

Listening to Children Policy

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Our Values

At Young Friends, listening to children is not a moment or an activity — it is a way of being. Children are treated as citizens of now, not just learners in waiting. Their thoughts, feelings, rhythms and rights guide our environment, our teaching and our culture.

- **Sustainability** – Respecting children’s voices teaches care for people and planet
 - **Respect** – Children are seen and heard as individuals with value
 - **Authenticity** – Listening is active, daily, and built into how we relate
 - **Supportive Leadership** – Staff model curiosity, reflection and dialogue
 - **Community** – Children are part of a shared space where everyone matters
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Policy Statement

This policy outlines how we embed genuine listening into our daily practice. It protects children’s rights to express themselves freely, to feel emotionally safe, and to have adults respond with attentiveness and respect.

Children at Young Friends are not ‘allowed to speak’ — they are expected and encouraged to. We use voice, body language, behaviour, silence and relationship to hear what they need us to know.

What Listening Means to Us

- Attuning to **non-verbal cues** like body language, tone, energy and withdrawal
 - Giving children time to **finish their thoughts**
 - Asking open questions — then waiting, without rushing or correcting
 - Creating a **safe, unhurried space** for everyday expression
 - Making our own adult communication clear, kind and respectful
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How We Listen Daily

- Practitioners crouch or sit at the child’s level and engage with **eye contact** and interest
 - Children are given options and meaningful **decisions** throughout the day
 - We reflect back what they say to show we’ve understood or to clarify
 - Staff check in emotionally — “You look unsure”, “Was that tricky for you?”
 - Silence is respected — we don’t demand answers, and we notice what’s behind it
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Decision Making and Autonomy

Children are offered:

- **Real choices:** “Would you like to stay outside or come in?”
- Opportunities to **help plan** routines and projects
- Space to say “No” or “Not yet”

- Influence over how they are comforted, what they want to share, or how they approach challenges
We understand that participation isn't performance. We observe and listen quietly when needed.
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Listening to Protect

- We train all staff to listen **safely**: recognising when to report or when to reassure
 - If a child discloses something concerning, we listen **without interrogation or promises**
 - Staff **report immediately** to the DSL and follow safeguarding procedures
 - Children are never blamed or silenced for raising difficult or confusing topics
 - We use open books, stories and circle times to support understanding and invite expression
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Children with Additional Needs

- Children who are non-verbal or pre-verbal are **listened to through play, routine and sensory engagement**
 - Makaton, gesture, objects of reference and PECS may be used where relevant
 - Staff are trained to attune and interpret signs of communication respectfully
 - All children are seen as communicators — even without words
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Family Partnerships We

share:

- What a child has expressed during the day (verbally or otherwise)
 - Concerns or big emotions that arose, and how we responded
 - Conversations that may need follow-up at home
 - Parent observations of how their child expresses themselves
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Embedding Listening in Culture

- Staff meetings include **reflection on listening** – “What did children tell us today?”
 - Supervision explores how practitioners listen and respond
 - Environment is regularly adapted based on child interest and feedback
 - Children's language and ideas appear in displays, journals and planning
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Linked Policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection
 - Curriculum and Pedagogy
 - Behaviour and Relationships
 - Key Person
 - Supervision and Appraisal
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Authorisation

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