

Summary of 10 questionnaires received from a range of practitioners who have been trained in how to use Talking Mats. The responses were given a number (participant 1-10) when they were received.



Who can use Talking Mats?

Talking Mats training is useful for practitioners who are working directly with children. The following professionals contributed to this report.

- Head Teacher from complex needs school in Glasgow
- Clinical psychologist from Stockport
- Outreach teacher supporting children with complex needs
- Specialist Speech and Language Therapist in a school supporting children and young people with complex health, education, movement and communication needs aged 5-18
- Speech and Language Therapist supporting young adults
- Teacher – special school
- Educational Psychologist – Wigan
- Support worker – TEENS plus
- Speech and Language therapist – special school
- Teacher of Additional Support Needs



How will Talking Mats training help you?

All the respondents indicated that they were looking for training and a resource that would allow them to gain the views of children and young people in a structured and meaningful way. They wanted to support them to give their views about a wide variety of issues including: aspects of their care (big and small); their education and transition. (Participants 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10)

The clinical psychology team have as a core value “*holding the young person at the centre of all their work*” They were looking to develop their skills when working with young people with learning disability/autism to help them to “*listen appropriately*” (P5)

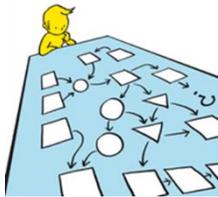
... tool to gather evidence of the pupils voice. Gathering children's opinions and feelings on their everyday lives allows us to make necessary changes to ensure barriers to learning and indeed inclusion are being broken down. (P1)

When we applied for the training we hoped that it would provide us with an approach and the resources that we needed to bridge the gaps in communication at TEENS+ by allowing our students to discuss issues that would never otherwise arise. (P2)

Wigan Council were selected to carry out a Pathfinder Project in light of the new SEND Code of Practice (2014). Part of this project focused on further development of skills/ good practice in involving children in decision-making processes, i.e., obtaining the 'Voice of the Child'. Colleagues were looking for an evidence-based approach to enable this, and felt that Talking Mats could help. We liked the idea of using a visual tool/approach.(P.3)

The Talking Mats training aims to help practitioners to:

- 1. Understand the Talking Mats communication framework.**
- 2. Have increased awareness of their own communication style.**
- 3. Be able to use Talking Mats for a range of purposes within their work or at home.**
- 4. Use a tool which evidences child- centred working.**



Did Talking Mats training fulfil the aims?

1. Understand the communication framework

Respondents commented that understanding the principles of Talking Mats has helped them to:

- Adapt their language appropriately for clients (P2, P8,P10)
- Allow clients to have control (P2, P3,P8)
- Communicate at a client's pace (P2,P7,P10)
- Phrase questions (P1, P3,P8,P9,P7)
- Maintain neutrality.(P1,P3,P8,P9)

"Staff are much more aware of the level of understanding the CYP have and who Talking Mats is a suitable tool for."(P8)

"It is easier for me to gather a greater quality of information from pupils I work with meaning I can make support specific and personal. Teachers I have worked with who have been trained are more

likely to seek pupil views and respond to it as it is clear and they are able to recognise that it truly is the pupils voice.”(P1)

2. Have increased awareness of your own communication style

Practitioners were asked to comment on the impact of their training on their own communication.

“The training strengthened my active listening skills” (P2, P3, P9)

“ Being able to really listen to what someone is telling you and to summarise/feedback this information accurately” (P5)

“staff who have completed foundation training have told me that it had a big impact on their communication and I have observed this in their use of Talking Mats within our service” (P.8)

The training had an impact on my communication style which I thought was good. I realised that sometimes what I thought was a choice wasn't an actual choice for the young person and they were not having the freedom to express themselves. We think we know the pupils so well here in school. It made me reflect on that (P4)

I am more able to embrace silence, being more aware of the young person's processing speed (P10)

3. Be able to use Talking Mats for a range of purposes within your home or school

All commented on the wide range of issues that can be discussed including:

- Choosing activities for clubs
- Commenting on seating assessments
- Giving views about attending respite services (Pre and post stays)
- Views on transition
- Views on health and well-being indicators (Girfec) for inclusion in Single Plan
- Trouble shooting difficult issues for CYP
- Deciding on venues for trips
- Giving views about which AAC method CYP prefers to use in different situations
- Things I like in School.(P8)

One of the main benefits was learning how to problem-solve and create resources to facilitate this process. The foundation training breaks down problems in to simple concepts and allows you to tackle these one issue at a time. This skill will stay with me and always influence my practice as an SLT. (P2)

We have been creative in our use of Talking Mats. Not only do we use them for choice/decision making, expressing views and opinions and general conversation we also use them as part of our students' reflection activities, group discussions, in their learning and for understanding social

behaviour (i.e. appropriate/not appropriate). Our students are so familiar with the format of Talking Mats that we feel we can use them for almost everything!(P2)

4. Use a tool which evidences child- centred working.

Respondents commented that using the mats can support young people to discuss difficult issues (P9)

Children are able to give their views at meetings without having to be present as this can be stressful (P1)

It has become a consistent part of our student's schedules – either weekly or in some cases, daily. Our students' use of Talking Mats to express themselves is now embedded into their own Individual Learning Plans to ensure that our staff are aware that this resource is a vital part of our students' learning and communication. (P2)

Some of the respondents gave us specific examples

- One pupil now receives support from an adult to get dressed after PE rather than relying on support of peers. The same child now wears ear defenders in gym due to the noise level.
- A pupil now has a quiet space out of the classroom he can access when he becomes anxious and uses ICT to complete writing tasks
- We identified that one child was playing a scary computer game which was impacting on his mental health through a talking mat and use this as evidence to a parent who did not believe there was a problem at home. (P1)
- Mat carried out with a child pre first stay at respite service highlighted concerns the child had. As a result of this, changes were made and support provided which resulted in a highly successful first visit/ on- going use of respite service.(P8)
- Mat carried out with young person about personal care situation resulted in changes in staff practices to address the issues raised by the Talking Mat.(P8)

Across the team, we have seen very tangible and real benefits to using TMs. We are engaging yp far more in our interventions. YP with significant communication and mental health needs are more directly involved in their care. Positive behaviour support plans are made more collaborative and the voice of the yp can be shared with parents, school and respite to benefit the lived experience of the yp. (P3)

Staff who have been trained suddenly feel empowered, helping the young people to have more control of their own lives. It also helps staff to set appropriate targets and to highlight any issues that need to be addressed.(P6)