

## Eliciting and promoting pupil voice

“Children who are capable of forming views have a right to receive and make known information, to express an opinion, and to have that opinion taken into account in any matters affecting them. The views of the child should be given due weight according to the age, maturity and capability of the child.” *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)*.

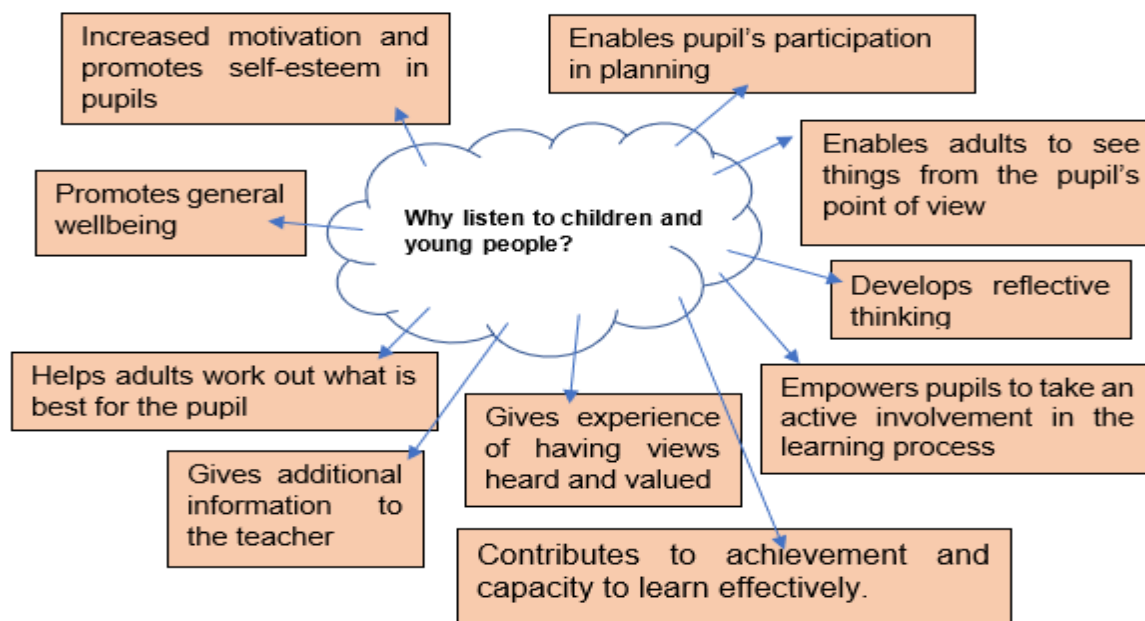
### Overview description

Pupil voice refers to the children’s and young people’s participation, contribution and influence in them having more of an input, expressing their views and suggestions about what they want in order to improve their learning and well-being in school or education setting (Cheminais, 2008). Pupil voice work requires a setting-wide commitment to listening to the views, wishes and experiences of all children and young people. Giving children and young people a voice about specific issues and feelings in their life is essential. If settings are going to meet the holistic needs of all pupils, teachers and professionals must listen to and respect the views of the pupils they work with. Pupils need to feel listened to, considered and valued.

The aim of eliciting pupil voice is to enhance pupil’s self-esteem and to empower them to become more successful learners. Pupil voice commonly aims to seek views related to, but not limited to; life at school/college and relationships with the community, policies, structures and organisation, parents/carers, teaching and learning, facilities, curriculum provision and the effect the provision has on the pupil’s outcomes.

### Why is it important?

Some of the advantages of eliciting pupil voice have been found to be:



*East Sussex Language and Learning Support Service (2006)*

Additionally, research suggests that educational settings with a strong commitment to pupil voice have reported positive outcomes associated within reduction in exclusions, better behaviour and better relationships across the educational community.

### Who should gather pupil voice?

Think carefully about who will administer the materials. Some pupils may be more comfortable with someone they don't know well, who may be external to the school and others may respond better to a familiar person. The familiar adult could be a key adult or a member of the pastoral team. Sometimes it is helpful if the member of staff eliciting pupils voice doesn't hold a role of authority. The person gathering the pupils voice needs to know the context in which the pupil learns.

