

# Young Children's Voices

## Definition

Babies and young children lead rich lives, they are competent beings and experts in their own lives. From birth, they have thoughts, feelings and preferences which they are capable of communicating. That is, they have a voice. The concept of 'voice' for this youngest age group relates to deliberate self-expression, and there are many different ways of expressing voice beyond the articulation of words or sentences (Arnott & Wall, 2022).

Babies, for instance, express themselves in a range of ways such as smiling, crying, cooing, gesturing, eye contact, attention/focus, and moving their faces, limbs and bodies. Toddlers may communicate verbally, but also through creative activities such as drawing and play. Typically, as they get older, young children develop more cognitive skills and a greater capacity for self-awareness. Alongside a growing maturity, they may enjoy expressing themselves in imaginative ways.



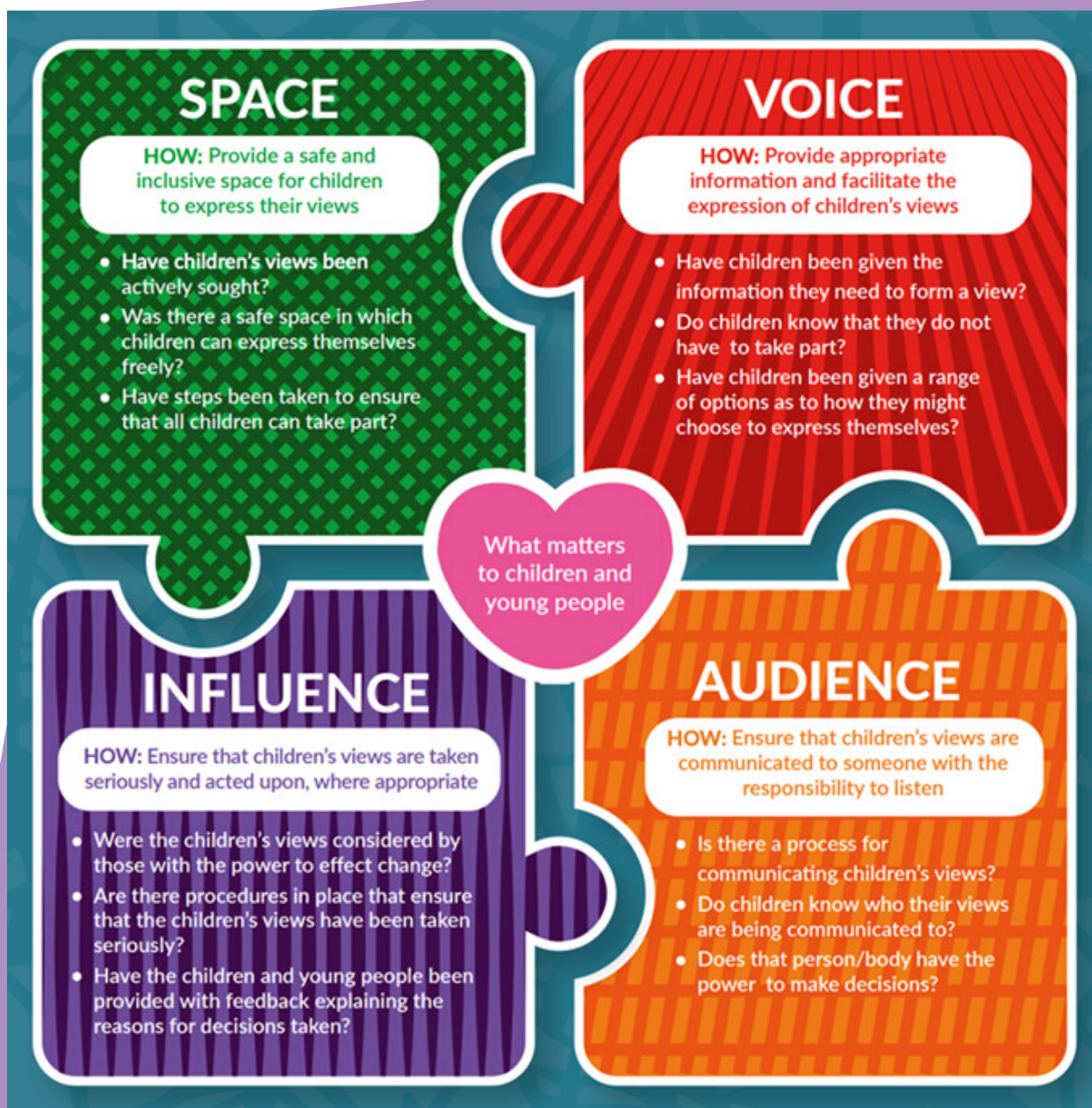
For all young children's voice to be fully realised, however, adults must listen. [Clark, McQuail and Moss \(2003\)](#) define listening as

- An active, dialogical and relationship-based process of communication involving hearing, interpreting and constructing meanings
- Not limited to the spoken word
- A necessary stage in participation in (a) daily routines as well as in (b) wider decision-making processes

There is intrinsic value in listening to babies and young children; they have a right to have their voice heard. Listening is also required to develop and enable babies and young children's participation. [Lundy \(2007\)](#) offers a model that explicitly identifies this connection. She outlines four essential elements of child participation:

- Space: Babies and young children must be given the opportunity to express a view
- Voice: Babies and young children must be facilitated to express their views
- Audience: Babies and young children's voices must be listened to
- Influence: Babies and young children's views must be acted upon, as appropriate

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*Lundy model of child participation (2014)*

Participation occurs when babies and young children are actively involved in a decision-making process and power is shared (Miller 2003). However, participation is not the only valid outcome of listening to babies and young children. A culture of listening – whether in the home, in an early years setting or in society at large – will nurture positive relationships with babies and young children, build their confidence and sense of self-efficacy, and improve their day-to-day experiences and environment ([Williams 2009](#)).