



A **worry monster** (a soft toy with a zip or mouth for “posting” worries) is a simple, child-friendly tool that can significantly improve how safe, manageable and participative a Children’s Hearing feels for a child or young person. Used sensitively, it supports **emotional safety, communication, regulation and power-sharing**, all of which are core to trauma-informed practice.

By sharing their feelings with the worry monster the worry becomes something **external**, not part of the child. The child is not defined by their distress, shame and fear of judgment are reduced.

It supports trauma informed practice and the child’s rights to be heard by supporting children and young people to:

- Share their feelings safely
- Communicate without speaking
- Feel in control and taken seriously
- Stay regulated during a stressful process

When a Worry Monster Is Helpful

A worry monster can be particularly helpful when a child:

- Appears anxious, withdrawn, or overwhelmed
- Finds it hard to answer questions
- Worries about “saying the wrong thing”
- Has speech, language, or processing differences

Trauma-Informed Principles

When using a worry monster, Panel Members should uphold:

- **Choice** – the child decides whether to use it
- **Control** – the child decides what goes in and what happens next
- **Safety** – worries are handled calmly and respectfully
- **Transparency** – be honest about what can and cannot happen/share but not fix worries

Participation must **never** be forced.

How to Introduce the Worry Monster

The Hearing Reporter should introduce the kit **early**, ideally in the waiting room before the hearing starts.

Use calm, permission-based language, for example:

“Some children find this a helpful way to tell the panel how you are feeling about things. You don’t have to use it, but it’s here if you want to.”

Explain clearly:

- What it is for
- Anything they would like to tell the panel can be written or drawn
- That the child controls whether anything is read aloud

Avoid presenting it as:

- A reward
- A behaviour tool
- Something “just for little children”

How Children Can Use the Worry Monster

Children may choose to:

- Express their views and feelings during the Hearing
- Write or draw instead of speaking
- Put something in without showing it to anyone
- Decide later whether they want to share what’s inside

All of these are **valid forms of participation**.

Use Worries to Improve Understanding

Worries may highlight:

- Misunderstandings about decisions
- Fear of the process
- Concerns about relationships or change

Use these insights to:

- Explain things more clearly
- Slow the pace
- Adjust how decisions are communicated



What to Be Honest About

It should be made clear to the child if:

- Information shared cannot be responded to today
- A decision has already been made
- Something is outside the hearings power

Honest explanation builds trust more than false reassurance.

What Not to Do

- Insist a child uses the worry monster
- Read the child's views aloud without consent
- Challenge or debate views
- Use views to test credibility
- Treat views as behaviour or "attention-seeking"
- Rush through the child's views to move on

Reporter Practice Point:

Where possible the approach taken in point 1 should be followed

1. If the child wants to write something and put it in the worry monster, another person present at the hearing can raise the matter at the hearing. That might be done, for example, by presenting the information verbally, supporting the child to do so or introducing the subject the child has shared views, questions or concerns about.
2. If anything that a child writes and wants to share via the worry monster is to be provided directly to panel members, the reporter should take the usual approach to information brought along to be tabled at the hearing, as set out at paragraphs 4.9 and 4.10 of Practice Direction 7 on the Role of the Reporter. The reporter is to be alert to any fairness issues that arise from any written information being tendered and accepted at the hearing (for example, if the panel members read the information but don't take steps to share it with any relevant persons).
3. If direct sharing of written information with panel members is anticipated or an option, then any member of SCRA staff introducing the worry monster material to the child and anyone supporting the child requires to explain that if anything the child writes down, or anything that someone else writes down for the child is given directly to the hearing, the information may also be shared with the relevant persons.