



Co-production in action: How HIQA and Tusla co-produced a toolkit to support and enhance effective communication between children, families and foster carers and Tusla staff.

**Sarah Fitzgerald**

Project Lead, Health and  
Social Care Standards, HIQA

**Maria MacInnes**

Service Improvement  
Manager, Tusla

# HIQA's role in developing National Standards

- HIQA is responsible for setting national standards for health and social care services and also has a role to play in developing guidance and tools to support services to implement the standards.
- National standards for health and social care services aim to:
  - provide a common language to describe what high quality, safe, person-centred care looks like
  - create a basis for services to improve quality and safety of the care they deliver
  - help people using services to understand what they should expect from a service
  - promote practice that is up to date, effective and consistent.

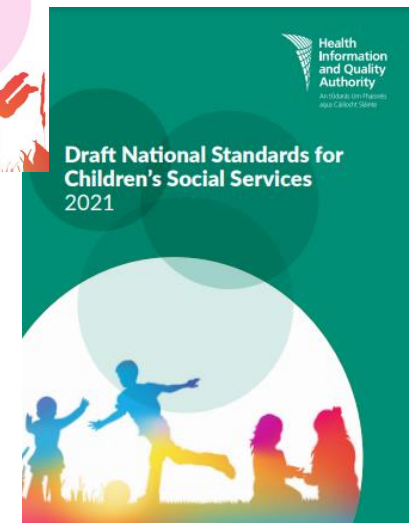
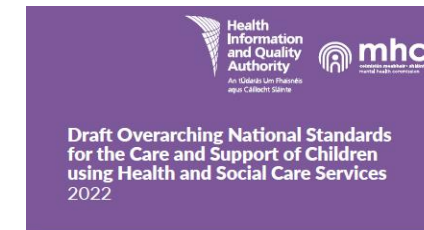
# Tusla's role in supporting children and families

Tusla is responsible for:

- supporting and promoting the development, welfare and protection of children, and the effective functioning of families.
- offering care and protection for children in circumstances where their parents have not been able to, or are unlikely to, provide the care that a child needs.
- ensuring that every child in the State attends school or otherwise receives an education, and for providing educational welfare services to support and monitor children's attendance, participation and retention in education

# Focusing on good communication

- Good communication is a key element of all national standards developed by HIQA, including those that are focused on the care and support of children who use health, social care and children's social services
- Extensive stakeholder engagement during development of two new sets of children's standards to identify and understand barriers and facilitators to implementing standards in practice
- Developing tools to support effective communication and information sharing would have the most impact for the sector
- Resonates with the findings from Tusla's 2023 report '*Through the eyes of the child*'



# Building and sustaining a co-production approach

## Building trust:

Engaged with senior personnel to map a framework for good practice for communication and information sharing in Tusla



## Creating a shared vision:

Drew together a collaborative cross-sectoral Working Group to develop tools to support effective communication and information sharing

# Purpose, principles, practices and processes

## Purpose of the Working Group

Collaboratively develop a user-friendly tool(s) that supports Tusla staff to communicate and share information effectively with children, families and foster carers in a child-centred way. These tools will build on existing good practice and frameworks that enable good communication and information sharing.

## Principles of the Working Group

- Inclusiveness
- Participation
- Understanding and listening
- Empathy
- Collaboration and sharing of roles and responsibilities
- Nurturing love to challenge fear and anxiety
- Honesty
- Asking hard questions
- Being aware of bias
- Confidentiality.

## Practices of the Working Group

- Use evidence-based approaches and analysis of best practice within the area of communication and information sharing
- Identify and agree on who our key stakeholders are.
- Engage with these stakeholders and share findings with the group.
- Avoid jargon in how we communicate with our stakeholders and each other.

## Processes of the Working Group

- Hold meetings in person where possible to build a collaborative approach.
- Demonstrate flexibility and adaptability within the group.
- Agree the activities of the group
- Agree actions and clear timelines for tasks.
- Form sub-groups for specific tasks and areas of inquiry and share findings with the wider Working Group.

# Aim of the communication toolkit

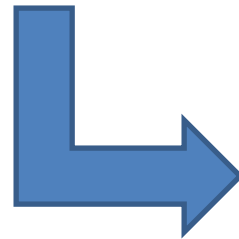
To collaboratively develop a user-friendly toolkit that supports Tusla staff to communicate and share information effectively with children, families and foster carers, in a child-centred way. This toolkit will build on existing good practice in effectively communicating with children, families and foster carers, which will in turn lead to better outcomes for children.



