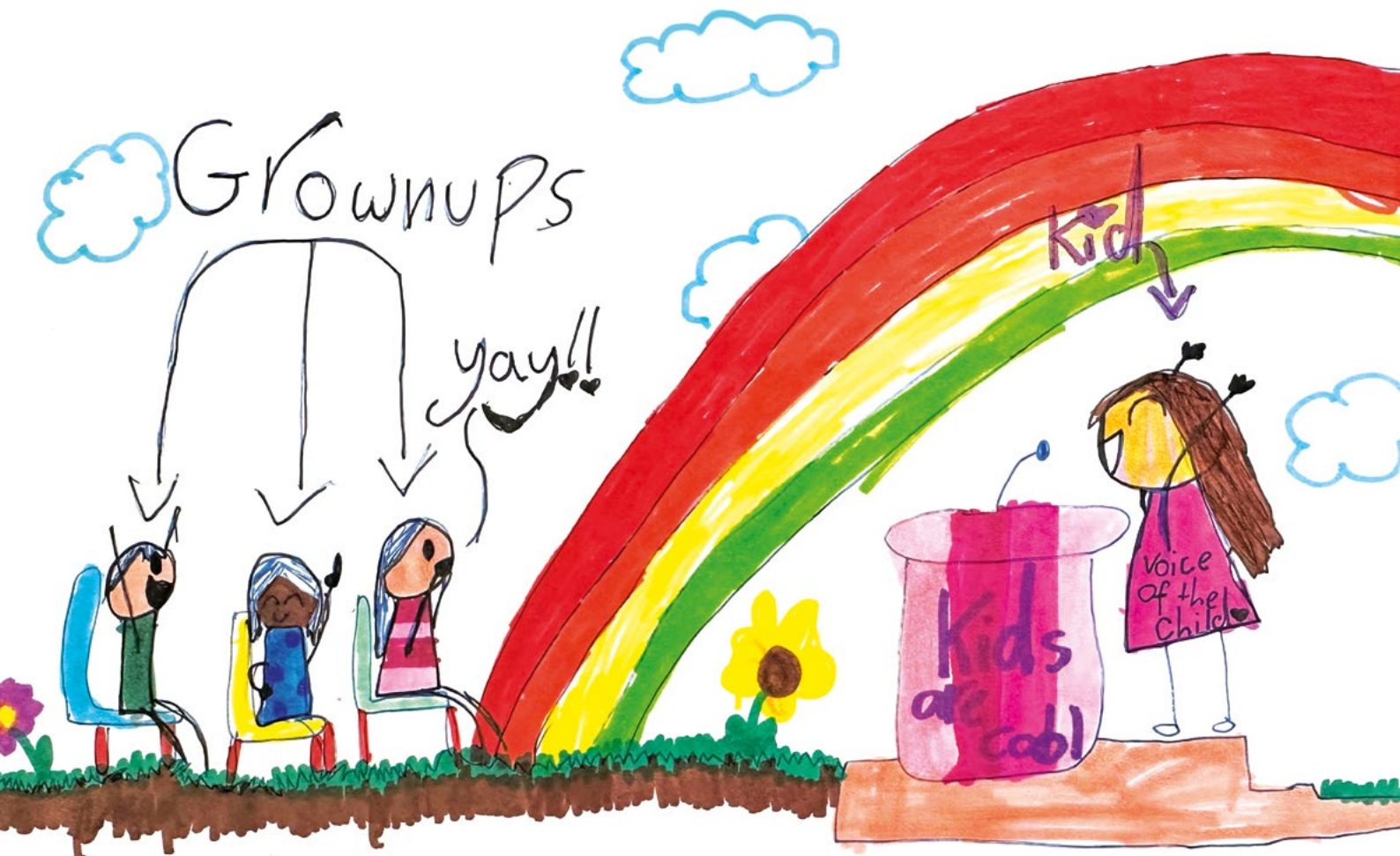


Voice of the Child

A toolkit for involving children and young people
in research and service provision

JUNE 2025



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Edition 2

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Cover illustration: Lorna, aged 9.

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Introduction

Children and young people have an undeniable right to shape the decisions and processes that affect their lives. The development of the Voice of the Child recognises and respects this right. It gathers a range of evidence and resources about how to enable children and young people to be active contributors to the production of meaningful and impactful research, healthcare and practice.

Our commitment

We are committed to championing the voices of children and young people in both principle and practice. As a leader in child health, we embrace the perspectives and lived experiences that only children and young people can offer. We acknowledge that power differentials, adult-centric models, and conventional research and service paradigms have often side-lined their contribution. By actively partnering with children, young people, families, and communities, we can redress these imbalances and create environments in which they are genuine co-creators of knowledge and solutions.

Why a toolkit?

The Voice of the Child was developed to support researchers, clinicians, service providers, and others dedicated to placing children at the heart of their work. We have witnessed how involving children and young people in meaningful ways enhances the quality, relevance and trustworthiness of research, practice and policy. This toolkit is designed to support those seeking to share our goal of empowering children and young people to be active contributors. It allows users to navigate the practical, ethical and cultural considerations required for child and youth involvement. This toolkit draws on our research, consultations and practice wisdom, and the direct involvement of children and young people. It integrates diverse theories and evidence-based practices – including co-production, community and consumer involvement and rights-based approaches – to guide involvement that is purposeful and impactful.

Our approach

Choosing the term ‘voice of the child’ reflects our alignment with children’s rights frameworks. While we value the active involvement children and young people in research, practice or policy, we recognise there is no single ‘correct’ method for involving children. Consequently, the toolkit comprises a set of core principles and rights and draws from multiple schools of thought and participatory approaches to offer an introduction to various tools and concepts.

This approach complements broader models of consumer and community involvement, and patient and public involvement, in research, education, health, and social care. By centring children and young people’s perspectives, we ensure that their involvement builds on and strengthens other established practices that prioritise co-production, equity and respect.

Choosing the term ‘involvement’ over ‘engagement’ emphasises our partnership approach. Children and young people’s participation should extend beyond ‘data collection’. They should be meaningfully included across projects, influencing processes and outcomes.

A toolkit for all

Melbourne Children's is committed to centring the voices of children and young people across all our programs, projects and initiatives. We do this not just to fulfil an ethical duty, but to enrich every aspect of our work, ensuring that research, practice and policy are genuinely shaped by those at the heart of our mission. While the toolkit reflects our experiences and aspirations at Melbourne Children's, it is a living resource that thrives on collective wisdom. We offer this toolkit in the spirit of collaboration and continuous learning. Together we can uphold the rights of children and young people and create happier, more inclusive futures for all.

Melbourne Children's

Melbourne Children's brings together four organisations; The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, the University of Melbourne, Department of Paediatrics and The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation at a single, purpose-built and multi-award winning campus in the city of Melbourne.

The purpose of Melbourne Children's is to collaborate to advance child and adolescent health through prevention, early intervention and health promotion, while providing the highest quality clinical care, research, education and training.

We invite you to join us in refining and expanding these approaches over time. Please share your feedback and insights with our team to contribute to continually strengthening the toolkit's relevance and applicability. Email: VOC@mcri.edu.au

We look forward to ongoing partnerships with children and young people, and working alongside partners both within and beyond Melbourne Children's to expand the possibilities of child and youth involvement, advance our collective practice, and honour the power of young voices in transforming their own lives and the world around them.

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About the toolkit

The Voice of the Child toolkit is an evidence-based resource designed for researchers, service providers, clinicians and others keen to involve children and young people in their work - whether they are just starting out or looking to expand their skills. Drawing on research, consultations and best practice, this toolkit offers practical guidance for planning, designing and implementing a process of involvement – whatever your context.

While it can be used to involve children and young people of all ages, this toolkit specifically addresses gaps in existing resources by focusing on children under 12 years old. It is not intended as a comprehensive guide to participatory approaches or research methodologies (links to further resources on these are provided), but rather provides practical information, step-by-step guides, illustrative examples, and a range of resources to build knowledge and overcome the challenges of effective involvement.

The toolkit consists of four sections:

- **Part 1 The foundations of involving children and young people.**
The values and principles that underpin the involvement of children and young people.
- **Part 2 Planning.** Initial steps for enabling the participation of children and young people.
- **Part 3 How to involve children and young people.** How to ensure authentic, safe and representative involvement.
- **Part 4 Activities and methods.** Methods to inform and inspire the involvement of children and young people.

The [Voice of the Child](https://ccch.org.au) is available on the Centre for Community Child Health website: ccch.org.au

The online edition includes additional resources and examples.



Part 1

The foundations of involving children and young people

Involving children and young people explores the values and principles that underpin the involvement of children and young people, and how to put them into practice.

What is child and young person involvement?

Although approaches can vary, the fundamental purpose of child and young person involvement is consistent – to foster involvement ‘with’ or ‘by’ children or young people rather than ‘to’, ‘about’ or ‘for’ them.¹ This approach is widely recognised across research, practice, policy, and advocacy.²

Involvement requires genuinely listening to children and young people, and creating opportunities for them to meaningfully exert influence and impact.^{3,4} Involving children and young people not only captures their views, but also nurtures their strengths, interests and abilities. It provides genuine opportunities for their participation in decisions about things that affect and matter to them.^{5,6}





Involving children and young people can include, but is not limited to:^{5,6}

- surveys or consultations to help shape programs or services
- contributing to meetings and events
- participating on boards, committees, youth councils, and advisory groups
- designing, leading or supporting projects
- planning, co-facilitating and/or delivering presentations at conferences, training sessions or workshops
- co-designing and co-producing research, services and/or programs
- meeting and raising issues with politicians and other decision makers.

Why involve children and young people?

Children and young people have a right to express their views in matters that affect them.⁷ They offer unique and valuable perspectives, ideas and expertise based on their own lives. When their contribution is listened to and acted upon, it can enhance the relevance, quality, trustworthiness, dissemination, and impact of services, programs, interventions, campaigns and policies.⁸

Their involvement helps generate insights that may not otherwise be available through research ‘on’ children and young people, or where engagement is with adults alone.⁹ This enables the development of more effective policies, services and resources to address the needs of children and young people.¹⁰

Children and young people can benefit from participating in the process of research, practice and decision making. They may:

- experience an increased sense of empowerment, agency and self-efficacy in matters of importance to them
- receive mentorship opportunities and increased peer support, social connections and community involvement
- improve their personal knowledge and skills
- contribute to delivering interventions and services that more precisely meet their needs and the needs of other children or young people like them.

Values and principles

Establishing the toolkit values and principles

Involving children and young people in decisions that affect them is fundamental to ethical, impactful work. An extensive review was undertaken to inform the values and principles in this toolkit. It identified 25 relevant resources from diverse organisational contexts from which two core values and nine key principles were distilled.¹¹⁻³⁵ Collectively, these provide a rights-based foundation for involving children and young people. These values and principles were sense-checked and refined in collaboration with children, young people and Melbourne Children’s staff, and aligned with international human rights agreements - such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).



Values

Children and young people have a right to be involved in matters that affect them

Children and young people hold an inherent right to shape decisions and processes that influence their lives. Upholding this right means ensuring they can participate in meaningful ways and treating them as active contributors rather than passive recipients. Their voices deserve to be heard, respected and acted upon.

Children and young people bring unique perspectives and expertise

Children and young people offer unique insights that cannot be replicated by adult-centric approaches. Valuing this input respects their contribution, builds understanding and contributes to greater impact.



Illustration by Celeste, aged 5.



Principles

Building on the core values are key principles that translate ethical, rights-based commitments into practical action. Each principle highlights a dimension of meaningful involvement, emphasising inclusivity, shared power, safety, and ongoing support. Together, they provide a framework for ensuring children and young people's voices shape every stage of your work - turning positive intentions into consistent, empowering practice.

