

**Audience** Groups 1-8 (Working Together 2010)

**Methods** Individual work; small group discussion

### Preparation

Trainers may want to read the following to help them prepare:

Dahl, R. (1982) Matilda. London: Penguin.

Davies, M. and Morgan, A. (2005) 'Using Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) Questionnaires to Facilitate Consultation and Participation with Vulnerable Young People.' Child Abuse Review 14(6): 389-406.

Triangle Training DVD: Safeguarding Deaf and Disabled Children. Available: <http://www.triangle.org.uk/catalog/publications/cds-dvds-and-videos/safeguarding-deaf-and-disabled-children>. Accessed 10 August 2011.

Shemmings D (2000) 'Professionals' attitudes to children's participation in decision-making: dichotomous accounts and doctrinal contests.' Child and Family Social Work 5(3): 235-243.

Stalker, K. and Connors, C. (2003) 'Communicating with disabled children.' Adoption and Fostering 27(1): 26-35.

### Links to Common Core

**Common Core 1** Effective communication and engagement with children, young people, their families and carers (skills: listening and building empathy). Build open and honest relationships by respecting children, young people, parents and carers and making them feel valued as partners.

**Common Core 1** Effective communication and engagement with children, young people, their families and carers (skills: listening and building empathy). Be aware that some children and young people do not communicate verbally and that you need to adapt your style of communication to their needs and abilities.

### Learning Outcomes

To meet a child's developmental needs and support strengths.

### Process

In small groups, participants are to quickly think about how many methods of communication they have used, or could use, to assess neglect with children and young people at different ages and stages and with different communication methods or languages. They could consider the following ages:

- a three month old child
- a four year old child
- a twelve year old child with a communication impairment
- a fourteen year old young person.

Bring the groups back into the large group to discuss the questions:

- What different methods did you include?
- What different methods might you try in future?
- What barriers have you encountered to effective communication?

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### Time

Total : 45 minutes

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with a child or  
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## Process Continued ↘

Trainers may need to remind participants that communication does not only involve talking: amongst other things it includes listening, observing a child's behaviour and demeanour, and may involve structured or unstructured play (including imaginary play, reading, board games, colouring, modelling clay, etc), face to face contact, time in the car (workers often report that children may feel more comfortable chatting where there isn't face to face contact) or engaging in activities.

For older children and young people communication might involve using computers, and contact by phone or text. Trainers might also want to mention In My Shoes: Resource [www.childandfamilytraining.org.uk](http://www.childandfamilytraining.org.uk).

Some pointers in relation to different ages and stages are as follows.

- **A three month old child:** A three month child cannot tell you verbally what his or her experiences have been or are - so how does s/he communicate with those around him or her, and how can we communicate with him or her?
- **A four year old child:** Depending on their experiences and language skills, including whether English is their first language, verbal communication may be easier or harder for some children than others. In addition to talking, think about all the other ways a four year old communicates his or her experiences to us, and how we can communicate effectively with him or her. Here practitioners might draw on some of the methods used by researchers to enable children to share their views. Trainers might want to look at Clark and Moss' 'mosaic' approach (2001). This includes very small children taking photos of their environment and using these to talk about the meaning they attach to different areas of their environment (which was very different to the meanings attached by adults). Other researchers have used 'concrete' methods like pots and beans to help children say what they like more or less (Thomas and O'Kane 2000).

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## Process Continued ↘

- **A twelve year old child with a communication impairment:** The aim here is to encourage participants to consider imaginative means of communicating which are linked to an individual's needs and capabilities. Participants should also be asked to consider whether certain words and pictures are missing from some communication tools, and if so what that means for the individual's capacity to tell their story. They should also be asked to consider who might help them to communicate. If participants mention using parents as intermediaries they might be asked to consider whether parents necessarily know what their child is thinking or feeling and whether the needs of parents and children are always in accord. Participants can be directed to the research by Stalker and Connors (2003), which highlighted the difference in views between children and their parents and the inherent difficulties when parents 'speak for' their children. Other materials include the resources produced by Triangle. Triangle has been working alongside the NSPCC to produce a training DVD to raise awareness about the additional vulnerability of deaf and disabled children to abuse and neglect, and to help everyone who works with children know how they can safeguard deaf and disabled children more effectively.
- **A fourteen year old young person:** Much of the research conducted with, and by, young people about their experiences of services highlights that they can feel marginalised in child protection processes, and that teenage neglect is accorded less priority and is sometimes overlooked. Participants are asked to think about how teenagers might communicate with adults, and what the barriers to communication might be. They should consider how teenagers may communicate their experiences through their behaviour (such as offending, school refusal, running away, alcohol and substance misuse, self – harm or sexual activity). The way that some young people communicate might make it difficult for people to 'hear', and when thinking about barriers the group should be encouraged to consider the barriers that might belong to the professionals.

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with a child or  
young person

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## Process Continued ↘

When exploring barriers to successful communication and generate a list of practice responses to these challenges and remain solution focused. Some of the barriers that may come up include:

- **Lack of time** - there will never be a magic wand which gives practitioners as much time as they want, however, they need to make the most of what they have got, and can either put off doing things until the magic moment when they have all the time and resources they need, or do what they can now.
- **Lack of experience or training** – help them to consider how to fill the gap, perhaps they can arrange to visit a family centre or youth group to observe or participate.
- **Parental ambivalence** - encourage the group to think about solutions which recognise parental ambivalence and/or hostility but move them beyond it. What have they done previously which has worked well?
- **Lack of resources** - similar to lack of time, they may never have sufficient resources, but they can make imaginative use of materials which are cheap and easy to access (fuzzy felt, colouring, taking photos or public parks). They can also use children's books and films that have messages related to neglect or loss. An example is Roald Dahl's book Matilda. The main character Matilda experiences emotional and physical neglect, and one of the main adult characters Miss Honey has been affected by loss, neglect and abuse. Another film for younger children might be Dumbo (Walt Disney), which explores themes of loss, bullying and exclusion because of difference. For older children, Jacqueline Wilson's books explore a number of issues (children being accommodated, loss or being left at home in charge of younger siblings while parent goes on holiday) and are a good resource.
- **Ambivalence about the need to communicate with and involve children** - Shemmings' (2000) research with social workers highlighted that their willingness to involve children was dependant on whether they saw their key role as one of protecting children and young people (in which case they were unlikely to involve them in decision making processes) or enabling them.