# Building and sustaining a co-production approach

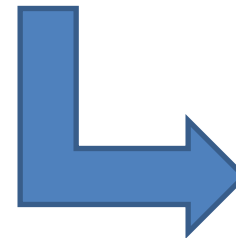
## Fostering ownership:

Identifying barriers and enablers of effective communication within children's social service and priority areas within our remit



## Ensuring inclusivity:

Wide stakeholder engagement with key stakeholder through focus groups, user testing, pre-implementation testing



## Delivery of toolkit:

Ensuring that we delivered on what we actually agreed –  
*“Fundamentals of good communication: How to have effective everyday conversations”*







# Fundamentals of good communication: Questions to help with everyday communication

## Getting ready to communicate

**Am I ready to communicate with this child, family or foster carer?**

How am I feeling? Am I attuned to how the person is feeling and what is happening in their life?

What is my relationship with this person? Do I know their story or family history?

How can I best prepare for this meeting? Who could help me to prepare?

What is the best way to meet this person? Should it be face-to-face or by phone?

Is the person expecting this meeting or conversation? When was I last in contact with them and how was it left?

Does the person need support when I am communicating with them?

## Purpose of the communication

**What is the purpose of this meeting or conversation?**

Am I clear on why this meeting or conversation is taking place?

Am I clear on what I am hoping to achieve from this meeting or conversation?

Have I thought about what the potential impact of this conversation will be on the person?

Have I thought about what a good outcome from this meeting or conversation would be for the person that I am communicating with?

## During communication

**Am I aware of my verbal and non-verbal communication?**

Have I clearly explained the purpose of the meeting or conversation to the person?

Am I respectful of the person and their needs? For example, if I was late, did I apologise?

Am I fully present and actively listening? If I am taking notes, have I explained why?

How is the information landing with the person? How are they reacting?

Am I aware of my tone of voice and do I ensure that it is open?

Do I have strategies to respond to the situation if it becomes challenging?

## Checking understanding

**Has my message been understood?**

Have I given the person opportunities to ask questions during the meeting or conversation?

Have I checked in with the person to see if they are fully understanding the message?

Have I reflected back the points raised by the person to ensure that I have understood them as they intended?

Have I documented the points raised by the person during our meeting or conversation?

Have I arranged a date and a time for a follow-up meeting or conversation?

## Seeking feedback

**Have I looked for feedback on the meeting or conversation?**

Have I supported the person to provide their feedback after the meeting and documented this feedback?

Have I addressed any questions, concerns or complaints in a timely way?

Have I clearly outlined the next steps, who is responsible for them and expected timelines?

Have I agreed to maintain regular contact with the person, even when there are no updates to give?

If the person needs support from other services, have I explained how I will follow-up with this?

Can I discuss any learning from this situation in my supervision?

## Practical case studies



**TÚSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

**Health  
Information  
and Quality  
Authority**  
An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis  
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

**Fundamentals of good  
communication: How to  
have effective everyday  
conversations**

**👍 Lets get started**

Preparing for  
Communication >

During  
Communication >

After  
Communication >

# Case study example:

## Preparing for Communication

Being prepared for a meeting or conversation helps to ensure that your intended message is delivered and understood by the person you are communicating with. Good preparation can help improve the experience of communication for the child, family member or foster carer.

Let's read through a scenario where being prepared for a conversation really helped and then let's read through a scenario where being unprepared for a conversation resulted in communication being more challenging.

[Click here to read Katie's story](#)



[Click here to read Jamie's story](#)



# Case study example:

## Jamie's Story

Jamie is a social care worker who works in a children's residential centre.

Let's hear from Jamie as he reflects on a time where he was unprepared to have a difficult conversation with Ben, a young person living in the residential centre.

Click **Next** to read Jamie's story.



# Case study example:

## Jamie's Story

I was a key worker for Ben, a 14-year-old boy who was living in a residential centre. About an hour before Ben was due to leave the centre to visit his family, I was told by my supervisor that Ben's weekend access to see his family had been cancelled.

My supervisor explained that this decision was made because Ben had recently been absconding from both from the centre and his family home, placing him in dangerous situations.



# Case study example:

## Jamie's Story

Ben was surprised by the news and felt that the decision had come from nowhere. He reacted badly, becoming upset and angry during the conversation. He was frustrated that he wasn't involved in the decision. And he felt that I, as his key worker, hadn't advocated for him.



# Case study example:

## Jamie's Story

Ben had questions on the decision and the next steps, but I didn't have the necessary information to hand to respond to his immediate concerns. I felt unprepared and out of my depth. I was worried that in reaction to the news, Ben would abscond and place himself in danger.





# Case study example:

## Jamie's Story

My relationship with Ben became fractured after this conversation and Ben felt that he couldn't trust me. I had to work hard to regain his trust over time.