Principles

- Have a clear purpose
- Include all children
- Agree on consent
- Create safe and comfortable environments
- Share power
- Use shared language and communicate openly
- Support children and young people to participate
- Be transparent and keep children and young people informed
- Achieve real benefits

Have a clear purpose

Everyone should understand *why* children and young people are involved and have a clear picture of the goals and outcomes you're collectively seeking to achieve.

'...it's important because it might help make kid's lives better.'

Thibaut, 7

'People have different opinions. And children's thoughts are different to adults and teenagers' thoughts.'

Frederik, 9

Include *all* children

All children should be given the opportunity to take part, no matter their background or abilities. No one should feel left out or overlooked. Purposefully remove barriers for equal participation and use inclusive methods.

'Kids from other countries, [they] might have other traditions and stuff, so they might think differently... and [different] religions.'

William, 10

'Don't forget the kids who have special abilities. No discrimination!'

Frederik, 9



Agree on consent

Children and young people have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' about joining in. Consent is not a one-off decision; it is an ongoing process, and adults should actively ensure that children are free to say 'yes' or 'no' throughout the entire project.

'They should be able to choose if they want to [be involved], your parents shouldn't just be like, 'you're doing this'. They should give them an option because [otherwise] they might be forced into something that they don't want to do.'

Frederik, 9

Create safe and comfortable environments

Spaces and activities should protect children and young people's well-being, with fair treatment for all.

'Make it really fun... and make sure the people that are around are really like nice as well.'

Summer, 12

'...just like a relaxing room where there's lots of games and like comfy stuff.'

Hayden, 10

Share power

Everyone's ideas and opinions matter. Children and young people should be able to help shape decisions, not just have their thoughts noted and forgotten.

'[All] types of kids, because everyone has different opinions.'

Louis, 7

Use shared language and communicate openly

Communicate using appropriate language for children and young people. Talk honestly and listen to each other, agreeing on the words and ideas you'll use to describe the work. This way, everyone has a clear understanding of tasks, roles and outcomes.

'You have to tell it to them in like a more simplified sentence.'

Hayden, 10



Support children and young people to participate

Those organising or leading activities should ensure children and young people have the time, tools and help they need to join in fully.

‘Not too long, not too short.’

Miller, 7

‘Cause if it's too long they'll lose interest and if it's too short they're not going to like pay attention at all.’

Frederik, 9

Be transparent and keep children and young people informed

Be honest and clear about how and when children and young people will be involved, including how decisions will be made and how much input they can have. If it is not possible to incorporate everyone's ideas, provide clear reasons and explain how any single viewpoint will be prevented from dominating. Children and young people deserve regular updates on what happens with their ideas and suggestions.

‘If they just say that it's really helpful, but don't ever use it, that might make you feel like they lied to you.’

William, 10

Achieve real benefits

Children and young people should gain something positive - like new skills, confidence, and the chance to make a difference. There should be a clear aspiration for impact.

‘I'd like to know if my support helped other people.’

Harrison, 10

From principles to practice

Establishing clear values and principles from the start respects equity, builds trust and accountability, and facilitates shared decision making. The values and principles provide a foundation for upholding the rights of children and young people, and maintaining a focus on sharing power with them - not just including them.

Each section of this toolkit provides guidance on how to integrate the values and principles into project planning, implementation, dissemination and evaluation. It includes practical resources designed to support the involvement of children and young people that build on the values and principles.

By learning from each project you undertake, you can build more meaningful partnerships with children and young people, and craft projects, policies and services that better meet their needs.



Part 2

Planning

Part 2 outlines key factors to consider at the beginning of any project involving children or young people.

Readiness to involve children and young people

Before involving children and young people, reflect on whether your organisation or project is prepared to approach this work in a way that upholds the values and principles of meaningful involvement as outlined in Part 1. If you lack the time, skills or resources to uphold ethical child-centred involvement, consider exploring alternative ways of hearing children and young people's voices rather than proceeding with direct involvement.

If readiness for involvement is insufficient, you can still amplify children's voices through:

- **accessing existing research:** Refer to published studies and reports from children's commissioners, peak bodies or advocacy groups.
- **reflections from adults with childhood lived experiences:** For example, adults who grew up with a disability or in challenging life circumstances, can share insights from their own childhood, effectively bringing their childhood perspective to discussions.
- **parent or guardian perspectives:** parents or guardians with lived and living experience can have a deep understanding of their children's worlds - both strengths and vulnerabilities - and can provide a valuable perspective.

Lundy Model of Child Participation

The Lundy Model of Child Participation (Lundy Model)⁴ is a participation framework that conceptualises the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).⁷ Article 12 of the UNCRC is about the right of children and young people to be heard – to express their views freely in matters affecting them, and for those views to be listened to and taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity. The framework is designed to ensure that children and young people have meaningful involvement in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

This model has four key components that support a rights-based approach, to ensure that children's voices are both heard and acted upon (Figure 1). The four elements follow a chronological order.



Figure 1: The Lundy Model of Child Participation⁴

Components of the Lundy Model ⁴

SPACE: Children and young people must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to express their views. This involves creating environments where they feel comfortable and confident to speak up.

VOICE: Children and young people must be supported in articulating their views freely. This means ensuring that children understand the issues at hand and that their opinions are valued.

AUDIENCE: Children's views must be listened to. This involves identifying the right people to hear the children's opinions, such as policymakers or practitioners who have the power to act on their concerns.

INFLUENCE: Children's views must be acted upon, as appropriate. It's important to show children how their contributions have shaped decisions, demonstrating the impact of their involvement.

Considering key questions in each of these four elements throughout the planning phase helps to ensure that the planned involvement is appropriate, purposeful and leads to meaningful outcomes (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Actioning the Lundy Model. (Adapted from Lundy's Voice Model Checklist for Participation as included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People in Decision Making 2015-2020).³⁶



Planning for involvement

Determining level of involvement

Where and how children and young people are involved depends on multiple factors, including project aims, resources and the extent of the commitment underpinning the work. Different approaches align with varying levels of involvement, from relatively simple consultation to deep co-design or co-production (Table 1). By matching each level of involvement (e.g. feedback sessions, advisory roles or full co-production) to the time, capacity and desired impact of the project, you can create authentic opportunities for children and young people to contribute. Remember, children and young people can be engaged at different stages - or not at all in some phases - as long as this is considered and you remain transparent about these decisions.

Table 1: Levels of involvement in decision making. (Adapted from Shier's Matrix for Analysing Children's Engagement in research processes)³⁷

Project phase	Level of involvement			Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children and young people are consulted	Children and young people collaborate with adults	Children and young people direct and decide for themselves	
Commitment behind the involvement	Children and young people will be informed, listened to, acknowledged and provided with feedback	Children and young people will be partners in the work, and their views will be actively considered and implemented to the extent possible.	Children and young people's decisions will be implemented and supported.	
Deciding on the project	Children and young people are asked about things that interest or concern them	Children and young people jointly define priorities or the scope of a project with adults	Children and young people choose the priority and project question	Who has a say in the project question?
Designing the project and choosing the methods	Children and young people are asked about the priorities, goals or methods for a particular project	Children and young people deliberate and jointly decide on the goals and approach with adults	Children and young people decide what methodology they want to use	Who is invited to get involved in project design?
Preparing the project instruments (e.g. focus group questions, survey)	Children and young people consulted on project instruments	Children and young people work together with adults on design of project instruments	Children and young people create their own project instruments	Who gets to work on the project instruments?
Identifying and recruiting participants	Children and young people are asked to advise on recruiting project participants	Children and young people jointly identify and recruit project participants with adults	Children and young people identify and recruit project participants	Who has a say in choosing participants?
Collecting data	Project involves adults interviewing children and young people or surveying their opinions	Children and young people collaborate with adults on data gathering	Children and young people organise and carry out data collection activities	Who gets involved in data collection?
Analysing the data and drawing conclusions	Adults show or describe preliminary findings to children and young people and ask for feedback	Children and young people and adults work together to analyse data and determine conclusions	Children and young people analyse data and draw their own conclusions	Who has a say in what the conclusions are?



Project phase	Level of involvement			Who is involved and who is excluded?
	Children and young people are consulted	Children and young people collaborate with adults	Children and young people direct and decide for themselves	
Producing a final product (e.g. report)	Adults consult children and young people on aspects of the final product	Children and young people and adults work together to produce a final product	Children and young people produce their own final product in their own words	Who gets credit for the final product?
Dissemination of the report and its findings	Adults consult children and young people on how to disseminate findings	Children and young people and adults collaborate on dissemination and awareness-raising activities	Children and young people undertake activities to disseminate their findings	Who is actively involved in dissemination?
Advocacy and mobilisation to achieve policy impact	Adults consult children and young people about possible advocacy actions	Children and young people and adults work together on plans for advocacy and mobilisation	Children and young people develop and implement an action plan for advocacy and mobilisation	Who is active in follow-up campaigning and advocacy?

Participatory approaches to involvement

The active participation of children and young people in a project can vary in intensity and duration. It can range from involvement in only some phases of a project or research to full co-design or co-production where the children or young people contribute to the entire process including co-planning, co-delivery and co-evaluation. Those interested in encouraging high levels of active participation of children and young people may want to explore participatory research resources.

Resources for participatory research

Kids in Action | The International Collaboration for Participatory Health Research (ICPHR).

A collection of resources and links to different types of participatory research with children and young people.

Kids in Action | Melbourne School of Population and Global Health.

A network is being established to increase the profile of participatory research with children. This is part of the ICPHR. Contact [Dr Katitza Marinkovic](#).

YPAR Hub | University of Berkeley. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

YPAR Hub takes an innovative approach for promoting positive community change and youth development. The Hub provides resources for reflecting on your group's capacity to engage in YPAR, forming a team, planning your YPAR project, and using the findings to advocate for change in your community.

Playful Participatory Research Guide | Harvard.

A workbook for teachers and school leaders who want to use playful participatory research in their schools.



Who to involve

Evidence suggests that incorporating children and young people early - such as involving them in planning - can boost their interest and motivation to participate. Where possible, co-designing elements of the project with them helps ensure relevance and fosters a sense of ownership.^{38,39}

Identifying which children and young people to include in your project will require consideration of:

- who will be affected by the project
- whose experiences and perspectives are relevant to the aims of the work
- diversity characteristics (e.g. age, culture or ability) that reflect the cohort your project is likely to impact
- skill levels or abilities required for the activities (including identifying potential barriers and providing support to maximise participation)
- interest in the project or proposed activities.



Illustration by Alessia, aged 5.



Diversity

Children and young people will have diverse experiences, perspectives and abilities. These will be shaped by:

- age and developmental stage
- ways of communicating
- cultural and linguistic background, ethnicity and religion
- skills and knowledge
- gender and sexuality
- socio-economic status and geographical location
- life challenges (e.g. experiences of trauma or adversity).

Aim to involve a representative cross-section of the community in your project. This will ensure equal opportunities for participation across different groups and capture diverse views and experiences. This can improve the quality of your data and information, strengthen the relevance of your work, and uphold ethical inclusivity.⁴⁰

‘Younger and older kids... and from different families... a bunch of different types of kids.’

William, 10

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognises that children and young people may experience overlapping identities and experiences – such as race, gender, disability or socio-economic status – that shape their lived experiences. Any one-size-fits-all approach will risk oversimplifying their experiences and may fail to meet their specific needs. Involvement methods should therefore be adaptable and sensitive to these intersecting factors, ensuring all participants can contribute meaningfully. Being mindful of intersectionality can help uncover hidden barriers to engagement, strategies that foster belonging, and respect diverse needs.

