



# Consulting with our Youngest Children Toolkit 2025

Developed in partnership between Highland Child Protection Committee 'Starting Out' Sub-Group and Care and Learning Alliance

# Contents

Page 3 - 4	Purpose of this tool Context Voice of the infant pledge
Page 5	About this tool
Page 6	Key ideas to encourage and support consultation with young children
Page 7 - 13	Strategies for consulting with young children
Page 14 -16	Additional resources

# Purpose of this tool

The purpose of this tool is to provide adults with strategies that will support young children to:

- share their ideas and make choices
- share their thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes and worries
- recognise their views matter
- know they are listened to
- support their sense of belonging
- develop confidence and self-worth
- develop their communication skills

## Context

As part of Scotland's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) every child in Scotland has the right to have their views heard and taken into account in decisions affecting them (Article 12) and to be protected from harm (Article 19). For more information on Children's Rights - [please click here](#).

Consultation with young children is more than just asking their views, it's about really listening to them, responding to them and acting on their ideas where possible. It's also about facilitating their ability to influence things that affect them and help adults to know and understand their concerns or worries through the child's eyes enabling adults to help protect them from harm.



For more information on the importance of listening to children see the current guidance for those working with young children:

***'Realising the Ambition; Being me'.***

Scottish Government, 2020 pages 66-77



The 'Wellbeing Indicators' sit at the heart of the GIRFEC approach and reflect the aspirations of Scottish Government for all children to be all of these things.

[Click here to read about the Wellbeing Indicators on the Scottish Government website](#)

## (context continued.....)

### Voice of the Infant Pledge

The national 'Voice of the Infant pledge' is written in simple language from the baby's perspective. It highlights that 'babies have their own minds and they have things to communicate from birth'. The pledge provides guidance for practitioners working with our youngest children and requires a commitment from services to facilitate consultation with infants to express their views. This tool should be read in conjunction with the 'Voice of the Infant Pledge' which can be found [here](#).

### Infant Pledge

*'I am one of Scotland's youngest citizens. To give me the best start, so that I can thrive throughout my life, I need to be seen as a person with my own feelings and rights. I depend on adults to interpret my cues and communications so that my rights are upheld, and my voice is heard.'*

*My relationships with the people who care for me are important and directly affect how my brain grows and develops, and how I learn to process and regulate my feelings. Safe and secure relationships and consistent care support my wellbeing now and give me better chances and outcomes in later life too.*

*Professionals and academics in the field of Infant Mental Health alongside organisations championing the rights and welfare of babies and very young children have come together on my behalf to create the following expectations, which they believe would help improve my life chances.'*

I expect that I will:

- Be seen as a person with my own feelings and views.
- Be seen as able to communicate my feelings and views.
- Be able to trust my important adults to think carefully about my feelings and views and speak them for me.
- Be supported to have secure relationships with the adults who care for me.
- Have safe, interesting places to play and learn, and the help I need to do so.
- Have my views valued by my family, community, and society.
- Have a say in decisions about what happens to me.

My important adults will:

- Have support to be healthy, including before I am born.
- Have the information they need to make good choices for me.
- Have the support they need to understand and meet my needs and their own.
- Have help from people with the right knowledge and skills.

It is everyone's responsibility to:

- Consider me and my perspective at all levels of decision making.

*Produced by the Voice of the Infant subgroup on behalf of the Scottish Government's Infant Mental Health Implementation and Advisory Group*

# About this tool

Consultation with children under 5 years of age can be a little challenging! However it's vital we take time to enable children to communicate their ideas, thoughts and feelings in ways best suited to their age and stage to ensure that we keep the child at the centre of all that we do.

We know that children need to feel secure, confident and familiar in their physical and psychological environments. Having a consistent approach to consulting with young children is more likely to help us gain a true understanding of the child's world enabling us to plan to meet their needs effectively.

The strategies in this tool can be used by adults working on an individual basis with a young child for a specific purpose or by adults who have significant contact with young children on a frequent basis embedding meaningful consultation in daily practice.

