

Children's Rights Alliance
for England

Let them have their childhood again

**A report from a young people's consultation weekend,
September 27th and 28th 2003, contributing to ...**

**WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE WORRIED A
CHILD IS BEING ABUSED**

NATIONAL TRAINING PACK

November 2003

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Background

At the end of September 2003, a residential consultation event was organised by the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) to obtain child protection advice and information from children and young people.

An invitation to participate in the event was widely circulated to projects and organisations working with children and young people – to CRAE member organisations, to locally based children's rights and advocacy services, and to NSPCC projects.

We received 21 applications from children and young people by the closing deadline (more enquiries followed). One application was from a 21 year-old in prison – see below. Another application had been submitted on behalf of a three year-old girl – the family centre she attended had misunderstood the nature of the project.

Until a few days before the event, we were expecting 19 young people. Following changes in some of the young people's circumstances, this reduced to 15. On the first day of the event, two young people did not arrive at the train station (one was ill and the other did not want to come on his own) – we therefore had 13 participants.

The application form invited children and young people to tell us why they wanted to take part in the consultation weekend. Here's a selection of their responses:

Application form – please tell us why you want to get involved:

I will like to get involved with you because sometimes I find some stressful at care home and don't know why – female (couldn't come because of placement move)

I am good at empathising and I am sympathetic to others' needs. I am interested in helping other children get what they need... 10 year-old female (attended weekend)

Because I want to know more about people being hurt or treated badly. I know quite a lot of child protection – 14 year-old female (attended weekend)

Because I've been involved in things like this and I think I would be a credit to the group – 15 year-old female (attended weekend)

Because it will get me away from this children's home for two days – 15 year-old male (attended weekend)

Because I think it will be good for us to tell you what it's like to live at [name of children's home] – 13 year-old male (attended weekend)

Because it's important that children get heard and I've been involved in children's rights – 17 year-old male (couldn't come because of sickness)

I want to have my voice heard around this child protection issue – 17 year-old female (attended weekend)

I have been involved in other groups and I think I have a lot to say about my life and what it's like to be in care. The ups and downs of life in care. Thanks for your time to read this!!! – 17 year-old male (attended weekend)

I wish I could get involved in this but as I am in prison at the moment and not due to get out until [date] and that would mean my being on a curfew. But I would of liked to get involved because I used to be in care and if there is anything I could do to help others that are there now, I would – 21 year-old male (did not attend)

Participants

Thirteen children and young people took part, aged between 10 and 18 years (one young man had turned 18 since returning his form).

Age	Participants
10	1
13	3
14	1
15	5
17	2
18	1
Total	13

The areas of the country the children and young people came from were Bristol, Buckinghamshire, Huddersfield, London, Northamptonshire, Nottingham and Surrey.

Three young people were from minority ethnic communities (one was a young refugee).

Several talked about having difficulties at school; one person said he had Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder, for which he was taking Ritalin.

One young woman in foster care was studying four A' Levels and had applied to Oxford University to do a languages degree.

The youngest participant (10 year-old girl) lived at home and had no personal experience of the child protection system or social services. She had, though, experienced bullying at school.

Twelve young people had direct experience of social services and being looked after – their conversations revealed almost universal experience of abuse or neglect. These young people talked openly about sexual abuse, parental mental illness and family violence.

About the weekend

All participants were sent a programme in advance, with practical information about the weekend and some background notes about the adult facilitators (see annex A).

Sessions were scheduled from 2.15pm to 6.30pm the first day; and from 9.15 to 3pm the second day. We had regular breaks – usually every hour – and most of the time young people were working in small groups of three or four. Large group activities were usually games and competitions.

On the Saturday evening, young people held a hugely enjoyable Karaoke (the adults participated too!)

At the end of the weekend, each young person was given a £50 gift voucher for a shop of his or her choice. Some young people were also given a £5 ‘bonus’ for competitions they had won throughout the weekend.

Adult facilitators

The adults running the consultation weekend were:

Carolyne Willow – CRAE
Melanie Pace – NSPCC
Sarah Thomas – NSPCC
Serena deCordova – NSPCC

Carolyne Willow prepared this report.

Recording

The adult facilitators, in notes or on flipcharts, manually recorded all of the discussions. Children’s and young people’s names were not always recorded next to quotes. To maintain a consistent style, the speech bubbles and certain sections of the report do not attribute the age and sex of the child or young person speaking, though we know who many of them were.

Draft report

The draft report was circulated to each participant, with a letter inviting them to correct any mistakes, misunderstandings or omissions. A few weeks later, each child / young person was contacted by telephone to see if they wanted anything changed or corrected in the report.

Feedback on weekend

At the end of the weekend, children and young people were asked to give their assessment of how it had gone. The two aspects of the weekend they enjoyed the most were meeting new people – “I love my new friends” – and the physical care (the bedrooms and the food). The karaoke was popular too: one young person reported the best bit of the weekend as being two of the workers “making pratts of themselves [at the karaoke]”. Two 17 year-old girls felt the group had not worked hard enough over the weekend. The only other complaint was “That we have to go home”.

Executive summary

Thirteen children and young people, aged between 10 and 18 years, participated in a consultation weekend at the end of September 2003.

The aim of the event was to gather children's and young people's perspectives of the child protection system. These will directly contribute to the training pack that is being developed by the NSPCC and others to accompany the What To Do If You're Worried A Child Is Being Abused Guidance.

Twelve of the participants had personal experience of the 'child protection system' and the 'looked after system'. Many talked openly throughout the weekend about abuse, neglect and continuing relationship problems with parents. The youngest participant, a 10 year-old girl, had no experience of receiving help from statutory agencies, though she had been the victim of bullying at school.

We did not seek information about young people's experiences of being looked after. However, young people gave graphic accounts of the highs and lows of life in care. Annex A reports some of the discussions. In particular it describes three young people's serious concerns about the unequal treatment of looked after children in foster care.

Children's and young people's knowledge of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was extremely low. None had heard about children's human rights through school or from a social worker or advocate. Of the four that had heard 'something', two 17 year-olds had been informed by workers from a Children's Society project; one teenage girl had completed a drama project on children's rights; and a 10 year-old had heard about children's rights from her mum's friend. It is surprising that none of the 12 looked after young people had been informed of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: all of them have been in care during the period following the UK's ratification of this human rights treaty (the UK ratified in December 1991).

