

VADÉ-MECUM



CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC DECISION-MAKING

Why should I
involve children?



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INTRO

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IS A HOT TOPIC, BUT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE STILL PATRONISED, LEFT OUT OF PUBLIC DECISIONS WHICH ARE IMPORTANT FOR THEM AND THEIR LIVES AND THEY OFTEN FEEL EXCLUDED OR NOT WELL INFORMED. EVEN WHEN THERE IS A LEGAL RIGHT FOR THEM TO BE INVOLVED IN DECISION-MAKING THEY OFTEN STILL FEEL THAT THEY ARE NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY OR ARE ONLY INVOLVED IN A TOKENISTIC WAY.



When children are mentioned in the Vade mecum, the definition of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) is used 'a child is every human being below the age of 18 years...'. The term children includes children and young people, as the term young people is often used for teenage children.

The purpose of this Vade mecum is to be a guide on how to implement children's participation in public decision-making. It is intended for persons working in public decision making, including, local, regional and national level authorities, but also for NGOs.

The vade mecum explains how to engage with children in public decision-making processes and what criteria to take into account. It is guided by Gerison Lansdown's '*Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation: A preparatory draft for piloting*' (July 2011), and builds on the experience of a variety of global case studies^{1/}. It also includes some practical exercises and guidance or references to these case studies.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE VADE MECUM

The Vade mecum starts with two introductory chapters explaining what children's participation entails and the reasons for working with children and young people on public decisions.

^{1/} A comparative qualitative analysis of 15 internationally selected case studies in which children have participated in public decision making has been carried out. The outcomes of this analysis have been integrated into this vade mecum.

The next chapters, 4 and 5, give answers to practical questions regarding how to get children to participate and how to ensure child participation is inclusive for all children, regardless of their age or ethnic and socio-economic background.

How child participation can be organised practically, including how to ensure a child-friendly environment and the timing of the participation process is described in chapter 6. Chapter 7 gives guidance on what child protection measures are necessary to ensure participation is safe for children. Chapter 8 discusses the role of the facilitator and what the needs are for those leading the participatory process.

Chapter 9 discusses how the success and impact of child participation can be measured and the need for a proper evaluation of child participation processes.

The Vade mecum ends with a **checklist for consulting with children**. This is a tick-box exercise for those who want to consult with children but need guidance on which aspects should not be forgotten. The checklist is summarizing the key points raised in the previous chapters of the vade mecum.



CHAPTER

**WHAT DO YOU MEAN
BY CHILDREN'S
PARTICIPATION?**

INTRO

CHILDREN PARTICIPATING AND CONTRIBUTING TO PUBLIC DECISION MAKING, EITHER AT LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL IS NOT NEW. IT FORMS PART OF THE OVERALL VISION TO INVOLVE CITIZENS IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES, WHICH ALSO NEEDS TO INCLUDE THE OPINIONS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. OTHER REASONS TO INVOLVE CHILDREN IN DECISION MAKING PROCESSES ARE THAT IT CONTRIBUTES TO THEIR CITIZENSHIP, IT PROVIDES THEM WITH A LEARNING OPPORTUNITY ON DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES AND IT EMPOWERS CHILDREN AND STRENGTHENS THEIR ABILITY TO HAVE THEIR VOICE HEARD².

²/ Politeia in cooperation with the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, 'Weet ik veel!' *Handboek voor kinder- en jongerenparticipatie*, Brussels, Belgium, 2010.

PARTICIPATION, A RIGHT

Children's participation means that **children have the right to have their voices heard, are listened to seriously and are able to influence decisions affecting them**. It is one of the many rights children have which are laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN-

CRC). The right to participate is, however, one of the four key pillars of the UNCRC. The official definition for children's participation in article 12, paragraph 1, of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is: *'State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child'*.

Next to Article 12 there are other related articles of importance for children's participation. These include Article 17 on the right to have **access to information** (including in a child-friendly manner) and the **right to freedom of expression** in Article 13. The **right to set up an association** is guaranteed by Article 15 and Article 14 guarantees the child's right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Article 5 clarifies that when providing direction and guidance in the exercise by children of their rights, parents and other guardians must have regard to the evolving capacities of children. Meaning that adults need to recognise that children acquire skills and competences as they grow up and they are able to take an increasing level of responsibility for decisions that affect them as these capacities develop.

Article 23 gives **disabled children the right to actively participate** in their community and article 2 requires all of the rights of the UNCRC to be implemented for every child, **without discrimination**.

The definition in Article 12 UNCRC states that all children have the right to participate actively in decisions about their own lives and in society as a whole. This is explored in more depth in **General Comment no. 12 of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child**, which gives guidance on how this article should be implemented in a range of different settings and situations, including in the family, in alternative care, in health care, in education and school, in judicial and administrative proceedings, in **public decision making**, in recreation, in asylum seeking procedures, and for working children. It states that *'the child's right to be heard imposes an obligation on States parties to review or amend their legislation in order to introduce mechanisms providing children with access to appropriate information, adequate support, if necessary, feedback on the weight given to their views, and procedures and complaints, remedies or redress'* (paragraph 48). This obligation is enforced by the Council of Europe Recommendation on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.³

Article 12 UNCRC and General Comment no 12 are the basis for the Vade mecum, but these cannot be seen separately from the whole UNCRC, which reflects all the specific rights of children. In order to start with the involvement of children in public decision making, both children and young people and professionals working with them have to know the UNCRC. Several **child-friendly versions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** are therefore available, including versions in different languages from UNICEF and Save the Children.⁴

3/ Recommendation CM/Rec (2012)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 (adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 28 March 2012 at the 1138th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

4/ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child In Child Friendly Language | Resource Centre and UNICEF - The Convention on the Rights of the Child - Resources - Child-friendly resources (in English, French and other languages) and <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm> - Search and a children's rights game with pictograms in the form of traffic signs developed by Defence for Children International, the Netherlands.

PARTICIPATION, IN WHICH SITUATIONS?



EXAMPLE

'Planning now for the future, Children 2020 - Start Strong strategy' - Ireland

The Start Strong project is a project where young children aged 3-5 years have been consulted by using a variety of methods, including individual interviews and group discussions as well as giving the children a photo camera to photograph what they liked and did not like within their surroundings. A book was compiled including the outcomes of the children's consultations 'If I had a magic wand' and presented to the Minister responsible for children.

Children's participation contributes to society as a whole and to policies and legislation developed by local, regional and national governments and to NGO activities in Belgium. It is a **'win-win' process** in which both authorities and NGOs gain from the input from children and young people and in which children feel listened to, taken seriously and able to contribute to decisions which affect their lives.

Children's participation is not something you can do by ticking a list with requirements and in this way make it a tick-box exercise. However, a 'tick-box' could be

useful to support child participation processes by ensuring that no important aspects are forgotten. For this Vade mecum we have chosen another type of check list (see Annex I).

Children's participation needs to be organised at the policy level which is closest to the children and around themes which are relevant for children. This does not mean that only issues such as cultural and sports events and play grounds need to involve children in decision making, but **policy makers have to think out-of-the-box and reflect on what implications any of their decisions can have on children.** *For example the restructuring of a city square raises issues such as parking spaces, safety measures for traffic, bus stop, etc., but can involve have an impact on young people who might use the square as a meeting place or have other issues which are important to take into account when restructuring the city square.*

To ensure an effective, ethical and sustainable participation of children, nine criteria need to be met which are integrated into the next chapters of the Vade mecum. These include, being transparent and informative; being voluntary; being respectful; being relevant; being child-friendly; being inclusive; supported by training; being safe and sensitive to risk and being accountable.⁵

5/ Gerison Lansdown, 'Every Child's Right to be heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12', Save the Children UK and UNICEF, 2011.



CHAPTER

**HOW DO YOU KNOW
THAT CHILDREN'S
PARTICIPATION WILL
BENEFIT US?**

INTRO

WHAT IS **THE RELEVANCE OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION** AND WHAT CAN THE IMPACT OF CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION BE ON ADULTS, CHILDREN AND ON POLICIES? DO WE AS ADULTS NOT KNOW WHAT IS BEST FOR CHILDREN?

Practical examples of children's participation⁶ show that it has a **huge added value for the children who participate and for the policy makers** who suddenly realize that children have something interesting to contribute. The active engagement of children provides information and insight into their lives with which to inform legislation, policies, budget allocation and services.⁷

It is a **myth to believe that adults know what is best for children**. Children's participation does not mean that children have to be heard or that they are not capable of contributing to public decision making processes. It means that children's opinions have to be respected according to their evolving capacities. When the participation process is explained properly, children understand what they can contribute to and what will be done with the outcomes of their consultations. An important part of this process is giving feedback to the children on what is done with their opinions and why.

6/ See Eurochild publications, 'Valuing Children's Potential: How children's participation contributes to fighting poverty and social exclusion' (2010) and 'Speak Up! Giving a voice to European children in vulnerable situations' (2012) and selected international case studies analysed (include reference..)

