



A FAIR START

for young parents
& their babies



Creating intergenerational change for young parent families in Cornwall and across the UK

The power of hearing infant voice

What does infant voice mean?



Infant Voice



Making sense of the world

Babies make sense of the world through sensory experiences, which develop brain pathways and emotional regulation. They depend on their parents to co-regulate with them—through sensitive, consistent responses that build secure attachment and help them feel safe.

But babies communicate non-verbally, and their voices can easily be overlooked, misinterpreted, or overshadowed by the needs and assumptions of adults around them.

Bringing infant voice into the room changes this. When we learn to see, hear, and feel babies' sensory communication, it strengthens early relationships, reduces stress for both parent and child, and supports young parents to feel confident, attuned, and capable.



Infant voice

Our sensory memories

Is there a sound or a smell encoded in your sensory memory?



Infant voice

Babies need to develop neural pathways, that tell them:

- I am safe
- I have a voice
- When I'm upset my needs are met
- I can express distress and it is relieved
- I am not in this alone

When we centre the baby, we reduce parental stress, because parents stop feeling like they are guessing - and can start feeling they can understand.



Infant voice toolkit

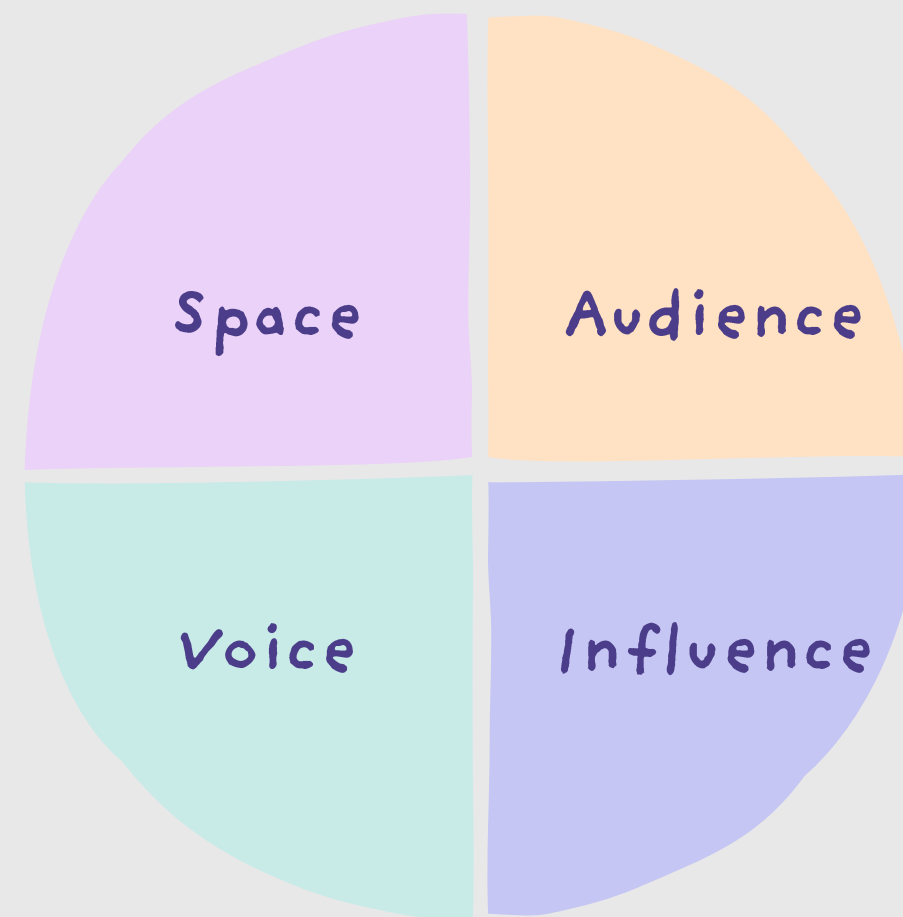
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Space - Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.

- baby-friendly physical environment
- reduced noise
- space to move
- stage-appropriate toys and instruments
- communication at the appropriate level
- managing the emotions of others

Voice - Children must be facilitated to express their view.

- notice baby's verbal voice (semantic or otherwise), non-verbal communications like movement, expression, action, sound, gestures, and silences
- notice how they make you feel
- work in pairs with one to solely observe baby



Audience - The view must be listened to.

- acknowledge seeing and hearing baby, child and parent
- speak directly to babies and children - this lets them know we are listening to them and they will respond
- respond to their cues and model this to others

Influence - The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

- talk about what baby is communicating to us - in conversations, with parents, colleagues and professionals
- present findings about baby's perspective when decisions are being made
- consider baby's best interests in every decision

Our infant pledge

Our WILD Practitioner Infant Pledge:

- I introduce myself to babies and children in a welcoming way
- I am curious about babies' and children's behaviour
- I have skills to listen to babies and children
- I allow time to observe what babies and children are telling me
- I acknowledge and narrate for babies and children
- I trust what babies and children tell me
- I support parents to understand their baby
- I take action based on babies' and children's voices

What this looks like, in practice:

- Use of evidence-based infant observation tools to inform our delivery
- Weekly monitoring of children's basic needs, wellbeing, attachment and participation
- Collaboration with parents to review babies' experiences, likes and dislikes
- Tailoring activities to individual babies' needs and preferences
- Creation of calming, sensory-aware, trauma-responsive environments; indoors and outdoors
- Telling first-person stories and experiences from babies' perspectives
- Commitment to practitioner training and reflective practice



A model for change

WILD seeks to use evidenced based interventions, training and support in all it's work with young parent families, and we want to learn from babies and their young parents to further develop our work and inform theory and evidence.