Despite children's and young people's relative ignorance of their rights, there was a huge amount of knowledge about the child protection system. One of the games during the first day was a 'jargon buster'. Small teams of young people were given a description of a term used in child protection and they then had to identify the term from an assortment of words and phrases laid out on a table – 'assessment' 'strategy' 'needs' 'case conference' 'child protection' 'abuse' 'consultation' 'Emergency Protection Order' 'safety'. The young people were extremely quick at working out the correct term.

We asked children and young people to advise on what adults should look for as a possible sign of abuse or neglect. Becoming quiet and withdrawn was the most common answer. We were told that anxiety and fear come in many forms – staying awake all night, crying, avoiding being in the house and feeling on edge all the time. Not being looked after by parents was another major theme,

encompassing a child ‘acting like the parent’ and being hungry, smelly or tired at school. Children and young people explained that ‘acting out’ could be a way of alerting others to abuse or neglect. We heard of a 15 year-old that had ‘rebelled against it all in the end’. There was strong advice for neighbours to act when they hear shouting and to ‘look out for you’.

Knowing and being able to trust someone was the strongest message from our conversations about seeking help. Adults included in this category were a Connexions worker, a police officer and a social worker. Two 15 year-old girls named women in their family that they could always approach – because they treat them like a daughter. One of the girls said, *“My mum’s cousin – she lives in Germany – because she’s always been there for me and she’s really nice. She’s like the only mum I’ve ever had if you know what I mean”*. A 10 year-old girl continued this theme, naming her mum and godparents as people she would turn to for help, *“I’ve known them for ages and I know them really well and I trust them”*.

Only one of the three young people from minority ethnic communities said he would prefer to approach a Black person for help – because they would have a better understanding of his life as a young Black young person.

A 13 year-old boy described not being able to seek help for his young sister who was being sexually abused by their stepfather. He graphically portrayed children’s acute powerlessness. *“I knew that if I told someone I would get battered ... he’s broke my little brother’s rib ... because he made up that he used to do karate and stuff so that none of us would get on the wrong side of him”*.

There was lots of advice about undertaking assessments. Listening to and valuing the child was seen as critical. The importance of relationships and building up trust was underlined: *“Children prefer to get to know people more over time – try to form a bond between the child and adult”*; *“Build up trust. Listen – don’t react straight away”*.

Parents were high on the agenda too – as one young person advised, *“It’s important to keep the parents on side so you don’t get moved off the case”*. Contacting statutory agencies – the police and social services were the only ones mentioned in this particular discussion – was seen as part of the assessment process, as was talking with extended family, neighbours and others in the child’s life. Young people understood the need to pass on and share information, though there was a request to do so *“in a private way”*. A 15 year-old girl recalled being greeted in the street by a sessional worker at her children’s home, who was a complete stranger. She assumed she must have known about her from reading her file and talking with others. The girl described the experience as “freaky” and “strange”.

‘Positive interventions’ is the title of the section reporting children’s and young people’s ideas for helping those that have been abused or neglected. The child being able to express him or herself was seen as vital, as was “staying in control”. Young people urged adults to stop the abuse or neglect. There were

calls for the abuser to be removed from the home, not the child. One young person suggested a way of keeping the family together *“Get somebody to live with them, then they should stop abusing them”*. Having someone to talk to was presented as an end in itself, rather than simply part of the assessment process. There were strong calls from teenagers in one group to give children and young people opportunities to play. An 18 year-old male explained, *“Open a youth group place – like have a bouncy castle and go mad, cos you’re all young kids really. It’s bringing back your childhood innit”*. A 15 year-old girl urged, *“Let them have their childhood again. Show them you love them and be a proper family”*.

Family contact, especially with siblings, was stressed, as was helping parents. There was a strong call from young people not to change their lives completely. One young person recommended that if children are separated from people in their own ethnic backgrounds, *“they should be able to know their history”*.

There were many ideas for reviewing whether the help has worked. Signs that a child is being treated well include – not being bruised, not walking the streets and not being violent. Children and young people strongly communicated the need for long-term support. As one young person said, *“You stop being violent – hurting yourself or someone else. You don’t need to ‘cry for help’ – but that doesn’t mean you don’t still need support”*. Another insisted, *“Support needs to last for a long time. Contact and support needs to be kept up so if the child or young person needs help in the future, they’ll know where to go / who to see and they won’t be back to Square One”*.

The final parts of the weekend, and of this report, focused on ‘how to be a good adult’ or an ‘ideal worker’.

As before, the emphasis was on having a relationship with a child or young person. When children and young people were asked to rank who they trust the most, blood relatives came out highest in three of the four groups, even though most were not living with their biological families. For these young people, none of their subsequent relationships with adults had come anywhere close to their attachment to parents. Not living with their parents did not erase the connection: what counted for these children and young people was that their mums and dads had at one time ‘been there for them’.

Just as parents can learn a lot about themselves by watching their children play, listening to young people designing their ideal parents or workers reveals a lot about their everyday interaction with adults. The emphasis on happy, smiley faces and friendliness is more than a hint that too many of us can be grumpy or bad-tempered. The calls for respect, fairness and a “shoulder to cry on” show that children and young people want full and equal relationships with adults. Most of all, they want to be able to count on the adults in their lives. As one teenage girl said, *“I want my social worker to come more often when I really truly need her”*.

1. Protecting children – what to look for

In relation to sexual or physical abuse, a common observation was that children and young people usually start to behave differently. All groups identified children becoming withdrawn and introverted, as a classic sign that something is wrong at home:

“You should notice people keeping themselves to themselves”.

“When a child hesitates to go home”.

“They become very shy, keeping themselves to themselves. They’re on edge all the time”.

“A young child might not be playing; not interacting”.

A young woman advised that:

“You’d avoid being somewhere you’d get hurt, or being alone with someone that would or could hurt you”.

Another said:

“If person [who had hurt child] is in the house, they might go out to get away from them”.

“They might stay awake all night”.

One young person suggested that a child might be *“complaining of stomach aches a lot or headaches – that’s a sign of worry”*.

Noticing a change in behaviour was seen as important:

“If you change how you act e.g. you cry when you don’t normally”.

“Adults could pick up signs when a child is being different”.

“Notice a change in personality from being normal to being quiet”.

In relation to neglect, three groups suggested that teachers could notice that children and young people are not being cared for at home:

“Like where the mum and dad are not being a mum and dad to their children. They’re just letting children do what they want ... They’re not making sure children are fed and watered [and] not making rational decisions – like my mother”.

“They might be acting like the parent and not having time to look after yourself.”