7/ Gerison Lansdown, 'A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, A preparatory draft for piloting', July 2011.

Children's participation has an added value for the children who participate, they acquire new skills, knowledge, competences and confidence, including debating and discussing issues together and how democratic decision making processes are carried out. Personally they learn that they are worth being listened to and feel acknowledged for their opinions. This results in an **empowerment of the children**, which makes them active and effective advocates for the realisation of their own rights.

Children's participation **promotes active citizenship of children** and by participating in matters of concern to them, they acquire the capacity to contribute to democratic societies. **Democratic decision making** is based on respect for each other's opinions. Children's participation in government decisions helps to improve public services, holds public officials to account and strengthens the rule of law.

Participation of children leads to better protection of children, since children who are silenced and passive can be abused by adults with relative impunity. Providing them with information, encouraging them to articulate their concerns and introducing safe and accessible mechanisms for challenging violence and abuse are key strategies for providing effective protection.⁸

If participation is not done properly, a bad participatory process could even create some damage to the child, for example when the consultation is not useful for the decision making process and the voice of children is not at all listened to. Children experiencing this will believe that it has not added value for them to participate, since adults do not listen to them anyway and do not take their views seriously.

Next to the added value for children, **adults who are involved in the participation process, including policy makers and other decision makers, gain new insights** into decisions that need to be taken and its impact on children and young people. They learn to take these opinions into account and in this way come to more balanced decisions, which take the interests and rights of children into account. Participation is central to a process of building accountability and promoting good governance. It can make authorities and policy makers accountable for their decisions and it can contribute towards the creation of a more transparent and open government, if the participation process is well organised and children's views are seriously taken into account. As a result, policies can better meet the interests and needs of their recipients.

8/ Idem.

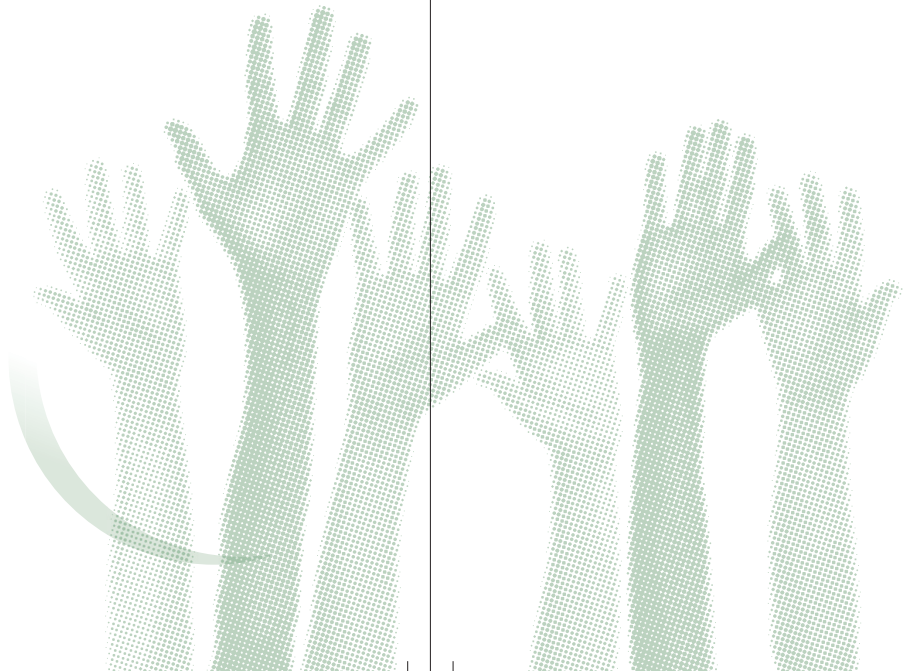
Children's participation will have an **impact on the decision making process and the outcomes of the decisions taken**. As experience shows, involvement of children and young people in the process not only makes it more legitimate in the eyes of the society, but also facilitates the implementation and follow-up. Better outcomes for children have been recorded in most instances where children have had an opportunity to participate and voice their opinions. **Children know what is good for them and can therefore contribute to good outcomes.**



EXAMPLE

'A RIGHT blether, what's important to you?' - Scotland

Children of different age groups were consulted to give input into the Scottish Ombudsman's strategic workplan for 2011-2015. Children were consulted at schools, youth organisations and local authorities were consulted in this process, which involved almost 75.000 children and adolescents. The team of the children's commissioner, which carried out the consultation was very satisfied with the outcomes. These were integrated into the plan.





CHAPTER

**HOW DO YOU GET CHILDREN
TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC
DECISION MAKING?**

INTRO

ONE OF THE KEY STANDARDS TO WHICH CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION NEEDS TO ADHERE IS THAT **A CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION PROCESS NEEDS TO BE TRANSPARENT AND INFORMATIVE**. THIS MEANS THAT ONE HAS TO ENSURE THAT THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS IS CLEAR AND IS WIDELY DISSEMINATED TO THE TARGETED GROUP(S). IT REQUIRES THAT **CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION TOOLS HAVE TO BE USED; AWARENESS ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN NEEDS TO BE RAISED**; CHILDREN AND PARENTS NEED TO BE INFORMED IN ADVANCE ABOUT THE PROCESS AND CHILDREN'S OPINIONS NEED TO BE RESPECTED.

TRANSPARENCY AND INFORMATION

Crucial to get children involved in public decision making is to **provide them with information on their right to express their views freely** and for their views to be given due weight. This information should be sensitive to their age, diversity and specific needs. At the same time **they need to be informed about how this participation will take place**, its scope, purpose and potential impact, including

respecting the child's opinion. Children will be able to understand how much impact they can have on decision-making and who will make the final decision. They will need to be informed and agree about the roles and responsibilities of all involved, including children, adults and other stakeholders. **Clear goals and targets will need to be agreed with the children.** Adults involved in any participatory processes are made aware of the needs of children, they will be clear about their role and are willing to listen and learn. They need to be aware that they should be willing to listen to children even if children are saying things which seem foolish or irrelevant to adults and adults are not ready or able to listen to. Organisations and facilitators involved are accountable to the children for the commitments they have made. (When children have faced barriers or challenges in other spheres of their lives, these will be taken into account and discussed with the children to reduce any potential negative impacts.)⁹

Apart from child participation processes initiated by adults, children and young people can start and lead by themselves. These existing child-led and child-initiated processes need to be included in public decision making processes and be supported by NGOs.

9/ Gerison Lansdown, 'Every Child's Right to be heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12', Save the Children UK and UNICEF, 2011.

**TIP**

Set up a mentoring or buddying system, which involves one person befriending someone in a new situation and taking responsibility for introducing them, showing them the ropes, explaining things, answering questions and providing support where necessary. This can be peer-to-peer mentoring, but also adults mentoring a child.

ORGANISATION OF THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS

To ensure the objective of the participation is disseminated and reaches the right target group, **one first needs to identify the theme on which children will be consulted.** The question to be asked is what impact the theme or issue can have on children and young people and whether their involvement in the decision making process can make a difference. Be aware that this question can also be turned around, for example, what would a project or decision be like without the involvement of children? If these questions are not answered before involving children in decision making, it might become a useless exercise for both decision makers and children.

Once it is clear that children need to be involved there are a wide range of methodologies to involve children from structural participation instruments, such as local and regional children's councils, to one off consultation processes focussing on a specific issue. These can include focus group discussion, questionnaires, consultations with specific groups of children targeted at their specific needs or age groups. To ensure an equal chance for all children to participate, specific attention has to be paid to include children living in vulnerable circumstances and to adapt participation processes to the children's age and capabilities (see chapters 5 & 6). At the same time, ensure that children who have set up their own initiatives will be involved.

To ensure children will participate, planning needs to be done. **Four steps can be identified to set up a children's consultation process.**¹⁰ Though before these steps are taken consideration needs to be given to set up a **permanent consultation mechanism**, to ensure that children are not only consulted 'ad hoc' but permanently in decision making processes.

10/ Politeia in cooperation with the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, 'Weet ik veel!' *Handboek voor kinder- en jongerenparticipatie*, Brussels, Belgium, 2010, p. 23-28.

01

This **firstly involves the analysis of the government project, decision, or action**. What decision needs to be taken and at what point of the decision making process are we at the moment? Next to 'new' decisions and actions, this could include the evaluation of the implementation of already taken decisions. Which other stakeholders (for example, interest groups and NGOs) have an influence on the decision making process?

02

The **second step is to plan the participation process** and the points in the process where children will be able to participate. Different processes are possible, but it needs to be taken into account that planning could be done in close consultation with children. For example there can be two parallel decision making and children's participation processes or a decision making process has already started and the children's participation process starts within the process already begun. Another possibility is that a consultation process for adults or different interest groups has been set up, to which a parallel participation process for children can be added. Children can also contribute to future policies and projects and give guidance as to what is needed in the future or they can contribute to general problems and the outcomes can feed into different policy areas.