Budget and time planning

The ideal time to consider the full costs and time of involving children and young people is during the planning phase of your project to ensure you plan for the necessary resources, budget and time. If the project involves funding from grants or other external funders, appropriate planning and accurate budgeting can help ensure that you secure adequate funding to fully implement the project.²¹

Budgeting

Costs involved in children or young people’s involvement may include:

- remuneration or reimbursements (e.g. the cost of transportation) for the children and young people and/or their parent or guardian)⁴¹
- payment for facilitators and, if needed, co-facilitators
- staff training or capacity building requirements^{21,24,25,37,38,41-43}



- training and/or capacity building for children and/or young people^{35,37,38}
- venue or material costs (e.g. audio recording equipment or tools and/or materials to support involvement)
- staffing costs (e.g. designing child-friendly documents and activities, managing youth advisory groups)
- participatory budgets for children and young people to decide on how to use it
- data collection (e.g. audio recording equipment), transcription, synthesis and analysis costs).

Time planning

Involving children or young people in your project or research can require additional time when compared to involving adults. Allowing 2-3 times the usual amount of preparation time can help ensure that appropriate resources and activities are provided for the children or young people involved in your project, and that appropriate facilitation can be achieved.

Before developing a budget or project timeline, take time to consider the information provided in [Part 3: How to involve children and young people](#) and [Part 4: Activities and methods](#) to ensure that adequate resources are available to successfully undertake your project.



Part 3

How to involve children and young people

Part 3 explores factors that support authentic and meaningful engagement of children and young people.

Thoughtful and inclusive planning ahead of involving children and young people in your project will help to optimise their engagement and support better outcomes for all. This includes:

- ensuring activities respect children's rights ([Part 1](#))
- considering the children and young people most likely to be interested in participating, their potential level of involvement, and the required resources ([Part 2](#))
- preparing for involvement by:
 - building an understanding the children and young people you would like to engage
 - identifying potential recruitment strategies
 - obtaining consent
 - communicating effectively
 - enabling children and young people to shape the project
 - ensuring inclusivity
 - identifying appropriate settings and facilitation
 - planning for safety and harm minimisation
 - maintaining confidentiality and privacy
 - recognising the contribution of children and young people
 - establishing processes for effectively providing feedback
 - selecting the most age-appropriate and suitable engagement activities ([Part 4](#)).

Reaching out to children and young people

Thinking strategically about where and how you can connect with children and young people who would be interested in - and benefit from – involvement in your project helps to ensure meaningful and effective participation. Potential avenues include:

- youth organisations such as local council youth centres, drop-in centres or cultural clubs
- government or non-government services (e.g. community health centres, childcare centres or local libraries)
- community groups or clubs (e.g. Scouts, sporting clubs or faith-based organisations)
- digital platforms: online forums, apps or youth websites popular with children or young people in your target age range (e.g. moderated Discord servers or youth-focused hubs)



- social media channels such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook for young people older than 16 and parents or guardians. Refer to the communications policies of your organisation, and the particular channel, for guidelines on social media use.
- condition-specific or advocacy groups (e.g. AMAZE, Tourette Syndrome Association of Australia or Yellow Ladybugs)
- schools.^{33*}

Reaching out through trusted intermediaries — such as youth workers, school counsellors or sports coaches — can significantly improve both the quantity and quality of responses, as these people are often trusted gatekeepers and advocates.⁴⁴ When approaching people or organisations for recruitment assistance, clearly communicate the purpose and benefits of participation for children and young people.

Consent

Obtaining consent is essential whenever children or young people are involved in a project. In a research context (e.g. co-design or children as research participants), both ethics approval and informed consent are typically required. Even if a parent or guardian is providing informed consent, based on the child's or young person's capacity to consent, children and young people should still have the opportunity to agree to or decline involvement. In nearly all situations, a child's decision not to participate should override any prior consent provided by their parent or guardian.

In Australia, the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#) provides guidelines for researchers undertaking research with or about people. The National Statement helps researchers and research ethics committees identify and address ethical issues in the design, conduct, review, and dissemination of human research. Chapter 4.2 of the National Statement specifically addresses research with children and young people.⁴⁵

For consumer involvement approaches (e.g. providing input on research design or involvement in service design and delivery), ethics approval and formal consent may not be needed. However, you should still seek permission from parents or guardians and agreement from the child or young person.

Capacity to consent

Consent can only be obtained directly from a child or young person if they have the capacity to consent. Otherwise, proxy consent is required, for example from a parent or guardian. Agreement from the child or young person to participate should still be sought, even when it is the parent or guardian is consenting. Capacity to consent is based on a range of factors, including age, maturity, and individual circumstances, and is assessed on a case-by-case basis.¹⁴ Consider the capacity to consent based on maturity level (Table 3)⁴⁵

* To advertise a project (e.g. a flyer), individual schools may agree to, for example, include information in their parent newsletter. However, to recruit through schools, you will need to follow the formal approval process of the relevant education system.³⁰



Table 3: Maturity and capacity to consent

Parent or guardian consent required				
Participant consent required*				
Include in discussions about the project				
Maturity	Capacity			
Infants	Unable to take part in discussions about the project	No	No	Yes
Young children	Can understand some relevant information and take part in limited discussions about the project	Yes	Yes	Yes
Young people of developing maturity	Can understand the relevant information but remain vulnerable due to their relative immaturity	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mature young people	Can understand the relevant information and consent, and are not vulnerable due to immaturity	Yes	Yes	No

*Verbal agreement to involvement by children and young people is critical. They must be able to decline or withdraw at any stage.

Children and young people can still express their agreement to or wish to not participate and, except in exceptional circumstances, you can respect children and young people by ensuring their declining to participate overrides any prior consent given by a parent or guardian.^{45,46}

Voluntary and ongoing consent

Consent must be given **freely**, without pressure or coercion, and it should remain valid only as long as the child or young person feels comfortable. They must be able to **decline or withdraw** at any stage, with no negative consequences.^{16,27,47}

Consider environmental and relational pressures that can influence children and young people's agency when making decisions regarding participation in different contexts and settings such as schools, families or communities.⁴⁷ For example, in schools, children's compliance with authority is often enforced, which can affect a child's agency in consenting and may be considered coercion.⁴⁸

You should provide genuine opportunities for children and young people to renegotiate or withdraw their agreement or consent at any stage. Children or young people involved should understand how to stop their involvement at any time.⁴⁷ The most suitable strategy will depend on the child or young person's individual context, and may involve actively checking in on a regular basis to see if their circumstances and preferences have changed.^{16,33} This may include discussing with children beforehand the use of hand signals, red/green tokens, or picking up a safety stick that indicates the need or desire to stop,⁴⁹ or observing non-verbal cues and body language. For example:

- Are they turning away, fidgeting or restless?
- Are they shaking their heads, displaying a frown, sighing or showing signs of frustration?

These non-verbal cues may indicate a reluctance to continue participating and should be responded to immediately.⁴⁷



Informed consent or agreement from children and young people

Informed consent is established if a child or young person can understand enough to make an independent informed decision. You can obtain informed consent by providing participants with details about the research or project and what their participation entails.⁴⁷ This includes:

- what the research or project is about^{16,46,47}
- what will be expected of them if they choose to participate^{16,46,47}
- practical details such as dates and locations for involvement⁴⁷
- how their contribution will be used³³
- the potential risks and benefits of participation^{46,47}
- the extent of confidentiality and privacy, and any limitations to this^{41,47}
- that their involvement is voluntary and they can stop taking part at any time^{41,47}
- that they can ask questions and discuss concerns.⁴⁷

Information should be provided in ways that are appropriate and easy for children and young people to understand, taking into account their age, ability and context. For more information on how to do this, refer to the [Communication](#) section.

Consent for publishing or publicly sharing content

Consent should be obtained prior to publishing or publicly sharing children and young people's artwork or photography, and any accompanying textual interpretation.

Consider if the child or young person would like the artwork and their textual interpretation acknowledged and if so, how. Some options may be using the child or young person's real name (either full name or first name only) or a pseudonym. Consider whether you want consent to also publish other details such as their age or gender.⁴²

Media and imagery

Explicit permission from the child or young person - and if necessary - from their parent or guardian is required if you plan to use photos or videos of children or young people (e.g. for media, presentation or social media purposes), use media release consent forms as guided by your organisation.



Communication

Children and young people should have clear, accessible information about the project so they can engage meaningfully. Effective and engaging communication with children and young people involves tailoring information to their developmental stage, cultural context and language skills. Providing the information that young people require in a style that supports their engagement, helps them to participate meaningfully in your project (Table 4).

Table 4: Information to provide to children and young people⁵⁰

Aims and objectives	Why the project exists and why their views matter.
Roles and responsibilities	What is expected of them, how much time it may require and how they will be supported. ¹⁷
Impact	Which decisions or outcomes their input could influence, and how you will demonstrate this back to them. ¹⁷
Limitations	Where their involvement might not be able to effect change, and why. ¹⁷
Open communication	Encourage them to ask questions, seek clarification, raise concerns or share ideas at any stage.

‘[Make sure] it's welcoming’

Hayden, 10



Illustration by Celeste, aged 5.



Use child-friendly language

Whether communication is written or verbal, communicate in age-appropriate, straightforward language that avoids complicated words or technical jargon.

If complex terms are unavoidable, explain them in ways that children can understand. For example, instead of just using the word ‘nutrition’, you could explain, ‘Nutrition means eating good foods that help your body grow strong and healthy. Good foods are things like fruits and vegetables.’

The goal is to break down the concept into everyday language and relate it to things children are familiar with. You can tailor content to different age groups by adjusting vocabulary and sentence structure. Adding examples or visuals can also make the explanation more engaging and easier to grasp.

Incorporate visual elements

As children and young people have varying literacy levels, consider using visuals (e.g. pictures, icons, infographics and diagrams) to accompany written descriptions and explain key points. Comic strips or storyboards can also be used.⁴³

Consider using graphic design platforms like [Canva](#) or [Adobe Express](#) to design visually engaging documents. These platforms contain existing templates which can be adapted to suit the purposes of your project.

Use images that are inclusive and reflect the diversity of children and young people including physical characteristics, gender, abilities and culture.

Digital content

Videos with voiceovers can be more engaging for children and young people, especially younger audiences or those with limited literacy. Visual communication platforms like [Powtoon](#) or [Moovly](#) can be used to create animated videos to convey messages in a dynamic and interactive way.

‘If you put it into a video they will watch it, and they will want to watch it.’

Louis, 7

Consider cultural and language diversity

Ensure your materials are culturally appropriate and reflect the linguistic needs of children you plan to involve. This could include:

- translating documents into relevant languages
- using culturally relevant examples or imagery
- working with bilingual facilitators to clarify concepts where necessary.



Test materials

Before finalising written or verbal materials, test them with a small group representing the target population (e.g. age, developmental level or culture). Doing so helps ensure the language, format and concepts are appropriate for the children or young people you will be involving in your project.

‘Ask them simple questions. Because if you ask them too extreme or too hard [questions] they might be like ‘I don’t know.’

Summer, 12

When testing materials with your intended target group, seek feedback about whether the materials are:

- **clear:** Is the language and ideas are simple and easy to understand?
- **engaging:** Are the materials are interesting? Do they resonate with the target groups’ experiences and interests?
- **effective:** Is the purpose clear? Are the instructions are communicated in a way that is meaningful and actionable for the intended target group?

How to test materials

Pilot sessions

- Conduct a small trial run of the materials with a group of people representing the target age group you’re hoping to engage. Test with children from diverse backgrounds, experiences and circumstances, including cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Observe their reactions and ask follow-up questions to gauge their understanding.