“You mightn’t be getting what you need at home,

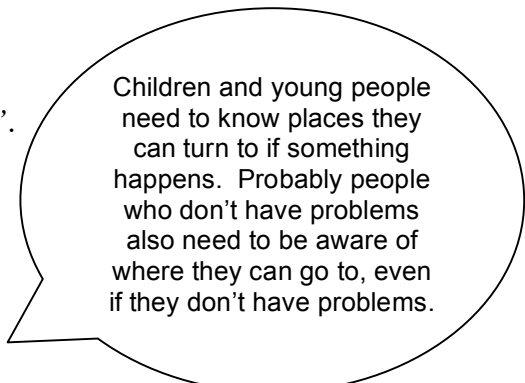
e.g. food, privacy, pocket money, showers and toiletries”.

“They might smell dirty - no one would like to sit near them”.

“If they’re tired and falling asleep in class”.

“Teachers need to pick up on learning difficulties and let children and young people know what sort of help is available out there”.

“Notice whether parents come to pick children up from school. If didn’t come there’s something wrong – go and see if child is alright. Keep a close eye on them”.



Children and young people need to know places they can turn to if something happens. Probably people who don’t have problems also need to be aware of where they can go to, even if they don’t have problems.

Young people in one group named Miss Honey from the Roald Dahl children’s book *Matilda*, as being the type of teacher children need. Miss Honey notices that Matilda is exceptionally intelligent and takes an active interest in her. This compensates for Matilda’s neglectful parents, who are too busy with their own lives to notice how special she is.

A girl said that a child might try to let a friend’s parent know all is not well at home:

By asking for something e.g. food when you want help. You might go to a friend’s house for food.

Young people ‘acting out’ or getting involved in crime was another example of needing help.

“You can tell say if they haven’t been respected or stuff, they won’t look right and they won’t have the right attitude because they’d be annoyed with whoever’s been abusing them”.

“They might rebel against it all in the end. Cos I like knew this boy in care. At 15 he just turned and he’s now tagged by police. He’d had enough of his adoptive parents. He just rebelled because they wouldn’t let him do nothing”.

One young woman described how young people may indirectly communicate to their peers that they have been abused:

“Acting strange with boyfriend. Not wanting to be touched sexually”.

There was advice for neighbours too:

“Neighbours should look out for you”.

“Neighbours need to be aware if there’s shouting”.

“If neighbours hear loud shouting or bangs in the house next door, they need to notice and get involved for the right reasons”.

2. Young people seeking help

In small groups, we asked young people to reflect on a time when they had sought advice or help. We asked them to say whom they approached and why: we also asked if anything had put them off seeking help.

A 14 year-old girl said the most important factor in seeking adult help was:

“The fact that someone cared about you”.

One 15 year-old boy said he had never had an adult he could talk to, until recently when he had been given a Connexions worker:

“He really helped me through a rough time... he talked me through it... He was trustworthy, he got to know me even before we got to talk about the problem, He didn't put any pressure on me... Just knowing someone was there [was important] – before that I didn't have anyone to turn to, to tell confidential information to”.

When asked why he thought he'd been allocated a Connexions worker, the boy answered:

“I dunno. Maybe someone had said I looked a bit down”.

A 15 year-old girl had not seen her mum since she was six years old. She could not confide in her dad. However, her dad's girlfriend was someone she could approach – because she listens and understands and treats her like her own daughter.

A girl the same age in another group repeated the importance of being treated like a daughter:

“My mum's cousin – she lives in Germany – because she's always been there for me and she's really nice. She's like the only mum I've ever had if you know what I mean”.

A 14 year-old girl raised confidentiality. She gave an example of a girl discovering she is pregnant:

“If you told a teacher they wouldn't keep it safe, they'd tell other teachers”.

A 15 year-old boy stressed the importance of knowing and trusting the person to whom you are confiding in:

“I couldn't tell a teacher because you don't know them, they are a stranger – it would be like telling a stranger your business”.

A 14 year-old girl said something had happened to her when she was younger and she was told that she should see a counsellor. She said she didn't want to because talking about it wouldn't *“get it off her back. It's just another stranger”*. She kept saying that

talking wouldn't help get her problem off her back – she would still have flashbacks about what had happened to her.

This same girl described having to video record evidence for a criminal court hearing. She said she would feel able to speak again to the police officer who interviewed her, because she knew what she had been through.

An adult showing care and interest without over-reacting was seen as important by a 15 year-old girl:

“I wouldn't speak to my foster carer because she's training to be a counsellor. Every time you speak to her she switches into counselling mode”.

A 15 year-old boy explained that sometimes adults just trying to help is all that matters:

“I would ask my social worker, for things that I want, for example money... I have had three changes of social worker. The first one left, the second one also left – no one told me why. The third one wasn't there for me, he wouldn't try and sort things out, so I asked for a new one. The fourth tried to help but couldn't – he still couldn't sort the problems out but at least he tried”.

In one of the groups, all three young people were from minority ethnic communities. They were asked if the ethnic origin of the adult they were seeking help from was important. Two thought it was not important:

“I never really talked to black people about my problems, so no... I'm not really bothered if they are black or white.” 14 year-old girl

“It doesn't matter what they are because they are just people, they are all the same.” 15 year-old boy

The third, a 15 year-old boy, disagreed:

“I don't know why but there are certain things I couldn't talk about so it would matter to me.”

He said he would choose a black worker, as they would have a better understanding of being a Black young person – because they had lived it. He said he would prefer to speak to a Black person if he got into trouble with the police. He said that in his city there was a definite split between Black and white people.

Bullying from peers was raised in one group. A 10 year-old girl said there had been times at school when people had teased and bullied her. She said:

“I asked for advice from my godparents because I feel I can talk to them”.

When asked to whom she would turn in the future if she needed help, she replied:

“Probably my mum or my godparents because they listen and they don’t like interrupt. I’ve known them for ages and I know them really well and I trust them”.

A 13 year-old boy living in a children’s home named his dad as being there for him:

“Mostly my dad because I see him more than I do my other family. He’s always there for me and he listens to stuff that I tell him and he listens more than other people I live with”.