# Case study example:

## Time to Reflect



Take a moment to reflect on what you learned from Jamie's story.

- What preparation could Jamie have done to ensure that Ben had a more positive experience during this conversation?
- Are there any processes or tools that Jamie could have drawn on to prepare for the conversation?
- Were there any other people that Jamie could have drawn upon for support?
- Was Jamie the best person to deliver this news or could he have asked someone else to have the conversation with Ben?
- Can you apply any learning from Jamie's story to your own practice?
- Is there any learning from Jamie's story that you will share with your team?

# Pre-implementation testing

- In order to assess the usability, acceptance and adoption of the toolkit, we ran a phase of pre-implementation testing in Tusla
- To recruit teams to take part in testing, we used existing fora within Tusla to engage across different levels of staff to communicate information on the toolkit
- A total of five children-in care teams from across the country took part in an 8 week testing phase
- Staff were encouraged to use the toolkit in their day-to-day communication with children, families and foster carers, during group and individual supervision and during team meetings
- Positive feedback from across all teams with good acceptance of the toolkit

# Feedback from testing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weaving the toolkit into everyday practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting communication with children, families and foster carers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication, dissemination and scale up of toolkit</li> </ul>
<p><i>“It should be used as part of everyday practice and kept on the agenda for supervision and induction to instil this type of thinking.”</i></p>	<p><i>“The tool is useful with supporting the structure of phone calls and finding my style as a new worker.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Staff understood the importance of getting their [children, families, foster carers] feedback but found it difficult to find the right time for the conversation, particularly if who they were meeting with presented as heightened.”</i></p>
<p><i>“New beginners and experienced staff would benefit from training based on the communication tool as a way to reflect and reconnect on their communication.”</i></p>	<p><i>“It helps me to consider how the information is actually being received to ensure there is clarity, especially in times of high stress.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I think we should have practice workshops to roll it out to all staff. Some of the complaints we receive is directly linked to poor communication skills amongst staff.”</i></p>
<p><i>“It is useful for new staff as it offers to guide communication in practice by connecting theory from college to practice.”</i></p>	<p><i>“It has helped my team to think about a call before they make it or think about the purpose of a visit to a placement.”</i></p>	<p><i>“As well as including in induction packs and supervision meetings, we can use this at regional team meetings and also to support reflective recording practice.”</i></p>



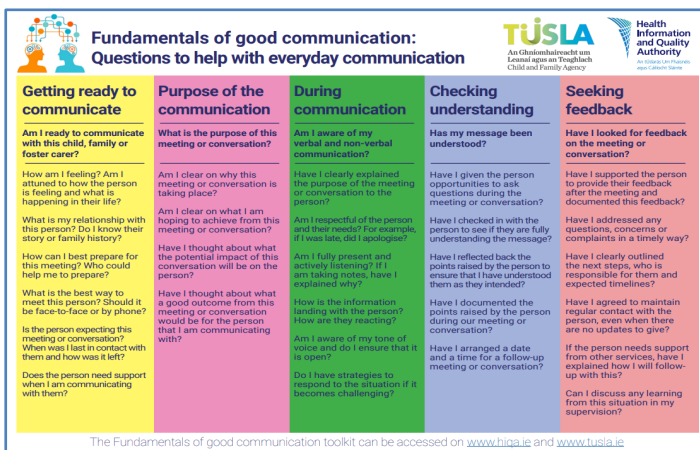
# Launch of toolkit



**Fundamentals of good communication: How to have effective everyday conversations**

**Lets get started**

- Launching the toolkit today at Social Care Ireland Conference
- Toolkit is going live on the HIQA and Tusla websites and will be freely available for all staff
- Promotional videos
- Social media coverage and promotion
- Hardcopies available at our stand – come say hello!



