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Effective Direct Work with Children, in the Time that you Have

How much time do
you spend with the
parents/carers v the
child?



Listen to the Child

“Practitioners spend a lot of time being preoccupied with and worried about children but often spend little time working directly with them.

Children may be in the best position to help professionals understand their situation so it is important that their views and perspectives are sought. Direct work with children will also provide an opportunity to monitor the children’s progress in relation to the work with the parents.”

(University of East Anglia. Research in Practice Guide)

Communicating with Children

It should never be a case of “ticking the box” -
What does “seen” mean?

- Explain who you are and why you are there
- Ask the child where they want to see you
- Help them think how to explain you
- Never use jargon
- Understand the child's language
- Language moves on

Communicating with Children

- Ask the child, don't just tell the child
- Be honest
- Put yourself in the child's position
- Acknowledge with older children the difficulties of having a social worker
- Remember, it is not the child's fault but be careful of criticising the parents/carers to the children
- Remember, children are not stupid, they are young

Communicating with Children with Disabilities

- Find out from the experts the best way to communicate with the child. It may be better to ask the school, or other professionals, rather than the parent, depending on the reason for your involvement. Don't assume you know how to do it.
- You may need someone to help you interpret what the child is telling you. Again, choose carefully. A carer may not be the best person.
- Make sure you understand the child's level of competence.

Findings from Serious Case Reviews

Common themes:

- The child was invisible
- The child was not heard
- The child was not believed
- There was no understanding of the child's day to day life

So how can we do it better in the time that we have?(1)

- Communication is not just about speech. 80% of all communication can be non-verbal. As Sophie, aged six, said “Listen with your eyes, as well as your ears”
- Build a rapport with the child before you start asking them deeply personal questions
- Be an active listener not a busy doer
- What is the child’s motivation to talk/not talk to you?

So how can we do it better in the time that we have?(2)

- Coffee shops and burger restaurants may be good for the bonding stage with a child but are not the places for direct work
- Have clarity about the purpose of the direct work you are doing with the child
- The car is a really useful place for conversations with older children. It is a safe, contained space where you are sitting alongside each other, rather than face-to-face.

So how can we do it better in the time that we have?(3)

- Get down to their level, if they are physically smaller than you
- Use games, toys, crayons, as appropriate
- Make sure you do your best to understand any cultural differences
- Don't patronise but talk to them at their level

And Finally.....

Remember that children are not stupid, they are just children

Don't be afraid!