Another 13 year-old boy explained:

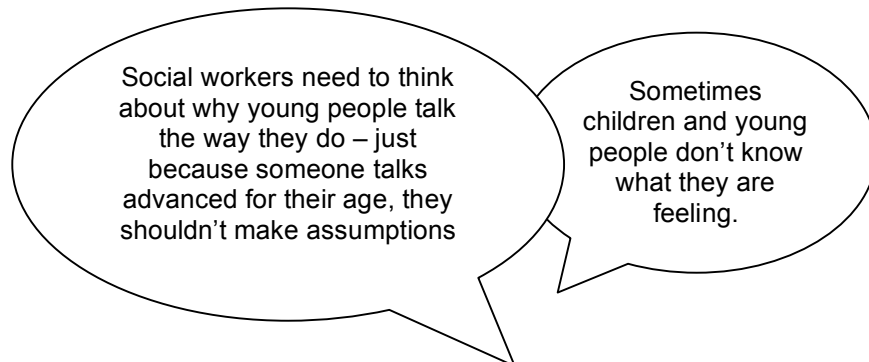
“My mum because it doesn’t matter what I say she wouldn’t tell me off. I can tell her anything without getting done for it. It’s partly because she’s my mum. Like I used to have this best mate and my mum would do anything to help him [for example giving him cigarettes and alcohol]. My mum would let him do anything. I like my mum for doing that”.

Not everyone had approached an adult for help. A 13 year-old boy said, *“I can’t think of anything I’ve only ever asked for advice on what type of golf clubs to use”.* He then described his younger sister being sexually abused and approaching him for help.

“I’ve had to give advice to somebody... My little sister, she was 7 or 8 years old. She was getting sexually abused by that person I told you about earlier... I kept telling her to tell my mum...she didn’t tell my mum till we left [name of step-father] and went to live back with my real dad. I knew that if I told someone I would get battered by [step-father]... He’d broke my little brother’s rib. The only person I could really talk to was my social worker but I hated her...she always wanted me to go into care, all the time. My sister kept crying every time she came to talk to me”.

When asked why he had not felt able to tell his mum, the boy replied:

‘Because [step-father] would have beaten us all up. Because he made up that he used to do karate and stuff so that none of us would get on the wrong side of him’.



3. What's important in assessment

(All bullet points are direct quotes from young people.)

Listen to the child ... and build up a relationship

- Speak to child on its own.
- Reassure child that it's not their fault, that they're not going to get into trouble and no one will hurt them because they've told.
- At college we've been told to give children good praise and encourage them. [18 year-old male on health and social care course].
- Build up their confidence to talk.
- Make young people feel wanted and valued.
- Listen to the child or young person because you've got to respect their views and try to sort it out for them. Offer your support so if anything happens again, they know you're there for them.
- Children prefer to get to know people more over time – try to form a bond between the child and adult.
- Build up a relationship first. Build up trust. Listen– don't react straight away.

Talk to parents

- Stay calm; go easy on the subject.
- Get straight to the point – don't go round houses.
- Have a cup of tea, use tactful language.
- Don't go 'Oh are you abusing your kids'.
- Be careful –the parents might get pissed off and they may change the child's school and you can't help the child anymore.
- It's important to keep the parents on side so you don't get moved off the case.

Contact agencies

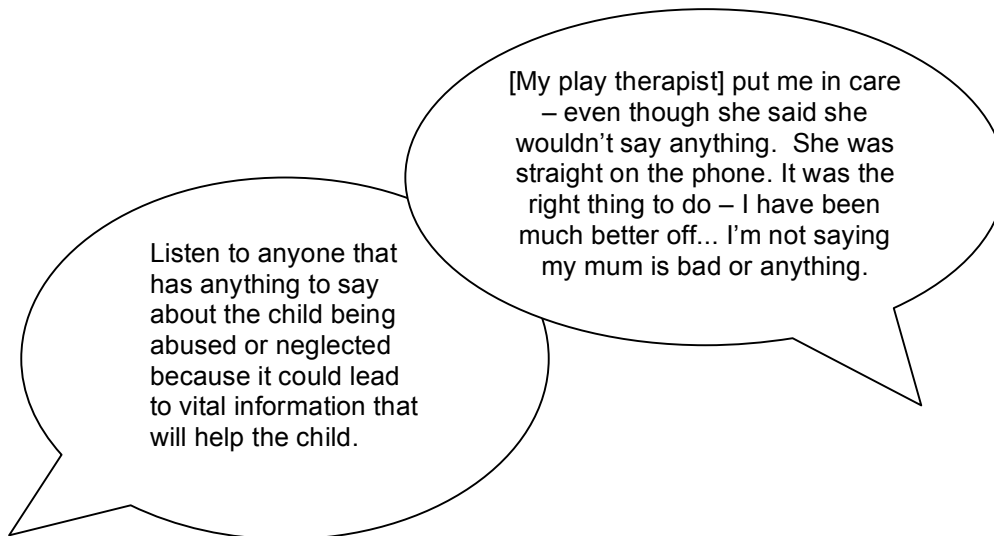
- Speak to social services.
- Tell the police what you think is going on – meet in a confidential area, so it's not obvious.
- Get the police involved sometimes if someone's being badly hurt.

Talk to extended family, neighbours and others

- Go to other family members, e.g. grandparents; neighbours; maybe speak to locals in the area.

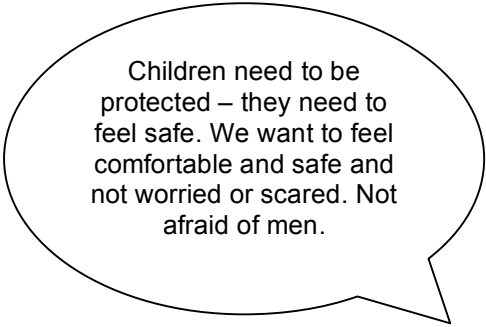
Share information

- You need to pass on information in a private way:
"I passed this sessional worker in the street and she knew me. I'd never met her before in my life. I found that really strange. It was really freaky. It's OK to pass on information in a meeting, in a confidential way. But not to come up to me in the street". 15 year-old female



4. Positive interventions

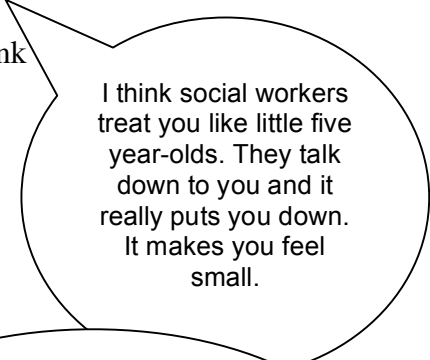
(All bullet points are direct quotes from young people.)



Children need to be protected – they need to feel safe. We want to feel comfortable and safe and not worried or scared. Not afraid of men.

