



TERM 03 TOPIC

Parents Newsletter

Marijana Filipovic-Carter
Family Engagement & Support Lead

“MY VOICE MATTERS”

EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO CONFIDENTLY EXPRESS THEMSELVES

This year's Children's mental health week's theme is “My voice matters”. Various professionals, parents and carers are encouraged to reflect on ways to empower children to accept their own feelings, follow their instincts and interests, use their voices to share ideas and inspire others. Empowering children in this way can have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. Place2Be, one of the UK's leading children's mental health charities, states that children and young people who feel that their voices are heard have higher levels of self-esteem.

What can parents and carers do to make sure that children's voices really do matter? In general terms, for children to feel comfortable with their feelings and confident to express their thoughts and ideas, they need to be growing up in an atmosphere where they feel at ease with their emotions, where they feel encouraged to express them and where they feel empowered to contribute their ideas. Specifically, that means that children might need adults to reflect on their own behaviours listed below.

Are you really listening?

For children to be able to accept that their voice matters, they need to feel that their voice is first heard. How often do our children talk to us while we are focusing on other things and only half listening? How often do we ignore what they say and try to impose our own version of events onto them? To change this, first start with noticing whether you really listen to your children. Try not to interrupt and master the art of reflective listening: ask open-ended questions and repeat their ideas using your own words.

Do you validate their feelings?

Sometimes when children share their feelings with us, we tell them that's not how they (should) feel: “Of course you don't hate your brother!” There are different reasons why adults do this, but the impact on most children is similar: they start to question their own feelings and thoughts and undermine their own voice. On the other side, validation helps children feel worthwhile, seen, valued and understood. If this is something you would like to improve, try adapting the following phrases:

- “Now that you've shared your point of view, it makes sense that you would be so upset about the situation.”
- “I appreciate you sharing your feelings with me. It must have been so frustrating for you to feel misunderstood.”
- “Oh, wow! If that happened to me, I would feel like that too!”

Are you trying to rescue children from their feelings?

Of course our job is to protect our children. Their safety is paramount so stepping in to keep them from harm is a must. But there are times when we shouldn't intervene; times when interfering is more counterproductive. Trying to save and rescue our children from their feelings is one of those examples. Again, adults do this for various reasons but the impact on children can be profound – undermining their self-esteem and confidence, believing that they are not capable of coping with different situations and emotions.



FAMILY SERVICES

MOVE
MORE
EVERY CHILD ACTIVE



@MoveMoreCIO

www.move-more.org

Charity Number 1175899

Paradoxically, the more we rescue, the more children need us to rescue them thus creating a vicious cycle. If you are curious about how to minimise rescuing your children, consider the following:

- Try to see your children's feelings and reactions as communications and not as a 999 call: become curious with the situation, ask questions, find out what is going on and see if a child can deal with things on their own.
- Practice being patient and wait: children are often able to sort themselves out so give them the opportunity to strengthen their coping "muscle".
- Make sure that your children hear you say how capable they are of handling different situations.
- Finally, remember that they don't always want or need answers or solutions from you: sometimes children just want to offload.

Have you tried communicating in different ways?

Some adults get frustrated because they put a lot of energy in encouraging children to share their voice only to be faced with "I don't know" (and a shrug). Very often this is because children really don't have an answer and sometimes this could be down to children maybe needing us to ask the questions in a different way. Think about different ways of communication and different senses. Communication doesn't just have to be verbal; you can use post-it notes, text and voice messages, picture cards, non-verbal signals and so on.

Do you ask for and accept their opinions?

How often do we ask children to listen to us and our opinions? How often do we ask them to share their own views? How often do they get dismissed because adults don't believe that they have anything meaningful to add? How often do we ridicule their opinions and ideas? Children are very resourceful and if we don't ask for their opinion, they won't feel validated and seen. Furthermore, children won't have the opportunities and experience necessary for being able to think through their opinions and refine them.

To help children practice having conversations and thinking through their positions, think how you can adapt the following suggestions to suit your situation and your children's age and developmental stage:

- "This happened at work today. What do you think about it?"
- "I read about an interesting experience in my book last night. I would love to know whether it sounds as exciting to you."
- "I am curious to know where you see yourself in the future. What do you want for yourself? It seems to me that right now school isn't very important to you. Whilst there are many successful people who didn't do well in school, it can limit your options. How do you see it working for you? What's your plan?"
- "We are planning our holidays. Is there anywhere that you'd love to go?"
- "We think that it would be a good idea to set some boundaries around screen time. What do you think is the right amount?"