Gather feedback

- Ask simple, direct questions like:
 - ‘Did that make sense to you?’
 - ‘Can you tell me in your own words what this means?’
- Encourage honesty and assure them there are no wrong answers.

Iterate and refine

- Adjust the materials based on the feedback received. For instance:
 - replace complex terms with simpler language or explain them differently
 - add visuals or examples to clarify abstract concepts.
- Test the revised materials again, if feasible, to confirm improvements.



Resources

A range of resources is available to support your efforts to develop child-friendly materials. We invite you to explore these and choose those that best meet your needs.

Developing child-friendly resources

Plain Language Resources | RCH

A collection of plain language resources from The Royal Children's Hospital's Research Governance and Ethics Office, including templates, participant-facing documents, branding materials, and procedural guidelines.

Creating child-friendly versions of written documents | European Commission

A guide to adapting written materials to be child-friendly including appropriate word choices.

How to Write a Child-Friendly Document | Save the Children

A step-by-step guide on developing child-friendly documents including appropriate word choices.

The Easy English Style Guide | Scope

A style guide for writing in Easy English, ensuring clear and accessible communication.

Examples of child-friendly resources

The Making Muscles Study Child Information Sheet | RCH

A child-friendly and Easy English resource explaining study participation, procedures, medications, potential side effects, data privacy, and contact details of the doctor for questions. The information sheet includes cartoon pictures of the medication, procedures and hospital.

Voice of the Child Workshop Information Sheet | Murdoch Children's Research Institute

A child-friendly information sheet, sent to children the week before, for the principles workshop attendees aged 7 to 11, including a photo of the facilitator, workshop overview, and a note about receiving a certificate and small gift.

Pilot Study of MC in Paediatric Palliative Care | RCH

An Easy English information sheet for children and young people explaining study participation, procedures, medications, side effects and data privacy. The study population was children and young people 6 months to 21 years. The information sheet includes cartoon pictures of the medication, procedures and hospital.

Considerations for involving children and young people

When planning to involve children and young people, consider whether they will participate independently or with a parent or guardian. Factors include:

- what you want to know. (e.g. Do you want the child AND the parent or guardian perspective? Is this best achieved in an interaction with the parent or guardian and child together?)
- the age or developmental stage of the child
- the familiarity, or comfort level, of the child with the setting and/or facilitator
- the familiarity, or comfort level, of the parent or guardian with the setting and/or facilitator.

'Maybe their parents could sit next to them...'

Hayden, 10



Involving children and young people alongside their parent or guardian

When planning for involvement where a parent or guardian is present, consider how power dynamics can influence or bias how children and young people contribute.¹⁷ Approaches such as child-only breakout sessions or child-friendly methods (e.g. visual aids, games or interactive activities) can help ensure children's voices remain central.¹¹

Involving children and young people without their parent or guardian

Some children may prefer, or benefit from, involvement activities without their parent or guardian's direct presence. This approach can be especially beneficial when:

- a parent or guardian is in close proximity, so children still feel secure (e.g. waiting in an adjacent space)
- the child is familiar with the facilitator or has had a positive introduction to them in advance
- clear safeguarding measures are in place, such as establishing safe physical environments, adhering to organisational child protection policies and ensuring there is a second adult or observer present.

Research shows that privacy from parents or guardians can sometimes allow children and young people to share more candid insights, especially about sensitive topics.⁴⁶ However, it is crucial to ensure robust safeguarding protocols are followed in these instances. When planning child-only sessions, organisers should:

- obtain informed consent from both the child and their parent or guardian, specifying the nature and duration of separate involvement
- reinforce the child's right to withdraw at any point
- establish a trusting rapport by explaining the session's purpose, activities and how the child's input will be used.

By offering flexible options - whether with or without parent or guardian presence - you can co-create safe, choice-driven opportunities for children and young people to participate meaningfully, while also respecting their preferences and individual contexts.

When involvement is ongoing

Projects involving continuous engagement – rather than one-off sessions – often benefit from structured methods such as child or youth advisory groups. These groups can:

- facilitate co-design activities
- offer ongoing feedback on research or service development
- help disseminate findings to communities of young people.

For more detail, refer to the [Youth advisory groups](#) resource sheet.



Working with diversity

Incorporating diverse viewpoints and a range of experiences and ideas can strengthen your project. You can support inclusivity and meaningful involvement by:

- **choosing inclusive methods:** Selecting approaches that allow children and young people with various abilities, languages and cultural backgrounds to participate equitably.
- **make activities accessible:** Providing necessary supports (e.g. interpreters, assistive technology or visual aids) so that each child can meaningfully engage.
- **accounting for cultural and linguistic needs:** Use culturally appropriate, LGBTIQ+ inclusive and trauma-informed methods where relevant.
- **be curious, not assumptive:** Find out what interests each child or young person, and which tasks they feel able and willing to do. Avoid assumptions about their preferences or capacities.

Every child and young person has different needs, experiences and cultural contexts that shape how they communicate, learn and participate. When planning to involve children who come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, identify as LGBTIQ+, are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, have experienced adversity or trauma, or have disabilities, it is vital to seek specialised guidance.

Resources

A range of resources is available to assist you to draw on evidence-based and practice-informed frameworks and approaches. Drawing on these resources will help ensure your work remains inclusive, culturally safe, trauma-informed and equitable. The resources below are organised around some of the characteristics the children and young people you work with might exhibit and are intended to support including them equitably in your project.

Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

[Getting It Right: Improving Co-Design Practice with Multicultural Young People Guide | CMY](#)

A guide exploring the challenges, gaps, and best practices of co-design from the perspective of multicultural youth.

[Youth Participation with Young People from Multicultural Backgrounds | Orygen](#)

A toolkit supporting the engagement and participation of young people from multicultural backgrounds and their families.

[Not Just 'Ticking a Box': Youth Participation with Young People from Refugee and Migrant Backgrounds | MYAN Australia](#)

A report highlighting barriers to participation for refugee and migrant youth, with recommendations for inclusive decision-making.

LGBTIQ+ children and young people

[A Language Guide | ACON](#)

A guide to key terms and inclusive language for creating safer environments for trans and gender diverse communities. ACON also offers [Pride Training](#), specialised LGBTQ+ awareness and inclusivity training.

[Inclusion Guide to Respecting People with Intersex Variations | InterAction](#)

Information on intersex inclusion, terminology, measuring inclusion, research, and best practices for forms and data collection.

[Rainbow Health Australia](#)

Evidence-based training on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, drawing on research and lived experiences to support individuals and organisations.



Minus18

Professional training modules on LGBTQ+ inclusion for workplaces and schools at all knowledge levels.

Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council

The peak body representing GLBTI individuals and groups from multicultural backgrounds.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

First Nations Cultural Safety Framework | Australian Evaluation Society (AES)

A framework outlining principles and practical guidance for conducting culturally safe evaluations at all stages, from design to implementation and policy translation.

Wayipunga: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Participation Framework | Koorie Youth Council

A framework providing strategies for organisations and governments to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth participation in decision-making.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Participation Resources | SNAICC

A collection of resources and training programs to support culturally safe child participation, including guidance on implementing the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

Understanding Cultural Safety for Aboriginal Children and Young People | Commission for Children and Young People

A guide to creating culturally safe environments that respect and support Aboriginal children and young people, including a reflection tool for assessing beliefs and practices.

Children and young people who have experienced adversity and/or trauma

Principles for Trauma-Informed Research and Program Evaluation | Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)

A guide to understanding trauma-informed research, its importance, and key principles for applying a trauma-informed approach in projects. AIFS webinar explores Supporting children who have disclosed trauma.

Children's Participation in Decision-Making | Emerging Minds

A resource library on supporting children's participation, including guidance for child protection practitioners, the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) toolkit, and resources for GPs, parents, and carers.

Posttraumatic Mental Health Resources | Phoenix Australia

A collection of resources on posttraumatic mental health, including a short guide on helping children after a traumatic event.

Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach | SAMHSA

A manual outlining SAMHSA's framework for trauma-informed organisations, including six key principles and ten implementation domains.

Children and young people with disabilities

Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA)

A national organisation advocating for the rights of children and young people with disability, [offering resources](#) on disability rights, anti-discrimination law, education, and the NDIS.

Online Accessibility Toolkit | Accessibility South Australia

A toolkit providing guidance on accessible and inclusive communication, including audio, Braille, accessible print, Easy Read, Auslan, and multimedia formats.

Voices of Children with Disability | Deakin University & Partners

A guide with resources to support the involvement of children with disability in research, policy, consultation, and service development with a particular lens on global health and development.



Safety and harm minimisation

Protecting children and young people from harm should be a guiding principle in your work. In Australia, frameworks such as the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#) and state-specific Child Safe Standards provide additional guidance for creating safe environments. By planning for risks early, you can ensure that their involvement does not conflict with children's best interests or pose a risk of harm.⁴⁵

Risk management

Before involving children or young people, conduct a risk assessment to ensure that the proposed activities do not conflict with their best interests or pose unnecessary threats to their safety. This two-step approach is widely endorsed in best practice guidance.

Step 1: Identify risk

Undertake a risk assessment of your project and planned involvement activities to understand the potential risks of your project.

When assessing risk, children and young people's right to be involved is balanced against the duty to minimise risk of harm.^{27,35}

Step 2: Manage risk

Develop a risk management plan that outlines the methods you plan to use to manage the potential risks you have identified. This may include:

- a clear plan for how you will respond to children's distress or disclosures of harm to themselves or others^{33,46}
- a process for referring child protection concerns, including mandatory reporting requirements^{33,46}
- information for the child or young person and/or their parent or guardian to seek help when an unmet need is disclosed, such as a mental health concern⁴⁶

You have a responsibility to minimise the risk of harm and other negative consequences that may arise from their involvement.⁵¹

Child safety encompasses physical, psychological, reputational, and cultural dimensions (Figure 3). A child-safe approach ensures that participation:

- does no harm
- minimises discomfort or distress, while recognising that discussing certain topics may cause anticipated distress
- maintains the privacy of participants.⁵²



Figure 3: A child-safe approach to participation

Trauma-informed practice

Many children and young people have experienced adversity or trauma. Taking a trauma-informed approach may include acknowledging possible triggers, respecting personal boundaries or offering supportive options such as breakout spaces or alternatives to group discussion. Checking in regularly and monitoring non-verbal cues can help you respond swiftly if a child or young person becomes upset or disengaged. See the [Resources for involving children and young people who have experienced adversity and/or trauma](#) section for resources about trauma-informed practice.

Setting

Involving children and young people requires careful planning and adequate time allocation.³⁴ Consider the time preferences and needs of children and young people and their parent or guardian to accommodate their schedules in your project timeline.⁵⁰ Keep in mind that children and young people often have other commitments and might have to participate around these.

Choosing a suitable setting

When selecting a space – be it physical or online - focus on both safety and comfort. Familiar environments such as a school library, classroom, community centre or even a home can ease anxieties and encourage engagement. If feasible, ask children or young people where they would like to meet. Particularly, where location choices are limited, think creatively about enhancing the environment (e.g. decorations, comfortable seating or an inclusive layout) to make it more child-friendly.



Safe environments

Physical or online environments where you will be involving children or young people must be safe. A safe environment is:

- free from physical hazards which may result in injury or harm
- accessible to all participants
- considerate of online risks and protections

Snacks

Snacks can play an important role when involving children and young people. Snacks provide a source of energy to help children and young people stay engaged, maintain concentration and prevent fatigue. Providing snacks also helps create a welcoming environment to help children and young people feel comfortable which is particularly important if they are in new or unfamiliar setting. Snacks can also help foster social interaction, making activities feel more relaxed and enjoyable for the children and young people.

