



# Child First Framework

Delivered by



**West  
Yorkshire  
Combined  
Authority**

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Change my worker  
**Activities** Where to see me  
Choose the topics **Input**  
Our education Influencing nhs decisions  
**Peace Choices** Personal decisions  
Make a better community How stuff is taught to us  
**Clubs** What happens to me  
Food **Residentials**  
**Issues** ADHD Professional decisions  
**Decisions**  
My care and people like me Wide range of GCSE options  
Behaviour issues How many sessions  
When to finish **Change** Choice  
Sports and tournaments Bradfor as a whole  
**More stuff to do**  
Get involved in decisions  
Summer activities

‘What’ children want a say in

Some children didn’t know what they would like to be involved in as they haven’t had the opportunity before.

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# Introduction

The term ‘children’ is used throughout this document to refer to anyone under the age of 18. Whilst we recognise this may not be the language children would use, this is to remind us, as professionals, of their legal status as children and our statutory responsibilities to them.

## What to expect

You will find questions that will help you think about ways to incorporate this approach into your work. The questions will also help identify where you are already demonstrating it. This will look different for all of us, the aim of the framework is to enhance the way we involve children in our work, so different points will be applicable at different stages.

We recognise that we all come with different experiences and are trying to do our best for children within the constraints we work in.

We need to celebrate where we are already doing this and replicate this across the system. We want this framework to inspire a network of like-minded professionals to share best practice and find the most effective ways to amplify the voices of children in West Yorkshire.

## What is Child First?

Child First is the central guiding principle in the Youth Justice Board’s strategic plan, with a focus around creating a justice system that treats ‘children as children’. It doesn’t replace any other approaches, it will only enhance our work!

We aspire to see this approach embedded beyond youth justice so that every service that impacts the lives of children in West Yorkshire operates through a Child First lens.

Adopting this will put an emphasis on meaningful collaboration with children, whether this be through co-production, co-design or consultation to ensure that our vision for the future of West Yorkshire aligns with children’s vision too.

## Who is this framework for?

This framework is aimed at all professionals who make decisions that may impact the lives of children in West Yorkshire, either directly or indirectly. This will involve everyone from executive officers to frontline workers.

Not only do we believe this is the right approach, Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that all children have the right to be heard. This means they have the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

We hope that this framework will help us all start to think differently about how children are affected by all our work and how we can better involve them in decisions going forward.





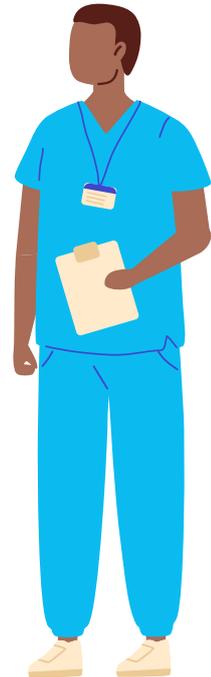
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# Our vision

A meaningful collaboration with children across West Yorkshire on the topics that matter most to them.

## Key Themes

- Recognise children as equal stakeholders
- Prioritise meaningful engagement with children to influence our work
- Evidence your understanding



# Child First network



We want to create a network of like-minded professionals who utilise the Child First principles to share good practice and find the most effective ways to amplify the voices of children in West Yorkshire.

## **In return, you can expect**

- An introductory call with member of our team to explore how Child First can be applied in your work
- Access to networking with others embedding Child First
- Advice, guidance and peer reviewing from the team – we won't get everything right all the time but we can support each other to make improvements
- Terminology and language guidance to ensure a consistent message

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# Who did we speak to?

This framework has been informed by the voices of 455 children from across West Yorkshire.

Their views were gained through face-to-face sessions delivered by Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) staff and partner organisations.

## Questions were focussed around 4 key themes

- We work together
- We see you as individuals
- We build trusted relationships
- Right place, right time, right person, right reason

This was done in a variety of settings including schools, alternative provisions, youth clubs and sports pitches!

A thematic analysis was then conducted on the feedback, so this framework is entirely formed from children's views. Quotes used throughout the framework have come directly from the children who took part in the workshops.

