



## Surveys

Surveys are a written (non-verbal) method for collecting responses from children and young people to a set of questions.<sup>62</sup> They can be designed to collect both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (open-ended) data, making them versatile for projects seeking a broad range of insights.

### The benefits of using surveys

Surveys can:

- be used in children as young as eight years (assuming use of age-appropriate language)<sup>14</sup>
- be administered online, overcoming geographic barriers to inclusion<sup>33</sup>
- typically reach larger groups more efficiently, enabling a greater level of generalisability and can allow for greater diversity and representation
- be anonymous, which may facilitate more open and honest responses not as readily provided in face-to-face methods such as focus-groups or interviews, particularly if investigating sensitive subject matter<sup>25</sup>
- facilitate data collection for quantitative research (e.g. using questionnaires with numerically rated items), qualitative research (e.g. using open-ended questions), or both i.e. mixed methods.<sup>63</sup>



### Keep in mind

- **Digital divide:** online surveys may inadvertently exclude children and young people without internet or computer access.<sup>33</sup>
- **Paper-based:** Printing and distribution costs, along with manual data entry and longer processing times, can be resource-intensive.<sup>33</sup>





- **Fixed questions:** The lack of a facilitator means no immediate clarification if survey questions are confusing.
- **Independent completion:** In the absence of support children may misunderstand some questions, potentially affecting data quality <sup>25</sup>

## Planning considerations



### Delivery Method

- **Paper-based:** May be more accessible in settings with limited internet but requires printing and manual data input.
- **Online:** Tools such as REDCap, SurveyMonkey or other platforms can automate data collection and analysis. Check privacy and security features to comply with ethical and legal requirements.

### Survey design and length

- **Keep it concise:** Children and young people's engagement often drops if surveys are too long. <sup>14,64,65</sup>
- **Licensing:** If using an existing scale or tool, ensure you follow any licensing or attribution requirements.

## Tips for designing your survey



### Questions

When drafting survey questions for children and young people, use:

- age-appropriate language (i.e. simple syntax, free from complicated words and technical jargon) <sup>14,64,65</sup>
- short sentences <sup>14,64,65</sup>
- questions based in the here-and-now (rather than retrospective questions) <sup>65</sup>
- introductory statements which provide helpful context for the question to follow <sup>65</sup>
- questions that require children to respond in the affirmative not the negative
- opt for closed-response option questions if you are resource limited. Open-ended questions require more time to code and analyse <sup>64</sup>
- If you are using existing instruments/scales or questions check if they are valid (measuring the intended concept) and reliable (consistent results) in the same population you are surveying. <sup>63</sup>
- Avoid drafting questions that:
  - are overly complex e.g. double-barrelled questions or hypotheticals <sup>14,65</sup>
  - require abstract thinking, or a reliance on memory and recollection to answer <sup>14</sup>
  - are suggestively phrased that might play to the children and young people's desire to please or answer in a way that they perceive as the 'right answer'. <sup>65</sup>



## Responses

- Responses like ‘don’t know’ or ‘other’ or ‘I don’t want to say’ can be used where children and young people must have specific knowledge to choose this answer. They help reduce misleading answers but may also encourage non-responses.<sup>59</sup>
- Limit response options to avoid confusion. Children or young people over 11 can manage 4–5 options, while younger ones may do better with 3–4 options or simple yes/no choices.<sup>65</sup>
- If using scaled responses take care to make them clear and easy to interpret. For example, survey response scales with written statements (e.g. strongly agree to strongly disagree) may be more effective than numerical scales (e.g. 1–5).<sup>65</sup> Frequency-based responses (e.g. never-often) may also be more understandable for children to answer.<sup>14</sup> Use of visual images such as emoticons may also be appropriate.<sup>65</sup>

## Using audio and visual elements

- Adding audio to an online survey can help engage children and young people with reading difficulties.
- Improving a survey’s visual appeal enhances user experience, especially for young children, boosting engagement and response rates.<sup>58</sup> Use a clear, easy-to-read font in an appropriate size for the respondents. Organise questions logically to avoid unintentional bias.
- Image-based Likert scales (e.g. happy to sad emoticons)<sup>33</sup> can be beneficial for use with younger children. Characters or pictures to break up surveys may also be appealing to children and young people.<sup>14</sup>

## Piloting the survey

Test your survey with a small group of children and young people to check clarity, validity, response patterns, formatting, language, usability, and completion time before wider distribution.<sup>14,25,65</sup> See the [Communication](#) section for more information on child-friendly communication and testing materials.