When offering snacks, it's important to consider dietary needs, allergies, cultural preferences and choking hazards to ensure all children and young people feel included and safe. Children and young people may not be able to advocate for themselves when it comes to dietary needs and so, where appropriate, it is also important to seek advice from their parent or guardian prior to any engagement.





Facilitation

Facilitating the involvement of children and young people calls for specific skills and an understanding of child-friendly techniques, whether it be for one-on-one interactions (e.g. interviews), groups, or ongoing involvement. Your choice of facilitator should consider:

- **project content:** Sensitive or complex topics may require a highly trained facilitator (e.g. experience in trauma-informed practice).
- **methodology:** Some methods (e.g. art-based co-design or group discussion) benefit from specialised facilitation skills.
- **participant cohort:** Different ages, abilities or experiences (e.g. neurodiverse children and young people) may require tailored approaches.

Where less experienced facilitators are involved, training or upskilling can enable them to manage interactions safely and effectively.¹⁰ Accessing, for example, a Community of Practice (e.g. [Emerging Minds Child Voice CoP](#)) or engaging a mentor with child and youth facilitation expertise can strengthen capabilities.

‘Be like really happy and energetic around [us]...’

Frederik, 9

‘Make sure the people that are around are really like nice...’

Summer, 12

Co-facilitators

Determine whether co-facilitation is necessary for your planned activity.

Key considerations:

- **Facilitator-to-participant ratio:** Younger children might benefit from more adult support; for participants who require more encouragement, a dedicated facilitator can offer one-to-one attention.
- **Specific characteristics:** You might need a bi-lingual or bi-cultural co-facilitator, someone familiar to the group, or a peer co-facilitator who shares their lived experiences.

Required safety credentials

Any adult in direct contact with children or young people should have current clearance (e.g. a Working with Children Check) relevant to the Australian state or territory. They must also be fully informed about their role, responsibilities, mandatory reporting requirements and processes for handling disclosures.

Youth facilitators

A youth facilitator is a young person who leads or supports activities with children and young people. Peers often increase engagement because they bring shared experiences, speak a common language and create a sense of youth-led leadership. This reflects a ‘nothing about us without us’ ethos.

You can find youth facilitators or training for youth facilitators through a range of organisations such as [Berry Street \(Y-Change\)](#) or [Foundation for Young Australians \(YLab\)](#).



Balancing power dynamics

When adults and children or young people collaborate, power imbalances can shape their interactions and affect how children's voices are heard.⁵⁰ Involving children in a meaningful way often requires intentional efforts to redress these imbalances. When children feel that have the same rights and opportunities, they are more likely to speak freely, share authentic perspectives and engage actively in shaping outcomes.³²

Understanding power imbalances

- **Adult authority:** Children may see adults (especially professionals) as authority figures, making them hesitant to disagree or question instructions.
- **Social norms:** In some cultures or settings, children are taught to be compliant and avoid challenging older individuals.
- **Expert-novice framing:** Children and young people might view adults as 'experts', even though the children themselves bring unique expertise in their own experiences.

By recognising these dynamics, you can design processes that ensure children's perspectives are genuinely valued and not overshadowed by adult viewpoints.

Strategies for managing power dynamics

- Providing children and young people with decision making power can help to reduce power imbalances. For example:
 - **Time and location:** Let children and young people choose when and where they participate, if feasible. This can help them feel more comfortable, reducing the sense of formality.
 - **Activities and methods:** Involve them in co-determining the types of activities or consultation methods. For instance, some may prefer digital tools or visual arts, while others may enjoy group conversations.
- Position yourselves as equals
 - **Physical positioning:** Sit at the same level as children and young people, avoiding scenarios where the adult is towering over them or sitting behind a large desk.
 - **Inclusive seating arrangements:** Choosing circular or side-by-side seating rather than hierarchical rows fosters a sense of shared space and mutual respect.
- Balance parent or guardian influence
 - **Separate conversations:** If a parent or guardian are present, consider facilitating portions of the activity without them. This allows children the freedom to voice ideas unfiltered.
 - **Establish ground rules:** Emphasise that the child's insights are essential and should not be overshadowed. Clarify the parent or guardian's supportive role.
- Acknowledge children as 'experts in their own lives'
 - **Value their lived experience:** Remind them (and adults) that children's day-to-day experiences make them experts in issues affecting them.
 - **Highlight their agency:** Encourage them to ask questions or offer suggestions, framing adult roles as facilitators who learn from children.
- Use peer or youth facilitators
 - **Peer-to-peer leadership:** When mature young people facilitate, younger participants may see them as more relatable, reducing the adult-child power gap.
 - **Mentorship:** Pair adult facilitators with youth co-facilitators to collaboratively manage sessions and share decision-making responsibilities.



- Communication style
 - Language choice: Use child-friendly, respectful language.
 - Active listening: Validate children's contributions with eye contact, nods and follow-up questions, reinforcing that their input matters.

Cultivating a shared sense of ownership

When children and young people sense that their ideas can shape a project, they are more likely to participate actively and challenge power imbalances. Strategies include:

- co-developing goals: Collaborating on setting aims, ensuring children can articulate what they hope to achieve.
- transparent follow-up: Showing them how their suggestions have been implemented or explain why certain ideas might not be feasible. This demonstrates respect for their contributions.

By actively acknowledging and addressing potential power differentials - from the physical environment to the methods of involvement - you can foster a culture of mutual respect. This not only enhances children's willingness to share but also improves project outcomes, ensuring decisions are informed by authentic, diverse child perspectives.



Illustration by Elissa, aged 14.



Group agreements

Establishing a group agreement, or ways of working together agreement, at the start of the work is a necessary step. These agreements include the details of how you will work together, and the values and principles that will underpin the work - such as respectful behaviours, communication, confidentiality and decision making. Group agreements are flexible and dynamic documents that help set and guide expectations for both participants and the facilitator, creating a supportive and safe group environment.⁵³

It is important to invest time in co-creating a group agreement with those who are participating in a group. The Values and Principles at the beginning of this Toolkit can be used to help shape your group agreement with children and young people.

Confidentiality and privacy

Confidentiality and privacy requirements ensure children and young people's personal information is protected and is a key component of maintaining participant safety.

Consider:

- how will you keep the information or other items provided by the participants (e.g. drawings or photos) confidential to protect their privacy or anonymity?
- who will have access to or be able to see their information?
- how will you manage confidentiality between participants if conducting group activities (e.g. focus groups or online forums)?
- under what circumstances would you need to break confidentiality?

Limits to confidentiality

Communicate the limits of confidentiality to children, young people, and their parent or guardian from the start of the project.³⁷ For example, in some situations you may need to disclose participant information to ensure their safety, or the safety of others.

Include details in your project protocol on the appropriate staff, services or authorities that should be notified (e.g. project team, ethics committee, parent/guardian, child protection)** if a child or young person discloses:

- a situation where they could be seriously harmed. This includes physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- that they intend to cause harm to themselves or someone else.

Data collection, storage and use

To ensure the confidentiality and secure management of the child or young persons' identifying information, you will need to ensure you collect, store, and use data in line with confidentiality and privacy requirements.⁴⁰

Unless by agreement, ensure children and young people are not identifiable in research reports, presentations, or any other forms of dissemination, including photographs and films that could compromise their privacy and safety.^{32,52}

** It's important to be aware of the mandatory reporting laws in your area, which may vary by jurisdiction. Always follow the relevant procedures for reporting child protection concerns.



Participant identifying information:

- can include names, email addresses, medical record numbers, or any other details that could be used to recognise an individual
- can include photographs, videos, audio recordings, and documentation
- must be stored in line with your organisation's privacy policies, and if you are conducting a research project, according to what is outlined in your approved ethics research protocol
- can only be used for the purpose it was originally collected, or for a purpose that the child or young person has explicitly consented to.⁵²

Reimbursement, remuneration and recognition

Providing fair and transparent reimbursement, remuneration, or recognition acknowledges the valuable contributions of children and young people in your project. The most suitable approach depends on factors including age, cultural context, level of involvement, ethical considerations and potential risks of undue influence.

For research projects, the type of reimbursement, remuneration and/or recognition you select will need to be approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and/or other ethics review bodies. The [NHMRC](#) provide guidance to assist in decision-making about types of recognition and payment.

Expenses and reimbursement

Children and young people (or their parent or guardian) may incur expenses while participating in a project - such as travel, accommodation, meals or childcare costs. Covering these costs helps ensure that no one is disadvantaged by their participation. This is especially important for children and families facing socio-economic challenges, as covering expenses can significantly reduce barriers to involvement. In your planning, also consider that families may not be able to afford to pay expenses and wait for reimbursement.

- Plan ahead: Factor reimbursement into your budget from the outset, ensuring you have clear processes for tracking and approving these costs.
- Policy guidance: Some organisations (e.g. universities and research institutes) have internal guidelines on how to process participant reimbursements ethically and efficiently.

Remuneration

Remuneration is money paid in recognition of a person's service or contribution.^{54,55} Payments are generally in the form of either direct deposits or gift cards; and best given in the form that is most useful and appropriate for the child or young person at the time.⁵⁴ Rather than one approach, consider offering different types of remuneration, and allow each young person to choose how they would like to be remunerated.

Key considerations:⁵²

- Nature of involvement: One-off activities (e.g. a focus group) may warrant smaller amounts, while ongoing advisory roles or co-design projects often justify more substantial sums.
- Degree of accountability: The more responsibility a young person holds - such as active membership on an advisory group - the higher the remuneration may be.
- Time commitment: Reflect the hours spent preparing, attending meetings or contributing to project outcomes.



Ensure you avoid undue influence or inducement. Payments should match the burden of participation and not persuade the child or young person to do something they would otherwise decline.

Recognition

Where monetary payment is not possible, or when you wish to complement remuneration, other forms of recognition can still recognise the value of participation. This could include:

- a small gift of appreciation for the child or young person (e.g. toy, game, book, craft or science activity or drink bottle). It's important to ensure that any gift is appropriate and safe for the age and developmental stage of the child (e.g. considering choking hazards, hazardous materials such as button batteries and allergies).
- personalised thank you note or message
- a Certificate of Appreciation⁵⁶
- a reference or letter of support
- special mention and acknowledgement of their contributions in publications, newsletters or social media (with consent)⁵⁶
- the final project outputs e.g. paper publications, published reports.⁵⁶

Who receives the remuneration or reimbursement?

Remuneration or reimbursement can be made directly to the child or young person themselves, or to their parent or guardian. This will depend on the context of involvement, including the participant's age.

Ethical and legal requirements

Research projects typically require Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) approval for remuneration or reimbursement. The NHMRC provides guidance on payments, encouraging transparency and underscoring that no payment should compromise voluntary consent. Consumer involvement or advisory capacities outside formal research, follow the same principles - voluntariness, avoiding undue pressure, and clarity on the amount and purpose of any payment - helps to maintain ethical standards.

By reimbursing costs, remunerating children and young people for the time and insight they bring, and recognising them in ways that are culturally safe and meaningful, you help ensure an equitable, respectful environment. This approach not only reduces barriers and fosters trust, but also communicates genuine appreciation for their crucial role in shaping better outcomes.

Accountability and feedback

Providing timely feedback to children and young people helps to build trust and demonstrates that their involvement is valued and important.

