



SOUTH WEST

**GIVING CHILDREN BACK THEIR FUTURE**

Mid & East Dorset Children's Centres  
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## **Consulting with Children Under 5**

### Methodology

As a team, we have been consulting with children from age 1 year up. The method we have used focuses around a story of a family of teddy bears. It is as effective with children of a much older age range, up to children aged 7. Researchers must be very comfortable with the story, as it needs to be animated and engaging. Therefore, all researchers, whilst using the same story, personalise it so that they are comfortable with it. At no point are notes used to support the story telling. It is relayed as an actual event.

### Why it works

It is successful on a number of levels.

- It values children as experts in their own lives
- It is only the children's views – no adult influences their responses
- Children feel valued as they are listened to
- It engages the children, by using a variety of props – four teddies, fully dressed and interactive, and the use of a mobile phone
- It can be easily adapted to support children with English as a Second Language, or with additional needs. This is done with the use of pictures. However, be aware of ensuring that in these instances the consultation does not become overly adult led.
- It raises a child's perspective within the community and therefore empowers findings
- It raises with providers how children are experts, and very knowledgeable in their requirements

## Storytime

The story discusses their concerns when they venture out into the 'Land of the Teddies' and discover that all other teddies throughout the land are very unhappy. They have nowhere to go, nothing to do, the areas in which they live and could play are generally unsafe.

The King teddy worries about his discovery, and then gets in touch with us, as a Children's Centre, to ask what he can do to improve the situation. However, we don't know! We cannot presume to know what the young teddies need. So we go to the children of the local community to ask their thoughts.

The children are shown their answers by holding up the results taken, making them feel important and valued. They are thanked for their help and told that the king teddy will be informed of their answers.

## Results

Children are valued and respected as experts in their own lives. Children are engaged with the story, but are never forced to participate – we ensure that all children assent as well as consent to the process.

Generally, results are broken into four different areas, Inside, Outside, Excursions and Family Support. In the majority of instances, the Five Outcomes of the Every Child Matters framework are raised by the children. Our most surprising result was the discussion around toilet provision and how important children felt this was with regards to external play areas. Children have proven to also be very concerned about the support that their parents and extended family receive.

We have found this to be a very effective form of consultation.

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