It is also important to arrange for staff using the materials to be trained. This may involve modelling by a person experienced in using such materials, arranging a staff meeting or attending a training session. The staff administering the materials may need to develop skills in listening and questioning children. They also need to have a clear understanding of guidelines and their role regarding pupil protection issues in the unlikely event of any pupil disclosures.

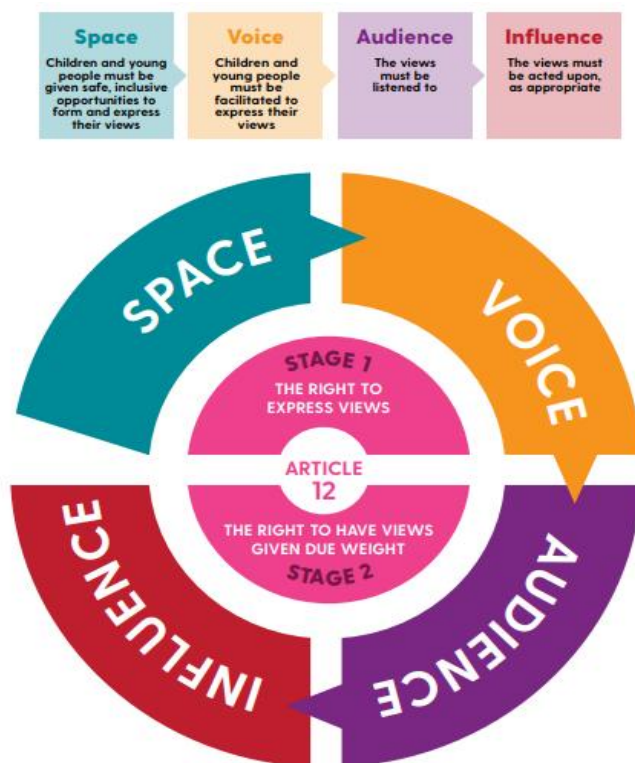
### Setting-wide approaches:

Involving pupils voice in setting-wide approaches guarantees that pupils can contribute throughout various decision-making processes. Pupils and staff must work closely together to ensure all views are considered. Some whole school approaches are:

- Embed pupil's participation into all aspects of school/college life. Ask the pupils the best way to promote participation and ensure their voices are heard within the school/college and community.
- Ensure that pupil participation is within the **schools'/college's values** and the **ethos** reflects the commitment to pupil voice. *Is it included in statements about setting statements, action planning, the website, classrooms and any other publications that talks about setting-wide values?*
- **Provide regular opportunities** for children and young people to share their views with each other and their staff. These opportunities can arise from everyday routines. For example, beginning classes with a welcoming ritual allowing children to release their most pressing thoughts in a 'breaking news' or 'what's on the top of your mind?' discussion.
- **Student councils** are a useful way of allowing children and young people to contribute to school life. Pupils are elected on the student council each year to represent the whole school/college. However, student councils can only select a small number of pupils and some children/young people may find this form of engagement challenging. It can be useful to hold a class or tutor group meeting

to discuss the agenda of the upcoming student council meetings to encourage all pupils to contribute in a non – threatening environment.

- **Inform pupils** and raise the pupil’s awareness about their rights and ways of participating within the institution through **assemblies, websites, notice boards** and **presentations** within lessons.
- A **‘suggestion box’** can be a way to allow pupils to contribute their suggestions to the school council or school community. Any pupil within school can put their suggestions forward through posting a note in the suggestion boxes around school.
- Rudd, Colligan and Naik (2006) propose that methods such as **questionnaires, interviews, surveys, focus groups, opinion polls and discussion groups** are a small selection of the potentially valuable methods for eliciting the voice of learners and pupils. Surveys can be analysed by significant groups to ensure that all sub groups of pupils have a voice and are involved in making decisions.