Thank you to all those involved in facilitating these workshops.

## What Next?

Embedding a Child First approach is everyone's responsibility, so we encourage you to come on this journey with us.

### To get started with a Child First approach

- Sign up to the Child First network, setting your intentions to embed this approach in your organisation
- Share this framework and its messaging with other professionals
- Consider the questions suggested throughout the framework – what can you do differently to demonstrate you have listened to children's voices?
- Share your learning with the VRP and the Child First community

We recognise this is the start of an ongoing conversation with the children of West Yorkshire so we will continue to evolve this framework as we learn.

The first question we asked the children at the sessions:

**‘What do you want professionals to know about you?’**

We were not surprised that this led to more than 375 individual responses! Broadly, these can be categorised across the following themes:

- Culture/heritage
- Disability
- Skills
- Family, friends and pets
- Achievements
- Interests and hobbies
- Personal characteristics
- Appearance
- Personality
- Pronouns
- Likes and dislikes



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# Think big picture

Consider the child as a whole, not just the aspect of their life that relates to our priorities.

- Understand how children are impacted by your organisation's work, both directly and indirectly
- Consider the different experiences and needs. What works for some won't work for all
- Engage with children as early as possible rather than going to them with a determined plan
- If children's views contradict existing approaches or ways of working, this is not a reason to disregard it, but the start of a conversation around how things can be done differently to be more inclusive
- Relationships should be reciprocal – as professionals we need to give something if we expect something back
- Long lasting engagement with children can help us to empower communities and improve trust and confidence
- Children are important partners in our work and can be recognised as equal stakeholders. We should consider how children could be impacted by all our work and engage with them as we would any other partner
- The earlier we capture children's voices the better! Capturing their views at the start of work and continuing to involve them helps to make sure it is meaningful



That I'm shy with new people but funny when you get to know me

Not think that cos I've been in trouble I'm no good

If I feel comfortable I will express myself

Listen to each individual child

How are children affected by your work and how do you know this?

What are the immediate and wider impacts?

How are you listening to the voices of the children your work affects?

## Questions to ask your organisation

What are the children interested in?

At what point do you currently engage with children?

How can you involve them earlier?

How can you demonstrate to children that you value them as individuals?

How can you demonstrate to children that you value them as stakeholders?

How do you ensure their involvement is meaningful?

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# You say, we're listening

Children can often have solutions to problems and can offer a creative insight into their lives and the issues that are affecting them.

They want to know there are **tangible outcomes** around the things that matter most to them – we said, you listened. How do we make it meaningful so children feel their views are valued?

**Joined up working** between organisations on both an individual and organisational level offers opportunities to **share learning** from engagement with children so they don't have to repeat themselves.

Children want to be kept in the loop following engagement, they want to know what actions are taken as a result and be involved in any future developments of the work.

This includes when **a plan must be changed**. Children were very clear about professionals **'being straight'**. If something can't happen, why? How can we continue working with children to find a compromise?

Don't make a promise they can't keep

I want professionals to communicate

Listen to each individual child

Explain why and say this is what we can do, what other ideas do you have

How are children impacted by your work?

Have they been identified in an Equality Impact Assessment?

How can children be involved in your decision making processes?\*

## Questions to ask your organisation

If you already engage with children as part of your work, how could you enhance this offer?

If you already engage with children as part of your work, how often is this reviewed?

What existing forums could you share this learning with other professionals?

How can you continue to involve children as your work progresses?

How do you feed this back to the children involved and wider cohorts of children?

\* For example commissioning, recruitment, scrutiny

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# How can we involve children?

A starting point to help us all think differently to involve children in meaningful and innovative ways.

Listen to each individual child

Getting our feedback on things that have happened – listening and putting answers together to improve things

Kids have good opinions and solutions but adults don't listen and think we're dumb

I want people to talk to me about how I can be safe and happier



Do you understand why it's important to involve children in your work?

Can children be involved in your recruitment processes?

Can children be involved in commissioning processes?

## Questions to ask your organisation

Could children design forms that hold their information?