Help children to express themselves

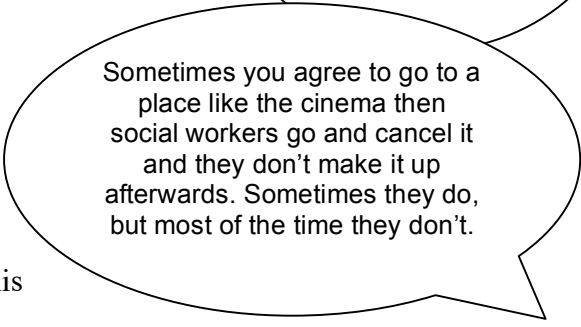
- Give me someone to talk to (e.g. psychologist or another specialist).
- I think the most important thing is to always listen to the voice of the child.
- Someone being there for them – to help us try and get through it. Maybe a social worker, teacher, friend or relative.
- You need someone who can understand the language and person's culture.
- Give the child one-to-one – just talk. For instance where I live I can speak to my keyworker if I have any problems around the house.
- Social workers can show respect by listening to you and understanding your needs. You need trust in each other. Try to be a friend.
- Social workers need to remove the age of the client and think about what they are saying and take it into account what that client is saying is valid and should be listened to.
- For some people talking might help. It can help to know that someone is there and they will help you – but you can fall out with them and that can put you off talking to anyone.



I think social workers treat you like little five year-olds. They talk down to you and it really puts you down. It makes you feel small.

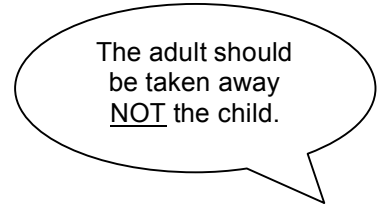
Help child stay in control

- The child needs control over a situation.
- Give advice but don't tell them what to do.
- Let the child think that things are going at his progress, not spiralling out of control.
- Trust the young person's opinion on what needs to be done – listen to them.
- Let the child know that they may have to make their own decisions at the end of the day – don't let it spiral by getting social services involved straightaway.
- Give me advice.



Sometimes you agree to go to a place like the cinema then social workers go and cancel it and they don't make it up afterwards. Sometimes they do, but most of the time they don't.

- When children and young people are feeling depressed – give young people ideas of how to solve problems from your personal experience.
- They should have an advocate.



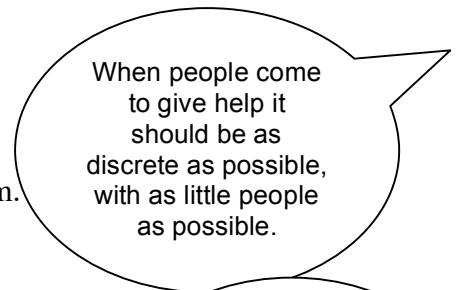
The adult should be taken away NOT the child.

Stop the harm

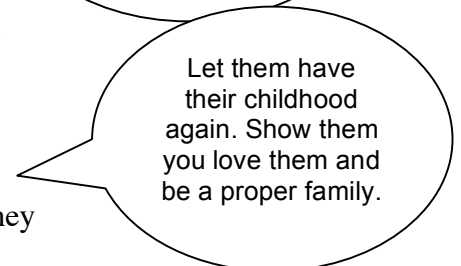
- Make sure the person doesn't live in the same house.
- Get somebody to live with them, then they should stop abusing them.
- Sometimes you might have to take the child away if they're not being parented properly.

Someone to talk to

- Set up advice lines / help lines – you can ring ChildLine free from your mobile.
- Have like a personal adviser who you can talk to.
- Have support groups for children and young people who have been abused, with adults helping to run them.
- Young person can have counselling – to chat, to try to forget the past and look forward to the future. To forget your fears and move on.



When people come to give help it should be as discrete as possible, with as little people as possible.



Let them have their childhood again. Show them you love them and be a proper family.

Give them a chance to play

- Give them loads of activities to show them how good they can be.
- For younger children do more play therapy with them, because that's the only way some people can express themselves.
- Disabled children need to have more interaction with children without disabilities. Instead of having designated play-groups for children and young people with disabilities you should have mixed groups.
- Open a youth group place – like have a bouncy castle and go mad, cos you're all young kids really. It's bringing back your childhood innit. Have ball pools and big slides.

Families matter

- Contact should be kept regular – especially with siblings, even if they don't get on well – as long as they are safe.
- Give family counselling to get a relationship back with your family and work out your difficulties and understand everyone else's emotions.
- Children need to be kept informed about what's going on in their families if they've been removed.
- Sometimes when a child is in the situation in their foster homes and they say really negative things about their real family, sometimes they are trying to please their foster carer.

Some foster carers expect you to call them mum and dad. We've got our own mum and dad, and we don't want anyone else taking the place of them.

People think about what's best for the child physically, but not emotionally – children lose contact with their parents. People are not honest and children and young people are not given true reasons about why they've been taken away. In the end this hurts them more.

Improve physical care

- Give the child what they need – not necessarily money but buy food and clothes.

Help children adapt ... but don't change their life completely

- Foster carers need to try and make kids understand that people live in different ways and need this explaining when they have to adapt to different environments.
- Children and young shouldn't have to change lives completely – adults should also make compromises.
- Don't change their life completely.

Help parents too

- Give the adult (parent / carer) someone to talk to (e.g. psychologist, specialist).
- Give parents / carers help e.g. advice on how to parent; more support.

You've got to think about what's best for the child... Social services can't just come in and take the children away – the parents need to be given a second chance.

If children are put into homes with people from different ethnic backgrounds, they should be able to know their history.

It's important for children to have support from a range of people, for example doctors, nurses and teachers. Everyone needs to be able to help.

5. Checking the help is working

(All bullet points are direct quotes from young people.)

Signs that a child is safe and happy

- You stop being violent – hurting yourself or someone else. You don't need to 'cry for help' – but that doesn't mean you don't still need support.
- You're not acting like the parent – you're having a childhood.
- Looking like you're being cared for – you wouldn't be walking the streets.
- You wouldn't need to avoid being at home or at school because you would feel safer.
- The parents / carers would be more relaxed.
- You're not bruised.
- You'll be happier and more settled.

Regular checks and ongoing support

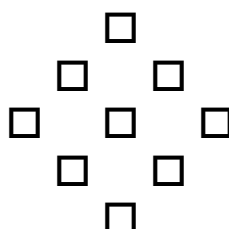
- See if they've gone to do the things you've suggested – check progress.
- Regular checking up – regular visits.
- Check with people who know you – for example teachers and people that the adult went to first. See if the child or young person's behaviour and school work etc has settled down – has it returned to how it was before the concern / worry?
- Check on you often at home – see you weekly if you're in care.
- Support needs to last for a long time. Contact and support needs to be kept up so if the child or young person needs help in the future, they'll know where to go / who to see and they won't be back to Square One.
- Like where I live we have a nurse who comes round. You don't have to speak with her if you don't want to.
- My social worker when I lived with my dad she came to see me every day but when they took me into care, she stopped coming to see me

Advocacy and complaints

- Whenever I've got a problem, I always go to see [name of children's rights and advocacy worker] because he sorts things out really quickly and he listens to you and takes our point of view as well as everybody else's.
- Because if you can't complain yeah, you won't get your point across. It will be just hanging in your head.
- So children and young people have someone to turn to when they need to make a complaint about someone who should be caring for them, or who is not doing what they should be.