**Fig 1:** The participation Framework (Laura Lundy)

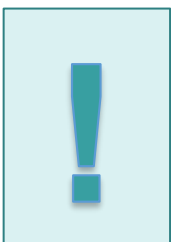
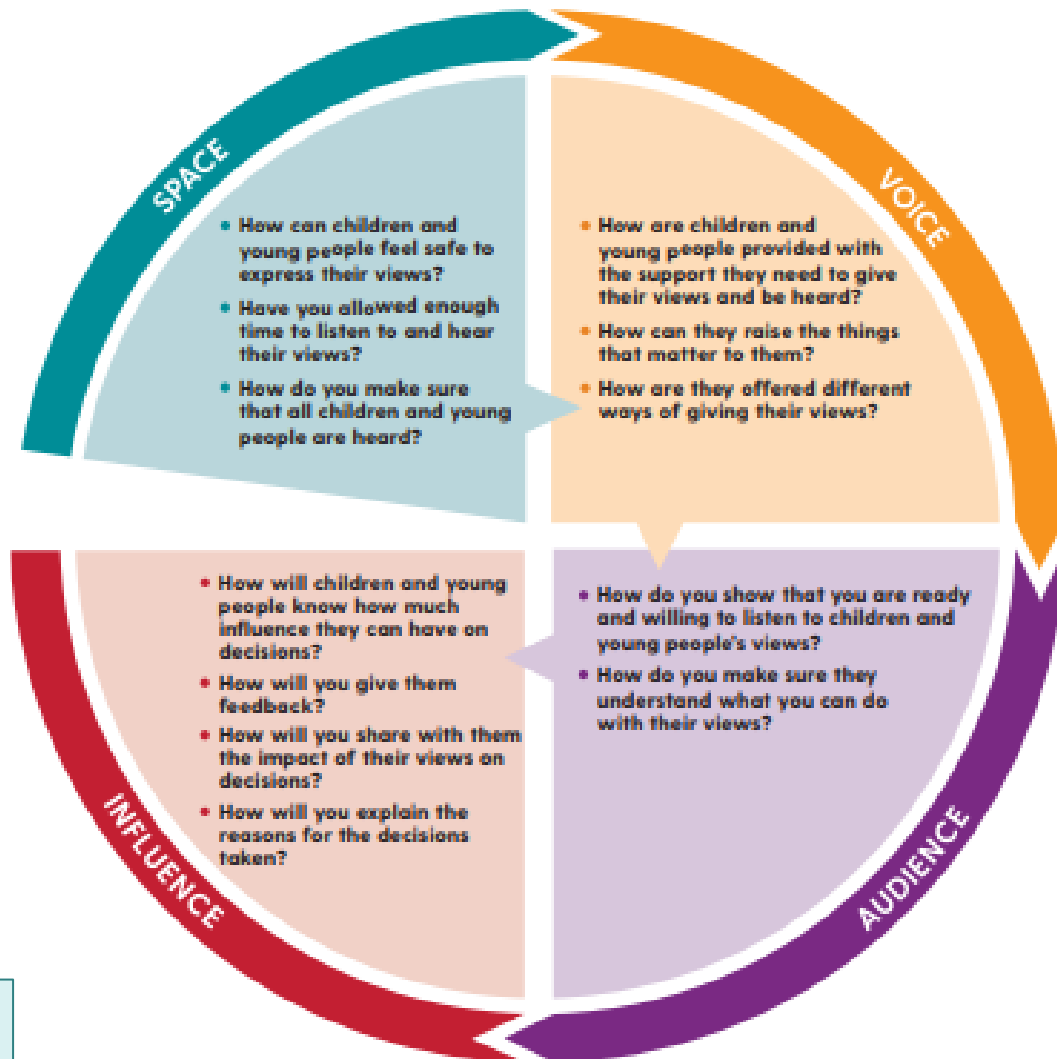
*National Framework for Child and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making*

This framework can provide guidance on the steps to take in order to give children and young people a voice in a setting.

<https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/>

**Everyday Spaces Checklist:** This checklist is designed as a guide to help settings ensure that children and young people have a voice in decision-making. It can be applied in many everyday situations including in classrooms, childcare settings, child and youth services and other spaces.

Please make sure that the ways you involve children and young people in decision-making are age-appropriate and accessible for all, whether in person or online.



### Important

Consider how you ensure that all children and young people are being heard, across each age group. How can you overcome language barriers? How can you make sure that the younger or more vulnerable and/or quieter pupils are listened to? What about those pupils who don't enjoy being at school or those who don't attend regularly? Make sure that it isn't only school council members who get their voices heard.