One way you can achieve this is by establishing an ongoing feedback loop. This keeps participants updated about your project during and after their involvement. This feedback loop keeps the children and young people informed about the outcomes of their involvement as well as the actions taken. Keeping children informed about their involvement means they may be more likely to engage again in future.¹⁶

Lundy recommends a four 'Fs' effective feedback loop process for consultations or collective decision-making processes with children and young people.⁵⁷



The Four 'Fs' effective feedback process

Full	Provide comprehensive feedback to children and young people outlining which of their views were accepted, which were not accepted and the reasons for these decisions. This feedback should also note who is implementing their views and what is happening next.
Friendly	Feedback or responses given by decision-makers to children or young people need to be in a format and language that they understand. They need to be informed about the findings of a consultation or survey and about how their views were given due weight.
Fast	Children and young people quickly grow up and move on from things they are involved with, so decision-makers need to give them feedback acknowledging their contribution, outlining initial progress and giving information on next steps as soon as possible. This applies to all key stages and developments.
Followed-up	Decision makers need to provide ongoing feedback and information to children and young people throughout the policy or decision-making process.

As you plan for feeding back progress or outcomes for your project, consider the views and preferences of the children and young people themselves about how they would like to receive feedback.

The ability for children and young people to contribute their own feedback is also important. This could include opportunities to suggest amendments to summary notes, interpretations of artistic works, and to correct the accuracy of how their perspectives or contributions have been recorded, interpreted and/or represented in final outputs.

Children and young people and their parent or guardian should also be able to provide feedback on the process and outcome of their involvement. This can be used to inform future efforts involving children and young people in projects within your organisation.²⁴



Illustration by Lorna, aged 9.



Part 4

Activities and methods

Part 4 provides resource sheets to support the active participation of children and young people.

Successful projects adapt and offer a range of different methods and activities to cater for the individual needs of children and young people.²⁴ There's no one-size-fits-all approach to involving children and young people meaningfully. Just like adults, they come from different backgrounds, have unique interests, skills, and ways they like to communicate and work. What works for some might not work for others, so where possible, offer a mix of opportunities rather than just one approach. Being flexible and varied in your approach and methods can help you reach and include a broader group of children and young people.

Activities for involving children and young people

It's important to design involvement with a focus on activities that will be engaging and interesting to the participating children or young people. Wherever possible, choose or co-design activities in partnership with the young people you aim to involve, paying attention to age and developmental level. Activities should emphasise play, creativity and imagination.

Resource sheets to support the involvement of children and young people included in this toolkit cover:

- [interviews](#)
- [focus groups](#)
- [surveys](#)
- [art-based activities](#)
- [photography](#)
- [task-oriented and activity-based methods](#)
- [youth advisory groups](#).

When using approaches that were originally developed by and for adults - such as interviews and focus groups - it is important to adapt them to the way children often express themselves, which may include incorporating play, movement, art, or other creative activities.



Interviews

Interviews are a verbal method to gather detailed and specific information about children and young people's experiences, thoughts, opinions, and beliefs on various topics.³³

The benefits of interviews

- **Flexibility:** You can tailor the questions, pace and style to each child or young person. This makes interviews adaptable across a range of contexts and topics.
- **Versatile formats:** Interviews can be conducted in multiple formats – face-to-face, online or by phone - and adapted to suit different ages, abilities and cultural contexts. Face-to-face and online interviews allow you to observe non-verbal cues (e.g. facial expressions or body language) that can enrich your understanding.
- **Enhanced engagement:** Interviews can be enhanced with child-focused activities to make them more engaging and help children express themselves more freely. For example, using drawing or storytelling can encourage richer responses.²⁵



Keep in mind

- **Time and resource intensity:** Preparing, conducting and processing (transcribing, coding, cleaning, analysing) interview data can be resource-heavy.
- **Qualitative depth vs. generalisability:** Interviews yield rich, in-depth qualitative information but do not typically produce population-level findings (i.e. findings that are generalisable).⁴¹





Planning considerations



- Choose an interview type that aligns with your project or research question, aims, and objectives to ensure relevant and valuable data collection.⁴¹
- Types of interviews include:⁴¹
 - Structured interviews, often used in quantitative research, involve strictly following a set list of questions, providing consistency across participants, and making it easier to compare responses.
 - Unstructured interviews are more conversational and open-ended, allowing themes to develop naturally, which can yield deeper qualitative insights.
 - Semi-structured interviews blend the two approaches, using a flexible set of guiding questions that let participants steer the conversation, offering both structure and adaptability.
- Consider a child-friendly approach to interviews by pairing the interview with a fun and engaging activity (e.g. [Art-based activity](#), [Photography](#), [Task-oriented or activity-based method](#)). This helps build trust, encourages more authentic responses and minimises potential discomfort or risks.

Interview questions. Design and draft your interview questions to ensure they are clear, relevant, and engaging. Consider involving children and young people independent from your participants (e.g. an advisory group), who can provide guidance and feedback on the questions you plan to ask. See the [Communication](#) section for guidance on developing and testing your questions.

Time. Interview duration depends on balancing question scope, available time, and the child or young person's age. It may range from 10–15 minutes to an hour and should be agreed upon through ongoing consent.

Materials. Tools like recording devices and transcription or coding software e.g. NVivo can be used to capture the interaction for accuracy and to streamline analysis.

Tips for conducting your interview



Starting the interview

Building trust is key to open conversations. Start by introducing yourself and using [icebreakers](#) to build rapport.³³ Warm-up conversational-style questions about age, school, interests or feelings about their day can help the child or young person feel comfortable before formal questions or sensitive topics.^{25,33}

It's important for a child or young person to know what is going to happen, so explaining the activity can be useful. It is also important for them to know what to do if they don't want to answer a question, want a break, or no longer want to participate. See [Consent](#) for more information on what it might look like, and ways to discuss, withdrawal of consent in children.

During the interview

Open-ended questions – questions that cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no' – are one of the best ways to elicit rich responses during an interview.^{25,58}

- 'Can you tell me about a time when you felt proud of something you did?'
- 'What do you think is the best part of being involved in [activity or topic]?'
- 'How do you feel when you're at school (or another setting)?'
- 'If you could change one thing about [specific topic or environment], what would it be and why?'
- 'What do you enjoy doing the most, and why does it make you happy?'



Supporting participants

- Show encouragement (e.g. nodding, repeating responses, or giving positive feedback) to prompt further elaboration.⁵⁸
- Frame questions as requests (e.g. ‘Please tell me about the photograph you took’) for richer responses.⁵⁸
- Avoid bundling multiple questions together to prevent confusion.⁵⁸
- Allow sufficient pauses between questions, as silence may indicate thinking rather than refusal or uncertainty.
- Be patient—children may need time to process and respond.

Concluding the interview

- Check-in with the child or young person at the end of the interview. Check how they are feeling - it gives them a chance to share if anything made them feel worried or upset during the interview. This also allows for timely referrals to appropriate support services if required.¹⁹
- You may also like to leave the child or young person and/or their caregiver with a ‘thank you leaflet’ or ‘summary sheet’. This could contain further information about the project, links to additional resources or services and your contact details if they wish to follow-up with you or your team in the future.¹⁹



Focus groups

Focus groups are a group-based, verbal method for gathering in-depth information from several children or young people at once. They can create a dynamic, interactive atmosphere in which participants exchange ideas, respond to each other's insights and build a shared discussion.^{33,59,60}

The benefits of focus groups

- **Interactive sharing:** Children and young people can bounce ideas off one another, potentially uncovering richer insights than in one-to-one interviews.
- **Peer support:** Group settings may help participants feel more comfortable, validating each other's experiences or normalising certain views.
- **Efficient data collection:** Facilitators can gain perspectives from multiple individuals simultaneously, which may be beneficial when time or resources are limited.



Keep in mind

- **Limited confidentiality:** Because children are sharing in a group, you cannot guarantee privacy. Focus groups are generally not suitable for sensitive or highly personal topics.³³
- **Group power dynamics:** More vocal participants may dominate the conversation, while quieter children's insights risk going unheard if facilitation is weak.²⁵
- **Logistical complexity:** Coordinating schedules for several participants and ensuring child-friendly venues, snacks and breaks can be more involved than planning individual interviews.





Planning considerations



- **Group size**
 - For **school-aged children** (6–10 years), 4–6 participants is recommended.⁶¹
 - For **older children and young people** (10–18 years), a group of 6–8 is generally manageable.⁶⁰
 - **Children under 6 years** often do better in pairs or very small groups, and typically have shorter attention spans - requiring frequent breaks or varied activities.
- **Time.** Focus group duration should balance discussion scope and participants' attention span.
- Younger children may need shorter sessions or breaks; limit sessions to 45–50 minutes for those under 10. Older children and young people can typically engage for up to 60 minutes.⁶¹
- **Power balance.** Forming groups of children and young people of similar ages can assist to prevent power imbalances and influence.^{33,53,61} Depending on the topic, grouping by shared characteristics like gender or culture may be beneficial, and a facilitator with similar traits might be appropriate.⁶¹
- **Creating and maintaining engagement.** Incorporate task-oriented activities like drawing, games, role-play or props (e.g. photos, dolls, puppets) to keep children and young people engaged.³⁶ Integrating movement or play can help maintain focus and create a comfortable, enjoyable environment, reducing restlessness and distraction. Be flexible to accommodate the group's needs and interests.
- **Recording materials.** Recording devices (video and/or audio) can help reliably document the discussion to be analysed later and facilitate evaluation. Video recording may be preferable to just audio, as it can be difficult to assign voices to the individuals speaking when retrospectively reviewing.⁶¹
- **Catering.** Offering snacks and drinks can be a great way to keep everyone comfortable, especially for longer sessions or certain times of the day.⁶¹ See the [Snacks](#) section for further considerations.
- **Additional information.** Have helpful information, resources or referrals ready to support the child, young person, or parent or guardian as part of your risk management plan and or ethics protocol.⁴⁶

Tips for conducting your focus group



Starting the focus group

Building trust is key to open conversations. Start by introducing yourself and each other, and using [icebreakers](#) or a 'warm-up' activity to build rapport³³ and help the participants feel relaxed and ready to share their views (see additional resources).^{53,61} Warm-up conversational-style questions about age, school, interests, or feelings about their day can help children feel comfortable before the formal questions or discussion of sensitive topics.^{25,33}

Group agreement

Establishing a group agreement at the start of the focus group is an important first step. This can be co-created with the children and young people themselves.

Group agreements may include things such as:⁵³

- I can say 'pass' if I don't want to answer (you can ask the children or young people as a group to come up with a word or phrase they'd like to use).
- I tell you if I don't understand you, or if you don't understand me.
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- We'll take turns talking.
- We won't tease or make fun of each other.



Facilitator moderation

Once the discussion has started, the facilitator should hold back as much as possible, to allow the participants to talk freely.⁴⁸ Moderation may be required at times to ensure all participants enjoy equal opportunity to contribute and engage in the discussion.⁶¹

During the focus group

Open-ended questions – questions that cannot be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ – are one of the best ways to elicit rich responses during a focus group.⁵³

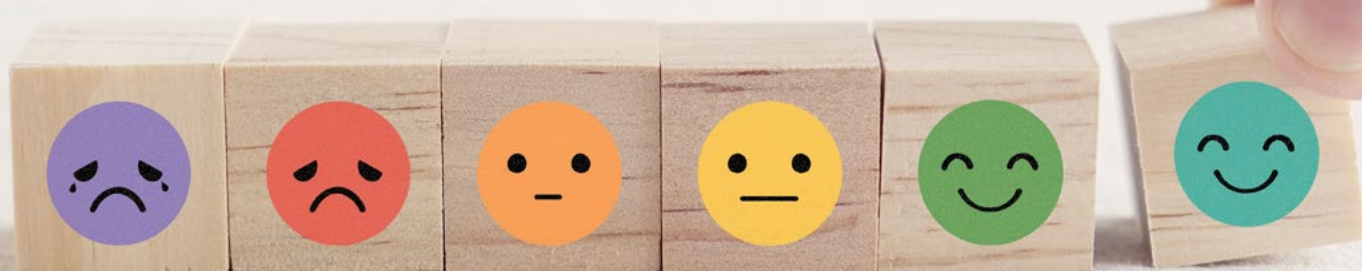
- 'Can you tell me about a time when you felt proud of something you did?'
- 'What do you think is the best part of being involved in [activity or topic]?'
- 'How do you feel when you're at school (or another setting)?'
- 'If you could change one thing about [specific topic or environment], what would it be and why?'
- 'What do you enjoy doing the most, and why does it make you happy?'

