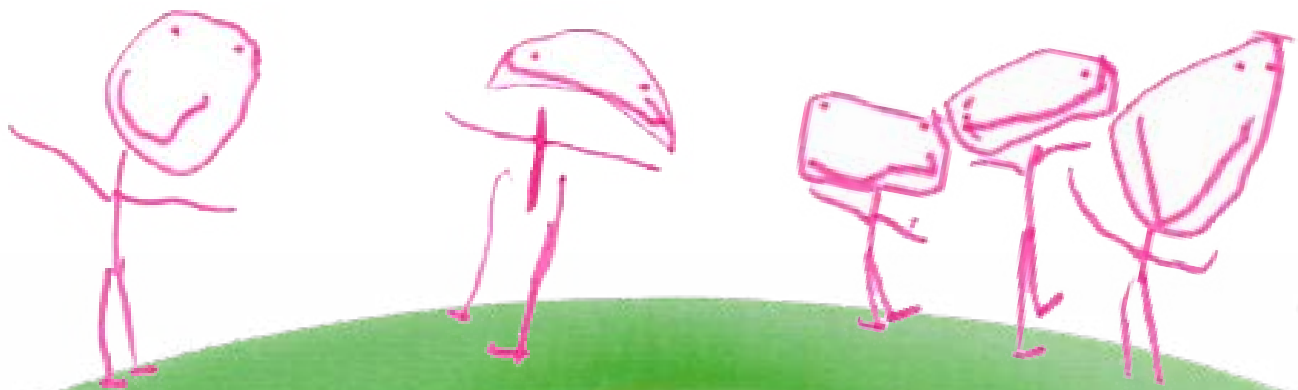
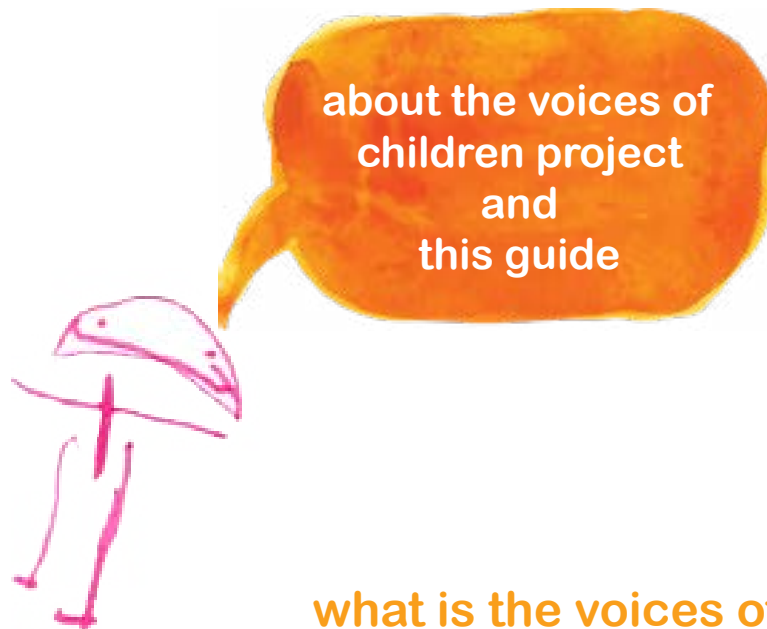




a parent
& carer's
guide to hearing the
voices of children



HANDS UP MALLEE



what is the voices of children project?

In 2019, Hands Up Mallee and the Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC) Early Years Planning Team. With the help of Early Years Educators and friends, set out to ask children aged 3-8, who live in the Northern Mallee, what they did and didn't like, and what they wanted for their future.

The project aimed to hear from at least 375 children aged 3-8 Years, who live in the Mildura LGA. The project reached over 450 children, with 375 giving us their consent to use their thoughts and creative works to help shape our community into a better place for everyone.

The work has been used to create this guide; and a storybook based on what the children have told us, to inform systems mapping for Best Start to Life, it will inform the MRCC Municipal Early Years Plan, and be shared back to children and the broader community.

why is this guide important?

It is important for the future of the children in our community, and our community as a whole that listening to their voice is not a one off or random event. This guide is a step towards Northern Mallee children's voices being heard and acted on as an everyday part of living in our community.

who is this guide for?


