



National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care

Policy: Communicative Practice and Democratic Participation in Residential Child Care

1. Purpose

This policy establishes a democratic, dialogic culture within residential child care settings by embedding the principles of **communicative action** and the **public sphere** into all aspects of daily life, decision-making, and organisational practice. It ensures that young people and workers participate meaningfully in shaping the environment, relationships, and decisions that affect them.

2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All residential child care workers
- Managers and senior leaders
- External professionals working within the home
- All young people living in the home

It covers everyday interactions, care planning, conflict resolution, team practice, and organisational governance.

3. Policy Statement

The organisation is committed to creating a residential environment where:

- Communication is grounded in **mutual understanding**, not control.
- Young people are recognised as **active participants** in their own lives and in the life of the home.
- Workers engage in reflective, dialogic practice.
- Decision-making processes are transparent, participatory, and democratic.
- The home functions as a **mini-public sphere** where issues of shared concern are openly discussed and collectively shaped.

This approach supports trauma-informed care, strengthens relationships, and promotes dignity, agency, and belonging.

4. Principles

4.1 Communicative Action

All communication within the home must be:

- **Respectful:** recognising the validity of each person's perspective.
- **Authentic:** grounded in honesty and openness.
- **Reasoned:** decisions and expectations are explained, not imposed.
- **Reciprocal:** adults listen with the willingness to be influenced.
- **Non-coercive:** communication is not used to manipulate or enforce compliance.

4.2 The Public Sphere

The home must provide structured and informal spaces where:

- Young people and adults deliberate on matters of shared concern.
- Everyone can express views without fear of ridicule or reprisal.
- Disagreements are explored constructively.
- Collective decisions are made transparently.
- Power is shared and visible.

4.3 Participation and Agency

Young people must be supported to:

- Influence decisions about their daily lives.
- Contribute to the routines, norms, and culture of the home.
- Participate meaningfully in care planning.
- Access information needed to make informed choices.
- Develop skills in dialogue, negotiation, and self-advocacy.

4.4 Professional Responsibility

Workers must:

- Model dialogic, reflective communication.
- Facilitate participation rather than gatekeep it.
- Make professional decisions transparently and explain their reasoning.
- Recognise and address power imbalances.
- Engage in collective reflection and shared decision-making with colleagues.

5. Practice Requirements

5.1 House Meetings

Each home must hold regular house meetings that:

- Are co-designed with young people.
- Include shared agenda-setting.
- Allow young people to raise issues freely.
- Use deliberative processes (discussion, reasoning, consensus-building).
- Produce clear actions and feedback loops.
- Are facilitated in a way that ensures equal voice.

House meetings must not be used solely for administrative updates or behavioural management.

5.2 Everyday Interactions

Workers must:

- Use open, non-judgemental dialogue in daily routines.
- Explain decisions, boundaries, and expectations.
- Invite young people's perspectives and negotiate where possible.
- Avoid language that shames, threatens, or coerces.
- Support young people to articulate feelings, needs, and preferences.

5.3 Care Planning

Young people must be:

- Involved in all stages of their care planning.
- Provided with accessible information about their rights and options.
- Supported to express their goals, concerns, and aspirations.
- Included in reviews as active participants, not passive attendees.
- Given opportunities to challenge or question decisions.

5.4 Conflict Resolution

The home must use restorative, dialogic approaches that:

- Prioritise understanding over blame.
- Encourage all parties to express their experiences.

- Seek shared solutions and repair.
- Avoid punitive or exclusionary responses unless necessary for safety.

5.5 Staff Practice and Team Culture

Teams must:

- Hold regular reflective forums where workers can discuss practice openly.
- Use collaborative decision-making processes.
- Encourage constructive challenge and critical reflection.
- Share responsibility for the emotional climate of the home.
- Ensure that organisational decisions affecting practice are communicated transparently.

5.6 Organisational Governance

The organisation must:

- Provide structures for young people and workers to influence policy and service development.
- Ensure that participation is resourced, not symbolic.
- Monitor the quality of communicative and participatory practice.
- Provide training in dialogic communication, restorative practice, and democratic facilitation.
- Embed these principles into supervision, appraisal, and quality assurance.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

Residential Workers

- Facilitate communicative, participatory practice.
- Model respectful, reflective dialogue.
- Support young people's agency and voice.
- Use restorative approaches to conflict.

Managers

- Ensure structures for participation are in place and functioning.
- Provide training and reflective spaces for staff.
- Monitor compliance with this policy.
- Address barriers to democratic practice.

Senior Leaders

- Embed communicative and democratic principles in organisational strategy.
- Resource participation meaningfully.
- Ensure accountability mechanisms reflect these values.

Young People

- Are encouraged, but never required, to participate.
- Are supported to express views in ways that feel safe and authentic.
- Have the right to challenge decisions and contribute to change.

7. Monitoring and Review

The organisation will:

- Conduct annual reviews of participatory and communicative practice.
- Gather feedback from young people and workers.
- Use findings to improve policy, training, and practice.
- Report outcomes to governance bodies and young people's forums.

8. Related Policies

- Participation and Rights Policy
- Restorative Practice Policy
- Care Planning and Review Policy
- Safeguarding Policy
- Staff Supervision and Development Policy