6. How to be a good adult

In small groups, we asked children and young people to ‘diamond rank’ different adults, according to how much they trust them. We suggested several adult roles – e.g. parent / carer, social worker, teacher, doctor – and encouraged them to think of others.



Adult you trust the most goes at the top of the diamond; then work your way down until you get to the adult you trust the least. This person goes at the bottom of the diamond.

There were several adult roles ranked as number one – mum, dad, foster carer, teacher and youth worker. Of the four groups:

Group 1 – two young people ranked foster carer highest; another ranked teacher.

Group 2 – two young people ranked mum highest; the third ranked dad; and the fourth ranked friend own age.

Group 3 – three young people ranked mum or friend highest.

Group 4 – three young people ranked family and youth worker highest.

The adults rated most highly by children and young people were those with whom they had close relationships – blood ties or friendships were crucial. As one 15 year-old girl said:

“I trust my mother because if it wasn’t for her I wouldn’t have been born. You mother’s your mother, you have got to trust her”.

A 13 year-old girl in another group said:

“[I would go to] my auntie because she treats me as if I’m her daughter and not her niece. Even though she’s hardly been in my life, she’s only been in my life since I was seven, she went out and bought me everything I needed”.

Children’s and young people’s conversations revealed four main groups of characteristics that help them determine whether or not they can or should trust an adult.

- Being there – children and young people having the general feeling that an adult is there for them.
- Proving yourself – an adult taking the time to listen; acting appropriately; and keeping promises.

- Having the right attitude—not losing temper or trying to take over.
- Knowing what you’re talking about – sharing relevant experience, and not acting as if they know more than they do. (Older teenagers particularly cited this as important).

How to be a good adult: being there

If I felt I was being abused, I wouldn't go to a police officer. I'd go to a social worker. If it was a weekend and my social worker wasn't about I'd tell my key worker. I don't know a police officer very well. They could be anyone, a stranger...Police officers should regularly pop into the children's home. My key worker is just like a friend.

13 year-old male

My solicitor only ever comes to see me when there's a court case going on. I want her to come and see me.

13 year-old male

I definitely wouldn't go to my social worker for help or advice...There is often a delay when you contact her. She's not reliable.

17 year-old female

I've only ever met my solicitor once. There was a case with my mum. She does ring me up. Id' rather she come to see me in person because it's friendlier.

15 year-old female

I was going to go to the police officer [that had previously been involved in child protection interview] but she was never around.

17 year-old female

My social worker didn't listen to what I said when I said I hate my carer. He said she is only looking after me. He would do my review and put it down as a visit.

17 year-old male

How to be a good adult: proving yourself

I didn't trust my social worker because everything I told her she had written down...I'm glad I haven't got a social worker anymore. My family comes first.

15 year-old female

When I got chucked in the cell for something I hadn't done, I had a parental adviser – he believed me and told me what to say in the interview.

15 year-old male

I would go to a foster carer because they would help if I tell them something. It is going to be confidential to a point.

17 year-old female

My play therapist kept me in control. You get to do stuff that will keep your temper under control. She talks to you and that.

15 year-old male

I personally work better with younger social workers and a bloke cos I like to do stuff that I like – golf, snooker, football, any sports really.

13 year-old male

My teacher took me to places to get the help I needed... because her work is child protection she is determined to get things done. She is trustworthy, a good teacher. She keeps things confidential – before she told the social worker, she asked me if it was alright.

13 year-old female

How to be a good adult: having the right attitude

The response from my foster carers is always honest because they have an open mind and try and look at things from my perspective as well as theirs.

17 year-old female

I avoided getting help from my foster carer, because I knew what they would do. They would probably have a right go at me.

13 year-old female

I wouldn't go to my mum because she'll flip and she's likely to tell the rest of the family.

13 year-old female

I don't like it when foster dad shouts advice at me. My foster mother puts things into nice terms.

13 year-old female

Youth workers are more like friends. They are not always telling you – this is your best interests; do it this way – they are not in your face all the time.

17 year-old male

Other people wouldn't go to my foster carer. One of her previous foster children called her a dragon. To be able to get advice from someone you need to get to know them and you won't get to know them if they give off a bad impression.

17 year-old female

How to be a good adult: knowing what you're talking about

I would go to my friend called [name]. She's a family support worker, but more of a friend really. She's friendly, bubbly; she listens and talks to you. She knows what I'm feeling and brings it up herself.

17 year-old male

I don't like it when my carer or teacher try to give me advice about my family and how I feel because they don't understand. They don't have the experience.

17 year-old female

I don't like advice from foster carers about how you are personally feeling when they have not been in the situation – or advice from them about how to deal with really personal family problems.

17 year-old female

My foster dad had a completely open mind about everything. You can say anything to him, no matter how bad it is. He says, "No one knows your self better than you".

17 year-old female

7. Design your ideal adult

This exercise moved the young people's discussions from talking about adults in their lives, to thinking about how adults ideally ought to be.

The three adult roles that generated the most ideas were: parent or carer; social worker; and teacher. The discussions about parents or carers mostly centred on foster carers – no doubt a reflection of the current circumstances of most participants.

Most of the characteristics put forward for all three roles were about personal attributes – being kind, understanding, affectionate and respectful for example. Many of the points raised in the previous 'diamond-ranking' exercise were repeated, with young people again asking who are dependable and have time for them.

All three roles had to be useful – young people wanted parents and carers who could give good advice; they wanted social workers who know what they are talking about; and teachers who know their subject.

Being fair and not discriminating featured in all three, in different ways – young people wanted teachers who are not sexist or racist and who do not discriminate; they wanted social workers who do not stereotype or discriminate; and they want foster carers who treat all children in the family the same.

Rules entered into young people's conversations about foster carers and teachers, but not social workers. Young people, for example, said they wanted foster carers who let them smoke or to reward them for doing something good. There were requests for teachers to let young people play music in the classroom, and to let students mess around when they get bored. One 13 year-old boy asked for a teacher who would let him wear his hat in the classroom.