A few tips

- Strategic use of follow-up questions prompts, and verbal cues can help keep the discussion flowing and encourage participants to provide more detail in their contributions. Examples of prompts include “Tell me more about ...” or “Describe ...”.⁵³
- Use reflective and summary statements to clarify meaning and understanding.⁵³ e.g. ‘It sounds like you feel happy/sad about!’ or ‘Did I understand right? You like drawing because it helps you tell stories?’
- Avoid leading responses by not over-assisting if a child struggles to express themselves. Instead, encourage them with phrases like ‘Try to find other words to tell me what you mean’ or offer a list of options to guide.⁵³
- Show encouragement (e.g. nodding, repeating responses, or giving positive feedback) to prompt further elaboration.⁵⁸
- Frame questions as requests (e.g. ‘Please tell me about the photograph you took’) for richer responses.⁵⁸
- Avoid bundling multiple questions together to prevent confusion.⁵⁸
- Allow sufficient pauses between questions, as silence may indicate thinking rather than refusal or uncertainty.
- Be patient—children may need time to process and respond.
- If the focus group is covering sensitive topics, it can be helpful to position these questions in the middle of the focus group to allow the children and young people time to ‘warm-up’ and importantly, ‘cool-down’ from the subject matter.⁴⁶

Concluding the focus group

- Check-in with the children or young people at the end of the focus group. Check how they are feeling - it gives them a chance to share if anything made them feel worried or upset and allows for timely referrals to appropriate support services if required.⁴⁶
- You may also like to leave the children or young people and/or their parent or guardian with a ‘thank you leaflet’ or ‘summary sheet’ containing further information about the project, links to additional resources or services and your contact details if they wish to follow-up with you or your team in the future.⁴⁶



Surveys

Surveys are a written (non-verbal) method for collecting responses from children and young people to a set of questions.⁶² 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)¹⁴
- be administered online, overcoming geographic barriers to inclusion³³
- 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 matter²⁵
- 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.⁶³



Keep in mind

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





- **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 ²⁵

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. ^{14,64,65}
- **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) ^{14,64,65}
- short sentences ^{14,64,65}
- questions based in the here-and-now (rather than retrospective questions) ⁶⁵
- introductory statements which provide helpful context for the question to follow ⁶⁵
- 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 ⁶⁴
- 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. ⁶³
- Avoid drafting questions that:
 - are overly complex e.g. double-barrelled questions or hypotheticals ^{14,65}
 - require abstract thinking, or a reliance on memory and recollection to answer ¹⁴
 - 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'. ⁶⁵



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.⁵⁹
- 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.⁶⁵
- 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).⁶⁵ Frequency-based responses (e.g. never-often) may also be more understandable for children to answer.¹⁴ Use of visual images such as emoticons may also be appropriate.⁶⁵

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.⁵⁸ 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)³³ can be beneficial for use with younger children. Characters or pictures to break up surveys may also be appealing to children and young people.¹⁴

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.^{14,25,65} See the [Communication](#) section for more information on child-friendly communication and testing materials.



Art-based activities

Art-based activities - such as drawing, painting, collages, vision boards, comic strips or digital art - are non-verbal methods that can help children and young people explore and communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences in creative ways. These activities can also enrich more traditional verbal methods (e.g. interviews or focus groups) by making them more fun, interactive and child focussed.

The benefits of using art-based activities



Exploring experiences

- Art supports children and young people to express knowledge, attitudes, perceptions and feelings that they might struggle to convey verbally, especially when discussing sensitive or complex topics.

Emotional expression

- Drawing or creating art can help children process feelings (including traumatic experiences) and enables them to explore difficult ideas in a more comfortable medium.

Stepping stone to deeper discussion

- Children and young people can use their artwork as a visual prompt for further conversation—making interviews or focus groups more engaging and insightful.

Increased engagement

- Incorporating creative elements can transform otherwise formal or daunting research activities into fun and enriching experiences.



Keep in mind

- **Age appropriateness:** modify methods to be age appropriate. In younger children a simple drawing activity may be appropriate but older children and young people may find it childish and be less likely to engage with this method. Young people may prefer an activity using artist pens (e.g. Posca, alcohol-based markers), paints, digital art or comic strips. Younger children may be happy with simple drawing or colouring, while older ones might prefer digital art, comic strips or more advanced forms of expression. Let them choose from a range of mediums to encourage ownership and creativity.
- **Confidence with art:** some children may lack confidence with art as a form of expression and be less likely to engage with this method. Not every child or young person is confident in their artistic skills. Providing reassurance that there is no right or wrong way to create art can help reduce anxiety.
- **Supplementing with discussion:** Always speak with the child about their artwork. Their own explanation often offers crucial insights, preventing adult misinterpretations.



Planning considerations

- **Choosing art activities.** Factor in age, learning ability, skills and interest. Where possible, involve children in deciding what art-based methods to use and offer alternatives if some are reluctant.
- **Keep the end in mind.** Think about how you intend to use the artworks and their interpretations and how this aligns with your aims.
- **Format.** For example, the ‘draw-and-talk’ format involves talking about drawings with the child or young person while they are being made; the ‘draw-then-talk’ format involves talking about drawings with the child or young person after they have been made.
- **Art Equipment.** Equipment for the art, can include artist pens, crayons or pencils, paints and/or craft supplies as well as a surface use such as paper, cardboard or canvas. Try to have a selection of materials on offer so that children and young people can choose what they create their artwork with.
- Artworks or drawings can also be produced via electronic mediums (e.g. using tablets).
- **Digital Equipment.** A camera and/or scanner can be used to make a digital record of the artwork. This means that children and young people can also take their art home.



Tips for conducting art-based activities

Supporting children during the drawing activity.

- Pre-prepare prompts or instructions for you to use to guide children and young people while they draw.
- Think about how you will address or clarify any questions from the children and young people if they need further support.



Interpreting drawings

To ensure accurate meaning, drawings should always be supplemented with an explanation. Both the drawings and their interpretations can serve as valuable data for analysis.

To assist with interpretation:

- Discuss the drawing with the child, either during the creation process or afterward in an interview.
- Record and transcribe their explanation using recording equipment, transcription tools, or by taking notes and annotations



See the [Consent](#) section for considerations around consent and recognition if publishing or publicly sharing artworks.

Art-based activities can be powerful tools, opening up creative, flexible avenues for children and young people to explore and communicate their thoughts and feelings. By coupling these methods with thoughtful facilitation and ethical safeguards, you can foster richer, more nuanced engagement that honours the unique perspectives of each child.

Resources and publications

[Using Drawings and Collages as Data Generation Methods With Children: Definitely Not Child's Play](#) | Nomakhwezi Mayaba et al. (2015).

An exploration of how drawings and collages can be used as research tools with children, highlighting challenges and considerations.

[Drawing Across Media: A Cross-Sectional Experiment on Preschoolers' Drawings Produced Using Traditional Versus Electronic Mediums](#) | Kirkorian et al. (2019).

A study comparing preschoolers' drawings created using traditional materials versus electronic mediums.

[Children's drawings: evidence-based research and practice](#) | Fabris et al. (2023).

An editorial exploring the use of drawing with children and young people, with links to research and project examples that have used this methodology.

[Drawing as a Facilitating Approach When Conducting Research Among Children](#) | Søndergaard et al. (2019).

An example of a qualitative research project that utilised drawing as a method with the child participants.



Photography

Photography is a non-verbal (visual) method - often combined with verbal elements - that allows children and young people to capture images and discuss them. Various approaches (e.g. photo-elicitation, participatory photography, photo-narratives, and photovoice) can help children and young people represent their experiences, generate conversation and inspire action.^{42,66}

Photography approaches

- **Photo-elicitation** – Using photos to prompt discussion or reflection.
- **Participatory photography** – Capturing and sharing experiences or perspectives.
- **Photo-narratives** – Telling stories through images.
- **Photovoice** – Using photos to represent, analyse, and inspire action.

In all approaches, children and young people take photos and then discuss their meaning.

The benefits of using photography

- **Visual expression:** Photography can supplement or replace verbal/written methods, offering a fresh perspective on children's experiences.⁶⁶
- **Engagement:** Photography can be more engaging than interviews or surveys, especially for those reluctant or unable to communicate verbally or in writing.⁶⁷
- **Inclusivity:** Many children and young people are comfortable with cameras and taking photos, making photography an easy-to-use method that also can give them agency over what they want to communicate.⁶⁸





Photovoice

‘Photovoice is a participatory photography method that seeks to empower people to share their experiences through digital storytelling.’⁶⁹

‘[Photovoice] involves participants taking photos guided by a research question, which are then used to help them reflect upon and explore the reasons, emotions and experiences that have guided their chosen images.’^{58,25}

The benefits of using photovoice

Photovoice has been used successfully with young children and young people who find it easier to express themselves through visual images. Importantly, images captured through photography can then be used as a basis for further discussion and sense-making.²⁵

The common use of personal smartphones with camera capabilities means barriers to engagement with this method are low. Reliance on participants’ personal smartphones for photovoice research can also help reduce the project cost of resourcing cameras.

Keep in mind

- Images alone do not convey meaning. Understanding a photograph requires context, explanation, and joint sense-making with the child or young person who captured it. Providing opportunities for them to explain their images is essential for accurate interpretation.^{33,42,68}
- Children and young people’s level of interest, confidence and skill in photography will vary and will need to be accommodated.⁴²
- Consider what photography can and cannot capture and whether it aligns with your research or project goals.⁶⁸
- Consider image quality, cost, and ease of use when selecting a camera, iPad, or other devices.⁶⁸



Planning considerations

- **Equipment:** What cameras, devices or equipment will you need?
- **Time:** The time required for the project will be affected by its scope, the number of children, the location, the age of participants and preparation and planning needs.
- **Setting:** Where will you engage children/ young people? (in-person; online?)
- **Power balance:** Interpretation and sense-making also ought to consider how other factors like adult-child power imbalances, imposed conditions, context, and broader social/cultural phenomena may influence the process of children and young people taking photos and the resulting images.⁶⁸



When using photography with children and young people, it is important to consider the following ethical requirements.

- **Additional consent requirements:** Do you have consent from other people featured in images or in settings such as private homes or health care services? This may be required if you plan to publish, display or share images publicly.⁶⁸



- **Ownership and copyright:** The rights of photographs taken as part of your project ought to be considered and communicated to participants when obtaining consent.^{42,68}
- Balance the child or young person's anonymity and privacy with their preferences for recognition.⁴²

See the [Consent](#) section for considerations around sharing photographs.

Tips for conducting a photo activity



Before beginning: Talk to the child or young person about any limitations to what can be photographed.

Interpreting the photographs should be undertaken with the children and young people who captured them, to ensure their intended meaning is triangulated and understood accurately.

