

## 7 Handouts: Communicative Practice & Democratic Participation in Residential Child Care

### HANDOUT 1 — Welcome & Framing: Why Democratic Care Matters

#### What This Training Is About

This training helps us build a residential home where:

- Young people have **voice, agency, and dignity**
- Workers communicate with **respect, transparency, and curiosity**
- Decisions are **shared, reasoned, and participatory**
- The home functions as a **community**, not a behaviour-management unit

#### Why It Matters

Residential care is:

- A living environment
- A site of power
- A place where relationships shape healing
- A community where young people learn how the world treats them

Democratic, communicative practice:

- Reduces conflict
- Builds trust
- Supports trauma-informed care
- Strengthens belonging
- Models citizenship and participation

#### Reflection Prompt

Think of the best home, team, or community you've ever been part of. What made it feel:

- Safe
- Fair
- Connected
- Respectful

These qualities are the foundation of democratic care.

## **HANDOUT 2 — Theory Made Practical: Communicative Action & the Public Sphere**

### **Communicative Action (Habermas)**

Communication aimed at **understanding**, not control.

#### **Key Features**

- Respect for each person's perspective
- Honesty and transparency
- Shared reasoning
- Willingness to be influenced
- Non-coercive dialogue

#### **In Residential Care**

- Explain decisions
- Invite young people's views
- Negotiate where possible
- Avoid "because I said so"
- Use curiosity, not compliance-seeking

#### **The Public Sphere**

A shared space where people deliberate about matters of common concern.

#### **In a Children's Home**

- House meetings
- Shared decision-making
- Open discussion of routines, norms, and issues
- Young people shaping the culture of the home

#### **Why It Matters**

Young people learn: How to express themselves; How to influence decisions; How to participate in community life; How to negotiate and collaborate

#### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where do we already practice democratic communication?
- Where do we slip into control or compliance?
- What gets in the way of shared decision-making?

## **HANDOUT 3 — Skills Workshop: Dialogic Communication Techniques**

### **Core Skills**

#### **1. Active Listening**

- “Tell me more about...”
- “I hear that you’re feeling...”
- “It sounds like what matters to you is...”

#### **2. Open Questions**

- “What would help right now?”
- “How do you see it?”
- “What’s important to you about this?”

#### **3. Explaining Reasoning**

- “Here’s why this decision exists...”
- “The concern I’m holding is...”
- “Let me be transparent about the limits we’re working with...”

#### **4. Naming Power Dynamics**

- “I know I’m in a position of authority here, so I want to make sure your voice is heard.”

#### **5. Negotiating Boundaries**

- “Here’s what’s flexible, and here’s what isn’t — let’s work together within that.”

### **Practice Exercise: Rewrite the Script**

Rewrite these interactions using dialogic principles:

1. A young person refuses a house rule
2. A conflict between two young people
3. A staff member enforcing bedtime
4. A young person challenging a decision

Focus on:

- Curiosity Transparency Shared reasoning Respect

## **HANDOUT 4 — Participation in Action: House Meetings & Care Planning**

### **House Meetings**

#### **Principles**

- Co-designed
- Youth-led where possible
- Deliberative, not administrative
- Transparent
- Action-oriented

#### **Good Practice**

- Rotate chairing
- Shared agenda setting
- Use accessible language
- Record decisions and follow up
- Encourage disagreement respectfully

### **Care Planning**

#### **Young People Should:**

- Help set goals
- Understand their plan
- Lead parts of their review
- Challenge decisions
- Receive honest explanations

#### **Workers Should:**

- Prepare young people beforehand
- Make plans accessible (visuals, plain language)
- Support expression of feelings and preferences
- Explain constraints without shutting down voice

### **Activity**

Design a house meeting agenda that centres young people's priorities.

## **HANDOUT 5 — Restorative & Dialogic Conflict Resolution**

### **Key Principles**

- Conflict is communication
- Behaviour expresses meaning
- Repair is relational
- Accountability is shared
- Punishment does not teach; dialogue does

### **Restorative Questions**

#### **For Everyone Involved**

- What happened?
- What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- Who has been affected and how?
- What needs to happen to repair the harm?
- What can we learn from this?

#### **Avoid**

- Blame
- Threats
- Sanctions as default
- “Because that’s the rule”
- Exclusion unless safety requires it

#### **Activity**

Take a real incident and redesign the response using restorative principles.

## **HANDOUT 6 — Team Culture & Democratic Practice**

## **What Democratic Teams Look Like**

- Psychological safety
- Open dialogue
- Constructive challenge
- Shared decision-making
- Reflective forums
- Transparency from leadership
- Collective responsibility for culture

## **Reflective Questions**

- Where do we already have democratic spaces?
- Where does hierarchy silence voice?
- What new forums do we need?
- How can we model the culture we want young people to experience?

## **Activity**

Map your team's "public sphere":

- What spaces exist?
- What's missing?
- What needs redesigning?

## **HANDOUT 7 — Personal & Team Commitments**

### **Your Personal Commitments**

Write down:

- One communication habit you will change
- One participatory practice you will introduce
- One team behaviour you will model

### **Organisational Commitments**

These will be gathered and fed back to leadership to support systemic change.