For ease of use we have used the following icons throughout the tool:



Denotes aspects particularly useful for adults working with children on an individual basis for a specific purpose (eg. Children's Service Workers, other professionals)



Denotes aspects useful for those adults who are part of children's day to day lives. (eg. Early Learning and Childcare practitioners including Childminders, parents/carers)

The following pages share ideas and ways to use puppets, characters and objects of interest to the child along with the idea of having a 'Share Ted' and additional resources. The idea of 'Share Ted', in this case called 'Shelby' is simply a teddy/soft toy/toy animal or character that becomes an occasional or regular feature in the child's play.

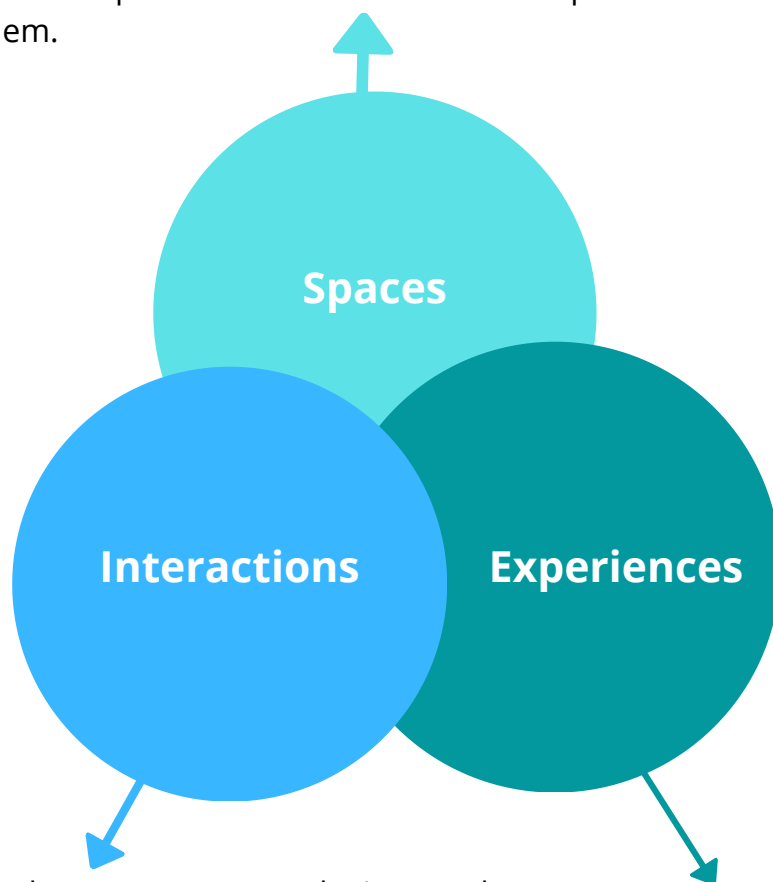
The use of puppets and favourite characters can support formal consultation with a child as well as everyday listening individually or in a group setting ensuring their voice is heard.

Some young children might engage well using a prop or character similar to their favourite character from Safe Strong and Free.

A top tip is to refer to the puppet or character in the 'third person' particularly for very young children or those who are developing their confidence in understanding or exploring their feelings.

# Ways to encourage young children's participation and share their views

- Spaces that promote safety and trust help children to feel secure
- Provide consistent routines and appropriate experiences where children are encouraged to participate in making decisions e.g. what fruit shall we have for snack today?
- Environments that promote self-regulation and social-emotional skills.
- Environments that support children's resilience, self-confidence and freedom of expression will help enable them to be able to express their needs, who and what will help them.



- Interactions that nurture, are loving and consistent
- Interactions that evoke communication with the children, open body language, calm reactions
- Interactions that wait and allow time for children to respond through both body language and verbally
- Interactions that show they value all communication positively – tears and tantrums too!
- Experiences that are rich in choice of resources to explore, create etc.
- Experiences that provide opportunities for children to try things out.
- Experiences that reflect the child's interest

# Top Tips for using puppets to consult with young children

Click on the image below to access a short video sharing some 'top tips' for using puppets/ Share Ted to encourage and support consultation with a young child.

Alternatively enter the following link into your browser

<https://vimeo.com/436438303/1be48eaebf>

or

[CLICK HERE](#) to download a copy of the narration.

<https://tinyurl.com/u723xsm9>



## Ideas for introducing a 'Share Ted'

Have the 'Teddy' character that you intend to use ready to share with child - or invite them to 'vote' for which teddy will become 'Share Ted' using bottle tops or stickers.