03

The **third step is to implement the participation process** and carry out participation activities as they were planned.

04

The **fourth step is to evaluate the participation process**, including whether the participation had an impact on the decisions made, whether children's opinions and their interests were properly taken into account. What can be learned for future participation processes and what can be done to change possible decisions taken with a negative impact on children? Important in an evaluation process is not only to involve decision makers (adults), but also involve the children who have participated in the consultation process.





CHAPTER

**AT WHAT AGE CAN CHILDREN
PARTICIPATE?**

INTRO

HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT DIFFERENT GROUPS OF CHILDREN CAN PARTICIPATE, INCLUDING DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS, THAT WE ARE BEING **INCLUSIVE AND NON-DISCRIMINATORY, THAT THERE IS A GENDER BALANCE** AND THAT CHILDREN PARTICIPATE **VOLUNTARILY**?

One of the requirements for effective and ethical participation is that children should never be forced to express their views against their wishes. They need to be able to step out at any stage in the participation process. To ensure children participate voluntarily they need to be given time to consider their involvement and processes are established to ensure they are able to give their personal, informed consent to their participation. They need to be given sufficient and child-friendly information about the participation process to make an informed decision. Timing of the participation process should be adapted to the children's needs and other commitments (e.g. schools, work, home).

It is a myth that only children of secondary school age (above 12 years) are able to participate in public decision making, because for younger children this would be too difficult. Experience has shown that different methods can be used for differ-

ent age groups with the same objective in a participatory process. For example e.g. in the Scottish case study 'right blether & right wee blether' the methodology used with the 'older' children was adapted and then used with the younger age group.



EXAMPLE

'Hearing Young Children's Voices' Australia (2002-2004) is a project where very young children, aged 0-8 years, have been consulted regarding a Plan for Children of the Australian Capital Territory. The aim was to improve the lives of children and their families and to integrate the opinions of children in the daily work of professionals working with this age group. The methodology used included verbal methods which involved one-to-one chats and group discussions with the children and non-verbal methods, including painting, drawing, poems, all adapted to the child's age and capacities. At the same time, services that worked with the children were involved in the consultations.

The fact that children's participation needs to be inclusive and non-discriminatory means that **all children regardless of their background and without discrimination** on any grounds (age, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability, birth or other status) need to be encouraged and provided with opportunities to participate. Consultation processes need to be aware of cultural sensitivities to children from different communities.

Children's participation needs to aim at including all children rather than only a few easy to reach children. This means that one has to reach out to children in their local settings rather than inviting them to a central point. In case there is a limit to the number of children who can participate it is recommended that **children select among themselves those that will represent them**, in a democratic and inclusive manner. Alternatively, there could be different levels of participation, for example a wide consultation with a questionnaire and a more limited consultation through a children's meeting. Participatory approaches need to be flexible to meet the needs of different groups of children.

The age range, gender and abilities of children are taken into account in the way participation is organised and the way information is presented.

Facilitators and others involved in the participatory process need to be able to work in a non-discriminatory and inclusive way.

In this respect, **equal participation of all children needs to be facilitated, taking into account consideration of 'inner diversity'**. The term 'diversity' is interpreted in many ways but it is most frequently applied within group settings to differences in sex, age, culture, religion, ethnicity, and so forth. Facilitators need to be aware of more subtle sources of diversity that are just as fundamental but are more easily overlooked in groups, including in school classes. These are individual differences that include, but are not limited to, how we learn, communicate, solve problems, make sense of our internal and external environments, and manage our sensory input. Anyone who has interacted closely with more than one child – whether as parent, teacher or in some other capacity – is aware of some of these differences although we often label them ('the child is a slow learner') or judge them ('this is the correct way to learn – that way is not correct') rather than simply acknowledging the ways in which individuals differ from one another. The first step in working with what we are calling 'inner diversity' is to be aware of these differences, and to allow them to be present in how you facilitate groups.¹¹

¹¹ Eurochild Methodological Framework for 'Speak Up! Giving a voice to European Children in Vulnerable Situations', May 2011, Brussels, p.7.

**TIP**

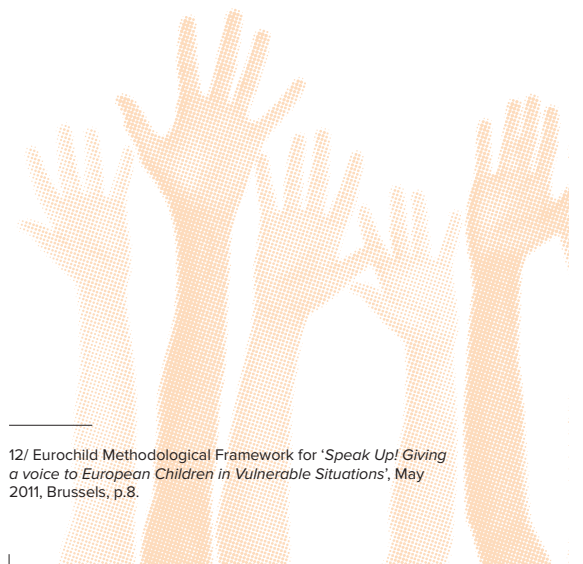
The following are two examples of inner differences and suggestions for how you can broaden your ways of facilitating groups. Some children (all of these points pertain to adults as well) listen best when they are able to engage tactilely, such as manipulating or making an object. Providing simple materials on the table such as clay or string for them to handle will actually help them listen more completely. Children who do not need this tactile engagement will not use the materials.

Another common difference is in the role of overt or silent verbalization. Some children need to begin speaking in order to understand what they are thinking; others don't speak until they have 'gathered their thoughts.' Taking comments from those who begin speaking immediately gives preference to only those few. Make sure that you alternate between allowing some responses from those who think aloud and also encouraging everyone to take 10 seconds to consider their answers/comments before taking verbal responses.

Another way of avoiding giving preference to only a few is to encourage various forms of responding: drawings, gestures, writing a word or phrase are all legitimate alternatives.

There are many other examples that are commonly used. Considering these two examples will create more awareness of these kinds of differences, and asking your respondents about their needs – for example, how they learn best, what they need in order to participate fully – and will provide much new information for enhancing your facilitation.¹²

12/ Eurochild Methodological Framework for 'Speak Up! Giving a voice to European Children in Vulnerable Situations', May 2011, Brussels, p.8.





CHAPTER

**HOW DO YOU ORGANISE
CHILD-FRIENDLY CONSULTATIONS?**

INTRO

CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN NEED TO BE ADAPTED TO THEIR NEEDS AND CAPACITIES, TO ENSURE THEY WILL HAVE THE CONFIDENCE AND OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE. THIS MEANS THAT A **CHILD-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT AND CHILD-FRIENDLY PARTICIPATION WORKING METHODS** ARE NEEDED. THIS INCLUDES BEING RESPECTFUL TO CHILDREN, TAKING THEIR OPINIONS SERIOUSLY AND PROVIDING THEM WITH CHILD-FRIENDLY INFORMATION.

CHILD-FRIENDLY WORKING METHODS INCLUDE ADEQUATE TIMING & DURATION OF THE PARTICIPATION

PROCESS: THIS INVOLVES ENSURING THAT CHILDREN GET INVOLVED AT AN EARLY STAGE OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS AND STAY ENGAGED FOR THE WHOLE PROCESS.

THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION NEED TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT WHEN ORGANISING CHILDREN'S CONSULTATIONS.



Top 9 Requirements for Effective and Meaningful Children's Participation¹³

All processes in which a child or children are heard and participate must be:

- **Transparent and informative**
- **Voluntary**
- **Respectful**
- **Relevant**
- **Child-friendly**
- **Inclusive**
- **Supported by training**
- **Safe and sensitive to risk**
- **Accountable**

ACTORS, METHODS AND TIMING

A good consultation with children is made up of a sequence of various steps, which are all interlinked and backed up with a vision. This can result in quite a lengthy process and might be too long to keep in pace with the children, however this needs to be accepted and sufficient time has to be allocated to the process.

13/ Gerison Lansdown, 'A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, A preparatory draft for piloting', July 2011.

This means that when organising children's participation several issues need to be paid attention to before starting with the consultation process. **Firstly, what are the target groups of the consultation?**

Most of the time these are not only children and young people, but there are other stakeholders involved which are important in the consultation and decision making process. These can include politicians, civil servants, experts, etc. All of these actors need to be identified and are important as they will be the recipients of the outcomes of the children's consultations and often responsible for the final decision making. These actors need to be kept in mind when organising children's consultations and where possible need to be involved in the children's consultations and be kept informed on any intermediate outcomes.