Personal attributes

Eyes –to notice.

Hands to help us.

Heart to care – loving.

Ears to listen.

Mind to think.

Give good advice.

Nice, kind and thoughtful.

Doesn't want
anything in return.

To love you for you!!

Someone who loves you and treats you
like their own child.

Affectionate – care about you a lot.

Aware of us.

To be able to understand what you say.

Friendly.

Can talk about your problems.

To know what your needs are.

Treat me they way I deserve to be treated.

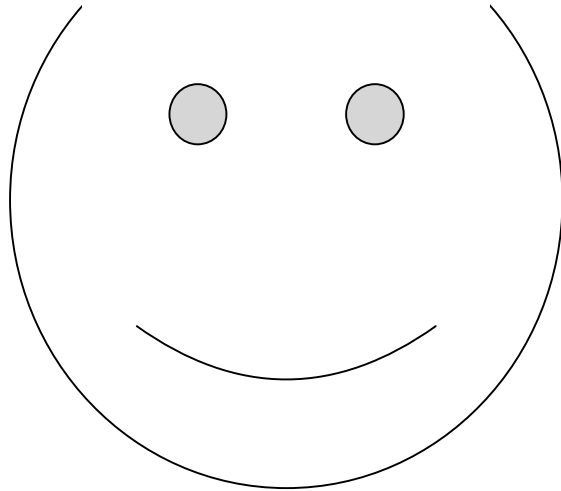
Happy but angry when wrong.

Cool but strict (dad).

Doesn't bug you.

Not taking place of biological parents.

**IDEAL PARENT OR
CARER**



Physical care

Gives you decent meals.

Buys you nice clothes.

Lets you smoke.

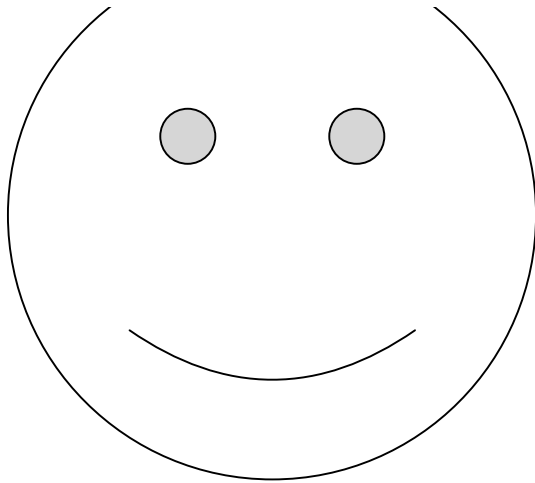
Gives you loads of pocket money.

Lets you stay up really late.

Doesn't force me to do things.

If we have been good we get
something in return.

IDEAL SOCIAL WORKER



I want someone who isn't shallow.

I want my social worker to buy a car so I don't have to walk for 30 minutes to meet my social worker.

I want a social worker who is compassionate.

I want my social worker to do something if I ask her.

I want my social worker to come more often (weekly) when I really truly need her.

I want a social worker who cares about us (me) and who's open-minded.

Open, friendly, reliable and honest.

Has a smile, kind and helpful.

Reassuring and not rude.

Listens to you.

Believe what you say to them.

To understand what your needs are and value what you are saying!!!

Give right advice; help us.

Stability – one social worker.

Shoulder to cry on.

Think objectively.

They check on you; so we don't have to wait until we have problems.

Good relationship with foster carers and birth family.

Get to know you, try and understand you as a person.

Not to stereotype or discriminate.

Support us.

Know what they are talking about.

Know job and where to go for info.

Interested in our social life.

My ideal teacher ...

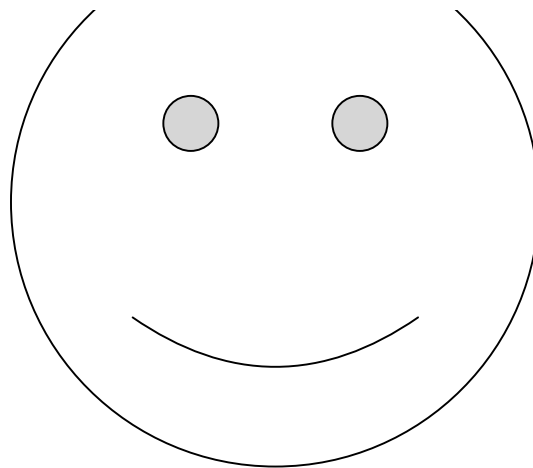
Gives you a good education and make you get good grades for when you leave school.

Gives you no homework.

A laugh! Let's us mess about in lessons as well as learning, because we get bored.

Is intelligent about their subject.

IDEAL TEACHER



My ideal teacher ...

Knows what your needs are.

Explains it properly to you – all the work.

Gives help when needed.

No perverts or paedophiles.

To be cool.

Lets you wear hats, not uniform.

Lets you listen to music in classes.

Personal attributes

To care about you more.

Respect you more.

Nice to young people.

Someone to talk to.

Easy listener.

Someone to share things with.

Not sexist or racist.

Equality to all students – no discrimination.

ANNEX A: BEING IN CARE

The focus of the weekend was on the child protection system. However, young people inevitably made observations and comments on the care system. In particular, they spoke passionately about problems in foster care, principally relating to inequality of treatment between foster carers' 'own' children and looked after children. In one group a boy proposed that the Government should introduce a law that would prevent foster carers who have children 'of their own' from looking after children:

"I think there should be a new law – that people who've got their own kids and they are still at home shouldn't be able to foster. If they've got kids they're too busy thinking about them".

The others in the group agreed:

"To be honest I think every kid in care would prefer just one other kid – or by themselves".

"All they think about is their own family, they leave you out. You want to be like you are at home".

A 13 year-old boy asked:

"If say my mum's sister wanted to come and work in my children's home, would that be possible? [It might not be allowed] because she's my family, she might treat me differently. Personally I'd love it because she's my family".

This group of three young people (in care in the same local authority) took the opportunity during the first day of the weekend to share several experiences of foster care that were 'not right'. Two examples of unacceptable practice (one in the past; one current) stand out:

A 15 year-old boy described when he had been moved to a new foster home, at the age of nine. He arrived with his social worker when the foster family was just finishing their evening meal. The social worker asked the foster mum to give the boy something to eat after the social worker left the house. The foster carer agreed, stating that there was none of the meal left but the boy could have cheese on toast. After the social worker left, the boy was not given anything to eat.

