



Acknowledgements

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Foreword

We are the [Making Participation Work](#) stakeholders' group, and we come together to share our knowledge and our work across England to build a clearer picture of what participation looks like in each region and to share knowledge. The meetings provide an opportunity to share priorities and to support each other to develop as practitioners.

Our approach as a group is to share collective knowledge of participation, engagement, and voice and influence work across England. We have members who work with babies, children and young people, and parent carers. We aim to deliver excellent participation and engagement to ensure that we are improving services that affect them, and that their voices are heard in decisions that matter to them most.

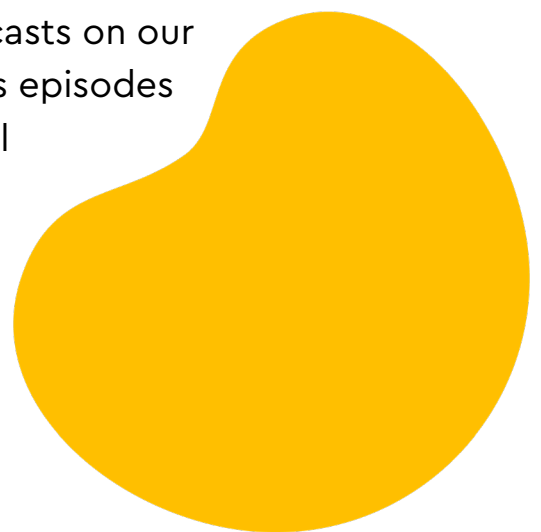
This guide has been developed to support practitioners to understand what good participation and engagement work looks like and includes some useful hints and tips from our experiences. We felt it was important to put this information together into one place so that we could support others in the field to engage effectively with children and young people.

✧ Young person's foreword

We are [FLARE](#), the young people's national advisory group to the Department for Education (DfE), who work together to make a difference and share our views on what is important to us, providing valuable insight by lived experience. We meet in-person and share our views and opinions on a wide range of topics that the DfE would like our views and perspectives on. We also have access to additional opportunities, such as the chance to talk to the Children and Families Ministers, and to deliver workshops to other young people at the annual [Youth Voice Matters Conference](#). FLARE offers disabled young people and those with special educational needs the opportunity to share their views in a safe space, with other young people who understand and respect their views.

Being a member of FLARE allows you the opportunity to learn new skills, such as teamwork, friendship, collaboration, and mutual respect. The opportunities that FLARE presents are unlimited, with the opportunity to write blogs for the [Council for Disabled Children](#)'s website, as well as the opportunity to record, prepare, and deliver podcasts on our highly successful podcast platform, with previous episodes highlighting important topics such as the General Election and the impact of the COVID pandemic on young people, to name a few.

As a member of FLARE over the past four years, I have had the privilege to take part in a lot of opportunities I would never have seen myself doing if it wasn't for the group, such as delivering workshops at the 2023 and 2024



Youth Voice Matters Conferences held in Manchester and Birmingham. I have also had the privilege to meet with two Children and Families Ministers, and delivered speeches to them based on my experiences, highlighting the importance of change. I have also had the opportunity to experience recording and delivering a podcast episode about my experiences during the COVID pandemic, and the impact on my education as a result. I have written many blogs for the Council for Disabled Children's website, on topics such as setting up my own autism advocacy group in my local area, leading a workshop at the Youth Voice Matters Conference, and reporting about the Youth Voice Matters Conference 2023. Throughout this time, I have been extremely fortunate to build knowledge around self-advocacy, what good co-production looks like, why it is vital to involve children and young people in decisions that affect them, and how this can be made possible.

Engaging with children and young people in decisions that affect them is absolutely vital. The key thing to remember is that the decisions you make now, will affect them in their future, in their today, in their world, and will leave a significant impact. They hold valuable opinions and should have the opportunity to share these in a safe space and in a way that works for them. They should have the right to share these with the people who work with them, and – when this is done in the right way – this can have the most significant impact on young people.