Secondly, one has to realize that **both quantitative and qualitative methods can be used**. Often a focus is placed on quantitative methods, since these will show the number of children consulted and can ensure that large groups of children will be consulted, ensuring the representativeness of the consultation. Such methods are only possible when the questions raised are limited. However, to ensure questioning without insinuating certain answers or forgetting possible answers is often not an easy task. A qualitative method leaves a lot more room for nuances and allows the children to contribute with their own ideas, thoughts and visions,

which can also lead to insights into the backgrounds and reasons for their ideas. A difficulty with qualitative methods is that children's answers can leave room for different interpretations. To overcome this, good feedback needs to be given to the children about the outcomes, to ensure they are not misunderstood or misinterpreted. Another way to ensure that the views of children are interpreted correctly is to organise a meeting between the children and the decision makers to allow the children to express their views directly to them and which allows for seeking clarifications during the meeting. At the same time, such a meeting allows the children and decision makers to exchange ideas.

The question of which methodology to choose depends on the information one would like to obtain from the children and from which group of children. For example, if a municipality would like to know what is important when restoring and restructuring a cultural youth centre, it might be useful to organise a qualitative consultation. If only a few options are available (example, due to budgetary constraints) a quantitative method might be the right method. A combination of both methods is also possible.



EXAMPLES

A mix of methodologies can lead to positive outcomes for both the children involved and public decision makers, for example when children were consulted on the **Plan Jeunesse- Belgique (2012-2013)** a combination of methods were used. This included an Agora (weekend meeting including discussions, theatre making, discussions with the Minister); a qualitative survey with children, amongst others by interviewing young people at a stand of the youth council in a big fair prior to the elections and a quantitative survey with children which was based on the outcomes of the qualitative survey.

In the **Council of Europe Policy review on children and youth participation in Finland** a survey with a large group of children was carried out, a focus group meeting was organised and individual interviews with children were held. The outcomes of the consultations have fed into the development of a new Finnish National Action Plan for Children and to the Council of Europe Recommendation on children's participation.

As was indicated in the previous chapter (5) the timing of children's participation needs to be parallel to the decision making process. **Timing, which is related to the decision making process, needs to be adapted to the rhythm and activities of the children.** This means taking into account school hours, school exams, holidays, etc. At the same time it can be useful to use different consultation methodologies during different stages of the decision making process. For example, starting with a small group of children in a focus group discussion, followed by a wider consultation or a small group of children can go and interview other children, which allows different levels of involvement of children. In other cases, a hearing of children can be organised on certain thematic areas. The timing and planning of the consultations are influenced by a range of factors, including the methodology chosen (quantitative or qualitative), the number of children that will be consulted, the way results of the consultations will be used and presented and what the best way would be to influence decision makers.

INFORMATION AND CONSENT

Linked to the timing and planning of the consultation process is the **provision of adequate and child-friendly information to the children**. Children need to be informed at the start of the process to be able to be engaged during the full process and to ensure a meaningful participation for both the decision makers and for children themselves.

Information to children and parents/guardians of the children about the consultation process, its purpose and its objectives needs to be clear and can be provided by information sheets. Involve the children in this process, since for children the achievements could be different (friendships and people that listen to you seriously) from what adults expect (input for the decision making at local, regional or national level).



These information sheets should include clear, sufficient and relevant information, including:

- Objectives of the consultation and how their work will fit into a larger process.
- Description of the consultation process (including timescale).
- The venue and the date.
- The programme of the consultation day.
- The number of expected participants and their ages.
- The facilitators.
- Logistics and support available.

Linked to the information sheets, consent forms for both parents/guardians and children need to be distributed and signed copies should be collected before carrying out the consultations. Basic requirements to be included in consent forms are the use of images: photos or filming of the child; medical information; the contact person for the child in case of emergencies and the assurance that the information provided will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Levels of engagement of children



Children can engage differently in participatory processes: from simple consultations on issues decided by adults/decision makers, to collaboration and own-initiatives. In the case of consultations children bring their expertise to a programme initiated, lead and managed by adults. When children are able to collaborate in decision-making processes, they are seen as equal partners in a programme initiated by adults. Children will have the opportunity to influence both the process and the outcomes. When a child participation process is child-led, children control the programme on a subject that they have identified themselves; adults only intervene in a supporting role.

The level of engagement chosen in a decision-making process depends on range of factors, however some guidelines need to be taken into account. Children should be included at the earliest possible stage.

Children's opinion should be recognized and valued and this also includes their opinions on how the participation process will be organised and run. Time is often a factor that prevents the use of child-led processes or even collaboration processes. It is therefore crucial to allow sufficient time to consult with children.



The provision of consent by parents or guardians is crucial before a child is involved in a consultation process.

This can not only be done by signing a consent form, but it is important that the consultation process, in which their child gets involved is explained to the parents/guardians. In some cases, it might be necessary to do this orally instead of in writing in order to build up a trustful relationship with the parents/guardians or to avoid illiterate parents being unable to understand the written forms. It often leads to an embedded practice of children's participation in their daily routine (for example within the institution the children live in, in a hospital, at schools). If participation takes place in a setting which is contrary to the cultural or religious background of the parents, a solution could be found to change the setting to accommodate these needs.



Ground rules for adults who consult with children

When organising a consultation process there are a set of ground rules that need to be taken into account for the adults who are directly involved in the consulting process with children:

- **Ensure the children know who you are,** what your role is and why you would like to consult with them.
- **Explain to the children why it is important to give their opinion,** often children believe that adults know already everything about them, which is not the case. For example, explain to the children that adults often do not remember how it was to play when they were children, since it was a long time ago. Explain that by participating they can ensure that other children benefit from their contributions.

- Children have to be able to **speak for themselves in their own words/mime/sign language in matters that directly concern them**, such as their daily life, family matters, their schools, their immediate environment, their relationships with the others and the wider community, living circumstances, etc. **Avoid technical terms and jargon!**
- All children need to have an **equal chance** to participate in consultations, whether these are surveys, focus group meetings, individual interviews or other types of consultations, without discrimination because of age, gender, abilities, language, social origin, class, ethnicity, geographic location, etc.
- **Adults involved in the consultation process have to be honest with the children** and give clear and understandable feedback. Being honest with children includes that the views of the children will not be used against them (for example, when a consultation takes place in a school and the children indicate that they do not like the rules at the school). They have to take into account the possible emotional sensitivities of children to certain issues that can be discussed (see child protection measures in chapter 7).
- **Avoid treating children as victims or weak.**
- Avoid gender stereotyping.
- **Avoid situations that can create stereotypes** or bias.
- **Confirm the accuracy of what a child has said** (for example, when organising a focus group meeting, provide feedback at the end of each session when conclusions and outcomes are summarized with and for the children).
- **Participation is voluntary:** children can step out of the participatory process at any time and are informed before taking a decision to participate that their participation is voluntary.
- Children have a **right not to answer** questions and remain silent.
- Explain that there are **no correct and incorrect answers** to questions.
- Ensure there is **enough time for children to think and provide answers** and to change their minds on issues discussed.
- Value the views of the children and **take their views seriously.**
- Strive to **understand the children in the context in which they live.**



Communication skills requirements for consultation meetings with children

→ **Non-verbal communication skills:** include maintaining constant eye contact without showing any preferences; address the whole group from a visible point; smile, nod or engage with others to express sympathy and understanding; be relaxed and confident when standing in front of the group.

→ **Verbal communication skills:** should include: ask using open-ended questions and prompts to elaborate on simple answers; explore whether all the members of the group agree with an expressed statement; speak slowly and clearly and avoid using jargon and technical language; be a good listener; paraphrase participants' statements to make sure that what they said has been accurately understood; keep an eye on participants requiring translation or in another way might need assistance to be able to follow the discussion; be respectful, trustworthy, non-judgmental, playful; summarize the discussions; guide the participants to draw general conclusions, allowing time for reflection; make sure that participants leave with positive feelings about what they have learned.

A CHILD-FRIENDLY MEETING ENVIRONMENT

The meeting environment for group meetings or meetings with individual children is very important as the atmosphere in which their discussions and activities take place. **The atmosphere in which children participate contributes to the confidence of children to participate.** Working in small focus groups create such an environment and enables the children to gain self-confidence, feel safe and it creates intimacy and friendship for all children as opposed to large sessions which can be intimidating for them. Similarly individual interviews can work well for children, who are not confident to speak in front of other children, in particular if it concerns sensitive personal issues. Practice has shown that a combination of methods can often be most effective.

Another factor contributing to a child-friendly environment is that the **meeting room needs to be big enough** for 'plenary sessions' and for round table discussions (world café – see tools section), but also for other activities, such as drama, role plays and creative and artistic work. Where possible use existing meeting spaces for children, like youth clubs, etc. If not, try to decorate the room with posters or pictures to make it less 'clinical'.

Ensure that **sufficient breaks** and time for lunch is included in the programme and ensure that healthy **child-friendly food and drinks** are available. Ensure that the meeting place is accessible for all children, including children with special needs.



Sufficient Resources

In any participation process sufficient resources need to be allocated. This includes a realistic budget covering all the costs to organise children's participation and sufficient human resources need to be allocated to the children's participation process.





