

ARTHUR reminds staff to focus on the voice of the child

Using voice of the child initiative enhances multi-agency child safeguarding response.

First published

4 March 2024

Updated

18 March 2025

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Public Protection, Safeguarding & Vulnerability Child abuse Ethics and values
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Region	Eastern
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	February 2022

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Children and young people

Aim

In late 2021, Suffolk Constabulary recognised that the voice of the child was not at the heart of force culture when dealing with incidents involving children. A rebranded approach was launched in April 2022. The focus was on the voice of the child and this centred around child abuse. The ARTHUR mnemonic was introduced to:

- ensure a consistent approach to assessing and recording risk
- capture children's views
- ensure all staff use professional curiosity and attention to detail

Intended outcome

To embed the principle and importance of child protection in force culture and ensure this was at the forefront of staff members' minds when dealing with any incident involving children.

Description

In early 2022, the voice of the child branding was developed. This was used in posters and guidance material that were launched in March 2022.

ARTHUR mnemonic

The ARTHUR mnemonic was created as follows.

- A – Are there children present?
- R – Review the circumstances to identify and assess any risks.
- T – Take time to speak with children, ask them how they are feeling and record what they say.
- H – How do they appear (demeanour)? Note any concerning behaviours.

- U – Understand their wishes, thoughts and feelings.
- R – Record detail (including body-worn video) and make a safeguarding referral or take action as soon as possible.

Communicating the campaign

There was a concerted effort to communicate the campaign through various mediums – including the force intranet, vlogs, force orders, briefings and emails to all operational staff.

Recording and monitoring

Officers and staff are required to record the voice of the child in a consistent manner on crime and non-crime records where children are present or ordinarily resident. These have been heavily monitored for compliance. Where children were present or resident and no voice of the child was recorded, feedback was provided to staff and supervisors.

Voice of the child entries are monitored via Suffolk Constabulary's domestic abuse delivery and child protection delivery boards to ensure consistent performance across the force.

Successes

There have been a number of positive examples of where the voice of the child has been used to good effect.

The voice of the child initiative has been recognised as an innovative practice in the [Suffolk national child protection inspection report into the constabulary's child protection arrangements](#) (report published December 2022).

This has been one of Suffolk Constabulary's most successful campaigns, positively influencing force culture and their approach towards protecting children.

Overall impact

- Increased awareness and professional curiosity in attending officers.
- Use of the ARTHUR mnemonic is becoming embedded in Suffolk Constabulary's force culture, along with the publication of hints and tips for officers to use when speaking to children.

- There is evidence of more officers actively seeking the voice, views and lived experience of children. These are shared with social care partners and are used when assessing the signs of safety. This enables rich decision making and enhances the multi-agency child safeguarding response.
- This initiative has continued to ensure officers provide better quality voice of the child submissions and views from their perspective. This is shared with partners when suitable and this also provides them with deeper understanding of the issues and perspective of a child.

Learning

Suffolk Constabulary's challenge was gaining officers' compliance to capture and record the voice of the child on crime and non-crime records. As officers are heavily loaded with information, it took time for this practice to become embedded.

After several force announcements reminded officers to record the voice of the child, multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) staff noted relevant investigation numbers where it had been missed. Officers and their supervisors were then reminded of the requirement to record by a senior officer. This exercise was conducted on three occasions and compliance improved.

Voice of the child was also added as a criteria in several regular audit streams in force. It was explained why it's critical to capture the voice of the child and examples were highlighted of where this has created meaningful positive change for children.

Some officers felt unsure of how to speak to small children, so guidance was issued on the force intranet. Additionally, if the child was non-verbal or very young, some officers would take this literally and not record voice of the child, the child's demeanour or environment, or what they might say if they could talk.

It is essential to regularly refresh the communications and requirement for officers and staff to use the template and record the voice of the child. Inevitably, with the passage of time, the force are finding that the number voice of the child entries declines and regular communication is required to ensure that officers not bypass this vital aspect of safeguarding. The voice of the child entries are monitored within domestic abuse performance and improvement groups.

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