Ideas to excite and encourage a child or group of children's curiosity could include:

- Place a Teddy in a box with a label addressed to the child attached to it
- Hold a circle time and encourage the children to guess what is in the box
- Get someone to make a 'special delivery' package addressed to the child

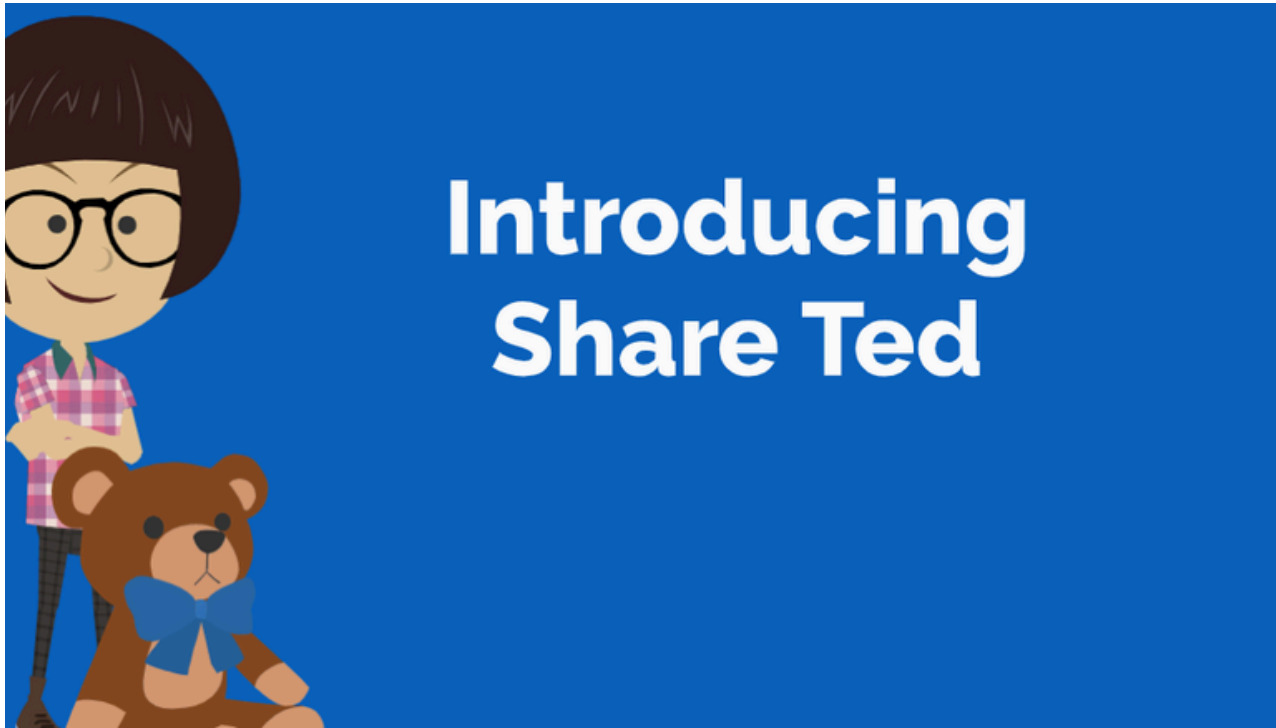
We have provided a short animation for children to watch to help you introduce the "Share Ted to a child or group of children.

As you watch this animation video with the child/ren, have your 'Share Ted' ready beside you to introduce and name!

Click on the image to play the video - alternatively enter the following link into your browser?



<https://vimeo.com/427411436/8920d3bf30>



Other ideas to help children establish a 'bond' with Share Ted:



- Select a few names that they like and create a list. Use some 3D objects (bottle tops/pebbles/pegs etc) for the child or group of children to vote with.
- Support the children to shake hands/cuddle the teddy/puppet if they want to and tell them their name etc.
- Facilitate play with the Share Ted - involve the Ted/puppet in something that interests and is familiar to the child e.g construction or sand play. Have the Share Ted play alongside the child.
- Take things slowly with Share Ted - try to involve the Share Ted in normal every day experiences such as snack, bathtime, story time before focusing on too many questions for more tricky subjects to discuss.