This guide book has been created with parents of young children in mind. It may also be useful to Educators and other people in our community who work in areas of childhood development or who make decisions that affect children.

how do i use this guide?

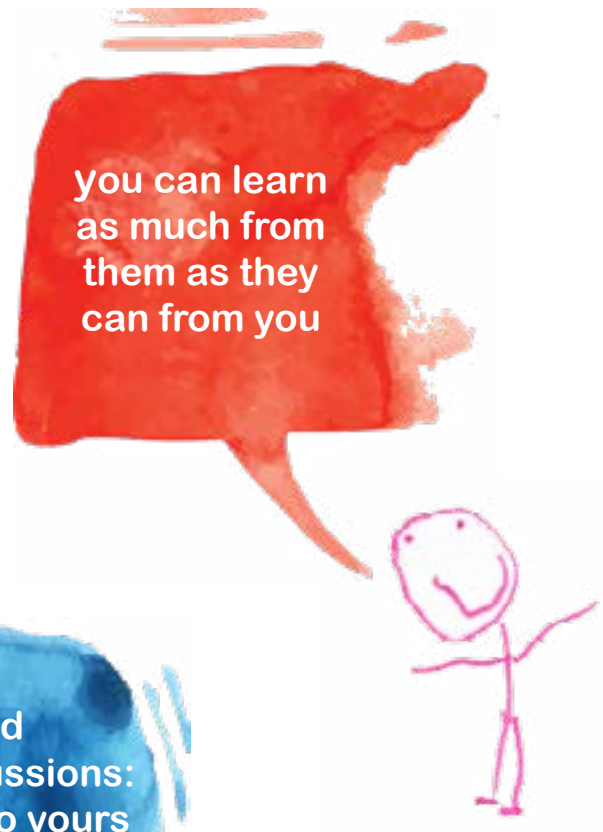
This guide should help you understand why it is important to help your child develop skills to use their voice, it should also give you a starting point for how to support this development in age appropriate ways.

The guide also provides links to other resources on communicating with your child, types of play that can help build your listening and communicating skills as a parent and empower your child to teach you about the world.


There are also links to contact numbers of support for parents who might find this way of communicating difficult for them.



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why is listening to your child's voice important?

Children have rights under the **United Nations Convention on the rights of the child**. Rights are things that every child should have or be able to do. All children have the same rights.

To make sure your child's rights under article 12 of the convention are met; it is important that they are able to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them, and that their opinions are taken into account.

Child Safe Standard 7 says:

Children have unique insights into their lives, their needs and the world around them. They have a right to be heard and have their concerns and ideas taken seriously, particularly on matters that affect them – including how to keep them safe.

By listening to your child and building their communication skills you are helping them use their rights and live a safer life.

Listening to what your child has to say also:

strengthens your bond

Children might not always remember the things we say or do, but they remember how we make them feel. This is especially important for young children who are learning how to be in this world by watching cues from their parents/caregivers. Actively engaging in conversation with them, patient listening, and allowing them the time to express themselves at their own pace creates a safe place for them to speak up and find their own voice which is an important part of their development.

encourages open communication

If children experience early on that their thoughts, feelings, and opinions have value, they are more likely to continue to share these with you as they get older. Start early, choosing a daily (preferably tech-free time) so you can focus on each other and your conversation. If introduced when children are little it is easier to build this as a life-long habit.

teaches by example

Children learn by copying our behaviors and following our lead long before they take their first steps. Being good listeners ourselves sets the example, teaching positive habits that they can use themselves.



grows a sense of self

When a child feels they are important to you their self-esteem grows. Children learn that your attention is at a premium based on what they see and feel in hectic family schedules. Choosing a regular time, often, where kids can get undivided, one-on-one attention builds self-worth and makes them feel valued.

builds understanding

Practice attentive listening when communicating. Listen with intent to understand, what your child is attempting to express, rather than thinking about how to answer, or solve their issue (Stephen R. Covey, childhood101.com). Attentive listening includes asking open-ended questions which encourages a deeper conversation between parent / caregiver and child. This lets your child know you are engaged and present in the conversation, and that what they have to say is important.

creates emotional awareness

Families who repeatedly eat together at the dinner table without mobile devices, or television are likely to have children who are better adjusted and less likely to experience anxiety and depression throughout their lives. Maintaining this regular connection promotes communication that allows parents to gain insight as to what's going on in a child's daily life....are they happy or distressed; did they have a good day?

