his or her own words.
- Don't make promises you can't keep.
- By telling the child: 'I can't make that promise, but I can tell you I will do my best to keep you safe', you can reassure the child, manage expectations, and encourage him/her to speak out about abuse.
- Tell the child or young person what you plan to do next.
- Advise the child or young person that in order for them to be safe they will need to talk to another person (police or child protection) about their experience and that you will support him or her through that experience. Let the child or young person know he or she can ask about what will happen next as often as he or she needs to.
- Do not confront the perpetrator.
- Remember, it is the role of the authorities to investigate the truth of the claim. Your role is to support the child or young person.
- Speak to your direct manager as soon as possible
- Document the incident and speak with your manager about reporting policy and family support.
- Refer the child and family if possible to trauma-informed services
- Manage your own feelings. Staff can often have history of trauma themselves. Ensure you have supports system.

Many of these tips were cited <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/responding-children-and-young-people-s-disclosures-abu>

You can also find information for all states and territories in the link below.  
[https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/1906\\_reporting\\_child\\_abuse\\_and\\_neglect\\_rs.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/1906_reporting_child_abuse_and_neglect_rs.pdf)

(Bussey, 1996; Office for Children Youth and Family Support, 2006; Department of Child Safety, n.d.; Department of Human Services, 2013)

# 05

## Conclusion

• CONCLUSION • CONCLUSION • CONCLUSION • CONCLUSION • CONCLUSION

# 05

---

Children and young people have the right to have their voices heard. Good engagement with children's voices provides an opportunity to harness and implement many inspirational ideas. We must be inclusive and encourage participation from a wide range of children. A variety of methods are covered in this guide and you can use different combinations of these to complement each other. Children's participation requires commitment to listen to what they have to say. BSL is committed to listening to children as a key part of delivering a quality service. We hope that you and the children at your service get a lot out of this guide and that children's voices are really heard.



# 06

# References

Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACEQUA). (2018) *Supporting agency: involving children in decision-making*. Retrieved from: <https://www.acecqa.gov.au>

Australian Human Rights Commission. (2018) *National Principles for child safe organisations*. Sydney, NSW.

Bussey, K. (1996). *Allegations of child sexual abuse: Accurate and truthful disclosures, false allegations, and false denials*. Incest Survivors Association, Autumn, 39-61.

Department of Child Safety. (no date). *Child sexual abuse: Things you need to know*. Brisbane: Department of Child Safety. Retrieved from: [www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/protecting-children/what-is-child-abuse/child-sexual-abuse](http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/protecting-children/what-is-child-abuse/child-sexual-abuse)

Department of Education. (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework*. Department of Education. Canberra, ACT.

Department of Human Services. (2013). *You and your child. For parents of children who have been sexually abused*. Melbourne: DHS. Retrieved from: [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/you-and-your-child-guide-for-parents](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/you-and-your-child-guide-for-parents)

Clark, A and Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*. London: National Children's Bureau.

G Force. (2015). *Children and Young People Participation Strategy*. CREATE Foundation and Qld Government. Retrieved from: [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au)

Hodgson, D. (1995) *Participation of Children and Young People in Social Work*. New York: UNICEF.

*Children's participation in decision making: Why do it, when to do it, How to do*. Inter-Agency Working Group on Children's Participation (IAWGCP, 2007) Published in Bangkok.

Lundy, L. (2007). *Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. British Educational Research Journal 33(6): 927-942.

Landsdown, G. (2005). *Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them*. Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Netherlands.

Lyford Jones, H. (2010). *Putting children at the centre: a practical guide to children's participation*. Save the Children, London, United Kingdom.

MacNaughton, G., Smith, K., and Lawrence, H. (2003) *Hearing young children's voices. ACT Children's Strategy: Consulting with children birth to eight years of age*. Parkville, Victoria: Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne.

Treseder, P. (1997). *Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making*, London: Save the Children.

Unicef. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

United Nations. (1989). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. United Nations. Geneva, Switzerland.

Victorian Children Youth and Families Act. (2005). Victorian Government. Retrieved from: [www.legislation.vic.gov.au/](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/)



Brotherhood  
of St Laurence

The Brotherhood of St Laurence acknowledges Elders and Traditional Owners of the lands and seas across Australia.

HIPPY (Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters) is a two year, home-based early learning and parenting program for four and five year olds that empowers parents to be their child's first teacher. With the support of Home Tutors, parents teach a structured 60 week curriculum of educational and behavioural activities to their child in the family home and attend Group Meetings. HIPPY is delivered in 100 communities across Australia. With Australian Government support, the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), together with local partner organisations, delivers HIPPY to vulnerable children and families; provides local jobs and skill development; and strengthens communities.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation concerned with social justice. Based in Melbourne, but with programs and services delivered throughout Australia, BSL works to support and empower socio-economically disadvantaged people. It undertakes research, service delivery, and advocacy, with the objective of addressing unmet needs and translating learning into new policies, programs and practices for implementation by government and others.

[www.bsl.org.au](http://www.bsl.org.au)

**Brotherhood of St Laurence**

Level 1, 219 Johnston Street

Fitzroy VIC 3065

Australia

**p** 61 3 9445 2400

**e** [hippyaustralia@bsl.org.au](mailto:hippyaustralia@bsl.org.au)

**w** [hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au](http://hippyaustralia.bsl.org.au)

Copyright © Brotherhood of St Laurence 2020

The Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters is funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Social Services.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence holds the exclusive licence to operate HIPPY in Australia.