



Communication and Interaction Team

Supporting Safeguarding Conversations for Children and Young People with Communication and Interaction Needs

“The need for good communication is crucial when considering safeguarding concerns. It is important to remember that communicating with young people is a two-way process – it not only relates to a young person’s ability to communicate but also relies upon the professional’s competency in communication.” NAS: Safeguarding Young People on the Autistic Spectrum

It is important to recognise that children and young people with communication and interaction needs may be more vulnerable to abuse because of differences in communication, social interactions or interpretation of others' motives. Management of a disclosure or a conversation around safeguarding with a child or young person with SLCN or autism can be particularly complex. All adults supporting a child or young person with Communication and Interaction needs should be aware of the following:

- Children and young people who appear to have good expressive language skills or a large vocabulary, may not necessarily be able to communicate abuse or know how to ask for help. This means that it is important to consider what a child or young person is communicating non-verbally about an indicator of possible abuse. Asking non-leading questions can help to start a conversation if you are worried for example – “Tell me the best and worst thing today?”
- Sometimes seemingly good expressive language skills can mask the difficulties a child or young person may experience with interpreting others’ motivations interpreting non-verbal cues. A supporting adult may need to be curious around different situations of concern or behaviours the child or young person is showing.

- The TED approach - (Tell me, Explain, Describe) requires a high level of receptive and expressive language skill. Some children and young people will benefit from visuals to prompt and support the conversation, even if they can usually express themselves verbally. These visuals should be at an appropriate language level to the child or young person. It is important that the visuals are not used to present leading questions however. Ensure that these resources are named, copied and shared with the disclosure so that, in the possible event that at a later date there is challenge around ‘leading questions’ being assumed, there is a clear record of the support materials used to enable voice of the child and that these are part of the support for an individual’s language and understanding.
- Allow a child or young person time to process questions asked. Repeating it or re-phrasing of questions too quickly may delay or confuse processing.
- Naturally, conversation around safeguarding will increase the anxiety levels of a child or young person and this anxiety is very likely to diminish a child or young person's ability to communicate – to both speak and understand. Again, visuals appropriate to the ability of the child or young person may be needed to support their communication. In addition to this, try to keep questions simple, using limited language.
- Explicit verbal reassurance or feedback might be needed to assure a young person that they are doing well during a



difficult conversation. They will not necessarily be able to read the listener's non-verbal cues.

- It is likely that a child or young person will need a break if making a disclosure or communicating about an uncomfortable subject. This break will support regulation and so effective communication. A visual tool such as a 'break card' can be used to support the young person's ability to request a break. In addition to this the adult may need to notice that a break is needed and initiate introducing it for the young person.
- Consider where a safeguarding conversation will take place. A child or young person is most likely to be able to communicate best within a familiar and comfortable environment.
- In terms of seating arrangements, it may be better for a child or young person to be sat by the side of an adult, which is less demanding than sitting face to face.
- A visual, for example a simple flow chart which is appropriate to the language level of the child or young person, will support their understanding of the process following disclosure. They are likely to need time to process any information given verbally. A visual is concrete and permanent and is something the child or young person can refer back to for reassurance if needed.

Useful Links:

'How it is' is an image vocabulary that has been developed to help children communicate about a range of important issues. It has been developed by Triangle and funded and supported by the NSPCC

- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection-schools/safeguarding-children-with-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send>

Safeguarding children with SEND:

- <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection-schools/safeguarding-children-with-special-educational-needs-and-disabilities-send>
- <https://preventforfeandtraining.org.uk/>