develops social skills

Regularly talking with your child gives them practice in dealing with the outside world and helps them to develop positive social relationships. Children learn that a conversation involves not just speaking but listening. Learning that relationships involve give and take teaches cooperative problem solving, how to be a good friend, and that it's okay to walk away from a situation if nothing else seems to be working; and most importantly, that it's okay to ask for help.

promotes exchange of ideas

Children are creative and naturally think out of the box because they have a unique perspective of the world. When we are little, everything is new and seen with fresh eyes. Unfortunately because of adults bias, sometimes children's ideas are dismissed without thought. Don't make this mistake. It is only by being engaged and talking to your kids that this exchange takes place. Remember to listen attentively!

From birth your child is communicating with you and learning how to express their needs and feelings. One of the ways they learn how to do this is through interacting with you. You might notice your baby copying or responding to your facial expressions and tone of voice. One way to begin building their voice is to leave pauses in your interactions for them to respond. This is part of what is called “serve and return” and helps them to learn about patterns in conversations and develop connections in their brain. [This great video](#) from The Centre for the Developing Child describes how to serve and return with your child to help build this skill for your family.



what age should my child be to have a say?

Your child has a say in their life from the moment they are born. Their cries, and expressions are their first form of communication. They can be saying many things from “I am hungry” to “I am scared” or making noises that tell you they are comfortable.

As they grow the way that they have a say in their life changes. See the table below for ways that your child might communicate and how you can help them have a say.

Birth to 3 Months	
<i>Baby might:</i>	<i>To help you can:</i>
React to loud sounds Calm down or smile when spoken to Recognise your voice and calm down if crying When feeding, start or stop sucking in response to sound Coo and make pleasure sounds Have a special way of crying for different needs Smile when they see you	Respond to their voice, smile at them, make eye contact when holding and feeding them, talk to them and leave space for them to respond through noises and facial expressions (serve and return).
4 to 6 Months	
<i>Baby might:</i>	
Follow sounds with their eyes Respond to changes in the tone of your voice Notice toys that make sounds Pay attention to music Babble in a speech-like way and use many different sounds, including sounds that begin with p, b, and m Laugh Babble when excited or unhappy Make gurgling sounds when alone or playing with you	
7 Months to 1 Year	
<i>Your child might:</i>	<i>To help you can:</i>
Enjoy playing peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake Turn and look in the direction of sounds Listen when spoken to Understand words for common items such as “cup,” “shoe,” or “juice” Respond to requests (“Come here”) Babble using long and short groups of sounds (“tata, upup, bibibi”) Babble to get and keep attention Communicate using gestures such as waving or holding up arms Imitate different speech sounds Have one or two words (“Hi,” “dog,” “Dada,” or “Mama”) by first birthday	



1 to 2 years	
Your child might:	To help you can:
<p>Know a few parts of the body and can point to them when asked</p> <p>Follow simple commands (“Roll the ball”) and understand simple questions (“Where’s your shoe?”)</p> <p>Enjoy simple stories, songs, and rhymes</p> <p>Point to pictures, when named, in books</p> <p>Acquire new words on a regular basis</p> <p>Use some one- or two-word questions (“Where kitty?” or “Go bye-bye?”)</p> <p>Put two words together (“More cookie”)</p> <p>Use many different consonant sounds at the beginning of words</p>	<p>Ask your child their opinion. “Would you like to wear a dress or shorts today?” “What is something you would like to do with me today?”</p>
2 to 3 years	
Your child might:	
<p>Have a word for almost everything</p> <p>Use two- or three-word phrases to talk about and ask for things</p> <p>Use k, g, f, t, d, and n sounds</p> <p>Speak in a way that is understood by family members and friends</p> <p>Name objects to ask for them or to direct attention to them</p>	
3 to 4 years	
Your child might:	To help you can:
<p>Hear you when you call from another room</p> <p>Hear the television or radio at the same sound level as other family members</p> <p>Answer simple “Who?” “What?” “Where?” and “Why?” questions</p> <p>Talk about activities at daycare, preschool, or friends’ homes</p> <p>Use sentences with four or more words</p> <p>Speak easily without having to repeat syllables or words</p>	<p>Respect your child’s right to tell you how they feel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They might say they don’t want to go somewhere, use this as an opportunity to talk about why, are they scared? nervous? Take your time to talk this through with them. • They might not want a hug or a kiss, this is okay and a good chance to teach them that it is their body and they can choose to not hug or kiss if they don’t want to. • Let them make some decisions about how things run in your family. • Spend time at meals talking to each other.
4 to 5 years	
<p>Pay attention to a short story and answers simple questions about it</p> <p>Hear and understand most of what is said at home and in school</p> <p>Use sentences that give many details</p> <p>Tell stories that stay on topic</p> <p>Communicate easily with other children and adults</p> <p>Say most sounds correctly except for a few (l, s, r, v, z, ch, sh, and th)</p> <p>Use rhyming words</p> <p>Name some letters and numbers</p> <p>Use adult grammar</p>	



