



**University of Dundee**

## **The infant voice**

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***The Infant Voice.*** Vicky Armstrong, Art Therapist and Research Fellow; Dr Josephine Ross, Reader in Developmental Psychology, both University of Dundee

As Developmental Psychologists, we know that mental health starts from birth. Infants need secure, responsive relationships to regulate their physical and psychological states, and infant mental health lays the foundation for social and emotional wellbeing throughout the lifespan. Recognising the importance of infant mental health, and our duty as the adults around infants to keep their perspective at the centre of their care, the Scottish Government have recently published the [Voice of the Infant Best Practice Guidelines and Infant Pledge](#). These guidelines were co-produced by a short-life working group on behalf of the Infant Mental Health Implementation and Advisory Group, which was part of the [Scottish Government's Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Programme Board](#).

These new best practice guidelines provide direction on how to take account of infants' views and rights in all encounters. They offer suggestions on how those who work with babies and very young children can notice, facilitate and share the infant's feelings, ideas and preferences that they communicate through their gaze, body language and vocalisations. These guidelines will help psychologists, who may work clinically with infants and their families or who may be doing research with infants, to be mindful of the infant's views and to meet their duty under the United Nations Convention of Children's Rights to support meaningful participation with even the very youngest children. The Infant Pledge (reproduced below) states clearly what babies and very young children should expect from those around them, and we hope that sharing this work as widely as possible will help professionals, parents and the public tune into and amplify the voice of the infant.



## Infant Pledge



I am one of Scotland's youngest citizens. To give me the best start, so that I can thrive throughout my life, I need to be seen as a person with my own feelings and rights. I depend on adults to interpret my cues and communications so that my rights are upheld, and my voice is heard.

My relationships with the people who care for me are important and directly affect how my brain grows and develops, and how I learn to process and regulate my feelings. Safe and secure relationships and consistent care support my wellbeing now and give me better chances and outcomes in later life too.

Professionals and academics in the field of Infant Mental Health alongside organisations championing the rights and welfare of babies and very young children have come together on my behalf to create the following expectations, which they believe would help improve my life chances.

### **I expect that I will:**

1. Be seen as a person with my own feelings and views.
2. Be seen as able to communicate my feelings and views.
3. Be able to trust my important adults to think carefully about my feelings and views and speak them for me.
4. Be supported to have secure relationships with the adults who care for me.
5. Have safe, interesting places to play and learn, and the help I need to do so.
6. Have my views valued by my family, community, and society.
7. Have a say in decisions about what happens to me.

### **My important adults will:**

8. Have support to be healthy, including before I am born.
9. Have the information they need to make good choices for me.
10. Have the support they need to understand and meet my needs and their own.
11. Have help from people with the right knowledge and skills.

### **It is everyone's responsibility to:**

12. Consider me and my perspective at all levels of decision making.