Ground rules to bear in mind when working with groups of children

If you would like to work with a specific group of children, several criteria need to be born in mind when selecting the children.

→ When consulting with groups of children take into account **the age of the children**: ensure that you work with children in fixed age groups, e.g. secondary school age, primary school age, preschool age or broken down in even smaller age ranges. If consultations with more groups of children are organised ensure children with a wide range of ages are not brought together in the same groups, though there are also good practice examples in which children of different ages (e.g. 18 and 10) worked happily together, where one could observe that the older children supported the younger children during the consultation process.

→ Ensure all children contacted in the selection process have **equal opportunities to participate** in the group consultations, taking into account the non-discrimination principle.

→ Ensure **a right balance of adults and children** in consultations. In the case of group discussions (e.g. focus group meetings or other group meetings) there should be a **maximum of adults present** and they all should have clear roles (preferably no more than 3 adults for around 15 to 20 children). For child protection reasons there should be a **minimum of two adults** present. When there are two facilitators, it needs to be clear who has the overall facilitating responsibility and what the role of the other facilitator will be, for example work with smaller groups of children or do the reporting of the consultations. Another adult present could be an interpreter, for example for children who need sign language or for children with another native language.

→ In case you want to **involve children in adult meetings**, never involve only one child, but a minimum of two children. This ensures mutual support and a chance to share thoughts with a peer. Ensure that the adults in the meeting are briefed about the involvement of children and that ground rules are agreed upon, including avoiding the use of jargon, listening respectfully to the children. Agree on mechanisms for the children in case they do

not understand what has been said, for example raising a red flag or card every time this happens. Practice has shown that co-chairing of a child alongside an adult has proven successful if the adult and the child work together to prepare the meeting and establish how their relationship will work.¹⁴

Background of the children

→ To ensure a good representativeness of children, ensure where possible that children involved are from different **backgrounds**: involve children from **rural and urban areas** and from different **geographical parts** of the country, but also ensure a **gender balance** (50% boys and 50% girls), where this is possible. For example, if consultations are carried out on specific issues, such as children in juvenile institutions and the majority of these children appear to be boys, then more boys should be consulted. It might be possible that for cultural and/or religious reasons, it is required that boys and girls meet in single sex groups, however the starting point should always be for children to meet in mixed groups, to ensure the understanding of each other's points of view.

→ When consulting with '**children experiencing vulnerable situations**'¹⁵ ensure that their specific needs and capacities are taken into account in the consulta-

tion process and work with facilitators and adults which have experience in working with these groups of children. For example, the Roma community is very diverse, some groups have modernised and some groups live in a very traditional way. Before mixing these groups the question should be asked as to whether this would contribute to a consultation process in which all children can genuinely participate. Children with disabilities also have very specific needs when being consulted, for example children with physical disabilities, such as hearing or seeing impairments, need different support than children with mental disabilities. However, it does not mean groups of children with different needs cannot be mixed.

→ Be aware that children experiencing vulnerable situations are often not the first ones that will be able to come forward to take part in consultation processes, they need to be actively approached and asked to participate and this needs to be done by people who the children already know or have experience in working with them.

14/ Participation Works (UK): '*Children & Young People's Involvement in formal meetings: A practical guide*.

15/ Particularly children living in vulnerable circumstances have had little experience of being listened to. The Eurochild report '*Speak Up! Giving a voice to European children in vulnerable situations*' (September 2012) found that many of children living in vulnerable circumstances felt that their opinion did not really count and some found it difficult to express their opinion because they had had so few opportunities to think about what is important to them as individuals and to make their own choices in life.

→ When consulting **with (school) children** it is advised that children volunteer to participate, after it has been explained what the consultations will be about and time investment needed. In the case there are more volunteers than places, it is recommended that **a selection is made using a random but transparent process e.g. a lottery so as to avoid designation of the 'best pupils'**.

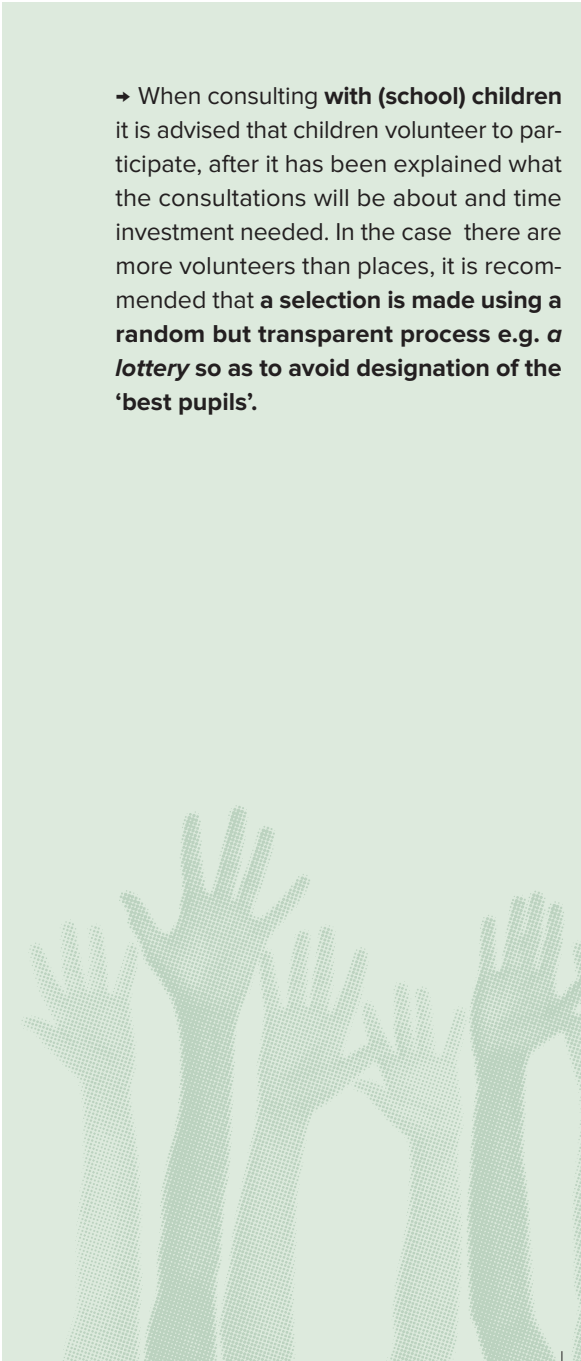
TOOLS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN IN GROUP ACTIVITIES



TIP

Mix activities and energizers with questions/group discussions, ensure it is not boring! Ensure it is fun for the children!

Partners can choose their own tools on how to work with children, which can involve a variety of methods. When working with children keep in mind that children, depending on the age group, might have shorter concentration time spans than adults. To keep their attention it is recommended to include **energizers** which can be used to bring back the energy into the group and which at the same time can bring fun to the consultation process. Next to energizers there are the 'getting-to-know-you' **icebreaker exercises and games**, which are used at the beginning of consultation sessions.





Energizer: The Zombie Game

The participants are asked to stand in a circle. One person A is asked to stand in the middle and is the 'Zombie'. He/she slowly walks to one participant B with his/her arms stretched in front of him/her, participant B has to look intently at another participant in the circle (he/she is not allowed to speak, but can only use his/her eyes). When eye contact is made with the other person (C) this person says the name of the person who stares at him/her. The Zombie (A) then turns around and starts walking in the direction of participant C, who has to stare at another participant. If eye contact is not made in time and the Zombie (A) reaches and touches a person in the circle that person has to stand in the middle and take over the role of the Zombie.

Note: this game can only be played when the participants already know each other's names. It can be played with children of all ages (except the very young) and in mixed child and adult groups.

Dynamix has developed a range of tools with **practical guidance, fun games and activities** for professionals working with children to ensure their participation in decision making processes, including '*Participation: Spice it up – a manual for encouraging children's participation*', written for Save the Children Wales. Manuals

for different age groups of children have been published by Dynamix. (<http://www.seriousfun.demon.co.uk>). At the same time the Flemish Handbook on child & youth participation includes many practical activities, ice-breaker games and get-to-know each other exercises.¹⁶

Tools on how to work with children can involve:

- Role plays.
- Carry out individual 'TV interviews' with the children, which are recorded on tape and let the children play with the video recorder as well.
- Carry out interviews with and by children to write their own magazine.
- Do creative activities such as drawing or art work.



Creative Activity

Children work in pairs and make a shoe box which represents on the inside their inner feelings and which presents on the outside what they look like, to visualize their feelings instead of talking about it. After the creative work, the pairs present their shoeboxes to the rest of the group.

¹⁶/ Politeia, 'Weet ik veel! Handboek voor kinder & jongerenparticipatie', Flanders, July 2010.

**EXAMPLE****'OUR RIGHTS OUR STORY' - WALES**

Children (aged 11-18) were consulted regarding issues such as education, health, information, participation and other issues of specific interest to the children. They received a photo camera and were asked to make photos of their surroundings, the community they lived in and important issues for them. The photos were used as a starting point for the discussions.

