

This chart accompanies the fourth in a series of online research briefings designed for practitioners across the integrated workforce who work with children and their parents or carers.

Additional information about the types of approaches you can use when working with children under five can be found in the online briefing. This includes a focus on the different types of play that children engage in at different stages of development.

To get the most value from the chart, we would encourage you to look at the online research briefing on our website. The online material offers more information about the importance of engaging with children under five, and outlines some potential techniques that practitioners might use to achieve this.

### **Developing a toolkit for assessment**

This chart briefly summarises some of the approaches and tools that a practitioner can draw on to communicate effectively with children under five. It also looks at how these might be used to inform an assessment.

#### **The online briefing:**

- > examines why communicating with children under five is so important
- > outlines some potential barriers and evidence-informed techniques for communicating effectively with young children
- > examines the research around the emotional impact on practitioners of working with babies and young children.

Author: Ann Norburn, NSPCC Photograph: Harmit Kambo



# **communicating effectively with children under five**

**Developing a toolkit for assessment**

# communicating effectively with children under five

## Issues to consider

### The age of the child

- > knowledge of child development ages and stages
- > knowledge of types of play

### The child's attachment

- > with their primary caregiver
- > relationships with others

### The environment

- > observation of the child in the child's world
- > impact of self on the situation

## What skills do I need to be an effective communicator?

*'The natural language of childhood is play... play is the royal road to the child's unconscious processes... an ideal vehicle through which non-verbal communication can occur'*

Dale F (1992) 'The art of communicating with vulnerable children' in Varma V (ed) *The Secret Life of Vulnerable Children*. London: Routledge.

Play helps to engage babies and young children, and to develop and maintain relationships and trust. This then helps practitioners to develop a sense of how the child feels and a sense of their world. This information can be used to inform the assessment and to ensure that the child's views are heard and considered.

## Other skills that are needed include:

- > Active/reflexive listening skills
- > Warm, open body language
- > Observation skills

A toolkit of resources can help to support engagement with young children.

suggestions for a toolkit	how can this tool be used?	what can it tell us in assessment?
<b>observation skills</b>	<p>It is important to observe children in their natural environment and with their primary caregivers to have a sense of their world and how they feel. It is particularly important to observe babies and very young children who have limited verbal language. With older children observation will help to think about how to engage them in activities.</p>	<p>Observation can give practitioners a sense of the child in their world. It can tell us about a child's development, including speech and language development, and potentially identify concerns around developmental delay. We can also ascertain the relationship between the child and their primary caregiver(s). Observation of the caregiver(s) with the child may determine parenting capacity to both meet need and to keep the child safe.</p>
<b>listening and talking</b>	<p>An essential tool to engage young children, develop and maintain relationships with them.</p>	<p>By listening and talking we can find out what has happened in the child's life and what they want to happen.</p>
<b>pens / crayons / paper</b>	<p>These can be used to engage very young children. With older children you could ask them to draw or to complete worksheets such as 'The three houses'. Paper plates make brilliant masks and children can draw 'feelings faces' on them.</p>	<p>Using creative materials could help us to assess the stage of development of the child. It can also help us to understand how a child is feeling, who is important in their lives, what worries them and what they want to happen.</p>
<b>creative materials such as paint and collage</b>	<p>With very young children use to engage; older children can paint or use collage to complete worksheets. Creative materials can also help to put children at ease when discussing difficult issues.</p>	
<b>messy play such as clay; dough; gloop made from cornflour or custard powder and water; sand and water</b>	<p>All ages of children can be engaged through messy play. Children can find messy play therapeutic and it can enable children to let out their feelings. Clay, for example, can be pummelled to release anger.</p>	
<b>baking / icing biscuits</b>	<p>Baking is a fun way to engage young children. Children can ice round biscuits and use decoration/sweets to make 'feelings faces' biscuits.</p>	
<b>bubbles</b>	<p>Children of all ages are engaged by bubbles.</p>	<p>How a young child engages with the bubbles can provide us with information about the stage of development of the child.</p>
<b>magic wands</b>	<p>Children can be asked what they would wish for if they had a magic wand.</p>	<p>Taking this approach can help us to know what is currently wrong in their lives, or what 'success' would look like for identifying outcomes.</p>
<b>puppets / soft toys / toy telephone</b>	<p>These can be used to explore how children are feeling without asking the child directly, for example 'How is Monkey feeling today?'</p>	<p>Using puppets and soft toys can tell us how children are feeling, what is happening in their lives and what they want to happen.</p>
<b>small figures / toys / lego / cars etc</b>	<p>These can be used to represent people in genograms or family trees when working with children who are too young to understand genograms.</p>	<p>This approach to genograms can help to provide information about what the child's relationship is like with others in their lives.</p>
<b>natural objects / outdoor exploration</b>	<p>These can include twigs, leaves, fir cones or pebbles (under supervision) to facilitate discussion with young children.</p>	
<b>indoor / outdoor games</b>	<p>Games such as Connect Four, basic board games and football can be used to engage young children and help to develop and maintain relationships.</p>	<p>By using games, natural observation and toys we can find out more information about the child's stage of development and language. They also potentially tell us about levels of stimulation that the child has experienced.</p>
<b>baby toys / musical toys</b>	<p>By including toys specifically designed for babies and young children of particular ages as part of your toolkit, you can ensure that you are communicating with them in a way that is appropriate for their age.</p>	
<b>stories and story-telling</b>	<p>Stories can be used to engage children and help them to tell their story. There are also some books which help children to explore feelings such as loss and bereavement.</p>	<p>Stories can give us a sense of how children are feeling and their level of understanding about what is happening in their lives. Stories may also enable children to tell us about their world.</p>