Do you have child friendly versions of front facing documents?\*

Can children be involved in communication or marketing campaigns?

Do children help shape your strategies and plans?

How do you use your work to inform children about career choices?

Is the voice of the child reflected in your policies and consultations?

How do you continually engage children in a meaningful way?

\* For example easy read versions or infographics using child friendly language

# Right person and right place

The right person genuinely wants to be there, wants to listen to children’s views and wants to amplify children’s voices to make a difference. This should always be the starting point.

## The right person has traits that children value

- Kindness – have their best interests at heart
- Honesty – be upfront about why you are there and what you are going to do
- Loyalty – don’t share what they have said unless you have told them beforehand, follow through on promises. If you do have to share something for a safeguarding reason, explain why and who you will be sharing it with
- Trust and respect – this has to be earned and can be lost quickly
- A sense of humour helps too

Children at the workshop gave examples of professionals they trust – mostly youth workers and support workers. This was partly due to the length of time they had known these professionals and the consistency they offered.

Children want to speak directly to people who have the authority to make change based on their suggestions, rather than having their ideas reported upwards.

Having the right people can help prove that the children are being taken seriously and their ideas are valued.



## Right place

Go to children, rather than expecting them to come to your organisation. When this isn't possible, for example, engaging with children in custody, consider what can make the space more comfortable.

The environment can be empowering – a space should feel safe, welcoming, and comfortable. Where possible, it should have flexibility to allow private chats and group discussions with suitable resources to support engagement such as fidget toys and snacks. What this looks like will vary and should be explored with each group or individual.

## Establish a relationship

Establishing a relationship is key and this can be done throughout the process. It doesn't need to be a formal icebreaker; it's just making yourself human! This could include personal information such as your pets, what you are having for tea and which football team you support along with what your job is and why you are speaking to the group.

Sometimes despite the best intentions personalities clash so building that relationship might take a bit longer. This perseverance will be valued.

Withhold all judgement and pre-conceptions. See the child as a whole person and accept them for who they are. Understanding how individuals come across is important so as not to misinterpret their body language – for example, at one of our workshops a child explained that they struggled to hold eye contact with people and felt this was often interpreted as them not paying attention.

There may be opportunities for shared learning between professionals around how they establish and maintain these relationships.

## Questions to ask your organisation

Why do you care about what children have to say?

How is the environment you intend to meet in suited to the needs of the children?

How do you demonstrate that you care?

Who is best placed to connect with children?

How do you intend to build a relationship with children?

Who needs to listen?



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# Engagement should be engaging