Jacob, FLARE member

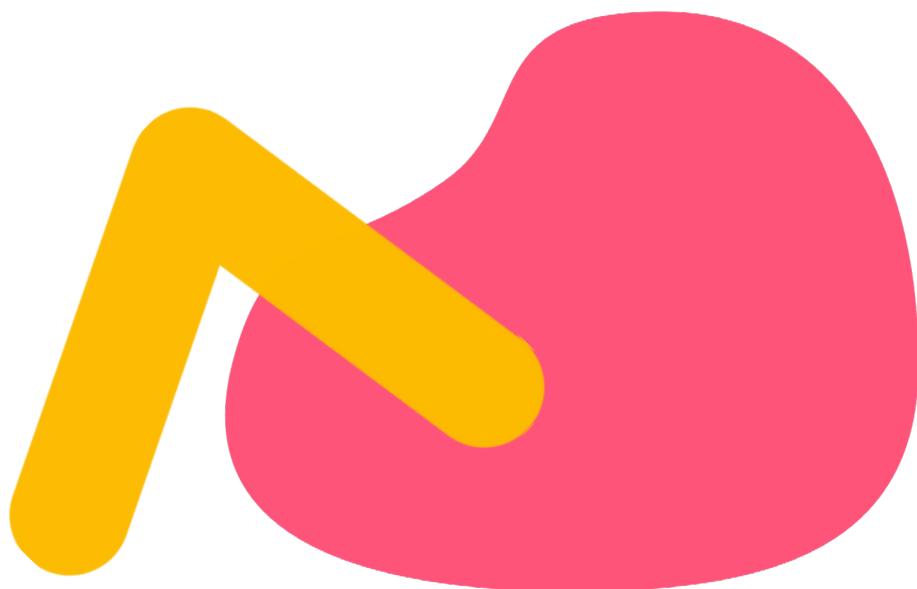
✧ What's in the Guide?

This resource is designed to give you information, hints and tips, and practical suggestions to enable you to engage positively with children and young people in the work that you do.

The resource has been created by the [Council for Disabled Children](#) with input from our Making Participation Work stakeholders group. Our stakeholders group is made up of professionals and practitioners working across children's health, education and social care whose roles focus on participation and engagement. This guide is not designed to introduce any new concepts, but instead brings together existing information in a single, accessible resource.

The Council for Disabled Children, in partnership with Kids, has been commissioned to lead this national participation programme for disabled children, young people, and those with special educational needs.

You can find out more about Making Participation Work [here](#) and learn more about the work Kids does [here](#).



✧ Understanding good engagement

Why is engagement important?

"If you want to know how well a pair of shoes fit you ask the person wearing them, not the person who made them, or who paid for them." — Malcom X

At the Council for Disabled Children, our work is underpinned by human rights as set out by the United Nations. **Article 12** of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which states that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

Article 13 states that the child shall have the right to freedom of expression: this right shall include the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Finally, **Article 23** states that children who have any kind of disability should have special care and support so that they can lead full and independent lives, as far as possible, and to play an active part in their community.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was established to protect and promote the rights and dignity of disabled people.

Article 7 of this states that parties to the convention shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realise that right.

Terminology

For the purpose of this document, we have chosen to use the term 'engagement' in its broadest sense, as there are various types of engagement and participation, along with different terminology used when referring to working with children and young people to support their input in decision-making at the individual, service/operational, and strategic levels.

In this context, we believe that engagement refers to the processes and methods of empowering young people to recognize their right to participate in decision-making and the benefits of doing so, while also providing them with the necessary skills and tools.

We have highlighted some common engagement terminology that you might be familiar with. It is important to note that there are no specific or universally agreed-upon definitions of engagement in decision-making with children and young people, but we believe these are the most

commonly used definitions.

Participation

When children and young people are asked for their views routinely or over a period of time which are taken into account when decisions are made.

Co-production

Children and young people work with us as equal partners in every stage of a project or service journey, including design, planning, delivery and evaluation.

Co-design

Children and young people work with us as equal partners to define a problem and then define tangible solutions that can be delivered.

Consultation

Children and young people are asked for their views at specific points during a project or service journey, which are taken into account when decisions are made.

Models of participation

We would always advocate for those who engage in decision-making with children and young people to adopt the **Lundy Model** of Participation, which has the values of participation and Article 12 of the UNCRC at its core. We use this model to sense check all our participation work, ensuring that our engagement with children and young people is meaningful and effective, and that the right decision-makers are hearing what children and young people are advising.

