

How to Use Talking Mats

Talking Mats support children and young people to share their views on school or other aspects of their lives using symbols, photographs or pre-written words depending on the age and cognitive ability of the child. For schools they are way of hearing the voice of children who find it hard to access and articulate their feelings, such as children with autism.

The facilitator gives heading such as:

- No problem, little problem, big problem
- Yes, don't know, no
- I like it, I don't know if I like it, I don't like it
- Ok, not ok

The headings given will depend on the ability of the child and on the topic of the Talking Mat. The photos, symbols or written words on cards can represent a whole range of school experiences and issues. The facilitator hands the cards to the pupil one by one. The pupil then arranges the cards under the heading to express their opinions. The facilitator will need to remind the child to give honest opinions and that there are no right or wrong answers.

The resulting Talking Mat can be copied or photographed so that staff have a clear view of what the pupil likes or can cope with, and what the pupil dislikes or finds challenging. This person centred information can be used to inform target setting and as the basis for part of an EHCP, or targeted plan. Talking Mats can be used whenever school staff need information about how the pupil is coping with a variety of situations and should be an integral part of a one-to-one mentoring approach with an autistic pupil. They can be conducted in silence, with the facilitator handing out cards one by one, if the pupil works best in an asocial setting.

Children whose language understanding is at less than a three word level will not be able to access Talking Mats and hearing the pupil voice of these children will involve detailed and focused observation, discussion with parents and carers, and with other professionals.