**Fundamentals of good communication: Questions to help with everyday communication**

Getting ready to communicate	Purpose of the communication	During communication	Checking understanding	Seeking feedback
<p><b>Am I ready to communicate with this child, family or foster carer?</b></p> <p>How am I feeling? Am I attuned to how the person is feeling and what is happening in their life?</p> <p>What is my relationship with this person? Do I know their story or family history?</p> <p>How can I best prepare for this meeting? Who could help me to prepare?</p> <p>What is the best way to meet this person? Should it be face-to-face or by phone?</p> <p>Is the person expecting this meeting or conversation? When was I last in contact with them and how was it left?</p> <p>Does the person need support when I am communicating with them?</p>	<p><b>What is the purpose of this meeting or conversation?</b></p> <p>Am I clear on why this meeting or conversation is taking place?</p> <p>Am I clear on what I am hoping to achieve from this meeting or conversation?</p> <p>Have I thought about what the potential impact of this conversation will be on the person?</p> <p>Have I thought about what a good outcome from this meeting or conversation would be for the person that I am communicating with?</p>	<p><b>Am I aware of my verbal and non-verbal communication?</b></p> <p>Have I clearly explained the purpose of the meeting or conversation to the person?</p> <p>Am I respectful of the person and their needs? For example, if I was late, did I apologise?</p> <p>Am I fully present and actively listening? If I am taking notes, have I explained why?</p> <p>How is the information landing with the person? How are they reacting?</p> <p>Am I aware of my tone of voice and do I ensure that it is open?</p> <p>Do I have strategies to respond to the situation if it becomes challenging?</p>	<p><b>Has my message been understood?</b></p> <p>Have I given the person opportunities to ask questions during the meeting or conversation?</p> <p>Have I checked in with the person to see if they are fully understanding the message?</p> <p>Have I reflected back the points raised by the person to ensure that I have understood them as they intended?</p> <p>Have I documented the points raised by the person during our meeting or conversation?</p> <p>Have I arranged a date and a time for a follow-up meeting or conversation?</p>	<p><b>Have I looked for feedback on the meeting or conversation?</b></p> <p>Have I supported the person to provide their feedback after the meeting and documented this feedback?</p> <p>Have I addressed any questions, concerns or complaints in a timely way?</p> <p>Have I clearly outlined the next steps, who is responsible for them and expected timelines?</p> <p>Have I agreed to maintain regular contact with the person, even when there are no updates to give?</p> <p>If the person needs support from other services, have I explained how I will follow-up with this?</p> <p>Can I discuss any learning from this situation in my supervision?</p>

The Fundamentals of good communication toolkit can be accessed on [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie) and [www.tusla.ie](http://www.tusla.ie)



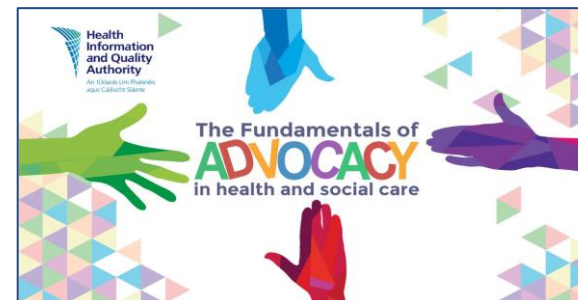
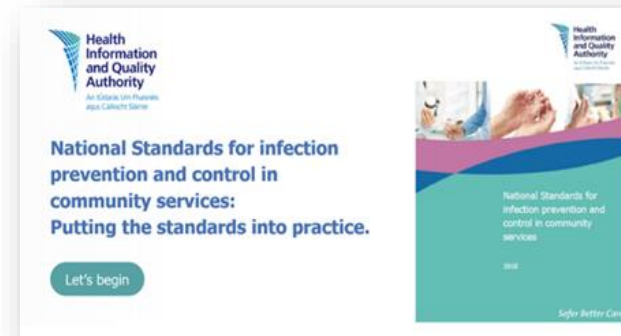
# HIQA Learning Hub



- HIQA's learning hub contains a range of materials to support staff to put national standards into practice



<https://www.hiqa.ie/learning-hub>





## Tusla Hub

- The Tusla hub hosts a comprehensive range of materials to support staff. Information about frontline services, support services, resources. There is news & updates every week.
- The communication toolkit will be available live from the hub from the 10th April



**TUSLA HUB** Home Services | Supports | Resources Staff Directory ICT Service Desk ★ Following

**Tusla Excellence and Innovation Awards**

Join us on **Wednesday 3rd April, 2024 at 11.00 am** when CEO Kate Duggan will announce the winners of the **2024 Tusla Excellence and Innovation Awards**