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Many people who are now parents were brought up in families where their voice was not given the same respect as an adults. This can make it harder to listen to what our children want, need or think and to see it as equally important as what adults want, need or think.

When we do this we miss out on learning important things about how our child sees the world and the person they are growing up to be. We also miss the chance to help them learn how to share with people outside of their family what is important to them.

Teaching our children what they think and feel is equally important as what we think and feel helps keep them safe, builds their emotional development and teaches them what personal agency is.



how to grow your child's personal agency



- Communicate with respect. Let them take their time to express their ideas without interruption.



- Give undivided attention. A child feels loved when we spend one-on-one time with them.



- Accept and love your children for who they are. This will allow them to feel more secure in reaching out to others and learn how to solve problems. It is important, even when disagreeing with their ideas not to put their ideas or them down.



- Make space for your child to contribute. When making a decision you can ask them what they think, or ask them to choose between a small number of options.



- Let them solve problems and make decisions. Avoid telling your child what to do; encourage them to come up with solutions to problems.



- Remember to give praise when they try to communicate with you, this will help them feel safe to keep sharing their voice with you.

you can learn
as much from
them as they
can from you



As your child grows you are learning who they are just as much as you are shaping who they will be.

Keeping our minds open about what we can learn from them, enriches our lives as much as theirs.



learning from your child



- Let your child show or tell you about a toy or object that they are playing with. Ask them questions like, what does the toy do? What are your favourite things about this object? If your child hasn't begun talking, you can still ask questions or show interest using the "serve and return technique" and begin learning what they like and how they feel through their reactions.



- Make time to learn and explore with them. Let them choose an object or topic and learn more about it together. If your child likes tigers you could both read a book about tigers together, asking your child questions along the way to see what they think are the most important things they learned.



- Try not to "lead" the conversation to things you know, instead ask open questions about what they know about the topic, object or game you are playing.



- Remember it is not about them being right, it is about being open to their growing perspective on the world and building your relationship.



meet them in their world
through play, activities, discussions:
don't require them to come to yours



“Children are naturally creative, curious, and capable; and loose parts play empowers them by giving them a safe space to explore, take risks, connect and express who they are...

Children, like adults, have many and varied ideas and opinions and it is our responsibility to provide them with opportunities to express them.”

Claire Rorke



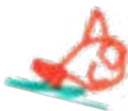
be part of their world



- Meeting your child where they are is an important step in making conversation natural, and giving them the power to understand their voice is equal. Make sure you get down to their level, sitting on the floor next to them, or at the table where they are working so that you are not looking down on them or standing over them.



- Watching for their cues of interest in objects, or activities (or beginnings and endings as discussed in the Serve and Return video) can help you meet them where they are and build interaction.



- Loose Parts play is a great example of a way to enter their world. Loose parts can easily be created in the home using things like empty boxes, toilet rolls and tape and placing them in a space where your child can use their imagination to build. Try being near enough to assist when asked but also leaving space for your child to lead the construction. While they are building you can ask questions and build your conversation skills! Loose Parts play was an important part of The Voices of Children Project, it helped us learn a lot about what local children do and don't like about where they live, learn and play and what they want for their future.

To learn more about how to use Loose Parts Play read [Loose Parts by Play Scotland](#).

helping your child be heard out of the home

By taking steps to listen to your child you are helping them build confidence in sharing their voice. As they spend time outside of the home in playgroups, kindergartens, schools and with family and friends they may need help building resilience, not all others will listen with the care and patience that you do.

building confidence

Here are four steps you can take to help your child build skills to talk to adults more confidently.