We've increased resource in WILD training and learning including:

- Newborn Observations
- Solihull
- ICON
- GCP2
- Infant Voice
- PTMF

We know work with young parents is mismatched with standard formal parenting support, where parents attend planned courses.

We instead need to be agile, respond to changing need, and flex skills to a range of sometimes challenging interactions.



How WILD brings infant voice alive



In our families teams

- Practitioner approaches
- Modelling and narrating
- Choice taking

In our operations teams

- Training and reflective practice
- Partnerships and systems work

In our strategic teams

- Funders and reporting
- National Young Parent Network

**When we bring the baby into the room
professionals soften, plans improve,
help comes earlier.**

Infant voice: impact

**wants to see
and make change**

**understands and accepts
the case for change**

**knows what they should
do and are able to do it**

**believes in
young parent families**



Sharing infant voice across partnerships



Public Health; Child Poverty

The voices of WILD's babies and young parents can be heard in the annual report from Cornwall's Director of Public Health, "Growing Up in Poverty". The report is written in partnership with babies, children, young people and their families, who have shared their experiences of child poverty, and the impact it has on all aspects of their wellbeing.

The report goes beyond the usual data and numbers, by hearing what poverty really feels like for children; the hardship, shame and stigma, and loss of their hopes and dreams. It calls for us all to take notice, and reminds us that every child has the right to be heard, to be safe, to be healthy, and to thrive. Poverty undermines these rights, and that is a shame on our society.

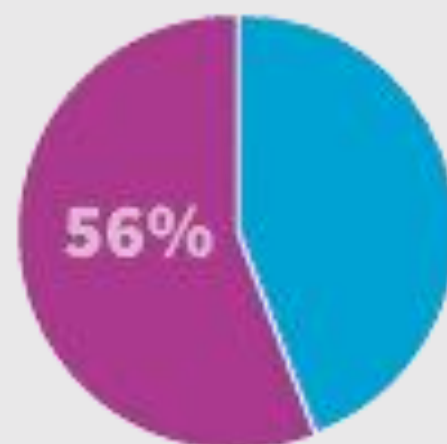
WILD's young parent families have shared their experiences; of being tired and hungry, running out of nappies, or electric, or clothing; of not being able to put your baby to sleep in a safe space; of constant worry. They also tell us what it feels like not to be able to decorate a room or buy a toy or gift for your child.

And our WILD children's team tell us, from the voice of babies, what it must feel like if your clothes are too small, or your tummy is empty, or your mummy is upset because she can't keep you warm.

Every practitioner surveyed
felt that **poverty is harming children's**
lives, with

89%

stating it **'very much' contributes**
to poor outcomes. Not a single
respondent believed it had no impact.



Over half (56%)

of practitioners reported that
they are spending **more time**
addressing the effects of
child poverty within their
school, group, organisation,
or service.



Nearly 9 in 10 (87%)

of practitioners indicated
that they had seen **an**
increase in the number of
children they are supporting who
are **experiencing poverty**.

The full report is available

Sharing infant voice across partnerships

Public Health; Child Poverty



I'm hungry again. It hasn't been that long since I last had milk... but my tummy is so small, and it gets empty so fast. It hurts when its empty and I need some more milk.

Mummy tries. She really does. She holds me close and tries to feed me like we did in the hospital.

It worked there, but now it's different, harder.

We both try, over and over, but the milk just doesn't come. I don't know why.

I get so frustrated. My tiny hands clench tight, and I scream because I don't have any other way to say:

"This hurts, I'm scared, I'm hungry." I arch my back. I cry until my whole body feels tired.

Daddy gives me my dummy. I suck on it furiously, I like the comfort the suck brings but is not enough I need some milk. Daddy goes out and brings back some powdered milk.

Sometimes Mummy and Daddy add too much water - just to make it last longer.

They're trying. I can feel it in the way they hold me, in the way they look at me when I cry.

The health visitor comes, she puts me on the scales, I feel worried. She asks Mummy and Daddy how much milk I drink. They tell her... but not everything, not the extra water.

I'm not growing like I'm supposed to. My vests are still a bit big like they were the day I came home.

I cry so much to tell everyone I am hungry. Mummy rocks me, Daddy shushes me, it's hard for them. Mummy is sad and gets frustrated when I cry so much but I can't help it, I'm hungry.



**With thanks from everyone at WILD, and on behalf of the young parents
and their children, for inviting us to share our work towards
a fair start for young parent families.**

www.wildproject.org.uk

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