## Some ideas to help find out what I like!

These ideas can be used with Share Ted /puppet or as stand alone

### Junk Model House

- Why not try making a home for your 'Share Ted' from a large cardboard box, furniture can be made from smaller boxes and other recycled materials.
- Alternatively, child/children can be supported to make their own 'house' for Ted from cardboard boxes or cushion 'den'

Creating a home for your 'Share Ted' enables child/children to revisit and explore this play often and helps them talk about their own environments.

### Memory books

- Children love to look back on things they have done. Memory books provide an excellent opportunity for them to recall, share new learning/ideas/feelings/recognise change and provides adults in their lives with the opportunity to observe and interact with this.
- Create a memory book to record things (with Share Ted if using the strategy)
- To develop their sense of ownership - encourage the child/children to design the front cover - include photos, adults can scribe child/children's comments, drawings etc.

### 'I like' game?

- Provide a basket or box of interesting objects or a set of photographs to help stimulate discussion
- Use your 'Share Ted' to ask the child/ren e.g. I wonder what this is?
- Invite the child/children to explore the objects/photos
- Help the child/children to create a list/display of their likes dislikes - revisit this often to support understanding that these can change as they grow and learn. our likes and dislikes may change as we grow and learn
- Click on the links below to access a set of photograph cards to get you started. We have provided a set of blank ones for the child/children to draw/stick their own ideas on

**[Click here to download a set of picture cards](#)**

**[Click here to download a set of blank picture cards](#)**



## Exploring feelings

The following strategies can be adapted and used in a variety of different ways

Using videos children are familiar with can be a great stimulus for discussion and recall.

Click on the image to access an animation video which you may find useful to help introduce conversations about what makes us feel 'safe.'



Alternatively copy and paste the following link into your browser

**<https://vimeo.com/427892025/cfb4ac5589>**

### **Clouds**

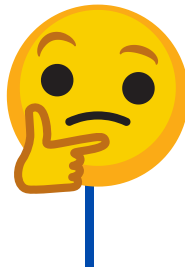
Provide the child/children with laminated pictures of dark and white clouds. Support them to create pictures of things that make them feel safe and things that don't. Provide flash cards/3D objects to help prompt conversation.

### **Pictures/Drawings**

Support child/children to draw/paint things that make them feel safe. Drawing and painting can be powerful tools for consulting/communicating feelings. Varying the size, medium, indoor and outdoors e.g. small trays with wet sand and sticks for mark making to accommodate children's preferences.



## Emoji Feeling Sticks



Make some simple emoji feeling sticks for children to access independently. Where practical, child/children can be involved in making these to develop their sense of ownership. Emoji sticks can be used in a wide variety of ways and are particularly useful for those children who are non-verbal or less confident communicators to share their feelings.

- Use 'Share Ted' to ask open questions. Try using picture cards and ask the child/children to choose an emoji stick to share what they think the 'Share Ted' feels about the picture. As with puppets, it can be helpful to use the third person for children who are in the early stages of developing their confidence.
- Read stories and encourage child/children to use their emoji sticks to answer your wondering questions about the character's feelings. You could ask the children what they think about an aspect of the story e.g - I wonder how do you think little bear felt when he saw his broken chair? How do you feel when your things get broken? etc.
- Different emoji faces can be added to explore more complex feelings such as scared worried, angry. etc.

## Useful questions

*Adopt a wondering approach - (see Highland Council Early Literacy Progression strategy 'Words Up')*

- I wonder who you like to spend time with?
- I wonder who makes you feel happy?
- I wonder who helps you when you feel sad?
- I wonder who can you share secrets with?

*You might find answers may not come straight away, until the young child/ren develop confidence to express themselves, so try the OWL strategy – observe, wait, listen. Try 'reflective listening' where the adult restates what the child has said – this shows you are interested, acknowledges what they said and the child/ren know you have really heard them.*



## Exploring children's right to be active and healthy

*The following strategies can be adapted and used in a variety of different ways*

Using some left over wallpaper or 2 large sheets of paper taped together, use 'Share Ted' to help the child/children roll out some wallpaper. Ask for a volunteer to lie on the paper for the child/children to draw around the outline of their body, then support child/children to cut round the shape of the figure they've created.