- Discussions in small groups, for example focus groups or using the world café technique.

**World Café**

Children sit in groups of 3 to 4 children around tables with table clothes/ papers on them (make it cosy and child-friendly, with drinks and biscuits on the table); children are allowed to draw and write on the table cloth/papers.

- Show a film which involves the theme/ issue to be discussed, followed by a discussion about this, or give children a camera to make their own film.

**EXAMPLE****CHILDREN MADE FILMS AGAINST VIOLENCE AND ABUSE**

In the Netherlands and Belgium children were asked to make films about violence and abuse in education and relationships. These films are published and can be viewed on the website of the organisation that supported the initiative Stuktheater.nl - [jongerentheater en debat kinder mishandeling](http://jongerentheateren debat kinder mishandeling).

- Surveys: Ensure that the questions are written in a child-friendly language and that next to the closed survey questions, there is some space for children to leave their comments and opinions. Before carrying out a survey with a large group of children first test it with a pilot group of children.
- Use social media (Facebook, twitter, chat-sessions, etc.) to consult with children, taking into account child protection measures regarding confidentiality and privacy (see chapter 7 on child protection measures).
- Agora, where children meet and discuss in small groups and where information is provided.



Fun activity

Draw a hot air balloon and fill it with ideas (for young children) or hide questions in balloons of different colours. Each group of children is allocated a different colour and at the start of the whistle the children are asked to locate the balloons. Once each team has located their balloons they are asked to burst them to find their team questions.¹⁷

- Ask children what they would do/like 'If I was in charge, if I was the Prime Minister, Mayor, etc.'; if I had a magic wand... or 'My dream is...'



17/ Children and Family Education Service, Coventry City Council, from 'Young children's citizenship, Ideas into practice', Carolyne Willow e.o. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK, 2004.



Diamond Ranking to help children rank their priorities¹⁸

A good tool to help children to rank their priorities is diamond ranking, it takes 20 minutes and can be done with groups of 4-8 children. The tool helps the children to discuss an issue without feeling like it is a discussion and it encourages children to justify why certain issues are more important in their opinion.

The activity starts with asking the children a question and have ideas (answers) for people to prioritize. Each idea is written on a **Post-it note** and each group is asked to arrange their nine ideas in a diamond shape with their top priority at the top, number two in second place, number three in third place, number four in fourth place and the lowest priority at the bottom. They need to get a consensus as a group and can move the ideas around until they reach an order upon which they all agree.



18/ Save the Children, 'Participation - Spice it up!' a manual providing more than 40 tried-and-tested activities and games to get children and young people involved in the decision-making process, March 2003.



CHAPTER

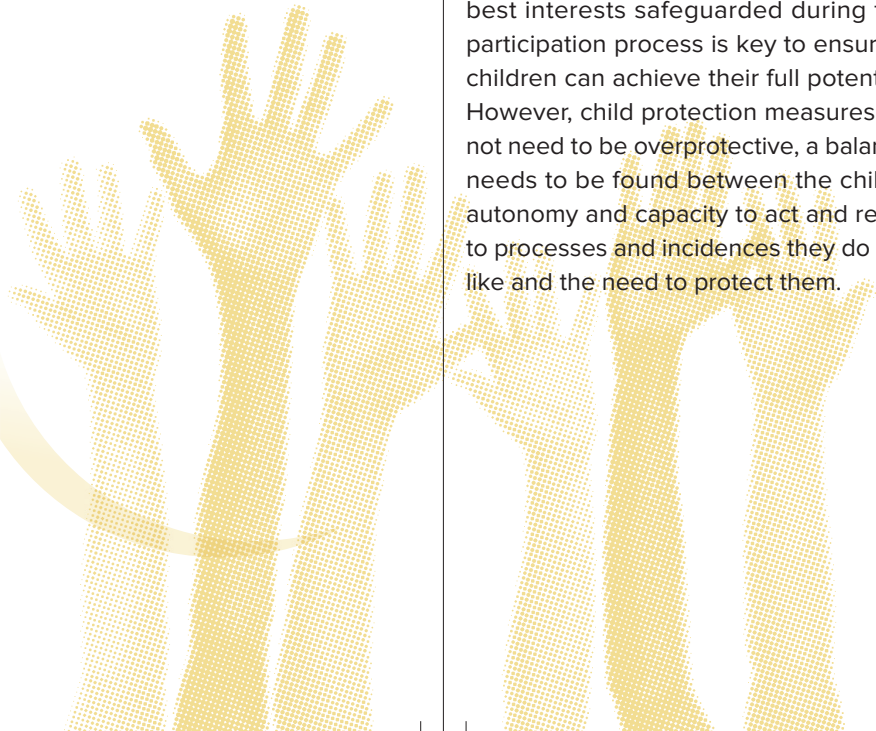
**HOW TO ENSURE CHILDREN'S
SAFETY IN PARTICIPATORY
PROCESSES**

INTRO

IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS, CHILD PARTICIPATION MAY INVOLVE RISKS FOR THE CHILDREN, IN PARTICULAR WHEN INVOLVING CHILDREN FROM PARTICULAR VULNERABLE BACKGROUNDS. CHILD PROTECTION MEASURES ARE THEREFORE AN ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT TO ENSURE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IS SAFE AND SENSITIVE TO RISK.

CHILD PROTECTION MEASURES

Child protection is one of the core principles underpinning the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and measures protecting children from harm and abuse and to make them feel safe need to be in place during consultations with children and young people. In particular when consultations involve children experiencing vulnerable situations, child protection measures need to be safeguarded throughout the consultation process. To have their health, safety, well-being and best interests safeguarded during the participation process is key to ensuring children can achieve their full potential. However, child protection measures do not need to be overprotective, a balance needs to be found between the child's autonomy and capacity to act and react to processes and incidences they do not like and the need to protect them.





Child protection measures to be safeguarded during a consultation process¹⁹

- **Inform the children and young people about the child protection measures** and rules and ensure they understand these before the start of the meeting.
- Make sure the accompanying **adults, facilitators and other persons** working with the children during the focus group consultations are **fully briefed** on their role and responsibilities before the start of the meeting.
- **Ensure consent forms** for parents/carers and children are filled in and returned prior to the focus group meeting(s).
- Ensure there is an **accompanying adult when children and young people have to travel**.
- Ensure there is, where appropriate, **travel and health insurance**.
- Ensure there is at least one adult person whom children can speak to in confidence, the so-called **child protection focal point**. This person has responsibility for the children's security and any support needed during the consultations/meetings and in the evenings at any accommodation venues. Preferably this should be someone other than the facilitator of the focus group meeting. The children have to be informed at the start of the meeting(s) about the name and the role of this person.
- Set up a **central data base with all details of the child and youth participants** (contact details, medical needs or conditions, to be taken from the parental and children's consent forms), with one person being responsible for holding this information and keeping it safe.

^{19/} The Child protection measures described here are partly based on the *Toolkit of good practice from the Save the Children International Alliance 'So you want to consult with children?'*, chapter 'Ensuring children are safe and protected', 2003.



Basic Principles Relating to the Protection and Respect of Children throughout the Process

- **Respect the privacy** of the children. This means that written reports should not reveal the identity of any of the children, unless the child and his/her parents/ carers give prior consent.
- Children's participation is entirely **voluntary** and each child should be free to step out at any moment if he or she no longer wishes to take part.
- Treat the children with **respect** and recognise them as individuals with their own rights.
- **Confidentiality**
 - Ensure that everything that is discussed or presented during the consultations is treated with **confidentiality**. This means that children need to be consulted and agree on the outcomes of the meeting and/or meeting report and give their consent that this can be published. It needs to be clear at the start of the consultations what will be done with the outcomes of the consultations and it **should not be possible to trace back the identity of any of the children who participated, unless consent has been given**. For example, when migrant children without a legal residence permit participate they might not realise that the effect of their participation could be that they can be recognised, which might lead to negative measures being imposed on them and their families. The organisers need to be aware about this and always **ensure that the privacy of children and is guaranteed their opinions are treated with confidentiality**.
 - Inform the children that the **meeting will be recorded and/or filmed or photographed** to be used for reporting and analysing purposes and ask their **consent** for this in the consent form. In case photos or films will be used publicly, the children's consent will have to be asked again and the privacy of the children needs to be respected.



