

# Susie Lukis – Positive Practices When working with Children: Listening to the Views and Wishes of Children

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The podcast was recorded to support professionals' use of the Victorian State Government Information Sharing Schemes and the Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework. These reforms require child-led practice, establishing children who experience family violence as victim survivors in their own right. They require that professionals strengthen their practice skills in listening to the voice of children. This information sheet provides useful practice advice for professionals about why and how to views and wishes of children and young people who experience family violence.

Services provided to child victim survivors should acknowledge their unique experiences, vulnerabilities and needs, including the effects of trauma and cumulative harm arising from family violence. By seeking the views and wishes of children practitioners can improve a child's wellbeing and safety.

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To access the podcast please visit [www.cfecfw.asn.au/information-sharing-resource-hub](http://www.cfecfw.asn.au/information-sharing-resource-hub).

## 1. Why is it important to seek the views and wishes of children and young people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma such as family violence?

- If we are working in a person-centred way, then we have to think about the views and wishes of children
- If practitioners believe their role is to support parents/adults only and want to provide a full service for a parent then practitioners also need to seek the views and wishes of children and understand the experience of their children
- Children are part of the service system, they are entitled to have a service provided and they are entitled to have their voice heard
- If we think about the UN Rights of the Child and state-wide frameworks and legislation such as MARAM and Information Sharing Schemes, this gives us the systems imperative to seek the views and wishes of children
- Seeking the views and wishes of children helps practitioners build a relationship with the child and young person, for some children it may be the first time an adult has actually sought their views and wishes
- Because practitioners are seeking the views and wishes of children in the context of their experiences, seeking the views and wishes of children also helps practitioners understanding what children have gone through, what is happening in their family
- Even when practitioners working with children who are pre-verbal or older children who are non-verbal because of trauma and I think we still can seek their views and wishes, we can still seek to understand their experience
- Practitioners have a role to play in empowering children to participate in decision making that about what happens to them or around them, as empowered children grow up to be empowered adults

*"I think there is no reason not to seek the views and wishes of children and young people and if we're going to provide a full service for a parent as well, then we have to think about the views and wishes of their children and the experiences of their children."*

## 2. What can, seeking the views and wishes of a child and/or young person, tell a practitioner about the wellbeing of a child?

- Practitioners can learn a lot about children and their experiences if we seek their views and wishes
- When practitioners engage children and young people and seek their views and wishes they build relationships with children and young people
- And from that comes an understanding of why they hold the views and wishes they do and how to support their wellbeing.

Example:

*"I worked with a young person who was 10 years old wanting child protection to remove him from home and place him in out of home care.*

*Now, had I not understood what was happening for him and his family, had I not understood the experiences, he'd had, from his perspective, I'd have thought that the reason he wanted that was something very different to what it was. His reason was actually because he didn't want to be a burden to his mother. He knew his mother was really busy with his very young siblings and because we took the time to speak with him, play with him, we understood what was happening for him and what his experiences have been. We're not only understood what his wishes were, but the context of that wish and how we could work with him. We realised that he didn't want to leave his mother and family, but he thought that would be the most helpful thing. And we were able to work with him and help him to understand that actually that was not the most helpful thing for him or for his family. But unless we had thought about what had happened for him. We wouldn't have understood, and known what his views and wishes really were. He felt safe enough to tell us what his views and his wishes were."*

## 3. How should practitioners seek the views and wishes of a child and/or young person who has or is experiencing trauma like family violence?

- Value building relationships with a child or young person, allowing children to see that practitioners are a safe person who can hold, not only their views and wishes, but also their concerns and their stories about what has happened for them. If practitioners build that level of trust and that relationship and we allow children to tell their stories, practitioners can hear what children's views and wishes are and understand the context in which they are communicated
- Sometimes there are children who are pre-verbal or who are non-verbal due to trauma and practitioners can still seek their experience
- It is important that practitioners always seek to 'bring children into the room', wondering what their experience has been and wondering what they might like to be different in their lives
- Practitioners need to actively seek out what might be happening for a child, or what a child might want by having conversations with the child or if not age and stage appropriate seeking an understanding the child's experience by engaging with their protective parents
- It is important that practitioners provide children and young people with a safe space that is not judgmental
- Walking beside children and young people rather than holding power over them is a valuable approach too.

