

### Purpose

The Voices competition enables young people with experience of the care system to develop and share their creative voice.

This year the theme of the competition is 'My Voice'. We are excited about receiving creative interpretations of the theme... Some examples might include the importance of feeling heard, the power of collective voices, or the voice inside your head. But we are open to many more!

This workshop is designed to give care-experienced young people an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of 'my Voice', share their unique perspectives, and develop creative ideas that they may build on in the future.

### Objective

Children and young people will develop an understanding of how to respond to the theme; they will give themselves permission to be creative; and they will make a start on their piece.

### Success Criteria

**ALL will...** consider different approaches to the theme

**MOST will...** Write something in response

**SOME will...** Finish a piece of writing



# The big question

What does **'My Voice'** mean to you?

This question invites participants to explore both the personal and creative aspects of the theme, encouraging them to reflect on the significance of their voice, how it is heard or not heard, and what forms of expression feel authentic to them. It also allows space for interpretation, giving young people the freedom to approach the theme in a way that resonates with their individual experiences and creative process. You might return to this question at the end to reflect on the ideas and creations participants have developed.

## Objective

Here is a suggested outline for the session. It is designed to take 1.5 hours. Feel free to adapt it to your own needs and the needs of the children and young people you are working with.

- Introduce the Voices competition **(5 mins)**
- Portrait Game – participants learn to let go of control when being creative **(10 mins)**
- If This Could Speak – participants consider what objects might say if they could **(15 mins)**
- Insides, Outsides – participants reflect on their own voices (what do other people hear/not hear?) **(20 mins)**
- Sentence Starters – participants write sentences that might form the basis of their work **(15 mins)**
- Automatic Writing – participants create a short piece of writing **(15 mins)**
- Discuss Next Steps **(10 mins)**



# Session plan

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## Introduction (5 mins)

Start by welcoming everyone and introducing the Voices competition, explaining that today's theme is 'My Voice.' Emphasise that the focus is on exploring how they express themselves—whether through words, thoughts, or creativity—and how their voice matters. Let them know this session is a chance to reflect on the theme, try some writing exercises, and begin a piece they can develop for the competition. Encourage creativity and remind them that there are no right or wrong answers—this is about experimenting and giving themselves permission to create freely.

You might wish to share some previous entries with them – examples from all age groups are available on our website: <https://coramvoice.org.uk/get-involved/voices-writing-competition/>

## Portrait game (10 mins)

*Resources: pens, paper, stopwatch/timer*

Provide pens and paper and explain the activity to participants: without revealing who they choose, they need to select three people in the room to draw. They will have 20 seconds to draw each picture. The goal is to draw quickly and without concern for accuracy—focusing on getting something on the page instead of trying to "get it right." Emphasise that the challenge is about letting go of control and accepting whatever the outcome is in the limited time frame. This is essential when you create a first draft of creative work – just get it out!

Start a timer and give students a short countdown as the timer runs out. After a few seconds of 'rest', begin the timer again for the second portrait, and finally the third.

Ask everyone to share their pictures, and ask others to guess. The results are often funny!



# If This Could Speak (15 mins)

*Resources: pens, paper, 'voiceless things' – Appendix A or preprepared objects*

Voices are like fingerprints. Everyone has their own individual voice – the things they say, and the way that they say them, are unique to them. Can you imagine what it's like to not have a voice? Lots of things do. In this exercise, we will imagine what an object might say if it could speak...

For this activity, you can either use the images of 'voiceless things' in **Appendix A**, or you could collect some physical objects in advance for the participants to consider. Alternatively, you might ask participants ahead of time to bring in an item they wish to use in this activity.

Begin the activity with a brief, collective discussion on what kinds of things don't have a voice (e.g., a tree, the wind, a feeling, a stone) and how they might experience the world. If working with younger children it might help to share an example.

Ask participants to work in pairs. Ask each pair to pick something they want to give voice to: from the images, objects, or their own creativity. Ask participants to consider what the voice of this thing might be like using the following prompts:

- How loud does it talk?
- What is the quality of its voice? (silky, gravelly, gruff, gentle etc.)
- What is the one thing it would say if it could?

Each pair can either share their answers to the above questions, or if they're feeling theatrical they can say the 'one thing' as though they were the object!

After this activity, engage in a discussion on what they learnt by imagining this perspective, how it felt to give a voice to something silent, and how might this relate to their own voice?



