



National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care

Training Module: Communicative Practice & Democratic Participation in Residential Child Care

Overview

This training module equips residential child care workers with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to embed **communicative action** and **public-sphere participation** into everyday practice. It translates policy into lived culture: how we speak, how we decide, how we repair, and how we build community with young people.

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

Knowledge

- Explain the concepts of **communicative action** and the **public sphere** in accessible terms.
- Describe how these principles underpin democratic, trauma-informed residential care.
- Identify power dynamics in everyday interactions.

Skills

- Use dialogic communication techniques in daily practice.
- Facilitate participatory house meetings.
- Apply restorative, communicative approaches to conflict.
- Support young people's meaningful involvement in care planning.

Values & Dispositions

- Commit to transparency, shared reasoning, and non-coercive communication.
- Recognise young people as active participants in the life of the home.
- Embrace reflective, collaborative team culture.

2. Module Structure

This module is designed as a **half-day (3.5 hour)** training session, but can be expanded to a full day.

Session Breakdown

Session	Duration	Focus
1. Welcome & Framing	20 mins	Why democratic care matters
2. Theory Made Practical	40 mins	Communicative action & public sphere
3. Skills Workshop	60 mins	Dialogic communication techniques
4. Participation in Action	45 mins	House meetings & care planning
5. Restorative Practice	30 mins	Conflict as communication
6. Team Culture & Reflection	30 mins	Building a democratic workplace
7. Commitments & Close	15 mins	Embedding learning into practice

3. Session 1: Welcome & Framing

Purpose

Set the tone: this is not a compliance exercise but a cultural shift.

Facilitator Talking Points

- Residential care is a *living community*, not a behaviour-management unit.
- Young people deserve agency, voice, and dignity.
- Workers deserve a democratic professional culture too.
- This module helps us build a home where decisions are shared, communication is respectful, and relationships are central.

Activity: “The Best Home I’ve Ever Seen”

Participants reflect on:

- What made it feel safe?
- What made it feel fair?
- What made it feel like a community?

Link responses to communicative action and participation.

4. Session 2: Theory Made Practical

Communicative Action (10-minute input)

Break it down simply:

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

- Adults explain reasoning, listen actively, and negotiate.
- Young people's perspectives are treated as valid contributions.

The Public Sphere (10-minute input)

- A shared space where people deliberate about common concerns.
- In a children's home: house meetings, shared decisions, open dialogue.

Group Discussion (20 mins)

Prompt questions:

- Where do we already see these principles in our home?
- Where do we fall into instrumental communication?
- What gets in the way of democratic practice?

5. Session 3: Skills Workshop — Dialogic Communication

This is the heart of the module.

Core Skills to Teach

- Active listening
- Open questions
- Reflective responses
- Explaining reasoning
- Naming power dynamics
- Negotiating boundaries
- Inviting critique
- Slowing down conflict

Activity: "Rewrite the Script"

Participants are given typical residential scenarios:

- A young person refuses a house rule
- A conflict between young people
- A staff member enforcing bedtime
- A young person challenging a decision

They rewrite the interaction using:

- Non-coercive language

- Shared reasoning
- Curiosity
- Transparency

Debrief

What changed when we shifted from control to understanding?

6. Session 4: Participation in Action

House Meetings

Teach how to run meetings that are:

- Co-designed
- Youth-led
- Deliberative
- Transparent
- Action-oriented

Mini-exercise: Participants design a house meeting agenda with young people's priorities at the centre.

Care Planning

Show how to:

- Prepare young people for meetings
- Make plans accessible
- Support them to express goals
- Explain constraints honestly
- Build shared ownership of outcomes

Role-play: A care review where the young person leads the first 10 minutes.

7. Session 5: Restorative & Dialogic Conflict Resolution

Key Messages

- Conflict is communication.
- Behaviour is meaning.
- Repair is relational, not procedural.

Teach the Restorative Questions

- What happened?
- What were you thinking/feeling?
- Who has been affected?
- What needs to happen to repair this?

Activity: “From Sanction to Restoration”

Participants take a real incident and redesign the response using restorative principles.

8. Session 6: Team Culture & Reflective Practice

Purpose

Democratic care requires democratic teams.

Topics

- Psychological safety
- Constructive challenge
- Shared decision-making
- Reflective forums
- Transparency in organisational decisions

Activity: “Our Team Public Sphere”

Teams map:

- Where they already have democratic spaces
- Where hierarchy blocks voice
- What new forums they need

9. Session 7: Commitments & Close

Individual Commitments

Each participant writes:

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

Organisational Commitments

Facilitator gathers themes to feed back to leadership