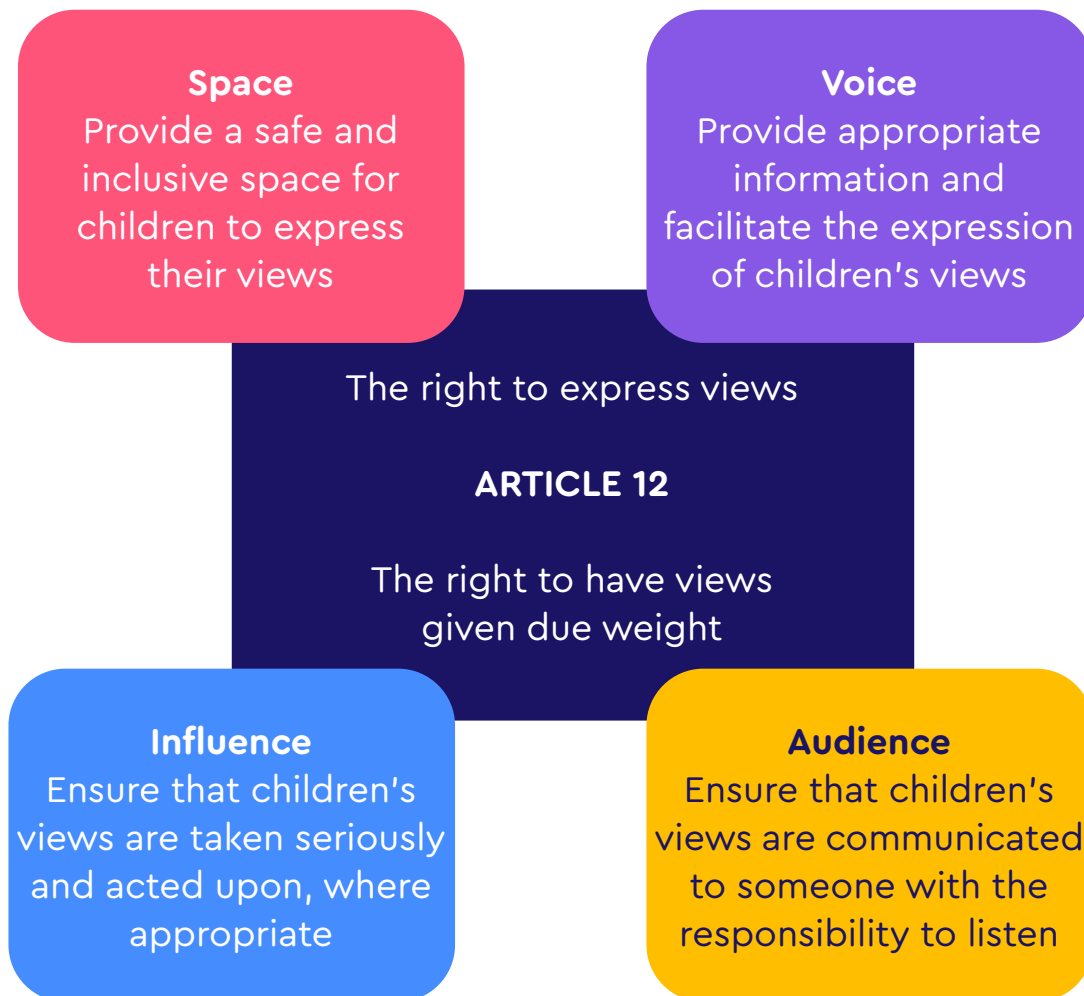
The Lundy Model of Participation is a practical framework that supports meaningful engagement with children and young people in decision-making processes. Developed by Professor Laura Lundy, the model highlights four key elements – Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence – that help ensure participation is

both genuine and impactful. It encourages practitioners to create safe, inclusive

environments (Space) where young people feel empowered to express their views (Voice), ensures those views are actively listened to by the right people (Audience), and most importantly, that they are taken seriously and acted upon (Influence). This model is widely used across education, youth work, and policy contexts, and provides a solid foundation for rights-based practice rooted in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



This model illustrates how the implementation of Article 12 requires consideration of the four interrelated elements set out in the Lundy model:



"The Lundy model has been adopted by national and international organisations and governments to inform their understanding of children's right to have their views sought and given due weight in decision-making, generating a sea-change in global understanding of child participation for policy and practice." — Queen's University Belfast, 2019