Child protection guidance for facilitators

- **Give guidance for facilitators, how to deal with sensitive issues** and provide information on what to do when children confide on sensitive issues, for example concerning abuse and violence. They need to be provided with a list of contact details of professionals or professional organisations that they can refer children to for professional assistance. These could for example be obtained from the children's helpline services and local and regional authorities.
- Ensure that facilitators know their national legislation, for example **when a child confides on abusive behaviour of an adult**. A careful evaluation of the existing law needs to be undertaken prior to the organisation of the children's consultation and conducting guidelines need to be agreed to ensure adequate reactions. In principle, nothing the child has confided in confidence can be revealed by professionals. Only in limited exceptional cases, where there is a concern for imminent danger, a risk for other persons or for the child who confided the information.
 - Facilitators and other adults involved in the focus group consultations need to **ensure there is a culture of openness** to enable any issues or concerns to be raised can be discussed.
 - In general it is **inappropriate for the facilitators and adults to spend excessive time alone with children away from others** or to take children to places where they will be alone with the chapterone/facilitator to avoid any incidences of inappropriate intimacy.
 - The facilitator or adult involved in the focus group consultations must **avoid actions or behaviour that could be considered as poor practice or potentially abuse**. They should never:
 - Use language, make suggestions or give advice which is inappropriate, offensive or abusive.
 - Behave in any manner (physical, psychological, verbal, etc.) which is inappropriate or sexually provocative.
 - Act in ways intended to shame, humiliate, belittle or degrade children.
 - Discriminate against, or favour particular child(ren) to the exclusion of others.

Child protection measures during overnight stays

- Ask the children if they have a preference with whom they would like to share a room.
- Rooms should be single sex – girls with girls and boys with boys.
- Be aware of possible conflicts and arrange accommodation to minimise these, wherever possible or appropriate.



EXAMPLE

'Children are European Citizens too' - a European consultation

Children aged 11-18 from 11 EU member states were consulted and their representatives travelled to Brussels to meet, present and share the outcomes of their national consultations with EU decision makers (2003).

Child protection measures were written up and implemented. These included the preparation of a data base with relevant information on the child/young delegates. All children received a badge with emergency numbers for them to wear during their stay in Brussels. All co-ordinators within the consultation process and the children were briefed on the child protection measures. Basic medical supplies were available on site and a doctor/nurse was available on call. A rest room was provided where children could take a break if they felt ill. A child protection focal person was appointed for the entire duration of the stay of the children in Brussels. The parents/ guardians of the children had received and completed consent forms for the children to participate prior to them travelling to Brussels.



CHAPTER

**WHO CAN LEAD ON CHILDREN'S
PARTICIPATION?**

INTRO

GOOD FACILITATION IS CRUCIAL TO THE OUTCOME OF THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES. THIS IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT WHEN CHILDREN ARE PHYSICALLY PRESENT IN MEETINGS. IN THIS RESPECT THE ROLE OF FACILITATORS IS TO GUIDE AND FACILITATE THE PROCESS. FACILITATORS AND ADULTS INVOLVED NEED TO BE TRAINED TO BE ABLE TO FACILITATE CONSULTATION PROCESSES EFFECTIVELY.

A GUIDING FACILITATOR

The focus group consultations are, whenever possible, guided by a professional facilitator responsible for 'steering' the process towards the agreed objectives. He/she does not get involved in the contents, but only ensures that the participation process is kept on track and the agreed ground rules respected. The facilitator should have a **good knowledge of children's rights (UNCRC)** and experience in working with children. In case the facilitator will work with children experiencing vulnerable circumstances, he/she needs to have experience in working with this particular group of 'vulnerable' children or has had similar experiences than the children.



Key characteristics of a facilitator

A good facilitator has to remain neutral, objective, and ethically committed to collaboration and democratic problem-solving.²⁰

The facilitator needs to help the group to accomplish its objectives while acknowledging the individual needs of its members (see chapter 5 on ensuring equal participation for all children). When a group is split up to work in smaller groups it is recommended to have additional facilitators to lead the subgroup work/activities.

²⁰Jan Horwath e.a., "You Respond" project "Promoting effective participation by young people who have experienced violence" A guide to good practice through training and development', Module two (Being an effective facilitator), University of Sheffield, UK, 2011.



The role of the facilitators includes:

- To *establish ground rules* with the participants to ensure safety and willingness to participate.
- To work with the participants to *help them develop their own individual ideas* and prioritise the issues the group wants to raise. Different forms of activities can be used to ensure diverse groups of children can equally participate.
- Assume that the *children you work with are experts* on their own lives and are wise and creative.
- Ensure *equal participation of all children* and ensure that different opinions of children are respected.
- Summarize the main points of the group at the end and pay attention to the comments made after the session(s) are finished.
- Ensure *child protection measures are implemented* and adhered to.
- *Write up the report* of the focus group discussions, activities or interviews carried out.
- Ensure children do enjoy the sessions and have *fun*.

TRAINING OF ADULTS AND CHILDREN INVOLVED IN CHILD PARTICIPATION PROCESSES

To ensure that adult decision makers have the skills to open up decision-making processes and to ensure that all children get a real say and influence in matters affecting them they need to be trained. Training is not only necessary for decision makers, but also for those that will facilitate the child participation process and last but not least, children and young people need to be trained on how to bring their rights into practice. **Key to the training on children's participation is to provide a comprehensive overview of children's rights as laid down in the UNCRC** and specifically of children's participation rights in various settings, such as education, local and regional government, health, social care and justice. Next to providing adults and children with an understanding of what children's participation entails and the commitment to it, they need to be provided with tools in how to engage in children's participation.²¹

21/ The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) has published two participation training handbooks, one for adults involved in public decision making and one for children and young people: 'Ready Steady Change', UK 2005: www.crae.org.uk/readysteadychange.

For adults and staff working with children, training tools and other development opportunities in participatory practices need to be provided to enable them to work effectively and confidently with children of different ages, backgrounds and abilities.

Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation. Training can involve capacity building to strengthen their skills in organising and facilitating meetings, raising funds, dealing with the media, public speaking and advocacy.

Information on children's participation and what this entails needs to be provided to all staff and managers involved in public decision making to ensure they understand the importance of involving children in public decision making and why they need to be committed to this. Where this would entail a significant change of culture in their current thinking and behaviour, they need specific support and staff should be able to express any views or fears they might have about involving children. The fears of involving children should be addressed in a constructive way.



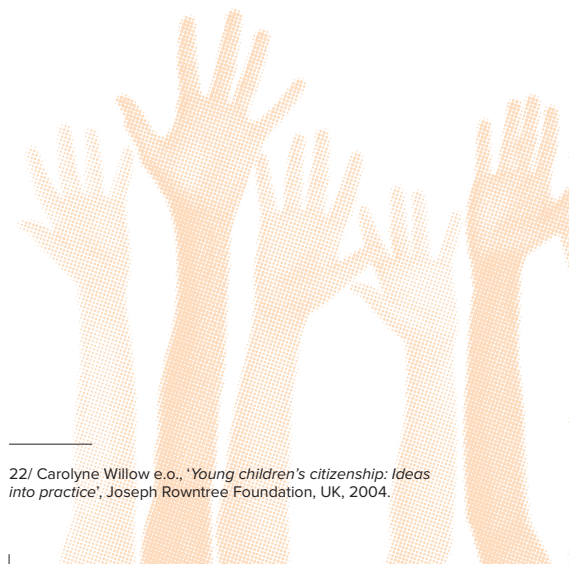
TIP

Staff who are afraid of involving children or for whom it means a huge shift of culture could be coupled with staff who have had positive experiences of involving children and who are willing to share their experiences with colleagues (mentoring or peer-to-peer support).

Bear in mind:

'Nothing beats personally hearing or seeing children communicating their views and ideas'.²²

Supporting staff with training entails that staff are properly supported and supervised and their participation practice needs to be evaluated.



22/ Carolyne Willow e.o., 'Young children's citizenship: Ideas into practice', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK, 2004.



CHAPTER

**HOW CAN WE MEASURE
THE SUCCESS OF CHILDREN'S
PARTICIPATION?**

INTRO

THE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THE PROCESS NEEDS TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN RECEIVE **FEEDBACK** ON THEIR INPUT. THE PARTICIPATION PROCESS NEEDS TO BE **REVIEWED AND EVALUATED** LEADING TO IMPROVEMENTS THROUGHOUT AND AFTER THE PROCESS.

EVALUATION OF THE PARTICIPATION WITH THE CHILDREN AND ADULTS INVOLVED

Whenever a consultation process with children is organised there needs to be a commitment that it will be evaluated. This includes children themselves being able to evaluate the participation process. The best way of doing this is to involve children from the earliest possible stage of the process to allow them to influence the design and content of the participatory process. Children need to be supported to participate in follow-up and evaluation processes and they should be encouraged to share their participation experiences with peer groups, local communities, NGOs and any projects they may be involved in.²³

Different forms can be used to evaluate child participation processes depending on the format used. If written (survey) consultations are carried out one or a few evaluation questions can be added to the end of the survey. If group meetings have been organised, questions to evaluate the consultation should be interactive where possible.



QUESTIONS TO EVALUATE CHILDREN'S CONSULTATIONS CAN INCLUDE

- How did the children experience the consultation process used?
- Were they listened to by the other children/young people and adults present?
- What was the role of the facilitator - was his/her role useful, guiding, creating a good or fun atmosphere, etc.?
- What did they think about the meeting environment, accommodation [in cases of overnight stays]?
- What did they like most? What did they like least?