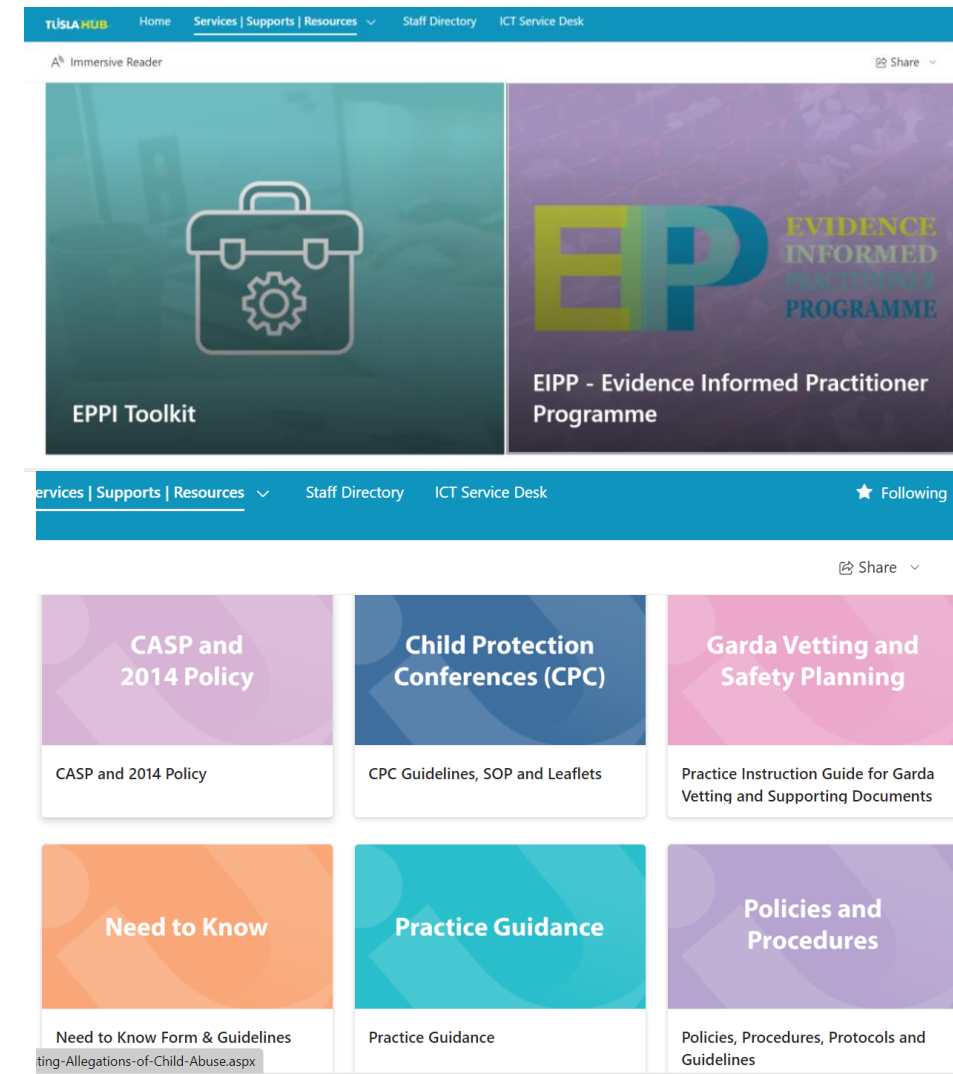
Tusla will honour the great work being done across the Agency in support of children and families by our Tusla staff

**Click here to REGISTER**



A message from the CEO as Tusla launches new Corporate Plan 2024 - 2026

Tusla has today published its new Corporate Plan 2024 - 2026. The corporate plan sets out the strategic direction, ambitions and key priorities for the next three years agreed between the Board of the Agency and Minister Roderic O’Gorman. 2024 marks...



**TUSLA HUB** Home Services | Supports | Resources Staff Directory ICT Service Desk ★ Following

Immersive Reader Share

**EPPi Toolkit**

**EIPP - Evidence Informed Practitioner Programme**

services | Supports | Resources Staff Directory ICT Service Desk ★ Following

Share

<b>CASP and 2014 Policy</b>	<b>Child Protection Conferences (CPC)</b>	<b>Garda Vetting and Safety Planning</b>
CASP and 2014 Policy	CPC Guidelines, SOP and Leaflets	Practice Instruction Guide for Garda Vetting and Supporting Documents
<b>Need to Know</b>	<b>Practice Guidance</b>	<b>Policies and Procedures</b>
Need to Know Form & Guidelines ting-Allegations-of-Child-Abuse.aspx	Practice Guidance	Policies, Procedures, Protocols and Guidelines

## Contact us

### Email

[standards@hiqa.ie](mailto:standards@hiqa.ie)



HIQA



@hiqa



@hiqaireland



@hiqaireland

### Email

[info@tusla.ie](mailto:info@tusla.ie)



Tusla -  
Child  
and  
Family  
Agency



@tusla



@Tusla  
- Child  
and  
Family  
Agency



@tuslaireland

# Thank you Questions?



**Health  
Information  
and Quality  
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis  
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

George's Court, George's Lane  
Smithfield, Dublin 7  
D07 E98Y

T: 01 814 7400  
W: [www.hiqa.ie](http://www.hiqa.ie)  
E: [info@hiqa.ie](mailto:info@hiqa.ie)

# TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