This can be done by:

- 'captioning', whereby children/young people write a short explanation to accompany the image as they are taken⁶⁸
- engaging them in follow-up verbal discussion via interview so that they can explain their images to the researcher⁶⁸
- Consider how to focus on the meaning of the images and what they represent to the photographer regardless of their aesthetic quality.²

By empowering children and young people to capture and interpret their surroundings, photography offers a powerful means of visual storytelling. When done ethically and collaboratively, it can deepen engagement, amplify marginalised voices and stimulate meaningful dialogue and action.

Resources and publications

[Photovoice Toolkit | Centre for Society and Mental Health.](#)

A guide to understanding and applying photovoice, including instructional videos.

[A Practical Guide to Photovoice | Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence.](#)

A step-by-step guide on using photovoice to share stories and drive community change.

[A Beginner's Guide to Photovoice Research | indeemo.](#)

An overview of the photovoice methodology in blog format.

[See It Our Way | BetterEvaluation Resource Library.](#)

A resource for organisations using participatory photography (photovoice) to advocate for marginalised communities.

[A 10-Year Systematic Review of Photovoice Projects With Youth in the United States | Fountain et al. \(2021\).](#)

A comprehensive review of photovoice projects involving young people across the U.S. over a decade.

[A Systematic Methods Review of Photovoice Research with Indigenous Young People | Anderson \(2023\).](#)

An analysis of methodologies used in photovoice research with Indigenous youth.

[How to Involve Young Children in a Photovoice Project. Experiences and Results | Butschi & Hedderich \(2021\).](#)

Insights and findings from experiences engaging young children in photovoice research.

[Whose Voice is It Really? Ethics of Photovoice With Children in Health Promotion | Abma et al \(2022\).](#)

A discussion on ethical considerations when using photovoice with children in health-related research.



[Applying the photovoice method with adolescents in mining areas in rural Mozambique: critical reflections and lessons learned](#) | Cambaco et al. (2024).

Reflections and lessons learned from using photovoice with adolescents in mining communities in Mozambique.

[Better Start Report](#) | Centre for Community Child Health & Better Health Network.

A report exploring the experiences of mothers in high-rise public housing using the photovoice methodology.



Task-oriented and activity-based methods

Task and activity-oriented methods use familiar, interactive activities to engage children and young people. These can include games, crafts, role-play and other play-based or participatory exercises that provide non-traditional ways for children to share ideas or information. They are particularly effective for children under eight years old.

Examples of some activities you may like to consider include:

- games (e.g. physical activity exercises, electronic games)
- role play, pretend play, puppetry
- storytelling e.g. story maps
- using emojis and speech bubbles to illicit participants' feelings.

The benefits of using task-based or activity-based methods

- Activities can provide a fun and engaging pathway for children to connect with the content of your project.^{25,33}
- Activities can be an effective means to focus the child or young person's attention when traditional interview or focus group formats and maintaining eye-contact may not be comfortable for the child or young person.²⁵
- Activities can produce artifacts which provide additional data points not based on verbal output.²⁵
- Activities can provide a springboard for richer discussion in focus groups or in one-on-one interviews.²⁵
- Activities can be adapted to accommodate the age and developmental abilities of different children/young people.²⁵





Keep in mind



- Choose activities based on the child or young person's interests, knowledge, and abilities to ensure engagement and relevance.²⁵
- Engage children and young people in selecting or designing tasks that align with their interests and suit the project.
- You can offer children and young people a range of activities and materials. Letting children and young people choose based on their skills, interests, and abilities, gives them control over their participation.²⁵
- Use skilled facilitators or practice using the methods. Not all facilitators are comfortable or experienced with task-centred or activity-based approaches. If new to these methods, spend time piloting with children and young people before starting the project or research. In this way you will become familiar with the tools themselves, your reactions and the participants' reactions, as well as your own limitations.²⁵

Resources and publications

[Practical Strategies for Engaging Children in a Practice Setting | Emerging Minds.](#)

A resource offering strategies for engaging children through play, creativity, and imagination, including visual arts, storytelling with dolls or puppets, and role play. Task-oriented methods for older children include drawing, painting, photography, and videography.

[Engaging Children in Decision Making: A Guide for Consulting Children | Wyndham City Council.](#)

A guide with task-oriented methods like speech bubbles for drawing ideas, graffiti boards for group discussions, and dot voting to prioritise activities.

[Empowerment and Participation: A Guide for Organisations Working with Children and Young People | Commission for Children and Young People.](#)

A guide with tools, games, and activities to engage and empower children (ages 0-18) in decision-making, including identifying safe and unsafe spaces through discussion, maps, and photography. It provides age-specific activities and guidance on tailoring approaches.

[We Are Here: A Child Participation Toolbox | Pinto et al. \(2020\).](#)

A toolbox featuring task-oriented methods like "Through My Eyes," where children and adults explore their perceptions of each other, "Sculptures of Partnership," where groups identify collaborative roles for adults and children, and a children's rights card game to understand the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



Youth advisory groups

Youth advisory groups offer a structured, ongoing platform where young people can advise, co-create and evaluate projects. This approach can be used to encourage deeper involvement, build trust and ensure a child- and youth-centred environment. They can advise on design, recruitment, communication strategies, data interpretation and dissemination. Youth advisory groups are especially helpful for capturing diverse child or youth perspectives, building trust and ensuring your work remains relevant to their experiences.

The benefits of youth advisory groups

- **Insights into youth needs:** Identify barriers, challenges and interests from a young person's viewpoint.
- **Communication guidance:** Suggest child-friendly or youth-focused language and platforms.
- **Tools and pilot testing:** Review surveys, interview guides or other methods to ensure they are engaging and appropriate.
- **Inclusivity advice:** Propose strategies for involving marginalised or diverse groups of young people.
- **Co-design:** Participate in or even lead workshops or events that shape your research or project outcomes.
- **Dissemination:** Help share findings with peers, community groups or social media networks.



NOTE: In research projects, children or young people can be both participants and advisory group members, but these are separate roles. Research participants provide data for analysis, while advisory members guide the project's direction and process.



Keep in mind

Advisory group recruitment: Refer to the [Reaching out to children and young people](#) section.



Training and upskilling

Providing proper preparation and support for children and young people is essential for ensuring their meaningful participation. Meaningful participation is possible only when those involved have sufficient information, experience, and training to contribute effectively.

Determine whether children and young people require any training or upskilling to perform their roles and responsibilities within the project. Provide training and upskilling prior to commencing the project to ensure full and meaningful involvement, and to reduce any potential risk of harm.¹³

Peer-to-peer training involves engaging children and young people in training their peers. This method provides children and young people with the opportunity to learn from and share knowledge with those of their own age.³⁰

Defining roles, responsibilities and goals

Collaborating with children and young people to define roles, responsibilities and goals helps to develop a sense of ownership and can enhance engagement.

Define and agree upon the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the project from the very start. This helps to manage expectations and avoid potential disappointments about what can be achieved through involvement. Involving children and young people when allocating defining roles and responsibilities (where possible) can also be beneficial.

Facilitators should openly discuss children and young people's goals for their involvement. This helps to align their contributions with their own objectives and what they perceive to be meaningful.

Children and young people have different strengths and capabilities. As such, they each will derive meaning from different types of activities and roles within a project. When defining roles, responsibilities and goals, consider showcasing their strengths while also providing opportunities to grow and develop new strengths.

Coordination and management of advisory groups (ongoing)

This section provides guidance on how to manage an advisory group clearly and effectively. The information is presented for consideration, not in any particular order.

Terms of Reference

- Create a *Terms of Reference* document.
- This document explains the purpose and goals of the advisory group.
- It also describes the roles and responsibilities of each member.



Planning considerations



Advisory group meetings

To ensure effective and collaborative Advisory Group meetings, consider the following:

- **Planning and scheduling meetings**
 - Determine the duration (e.g. 90 mins), frequency (e.g. fortnightly, monthly) and location (in-person, or online) of meetings. This will be dependent on the individual needs of the project.
 - Use tools like Doodle polls or availability tables to find a time that works for members.
 - If meeting online, set up re-occurring calendar invites with meeting links (Zoom, Teams, Webex) and send to all members.
- **Establish and share meeting agendas ahead of each scheduled meeting**
 - Distribute a brief agenda a few days prior to each meeting to allow members to prepare and keep discussions focused.
 - This is a good way to gently remind members that an upcoming meeting is approaching.
 - Consider including any reading material and documents (where relevant).
- **Rotate meeting times if needed**
 - For groups with varied schedules or time zones, consider rotating meeting times occasionally to accommodate everyone's availabilities.
- **Note taking and sharing meeting minutes**
 - Designate someone to take minutes to capture key meeting discussion points, decisions made and any post-meeting and action items required.
 - Share these promptly with all members, particularly those who were absent during the meeting (so they are kept in the loop of where the project is up to).
 - Besides note taking, assign other roles as needed (e.g. timekeeper or facilitator) to ensure meetings run smoothly and everyone has a chance to participate.

Encourage participation and engagement

- Begin each meeting by inviting members to share updates or raise relevant issues.
- Review outstanding tasks and follow up action items from previous meetings to maintain momentum and ensure accountability and progress within the group.
- A Working Together Agreement (WTA) can help foster a collaborative environment, especially for members who are unfamiliar with each other or have not worked together before (see the [Group agreements](#) section for more details).
- It is important to get every member to contribute and agree to the content in the WTA.
- Clarify communication expectations, such as response times to emails and other communications between meetings. This can help keep everyone aligned and ensure timely feedback.
- Acknowledge members' contributions during and outside meetings to encourage ongoing engagement. Consider sending a summary email that highlights members' contributions.

In-person meetings

- Ensure meeting location is accessible to people with physical disabilities e.g. buildings have ramps etc.
- Consider using a creative method of engagement (e.g. [Art based activities](#), [Photography](#), [Task-oriented and activity-based methods](#))



Online meetings

- If appropriate and with everyone's consent, recording meetings may help those who cannot attend in person. Add guidance on whether recordings will be used and how they'll be shared or stored.
- Consider enabling closed captions, for accessibility.
- If using Zoom, there are a [suite of apps](#) (e.g. Miro, Kahoot!, Zoom whiteboard) that can be used to increase engagement and collaboration during team meetings.

Tips for engaging and seeking feedback



If you are meeting online, try encouraging members to use the chat option or breakout rooms. This can help young people who may feel shy or not ready to speak. Give people other ways to join in and share their thoughts.

Flexible approaches to engagement and feedback

- Use different ways to keep everyone engaged (like emails, shared communications channel).
- Allow members to share ideas and ask questions in ways that suit them best.
- Be flexible and open to changes that support group members' needs.
- Provide opportunities for group members to give feedback on the meeting process itself. This could help in fine-tuning the format, length, and timing of meetings as the project progresses.
- Offer opportunities for members who were unable to attend meetings to provide feedback or input outside of meetings, such as through email or using the comments function in shared documents.

If you need feedback on specific documents, consider sharing a live version of the file. This allows multiple members to work on the document simultaneously and see each other's changes in real time, avoiding version control issues with all edits automatically saved. Just be sure to save local copies of different versions of the document as you go, in case you need to review a previous version later.

Resources and publications

[A Guide to Establishing a Children and Young People's Advisory Group | Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People.](#)

A comprehensive Guide from the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People NSW on establishing and running child and youth advisory groups, including a checklist.

[How to write a Terms of Reference for a Project? – Explained with Example | Change Management Insight.](#)

Actionable steps for developing a Terms of Reference.

[Terms of Reference Template | Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.](#)

[Children's voices for change: Co-researching with children and young people as family violence experts by experience | Dimopoulos et al. \(2024\).](#)

Insights to including a Youth Advisory Group in research with young people who have experienced family violence.



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