## Ten steps to a successful engagement

### 1. Tailor the engagement

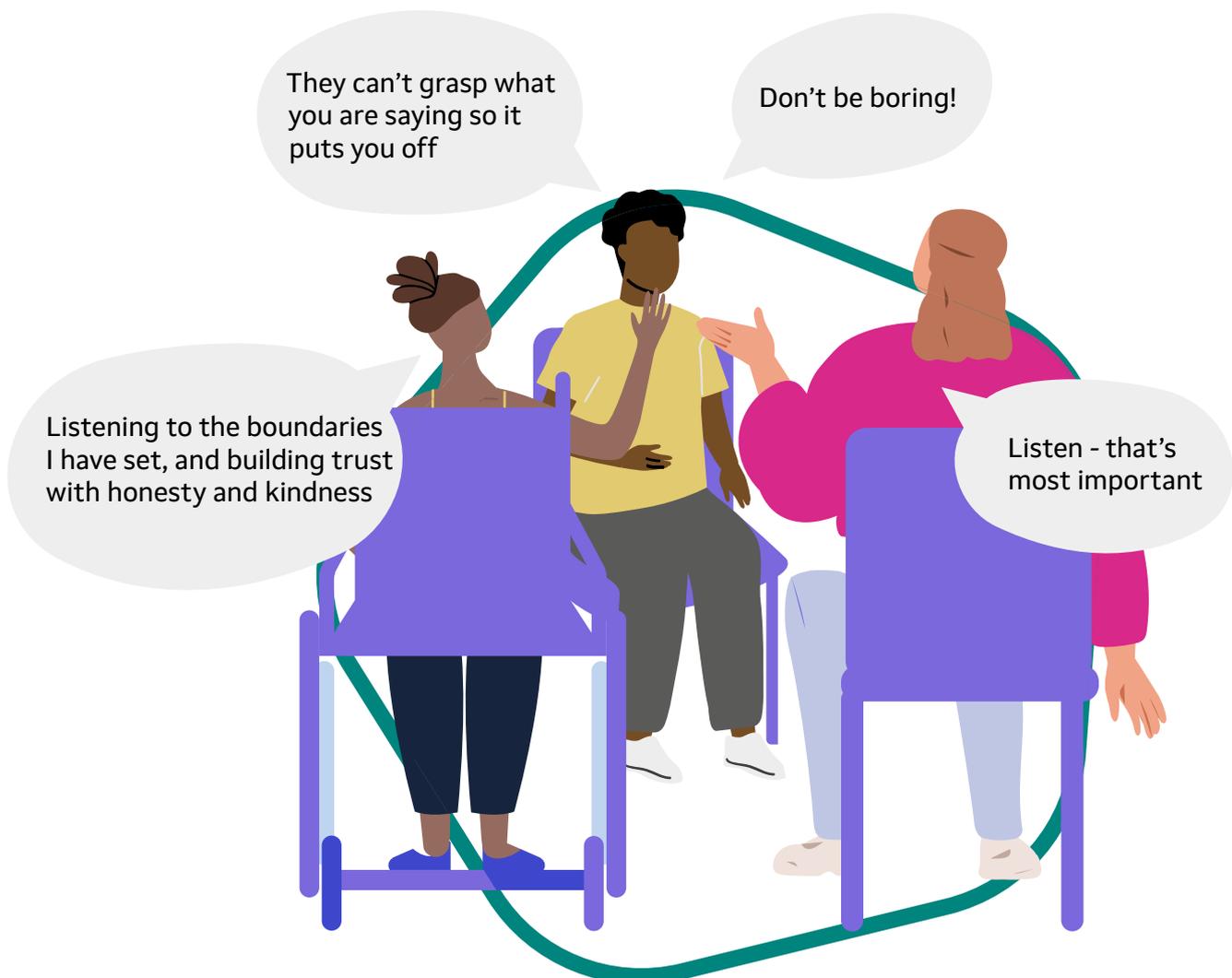
- Consider the learning style of participants
- Define topics that should be avoided, as well as those that will be included
- Define what effective communication looks like to the organisation
- Define what effective communication looks like to children