1. Start small by practicing with their friends / peers.

If your child isn't comfortable talking with peers, they probably won't feel comfortable talking to adults. If your child doesn't speak much when they're in a group, ask them why, and listen. Tell your child that it's okay to be shy and to listen more than they talk. But also let your child know that if they have an idea to share with a group, they should say it! Their ideas are important, and they should share them.

2. Practice responding to questions.

When your child is comfortable speaking freely with peers, have them practice responding to questions that adults ask. Resist the urge to respond to a question when an adult asks about your child; instead, encourage your child to answer the question, even if it takes a little while. Encouraging children to answer questions builds up their confidence and shows them that adults aren't as scary as they might think.

3. Practice initiating contact.

Once your child is comfortable answering questions when asked, have them practice starting conversations with adults. It can be as simple as encouraging your child to say hi to friends parents at playgroup, kindergarten or school, ordering their own food at a restaurant, or saying hello to the clerk at the supermarket.

4. Practice sustaining conversations.

The next step to mastering talking to adults is to sustain conversations. Whether your child starts the conversation or not, teach them tips and tricks for keeping a conversation going. Tell your child that they can ask the adult about their day, how their family are, or what's exciting in their life right now. Teach your child to listen to what the other person is saying and ask more about it. Above all, encourage your child to be sincere in their conversations.

building resilience

Because other adults may not listen to your child's thoughts and opinions as respectfully as you it is important to build their resilience.

You can do this through practicing the steps in building confidence above, and creating a safe space for your child to talk to you about when conversations with others don't go the way they had hoped. By being an open channel of conversation and listening to them you can help them work through the challenges of when communication doesn't go as expected. Remember try not to immediately 'solve' the problems they bring to you. Listen and let them feel heard before offering advice.



For some parents supporting their child to be heard can be difficult, this is okay. Sometimes this is because they are still trying to make their voice heard due to emotional injuries or trauma in their past.

If you feel that any of the steps to hearing your child's voice are difficult for you, it is important for you and your family that you get support for yourself and support to make sure your child can be heard and break the intergenerational pattern.

Some places you can get support with this are:

Phone Support:		
Triple 0	Emergencies	000
Lifeline	Crisis support, suicide prevention	13 11 44
Beyond Blue	Support with anxiety or depression	1300 224 636
SafeSteps	24/7 family violence support service	1800 015 188
Maternal & Child Health	Parenting support	13 22 29
Mens Referral Service	Working to end men's family violence	1300 766 491
Parent line	Parenting support	1300 301 300
PANDA	Post-natal depression support	1300 726 306
1800RESPECT	National Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence Counselling Service	1800 737 732
InTouch	Multicultural Centre against Family Violence	1800 755 988
Local Support:		
Mallee Sexual Assault Unit / Mallee Domestic Violence Service	24 Hour crisis service - sexual assault and domestic violence	5021 2130
Maternal & Child Health	Parenting and child health support	5018 8277
Mildura Base Hospital Mental Health Unit	Inpatient and community mental health support	5022 3500
MDAS	Mallee District Aboriginal Services	5018 4100
SCHS Parent Support Service	Parenting support and childhood development	5022 5444
The Family & Child Hub	Parenting support and childhood development	5021 7621
The Orange Door	Family violence support for adults, children and young people	1800 290 943
Your GP		

helpful resources

Active Listening <https://www.cdc.gov/parents/essentials/communication/activelisting.html>

Communication <https://pathways.org/topics-of-development/communication/>

Communicating well with children: tips <https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/connecting-communicating/communicating/communicating-well-with-children>

Giving Your Child “Voice” The 3 Rules of Parenting https://www.naturalchild.org/articles/guest/richard_grossman.html

Language Development in children 0-8 years <https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/development/language-development/language-development-0-8>

Loose Parts Play <https://www.playscotland.org/parents-families/loose-parts-play/>

Maternal and Child Health App

iOS: <https://apps.apple.com/au/app/mch-app/id1344022465>

Android: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=au.gov.vic.education.mch>

Raising Children Network <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Serve and Return <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNrnZag17Ek>

Talking with babies and toddlers, how and why <https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/connecting-communicating/communicating/talking-with-babies-toddlers>

10 ways to teach your child how to have a voice <https://www.herfamily.ie/parenting/10-ways-to-teach-your-child-how-to-have-a-voice-226071>