### Working with children from Aboriginal or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

- The approaches wouldn't necessarily change but if practitioners understand the context in which Aboriginal children live and the context of their family and the impacts of colonisation that flow down through all the generations of their family and the impacts that this trauma has on young children then approaches with children will be more responsive and effective
- Non Aboriginal practitioners may not be best placed to provide a response for Aboriginal child and their families and some Aboriginal children and their families may choose not to be supported by an Aboriginal organisations and that is absolutely their right
- It is important that practitioners have connections with Aboriginal practitioners in health, family violence and housing so that they can do secondary consultations and think about providing the best response for the child
- For Aboriginal children who don't know their mob or their country, practitioners can provide a tailored response that is centred in culture, and understands the significance of culture to their core being
- This is the same for newly arrived families who have been impacted by trauma, as practitioners can be informed by reaching out to ethnic communities and multicultural service providers about how they can provide the best response and understand what they need to be aware to connect to the children and their families to their culture

*"It is really important that we're transparent with children as we should be with adults. Letting children and young people know that seeking their views and wishes is not a guarantee that we can provide what they want, but that their views and wishes can be taken into account when thinking about what service or support is provided for a parent and child or a young person."*

### 4. What are the necessary skills for practitioners when working with children and young people and how do these skills extend towards working with protective parents/carers?

- Skills are important as well as an underlying belief about children, their place in the family and in society about children's right to receive a service from service providers
- Practitioners need to strengthen their understanding of a range of frameworks and have a "kit bag" in terms of knowledge and skills that they can draw on when working with children and their families, including:
  - an understanding about culture and how important culture is for families
  - attachment theory and what might be happening in relationships when working with a family, understanding the behaviour of the child and the parent, even when there are no verbal cues
  - trauma theory and trauma informed practice so we understand when we see behaviours, either from children or adults who have experienced trauma, we can understand what sits behind their behaviour and we understand how to work with that client
  - understanding of neurobiology, what happens for baby's in utero when mothers experience fear and trauma
  - *Best Interest* principles are also important
- Practitioners also learn by watching other practitioners, their peers and colleagues and by having regular supervision and time to reflect on their own practice
- Practitioners also learn from their clients, especially during conversations with children when seeking to hear and understand their views and wishes
- Practitioners who are open to hearing the voice of children and open to hearing about their experiences and have the capacity to sit and hold that learning are best placed to provide a response

- Practitioner's need to be aware of how much parents of children are watching us, it is important for us to model for parents that it is ok to have difficult conversations with children, we want children to know that we can hold information and that children know that it is important to them
- Practitioners want children to be able to talk to them as often children say they don't want to burden their parents and so practitioners sit in a privileged palace to hear from children and young people, and to help children to understand that they are important and their views and wishes are important and they have a right to have their voice heard

The prime thing that sits in front of everything else is always the safety for children and safety for parents. Sometimes practitioners hear the views and wishes of children and can't meet their expectations. In this situation what matters is:

- Transparency
- Having the same conversation with children, about the limits of confidentiality that practitioners have with adults
- That practitioners let children know that if they are concerned about their safety or wellbeing they may need to share their information
- Practitioners need to tell children that they want to hear about their experiences and what outcome is important for them
- Being a good role model and having transparent and honest conversations.

*"By building that relationship, by helping children see that we can hold what it is that they tell us and that we can support them through it, which doesn't always mean providing everything that they wish for or hope for."*

## Additional Resources

[Statewide Children's Resource Program](#)

[See, Listen and Respond: A Guide to Engaging with Children Experiencing Family Violence and Homelessness](#)

[What is the Statewide Children's Resource Program - Video](#)

[Australian Childhood Foundation Resources](#)

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