Top  
Tips!

For Early  
Years

- Use observations to notice and promote children's interests and ideas. Share with the class examples of positive learning and play that you have seen that day
- Where appropriate, utilise and 'in the moment planning' approach where children's interests and thoughts are at the centre of their learning and their ideas are valued and expanded upon.
- Provide opportunities for children to be heard and make choices throughout the day such as:
  - Voting for which book they would like to hear at the end of the day
  - Making their own lunch choices
  - Show and tell activities



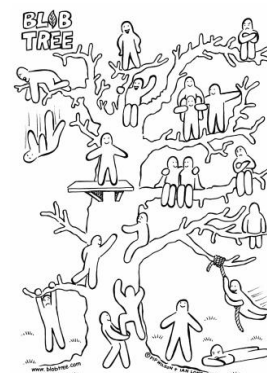
## Useful Resources

There is no one way to promote the voice of children and young people; each setting has a different unique cohort of pupils. There are various resources that can be used to elicit the views of the young person, being sensitive to their individual strengths and needs.

### *Individual and/or groups of children and young people:*

#### ➤ **The Big Book of Blob** (*Wilson and Long, 2018*)

Blobs are a way to discuss issues in a deep, meaningful way and yet they can be understood by adults and children alike. Blobs are neither male nor female, young or old, they are open to interpretation. The secret of how to use the Blob pictures is in asking the questions. Open the discussion with broad questions before coming to the deeper issues which lie behind each image. This activity can be used to explore and get an indication of the student's social and emotional status at the start of the session, over the course of the week and to reflect on how this might have impacted on their behaviour.



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Which blob do you  
feel like?

Which blob would  
you like to be?

## ➤ Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2001)

Drawing the Ideal Self is a technique that is based on personal construct psychology (PCP), in an attempt to improve professionals understanding of the children's views. Drawing the Ideal Self is a way of trying to discover the 'sense' in the young person's behaviour and attitudes (i.e. to understand their construing). It is based upon Kelly's theory and in PCP terms it may be viewed as a technique to tap into how the young person understands and interprets themselves. The idea of Drawing the Ideal Self is to help the client to explore their view of themselves, something which can be difficult for people to put into words. Children and young people are asked to draw and explore the kind of person they do not want to be like and the kind of person they would like to be like, supported with semi-structured questions, designed to elicit the children's views on the personality, interests, family, friendships, greatest fear, history and future.

Figure 1: Example of Step 1



Figure 2: Example of Step 2



More information can be found:  
<https://drawingtheidealself.co.uk/>

## ➤ Drawing the ideal school

'Drawing the Ideal School' (Williams and Hanke, 2007) is a tool used to gather pupil's perspectives on optimum school features in order to inform the planning of provision. The ideal school is based on the 'Drawing the Ideal Self' (Moran, 2001) technique and Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955). This approach seeks to explore a young person's important and core constructs about themselves and how they view the world. Children and young people are asked to draw a picture of 'the school they would like to go to' and 'the school they would not like' supported with semi-structured questions, designed to elicit the children's experiences of school, the classroom, other children, adults and themselves. This method appears to provide a structure that enables children to express their views using a combination of drawing, talking and writing.

*Ideal school drawn by a Year 10 pupil with Asperger syndrome who said:  
 "It's more of a palace than a school."*





For more information, see the article Williams, J., & Hanke, D. (2007). 'Do you know what sort of school I want?': optimum features of school provision for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. *Good Autism Practice (GAP)*, 8(2), 51-63.

[https://www.ucl.ac.uk/educational-psychology/new\\_site/resources/JaneWilliams\\_DECP2016conference.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/educational-psychology/new_site/resources/JaneWilliams_DECP2016conference.pdf)

### ➤ Mini Path and PATH centred planning (*Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope*)



A PATH is a person-centred planning tool that produces a shared vision of a positive future for the child or young person, with those who are important to them and who can support them.

Gathering the Views of the CYP is at the forefront of PATH. The professional will gather the thoughts, hopes and dreams for the focus young person's future and how they hope things might change in a year from then. It involves working collaboratively with the CYP to determine how things are in the present, and who's support they may

need and immediate actions that may help them move forward towards their dreams.