A 15 year-old girl, still in foster care, explained that her foster home has two bathrooms – one for the foster parents and their 'own' children; the other for looked after children. The foster parents have a cleaner – she cleans the family's own bathroom but not the one used by the fostered children.

Discussions about foster carer were not all bad. A girl from a different group urged foster carers to be more understanding: in doing so she revealed that for the first time she had adults who cared for her:

“Adults need to understand how we feel, because although they are telling you off for coming home late, they need to understand why we get angry – because we are not used to that amount of care”.

ANNEX B: INFORMATION SENT TO PARTICIPANTS BEFORE WEEKEND

KEEPING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Consultation weekend: September 27th and 28th 2003

NSPCC National Training Centre
Gilmour Close, Beaumont Leys, Leicester
Tel 0116 234 7200

Aim of the weekend:

The Government and the NSPCC wants advice from children and young people on improving child protection advice and support.

Adults running the weekend:

Carolyn Willow is the national co-ordinator of the Children's Rights Alliance for England. This is a charity based in London that tries to get the Government and others to respect children's rights. Carolyn has worked with children and young people for 20 years. She lives in Nottingham with her two young children and partner.

Evender Harran is a senior consultant in the publications section of the NSPCC. In the past he has helped make a training pack about protecting babies. He is now working on another training pack to help professionals better understand the needs of children. Evender is married and has two daughters aged nine months and three years and lives in Leicester.

Melanie Pace has worked with children for about 25 years. She works in the training section of the NSPCC. Her specialist subjects are making sure children get help to talk about and work through their feelings; and helping adults improve how they communicate with children. Melanie is also responsible for trying to make sure children and young people get a say in how the NSPCC runs. She has three children and one grandchild.

Sarah Thomas works at the NSPCC (she'll tell you more about herself when you meet her – she's on holiday right now).

Serena deCordova is the children and young people's participation officer at the NSPCC. She is 25 years old and has recently joined the NSPCC to ensure that children and young people's views influence NSPCC's policy and campaigns. She previously worked at Bexley Council for Racial Equality and is a volunteer for the National Black Youth Forum.

Practical stuff

- ❖ Ask your parent or carer to immediately return the “emergency contact form” included with this letter.
- ❖ To order your train ticket, contact Sharan Jeer at the Children’s Rights Alliance for England. Sharan works 10-6pm each weekday. Dial 020 7278 8222 then 0. Your ticket will be posted to your house.
- ❖ If you are coming with an adult we can buy their train ticket too. If you are travelling to the Centre in a car, we can cover petrol costs – you must have a receipt.
- ❖ We will meet you off the train at Leicester station, and we will travel by taxi in small groups to the Training Centre. When you come off the train, follow the signs for the exit – we’ll meet you in front of WH Smiths inside the station, next to where people can buy tickets. We’ll be holding up a sign saying “Children’s Rights”. It’s a small station so we should all find each other easily. If your train is late, or you’re lost in the station, please ring Carlyne’s mobile on 07765 282 381.
- ❖ At the end of the weekend, we will give you your £50 gift voucher. Please tell Sharan Jeer which shop you want your voucher to be from.
- ❖ We will provide paper and pens etc.
- ❖ Everyone will have his or her own bedroom – with shower, television and telephone (internal calls only).
- ❖ Each bedroom has towels and soap and shampoo.
- ❖ All your food will be provided – vegetarian food will be available at each meal. Please let us know if you have a special diet.
- ❖ There are free hot and cold drinks throughout the weekend.
- ❖ You do not need any money. However, you might want to bring a small amount. There is a large Tesco store opposite the Training Centre, and a canned drinks vending machine in the Centre.
- ❖ On the Saturday night, we will probably watch a video (we can buy one at Tesco’s). **We will expect everyone to stay in the Centre during the evening so we can be sure everyone is safe.**
- ❖ Some of you might be travelling with adults, who will stay in the Centre. They will not be involved in the work you do.
- ❖ The Training Centre has an overnight security person, and the adults running the weekend can be woken up if you need help during the night.

Timetable: Saturday September 27th 2003

Time	What we'll be doing	Notes
1-2pm	LUNCH	
2.15pm	Welcome and getting to know each other What the weekend is all about Working together well	Games Large group presentation Working in pairs then large group discussion
3pm	Introduction to children's rights	Large group presentation and questions
3.15pm	BREAK	
3.30pm	Say that again in Plain English please	A quiz to get to the bottom of words social workers and others use
4pm	Introduction to NSPCC training project	Large group presentation and questions
4.10pm	Whose job is it anyway?	Small group work
4.30pm	BREAK	
4.45pm	Design your ideal workers	Small group work
5.15pm	BREAK	
5.30pm	What helps children turn to adults for help; and what puts them off?	Small group discussions
6.30pm	END OF FIRST DAY	
7pm	EVENING MEAL	

Timetable: Sunday September 28th 2003

Time	What we'll be doing	Notes
8-9am	BREAKFAST	
9.15am	Guess the adult	Game
9.35am	Who we trust and why	Small group exercise then large group discussion
10am	BREAK	
10.15am	Making a country where children and young people get the help they need when they are being hurt or neglected	Small group challenge
11.15am	BREAK	
11.30am	Making a country where children and young people get the help they need when they are being hurt or neglected	Small group challenge
12.30pm	LUNCH	
1.30pm	Broadcast your ideas	Small group presentations (5 minutes each) then discussion
2pm	FREE SPACE – YOU DECIDE HOW WE USE IT	
2.45pm	How has the weekend been? What's next?	Individual activity then large group discussion
3pm	END OF WEEKEND	

ANNEX C: LETTER TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ACCOMPANYING DRAFT REPORT

17th October 2003

Thanks again for all your hard work at the Leicester weekend.

Your advice and suggestions were really useful.

Here is the draft report with lots of your words and ideas. Please have a read through and let me know if you want anything changed or removed. If you have any other advice, I'd be really happy to include that too.

I am sending this draft report to Melanie, Sarah and Serena so they can check it too.

I am also sending it to a woman called Enid Hendry at the NSPCC. She is in overall charge of the training pack that is being put together on child protection. She is very eager to hear all your advice.

I am sorry if I have made any mistakes or if I have misunderstood anything you said – just let me know and I'll sort it.

Please let me know what you think of the draft report by the **end of October**.

I will write again soon to let you know how your advice is helping the NSPCC.

It was really good working with you.

Take good care.

Carolyne Willow
National co-ordinator
Children's Rights Alliance for England

Telephone: **0115 910 7496** (you can ring this number anytime, including weekends – leave me a message and I'll get back to you).

Email: **cwillow@crights.org.uk**