- Place some food items/packaging or energetic play items e.g. skipping rope/ball etc. strategically close by to entice children's interest and thinking. Encourage the children to collect things that will help keep the figure they have created happy and healthy.
- Use your 'Share Ted' and a scenario card to set some questions.  
For example:  
*'Shelby Share Ted' loves to read his books and go for walks with his dog when he is at home - what do you like doing at home?*  
Scribe child/children's responses or encourage mark making/drawing to represent their information.
- Place some vegetables (real or pretend) in a bag (e.g. pillow slip). Ask children to feel inside the bag and guess which vegetables are there by feeling. Use 'Shelby Share Ted' to explore their likes, dislikes with food. Have more fun by cutting up the vegetables and using them to do prints on your cut out figure.

These strategies are particularly useful for exploring more difficult conversations around feeling hunger/bored/tired etc



## Songs

As with drawing and stories, songs and music can be powerful tools to initiate consultation, especially around sensitive issues.

**Click here** to access a song developed to help young children learn about body safety. (<https://youtu.be/IGC0cbB0NAM>)

Use the idea of drawing around the children and populating the cut-out figure with things to keep them happy and healthy. Add in photos of people who can help them etc.

## Role Play

Children can act out stories, scenarios, and come up with creative ways to solve problems while engaged in role play. Use 'Share Ted' to drop in some open questions or ideas into role play situations as a stimulus for children to 'act out' their thoughts/feelings.

## Start with the child's interest

Observe a child to find out their interest, or find out from family. Use this to support consultation e.g. a child who loves playing with the cars - create a visual/3D mind map of different items or cut out pictures to prompt discussion e.g Who helps to keep me safe?

Provide children with a drinking straw and they could blow the toy car to identify the people/things on the mind map that keep them safe.

## Use of technology

Make use of any available early years technology resources such as 'talking tins'. Children enjoy hearing and seeing themselves and similar to puppets, may feel more confident to speak into a gadget as opposed to face to face with an adult. 'Share Ted' can be used to pose open questions etc.

*Caution:* consider carefully before using video/phone cameras etc. Be clear that there are permissions in place to do so and mindful of any potential General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) issues.



# Safe Strong and Free

The Safe Strong and Free Project (SSF) is a Highland charity which aims to reduce the vulnerability of young children to abuse or assault through a Primary Abuse Prevention Programme.

Through the use of puppets and rhymes, children learn strategies to use which will help them stay safe if they encounter:

- bullying
- an approach from a stranger
- unwanted/inappropriate approach from an adult they know

To access a range of supporting resources from the Safe, Strong and Free website, simply [click here to access](#)

Safe, strong and Free resources for children

<https://safestrongandfree.org.uk/resources/>

Safe, strong and Free resources for parents/carers

<https://safestrongandfree.org.uk/resources/>

Safe, strong and Free resources for practitioners

<https://safestrongandfree.org.uk/workshops/>





# Additional resources

## Children's Rights and Participation

*Integrated Children's Service Board - Children's Rights and Participation Group*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://www.childrensrightshighland.co.uk/childrens-rights-and-participation-improvement-group>

## Participation Activities

*Inspiring Young Voices*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://www.inspiringyoungvoices.org/resources/useful-stuff/>

## Getting the views of Children and Young People Leaflet

*Highland Council/NHS Highland*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vs7vQcnzj9Fk\\_gISuOPFUvowPlx5LQXR/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vs7vQcnzj9Fk_gISuOPFUvowPlx5LQXR/view)

## Voice of the Infant: best practice guidance and the infant pledge

*Scottish Government*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/voice-infant-best-practice-guidelines-infant-pledge/pages/5/>

## Social Worker's Toolbox

*socialworkerstoolbox.com*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/category/activities/>

## Talking and listening to children

*ESRC funded research*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://talkingandlisteningtochildren.co.uk/>



# Learning & Development

## Highland Child Protection Committee

*HCPC Training Page*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://hcpc.scot/training/>

## Understanding the Child's Plan e-module

*CALA e-learning zone*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://calaelearning.co.uk/>

## What makes a good chronology e-module

*CALA e-learning zone*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://calaelearning.co.uk/>

## Think you know neglect?

*CALA e-learning zone*

**CLICK HERE TO ACCESS**

<https://calaelearning.co.uk/>