More information is available at: <https://inclusive-solutions.com/person-centred-planning/path/>

### ➤ Observations, questionnaires and 1:1 interview with the child/young person (interviews)

Professionals can use observations, questionnaires and interviews to seek pupil's views on the good and bad things about school. Questionnaires and interviews that allow school to find out pupils' awareness or perception of difficulties by building up a picture of the supports and barriers to their participation in school activities can be useful.

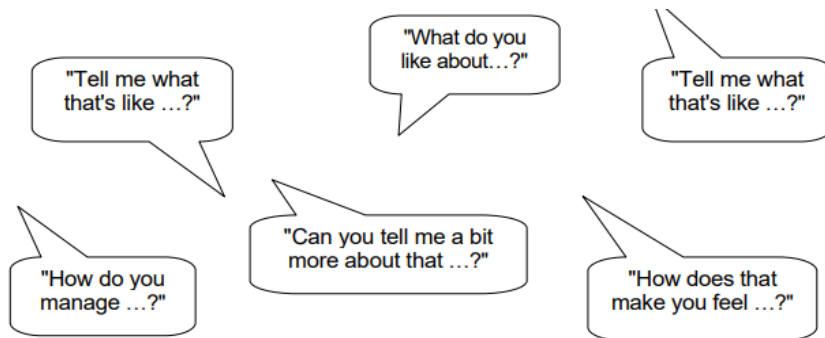
**Questions can include:**

1. What do you like doing at / what is your favourite thing about [name of school]?
2. What do you think you are really good at doing?
3. What do you find hard to do? / What do you find a bit tricky? Can you think of anything that would help you with this?

### **Types of supportive questioning:**

When deciding on questions, keep in mind the pupil's developmental stage and their ability to understand language and concepts.

Using Open- ended questions is normally the most useful course of questioning in helping the pupil talk. This can be supported with the use of visuals and/or cards. Here are some examples:



*East Sussex Language and Learning Support Service (2006)*

### ➤ Focus groups

Focus groups are a type of group elicitation that offers a dynamic that is less threatening and offers more anonymity (Bloom et al., 2020). Focus groups are focussed on a particular topic and provide you with information about pupil's opinions and feelings concerning the topic. Focus groups allow you to gain a deeper insight into their reasoning and understand the 'why' behind their responses. The atmosphere in focus groups is one of sharing and discussing rather than just interviewing, because participants are encouraged to interact directly with each other. The format of the group is conducive to gathering information not just about how people feel but also about why they feel that way. This is the essence of a focus group.

It is important to ensure that all children and young people are heard, across each age group. This will need consideration of those children and young people who have speech and language needs and those more vulnerable and/or quieter pupils. The following resources can be used to sought their voice:

### ***Resources to use with young people with speech and language difficulties and/or English as additional language:***

#### ➤ Talking Mats

Talking mats is a visual tool that can be used as a way to express the views of people with communication or learning difficulties. The process typically involves placing a mat in front of a CYP and introducing a single topic (e.g. leisure interests). Open-ended questions are asked and the CYP chooses symbols that represents an array of activities and places them on the mat. Talking Mats provides an excellent example of adaptability and potential to overcome children's communicative barriers.