23/ Gerison Lansdown, 'Every Child's Right to be heard: A resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12', Save the Children UK and UNICEF, 2011.

- What did they think about the length of the programme/sessions?
- What did they think about the size of the group/number of children involved?
- What did they think about the age group of the children involved in the consultations/group meeting?
- Did everyone participate equally? If not, was that felt as a problem for the group?
- What kind of atmosphere was there in the group?
- Did the atmosphere contribute to good cooperation and mutual understanding among the participants?
- Was participating important for the children and what have they learned from it? Would they engage in future participation activities?



Evaluation formats that can be used:

→ Ask children to give **marks on a scale of 1-5** to the different evaluation questions. Put the marks in the room and ask children to run to the number on the scale after each question has been raised. Scales need to be used as a 'springboard' for obtaining more qualitative answers.

→ Ask children to **stick smileys/faces** to the different questions. Note: the scales and smileys themselves do not enable a good analysis of their feedback, but need to be accompanied by the children's and young people's comments.

→ Evaluation Targets

A quick (5 minutes) evaluation tool to be used with any number of children. Prepare a target made up of three or four concentric circles on a piece of flip chart paper. At the top an evaluation question is written, e.g. Was today fun? Did you feel listened to? Make a different target for each question. Give everyone sticky dots – one per target. Then ask them to stick one dot on each target according to how close to the centre their response would go. Dots which go to the middle of the target indicate that the answer was very positive. In the end you will have a quick overview of the success of the consultation session.

Next to the evaluation carried out with the children involved in the participation process, **adults involved in the process** have to evaluate the process and agree on how they will translate and implement the outcomes of the children's consultations in their decision making, including legislation, policies, strategies, programmes and budgets.

Adults have to agree on what support they can continue to give to children to be able to continue their participation initiatives. If further support is not possible they should be clear on this and where possible provide contacts of organisations which might be able to support their continuous involvement.

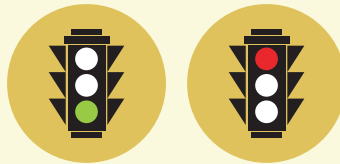
FEEDBACK TO CHILDREN WHO PARTICIPATED

Consulting with children in public decision making entails providing feedback to the children involved. They **need to be given rapid and clear feedback on the impact of their involvement**, the outcome of any decisions made, next steps to be taken and how their input will be used in decisions.

Feedback to children: Traffic Lights

Feedback to children needs to be presented in a child-friendly format. It is not sufficient to send children a formal public decision and indicate that their views have been taken into account.

An example of how to present feedback on what has been done with the different outcomes of the consultations is by using a green, orange and red traffic light.



Each outcome, conclusion or recommendation of the children's consultations will be linked to the place in legislation or policy decision and the traffic light with accompanying comments indicates whether the children's opinions have fully been taken into account (green light) or partly (orange light) or not at all (red light). Each outcome has to be explained: why have some ideas not or only partly been taken into account.

Feedback should not only include the impact of the opinions of children in public decision making, but also the results of the evaluation process and indicate that their feedback on the consultation process will be taken into account in future participation work.

Indicate that lessons have been learnt and will be used to improve future participation processes. Feedback should reach all the children involved in the consultation process.



Weaving a Web²⁴

A positive way of ending a consultation session is to make a Web. The activity can be done with a maximum of 15 persons and takes about 10-15 minutes.

The group sits or stands in a circle and the facilitator ties the end of a ball of wool around his/her finger. He/she then rolls or throws the ball of wool to someone in the circle and makes a positive comment about that person (e.g. this can be anything from the way he/she contributed to the discussions, became a friend, made jokes, liked the sweets that the person brought). This person will then wrap the wool around a finger and throw the ball to someone else. This continues until everyone in the circle has a strap of wool around their finger. The final comment is that it is now time to go and that everyone can take something positive with them. The wool is then cut off and everyone takes a piece of wool with them to remind them of the things they have done, learned and experienced.

²⁴ Save the Children, *'Participation - Spice it up!* a manual providing more than 40 tried-and-tested activities and games to get children and young people involved in the decision-making process, March 2003.

Experience has shown that people have often kept the wool for a long time and kept a positive remembrance of the consultation session.

Follow-up activities to be created at the end of a consultation process can be the creation of networks, using social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, provided that everyone has access to computers. **A thank you 'gift'** can be given to children, which does not necessarily have to be an 'expensive' gift, but can also be a certificate indicating that they have successfully participated in this consultation process. Such a certificate (or gift) will acknowledge the children's time, energy and contributions they have made.

ANNEX

CHECKLIST VADE MECUM

REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

The checklist is intended to be used as a **guiding tool** when organising a participatory process for children. It should be **used prior to the start of the consultation process** to ensure no aspect which is relevant to children's participation is missed.

The column 'Criteria taken into account' should be filled in with a negative or positive response and if a positive response is given explain HOW this criteria will be fulfilled.

TRANSPARENT AND INFORMATIVE

Is the objective of the participation process clear and has this been communicated to all children to be involved?

Has information to the children been provided in a child-friendly language and format?

Have children been informed on their rights (UNCRC) and what the right to participate means?

Have parents/carers and children been informed on the child participation process, including its scope, purpose and potential impact?

Will you ensure clear goals and targets will be agreed in collaboration with the children?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

VOLUNTARY

Did children have sufficient time to consider whether they would like to participate?

Are facilitators briefed and other measures taken to ensure that children do not have to express their views against their wishes?

Are children informed that they can leave the consultation process at any time and that participation is voluntary?

Is the timing of the participation process adapted to the children's needs, rhythm and other commitments (e.g. school, work, home)?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

RESPECTFUL

Have you ensured that children's opinions are taken into account in your decision-making?

Have you ensured that children are consulted at the earliest possible stage of the consultation process?

Have you allocated sufficient time to consult with children?

Where possible will you support children's own initiatives on issues they would like to discuss?

Have you ensured that children will be given clear and understandable feedback (be honest with them)?

RELEVANT

Have you ensured that children are able to contribute to the decision-making process?

Have you ensured that the participation process will be a continuous process rather than a one-off event?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



CHILD-FRIENDLY

Have you ensured that the meeting place is child-friendly and accessible for all children?

Have you allocated for sufficient breaks during the consultation?

Have you ensured that all information and the consultation process is child-friendly and suitable for the age group you intend to consult?

INCLUSIVE

Have you ensured that children with different backgrounds, gender and from different geographical parts of the country take part?

Have you made specific efforts to involve children experiencing vulnerable circumstances, including disabled children, minority groups, children experiencing poverty, children in juvenile justice, etc.?

Have you made specific efforts to ensure the participation process is accessible for children living in vulnerable circumstances (i.e. provide assistance to travel to the meeting place; ensure interpretation is provided; ensure the presence of facilitators with experience of working with these children)?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

SUPPORTED BY TRAINING

Have you provided information on what children's participation entails to all adults and staff involved in the public decision making process?

Have you provided tools on how to engage with children to the adults involved/ organising the consultation process?

Have you provided a comprehensive overview to the staff involved on children's rights as laid down in the UNCRC?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?



YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

SAFE AND SENSITIVE TO RISK

Have consent forms to participate been signed by the children and their parents/ guardians?

Has a child protection focal point been appointed (in case of physical meetings)?

Have child protection measures been agreed upon and been communicated to the adults directly involved in the consultation process?

Have the children been informed on the child protection measures?

Have you ensured that the privacy of the children is guaranteed throughout the consultation process?

Have you ensured that everything discussed or contributed by children will be treated with confidentiality?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT


 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

ACCOUNTABLE

Have you ensured that the participation process will be evaluated and will include children in the evaluation process?

Have you ensured that children will receive feedback in a child-friendly format on what will be done with the outcomes of their consultations?

Have you ensured that sufficient financial and human resources have been allocated to the participation process?

CRITERIA TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

 YES NO / IF YES, HOW ?

RESOURCE LIST

- Carolyne Willow e.o., 'Young children's citizenship: Ideas into practice', Joseph Rowntree Foundation, UK, 2004.
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- Gerison Lansdown, 'A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, A preparatory draft for piloting', July 2011.
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- Jan Horwath e.a., 'You Respond' project "Promoting effective participation by young people who have experienced violence" A guide to good practice through training and development', Module two (Being an effective facilitator), University of Sheffield, UK, 2011.
- Politeia in cooperation with the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities, 'Weet ik veel!' Handboek voor kinder- en jongerenparticipatie', Brussels, Belgium, 2010.
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- Save the Children International Alliance, Toolkit of good practice 'So you want to consult with children?', chapter 'Ensuring children are safe and protected', 2003.
- The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) has published two participation training handbooks, one for adults involved in public decision making and one for children and young people: 'Ready Steady Change', UK 2005: www.crae.org.uk/readysteadychange.
- UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office, 'Child and Youth Participation Resource Guide', 2006 http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/Child_Youth_Resource_Guide.pdf.



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