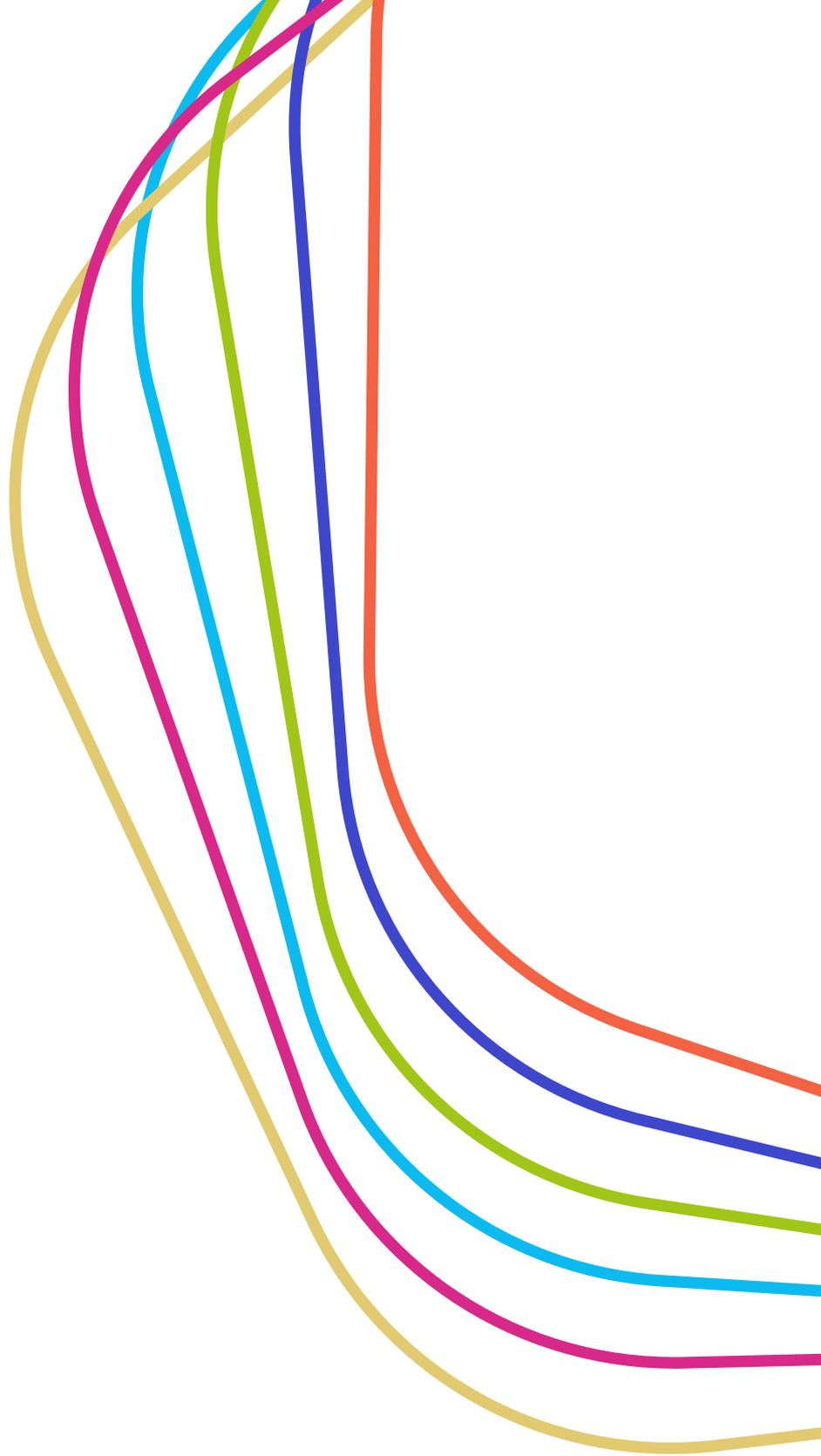
### 2. At the start of the engagement

- Set boundaries for the relationships between the individuals and also the group
- Provide an overview of the organisation
- Explain why you are consulting with children and with them specifically. This will help make them feel empowered
- Detail how any feedback will be used and how you will feedback the results with them

3. **Be curious and ask questions** whilst still respecting the boundaries set out
4. **Be mindful of the space**  
For example, if in a children's space e.g. a youth club, consider how to respect this and not overstay your welcome
5. **Be open to children asking questions too**  
This helps to build relationships and demonstrates you are on an equal footing
6. **Any engagement needs to be interesting**  
Focus on something that children are genuinely interested in – how can you find this out? A topic may not be typically engaging however that doesn't mean the activity can't be fun
7. **Be part of the conversation**, as well as asking the questions. This demonstrates that the children have been heard and understood, without dismissing any ideas
8. **Consider different methods to engage**  
Does it have to be a survey or can it be more creative? Ensure the engagement is accessible to different groups
9. **Capture what is said during any discussions** but consider how to do this in a respectful way. Examples include:
  - Sessions could be recorded to avoid writing notes whilst conversations are taking place
  - Children could be given opportunities to review the notes and check what they actually mean has been understood
  - Children could be given a facilitator role to help lead conversations
10. **Feedback to the children after the session**  
After any engagement with children it is essential you communicate how their contributions have made a difference. There may even be opportunities to include them in the next stages of the work

Listen to each individual child





We know how important it is to share our learning.  
**Scan the QR code** to share your best practice with  
the Child First community.

[\*\*westyorks-ca.gov.uk/VRP\*\*](https://westyorks-ca.gov.uk/VRP)



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