Practice Skills within Universities

Communication with children and their families

Improving the protection and wellbeing of children in Europe: enhancing the curriculum
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Communication with children and their families: What do you need to know, be, do?

Purpose of communication - with whom, why, how

Legislation, policy and values underpinning communication

Ethical communication - children and their families clear about your role, including the limits to confidentiality

‘Stages’ involved including importance of preparation, beginnings and endings

Skills involved in communicating with children and their families
Communication: Large group exercise

Knowing- what do children and their parents/ carers need social work students to know to help them communicate effectively?

Being – what values and ethics underpin communication with children and their parents/ carers?

Doing- what skills do students need to possess and demonstrate to communicate effectively with children, young people and parents/carers?
Communication with children and young people

• What do I need to know which might help me to stand in the shoes of John/Susan/Briony to try and understand a little bit more about his/her experiences

• What do I need to know so that I can help as effectively as possible?

• What are all the different ways John/Susan/Briony might communicate?
Who will help me to ‘stand in your shoes’?

John/Susan/Briony

Elaine/Brian/Sean

Community

Including Health Visitor, GP, Police, Teachers
Responsibility to communicate with children, listen to them and include them in decision making: Legislation

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:
  Article 3
  Article 12

- Children (Scotland) Act 1995, s6
- Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011, Part 3, s27
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, S 33 (6) (b) (i)
Protecting children and Young People: The Charter

The clear message from children and young people is:

As children and young people, we have a right to be protected and be safe from harm from others. When we have difficulties or problems we expect you to:

- Get to know us
- Speak with us
- Listen to us
- Take us seriously
- Involve us
- Respect our privacy
- Be responsible to us
- Think about our lives as a whole

Think carefully about how you use information about us

Put us in touch with the right people

Use your power to help

Make things happen when they should

Help us be safe

This is a message to all of us - politicians, communities, parents, families, neighbours; as well as police, health, social work, and education authorities; and people who work directly with children and young people - about what is important to them and how we go about helping to protect them.
Responsibility to communicate with children and include them: Guidance

“Children should be listened to and their views should always inform any decisions made about them. Children and their carers should also be able to expect honesty and to be given explanations for actions or decisions taken...”

Message from serious case reviews

Possibly the single most significant practice failing throughout the majority of the serious case reviews – the failure of all professionals to see the situation from the child’s perspective and experience; to see and speak to the children; to listen to what they said, to observe how they were and to take serious account of their views in supporting their needs.

What children and young people have said

**Helpful**
- Practitioners who care and are reliable, consistent and authentic
- Practitioners who listen (and act)
- Information in writing about processes in which they are involved
- Processes which include them in ways which are meaningful

**Not so helpful**
- Practitioners constantly changing, unreliable or inaccessible
- Feeling like they have no control
- Not being listened to and included
- Practitioners making assumptions about them or their families
- Language which is unclear/judgemental

Practice with children and young people

- Practitioners who are reliable, consistent and authentic
- Practitioners who listen (and act)
- Processes which include them in ways which are meaningful – including using language and words which child can make sense of, and leaving written information

In large group- What does this look like in practice- please give explicit examples?
Messages from research: Talking and listening to children

• Communication with children and young people is at the heart of child and family social work
• Communication involves social workers using a range of methods and techniques like touch, play, signing, body language, writing, drawing, activities, using symbols and other tools to engage and communicate with children and young people
• The relationship between children, young people and their social workers is more important than communication itself

Practice Skills: Preparing to see a child and his/her family

• How do you prepare for your first meeting with a child and his/her family? What do you read? Who do you talk to? What toys/games/books/materials do you get ready to take with you?

• How do you prepare when you are seeing a child and his/her family with whom you have regular contact?
Preparing for skills practice: Feedback

Definitions of feedback vary but Hawkins and Shohet describe it as:
‘the process of telling another individual how they are experienced’ (2006, p133)

Carroll and Gilbert (in Davys and Beddoe 2010, p139) identify three types of feedback:
• Corrective
• Confirmatory
• Reflective - ‘I wonder’


Preparing for skills practice: Offering effective feedback

Feedback is timely and regular
Communicated in clear, plain language
Provides examples to support points and arguments
Presents a balanced view.

In providing feedback:
Highlight barriers and problems
but also suggest solutions and make recommendations for improvement

IRISS (2010) Leading for Outcomes
Practice Skills: Beginnings

Take turns to introduce yourself, and say who you are, what you do, and why you are there to:

- John (age three)
- Susan (age 7)
- Briony (age 13)
- Elaine
- Sean
Including children, young people and parents in processes

Part of being included involves a child having information about different processes they may be involved in or have contact with. In Scotland, this may include:

- Children’s Hearings
- Child Protection processes
- Court

Practitioners need to understand the legislation and guidance which underpins each as a child may be involved in one or more systems, separately or at the same time. Need to be able to explain in ways which are meaningful to the child and his/her parents.
Skills Exercise: In groups of three

Explain what a Reporter to the Children’s Hearings does, and what happens at a Children’s Hearing to:

- John (age 3)
- Susan (age 7)
- Briony (age 13)
- Elaine
- Sean
- A professional who is going to a Children's Hearing for the first time
Translating knowing in to doing….

Children (Scotland) Act 1995 s16(1)
Where a court determines, any matter with respect to a child the welfare of that child throughout his childhood shall be its paramount consideration.

Children’s Hearings (Scotland) Act 2011 s25
The children’s hearing, pre-hearing, panel or court is to regard the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child throughout the child’s childhood as the paramount consideration.

Access via www.legislation.gov.uk
Skills Exercise: Translating knowing in to doing

Explain the ‘paramountcy principle’ in a way which is clear to:

- John
- Susan
- Briony
- Elaine
- Sean
- John’s grandparents
- Teacher/Health Visitor
Skills Exercise: The use of story telling

• Story telling is one way of helping children to make sense of their world, explore similar/different experiences, prepare for changes, and can also be a way of forming/maintaining relationships. You and the child might ‘make up’ a story which enable you both to visit aspects of past, present, and future, or you might use story books. If it is a while since you read a story out loud, practice this in pairs.

• Tait and Wosu use a ‘story telling bag’ with items which ‘lend themselves to story telling’ (2013, p167). Child reaches in bag, and chooses objects which you can then use for a story – child tells story, you tell story, between you (take a sentence in turn). Practice this in pairs.

London. Jessica Kingsley
Endings

In pairs:

Reflect on an ending (personally or professionally) you have experienced which went well

• What contributed to it ending well?
• How did you feel – at the time / now?
Planning endings with children and their families

- Need to be planned
- Acknowledge process
- Acknowledge feelings
- Countdown
- Shared reflection
- What can be controlled
- Ritual (but not avoidance)
- Clarity about future
Endings: Relational approach

Your ending needs to be seen in the context of the child's previous experiences of endings and loss - were they unplanned, traumatic, unwanted, unresolved?

Remember – “the ending of an encounter with a child is as important as the beginning. This may be one of many visits or it may be your final time together but in every case your departure will have an impact on the child”.

www.talkingandlisteningtochildren.co.uk
Importance of endings

“I thought none of my social workers liked me because they were all leaving.”

Preparing for endings

You have been seeing John/Susan/Briony and Elaine/Sean for 2 weeks/2 months/2 years:

• What messages do you want John/Susan/Briony to take away from the contact they have had with you about themselves, about you, about social workers, about the social work role?

• What will you do?
References


IRISS (2010) *Leading for Outcomes*

References


References


References


Winter, K. (2015) *Supporting positive relationships*