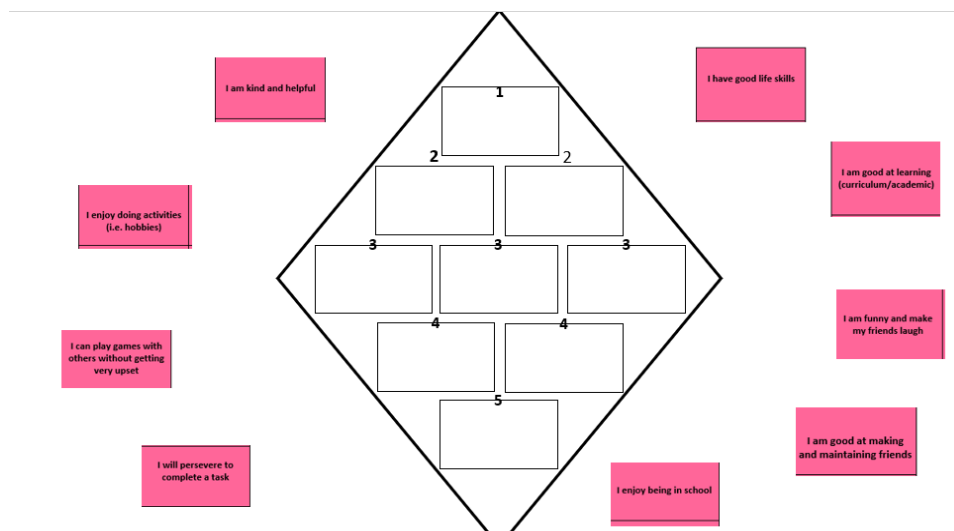




Taken from: <https://www.talkingmats.com/>

### ➤ Diamond ranking

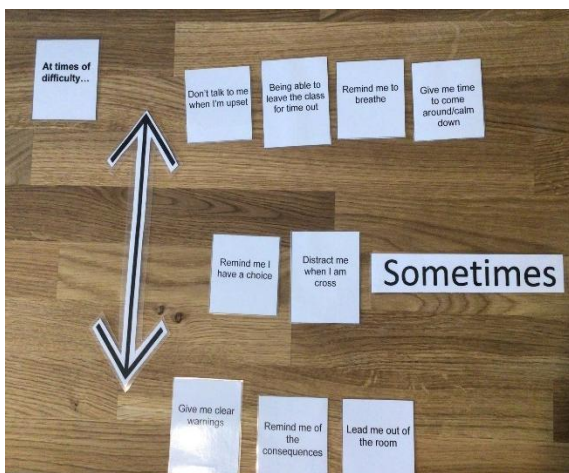
The diamond ranking is a tool devised to encourage discussion, in order to gather students views about what is important to them. The task involves asking the Child or Young Person (CYP) to sort activities into what they feel is most important to them, placing the most important at the top and least important at the bottom, forming a diamond shape. The diamond ranking seeks children’s views of their experiences of school across social, emotional, behavioural and learning domains including 4 specific areas; strengths, needs, leisure/interests and future aspirations.



➤ **Card sorts**

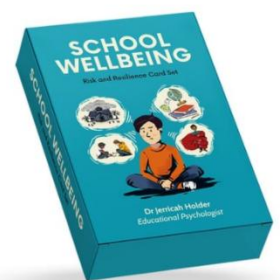
A card sort is an activity in which participants organise an often-large number of cards into groups or categories. Card sorts provide a structure that encourages activity and discussion that can elicit CYP's voice. Card sorts can be created on almost any topic or issue that a young person is experiencing. For example; ordering strategies that help young people at time of difficulty or identifying things they might find difficult in school. Children or young people can sort the cards in order of importance or into categories 'always like me' 'often like me' 'sometimes like me' 'never like me'.

*Examples shown below:*



➤ **School wellbeing cards Risk and Resilience Card set** (Dr. Jerricah Holder)

The School Wellbeing cards are a card sort activity that provides vital insight into how the young person views and makes sense of their experience of school. Grounded in resilience research, the deck of 40 picture cards, have been developed to reflect key risk factors associated with school avoidance or unhappiness at school, as well as strength and protective factors that promote school attendance and wellbeing. The School Wellbeing cards are designed to be used by education, health and social care colleagues and are suitable for children aged 7+.



**Taken from** <https://www.schoolwellbeingcards.co.uk/>

## ➤ The Mosaic approaches

“Viewing children as 'experts in their own lives', the Mosaic approach offers a creative framework for listening to young children's perspectives through talking, walking, making and reviewing together” Moss and Clark (2011).

The mosaic approach is designed to elicit the views of children and young people through a wide range of means. It combines visual methods including cameras, tours and map making of the young person's environment, with observation and interviews, to provide a number of ways within which can be used to explore a child's world.



The mosaic approach is aimed for children under the age of 5 years old.

**For more information:** Clark, A. and Moss, P. (2011). Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach.

## Useful links

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/whole-school-approach/pupil-voice/>

<https://www.talkingmats.com/>

<https://inclusive-solutions.com/person-centred-planning/path/>

<https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/health-wellbeing/mhew/whole-school-approach/pupil-voice>

<https://www.tes.com/news/why-student-voice-so-important-learning>

## References

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