

The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews

A thematic report of Ofsted's evaluation of serious case reviews from 1 April to 30 September 2010

This report provides an analysis of 67 serious case reviews that Ofsted evaluated between 1 April and 30 September 2010. The main focus of the report is on the importance of listening to the voice of the child. Previous Ofsted reports have analysed serious case reviews and identified this as a recurrent theme which is considered in greater detail here.

This report provides an opportunity to explore this key issue in more depth and draw out detailed practice implications.

Key findings

There are five main messages with regard to the voice of the child. In too many cases:

- The child was not seen frequently enough by the professionals involved, or was not asked about their views and feelings
- Agencies did not listen to adults who tried to speak on behalf of the child and who had important information to contribute
- Parents and carers prevented professionals from seeing and listening to the child
- Practitioners focused too much on the needs of the parents, especially on vulnerable parents, and overlooked the implications for the child
- Agencies did not interpret their findings well enough to protect the child.

Learning lessons: the voice of the child

Seeing and hearing the child

- **Practice implications; Practitioners should:**
- Use direct observation of babies and young children by a range of people and make sense of these observations in relation to risk factors
- See children and young people in places that meet their needs – for example, in places that are familiar to them
- See children and young people away from their carers
- Ensure that the assessment of the needs of disabled children identifies and includes needs relating to protection.

Listening to adults who speak on behalf of the child

- **Practice implications; Practitioners should:**
- Routinely involve fathers and other male figures in the family in assessing risk and in gathering all the information needed to make an assessment.
- **Local Safeguarding Children Boards should:**
- Consider how they can better engage the general public in safeguarding children.

Being alert to parents and carers who prevent access to the child

- **Practice implications; Practitioners should:**
- consider the implications of risk to children where they have concerns for their own personal safety
- Ensure that respect for family privacy is not at the expense of safeguarding children.
- **Local Safeguarding Children Boards should:**

- Consider how children who are home educated can receive the same safeguards as their peers.

Focusing on the child rather than the needs of parents and carers

- Practice implications; practitioners should:
- Recognise the specific needs of children and young people who have a caring responsibility for their parents
- Always consider the implications of any domestic abuse for unborn children
- Be alert to how acute awareness of the needs of parents can mask children's needs.

Interpreting what children say in order to protect them

- Practice implications; Practitioners should:
- Ensure that actions take account of children and young people's views
- Recognise behaviour as a means of communication
- Understand and respond to behavioural indicators of abuse
- Sensitively balance children's and young people's views with safeguarding their welfare.