# Insides, Outsides (20 mins)

*Resources: pens, flipchart or sugar paper, and/or premade template (Appendix B), post-it notes*

*For younger learners: sugar paper, glue sticks, printed images from Appendix C*

Objects aren't the only things that don't have a voice. Sometimes people don't have a voice too. There might be lots of things that we would like to say but don't feel able to. We might also try to say things and not be heard. In this exercise, we are going to think about the things that we can and do say and the things that we don't.

Provide pens, sticky notes, and large sheets of paper to all participants. Give them 1 minute to draw a large self-portrait, which should include their whole body. If using **Appendix B**, give all learners a printed copy. Remind participants at this stage that this activity is for personal reflection and they won't be asked to share their responses with anyone else.

**Stage 1:** Ask participants to write three answers for each of the following prompts, sticking the post-it notes in the space around their person. This encourages them to think about how their voice is currently used and heard.

- What do you talk about a lot?
- Who do you feel heard by?

**Stage 2:** Ask participants to write three answers for each of the following prompts, this time sticking them on the inside of their drawing. This brings attention instead to their internal voice, and the ways that they might feel their voice isn't being heard.

- What do you think about that you feel like you can't say?
- What do you try to say that people don't listen to?
- What do you wish others would hear or understand about you?

After participants have completed both stages, you can invite them to reflect on the contrast between what is visible/heard (outside) and what is hidden (inside). This activity is a great way to highlight the tension between external expressions and internal thoughts. This reflection may be usefully shared in the group by asking each participant to share one post-it note. Alternatively, this is an opportunity to lengthen the session beyond 1.5 hours and provide space for more in-depth discussion depending on your requirements and the energy of the group.



**Alternative for younger participants:** This activity may be made more engaging for Early Years and KS1 participants by putting the focus on their voice in a specific situation or relationship. We suggest framing the activity around a close friendship to make the activity more personal and concrete.

First, ask one of the participants to lie on a piece of sugar paper while the other participants trace their outline. This represents the friend. Ask the participants to consider the following 'voice acts' and whether they would say or do them to a close friend or not.

- I would tell secrets to this person
- I would shout at this person when I am frustrated
- I would call this person names when I am angry
- I would ignore this person when they asked me a question
- I would use swear words with this person
- I would listen carefully when this person is talking to me
- I would say sorry if I hurt this person's feelings
- I would tell this person if I am feeling upset
- I would lie to this person to get my way.
- I would ask this person for help if I am feeling stuck



Use the printed images from **Appendix C** with each prompt as you consider them one at a time. As a group, stick each picture that represents a way they would speak to their friend inside the outline of the person, and the ways they would not on the outside.

This encourages participants to think about how they do or don't use their voices in the context of a specific relationship, and how emotions may shape their voice.



## Sentence Starters (15 mins)

*Resources: pens, paper, sentence starters*

In this activity, participants are given a series of sentence starters to help stimulate thinking and conversation. These can be used as a written exercise or verbal discussion, depending on your preference. Participants can complete the sentences individually or in groups, either with longer, reflective responses or quick-fire answers. We recommend that you pick five of the below prompts:

- My voice is like a...
- When I use my voice, I feel...
- If my voice was heard, I would...
- My voice is powerful because...
- I use my voice to...
- My voice matters because...
- If my voice was louder...
- The words I need to say most are...
- My voice matters most when...
- I found my voice when...
- It is hard to use my voice when...
- I feel unheard when...
- I feel heard when...



## Automatic Writing (15 mins)

*Resources: pens, paper, stopwatch/timer*

This activity is designed to help participants explore their thoughts and ideas in an unfiltered, spontaneous way, focusing on the act of writing freely rather than on crafting a polished result. The goal is to connect with their internal voice and express themselves without self-censorship or judgment.

Ask participants to pick one of the sentence starters or post-it notes from the earlier activity. This will be the prompt they use to start writing. Once they have their starting point, the task is to write continuously for 5 minutes. The key is to not stop, even if they don't know what to write. If participants find themselves stuck, advise them to keep writing phrases like, "I don't know what to write, I don't know what to write, I don't..." until something new emerges. The goal is to keep the pen moving and allow the words to flow freely.

Encourage participants to let go of the need for the writing to be "good" or "correct." This is not about creating something they like but rather getting their thoughts out without judgment. They can always edit later.

After the 5 minutes are up, invite each participant to share 1-2 sentences from their automatic writing with the group. If anyone feels uncomfortable sharing a full sentence, you could encourage them to start by sharing just one word.

## Discuss Next Steps (10 mins)

Share the editing guide with participants and discuss how what they have written might be adapted to form an entry to the competition. Give them guidance on how to submit and where to find help if they want to learn more about the competition.

**Voices**  
2025

The Creative Writing Competition  
for Children in Care and Care Leavers