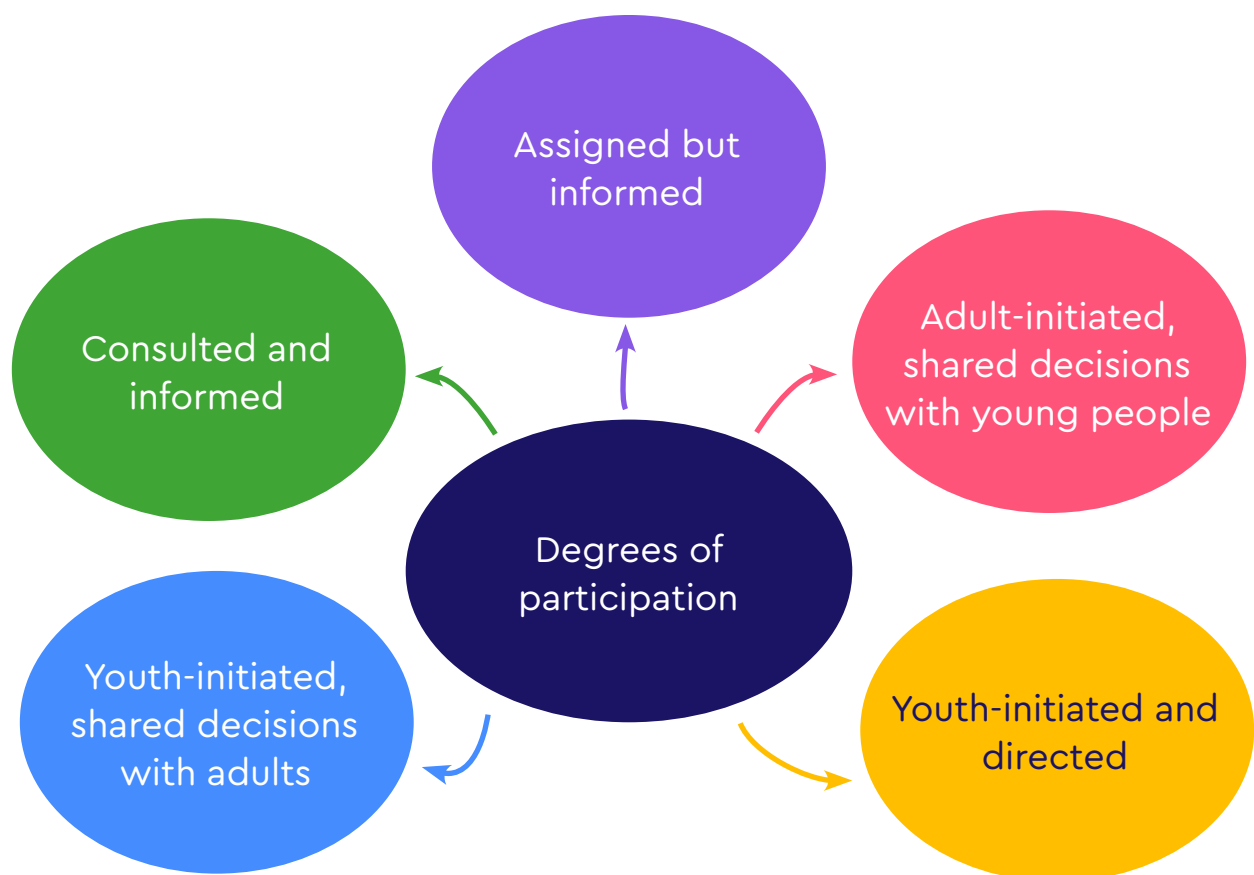
If the Lundy model underpins children and young people's right to engage in decision-making, the **Treseder Model of**

Degrees of Participation is an effective sense-check for the 'how to' of engagement.

This model defines the different forms that engagement can take depending on the level of authority and agency children and young people have within the project or

work, and from what point they are engaged in it.

As organisations, we use all of these; they are all equally valuable, but it is about finding the most appropriate method of engagement for the project or programme. The most important thing to remember is, whichever degree of engagement you choose to use, it must meaningfully fully include children and young people.



Some members of the stakeholder group use the **Slay and Penny** model to embed good participation and engagement practice. This model outlines six key principles to achieve co-production:

1. Recognising people as assets
2. Building on people's existing capabilities
3. Mutuality and reciprocity
4. Strengthening peer support

networks

5. Breaking down barriers
6. Facilitating rather than delivering

Slay, Penny (2014) state that "Co-production is a relationship where professionals and citizens share power to design, plan and deliver support together, recognising that both partners have vital contributions to make to improve quality of life for people and communities".

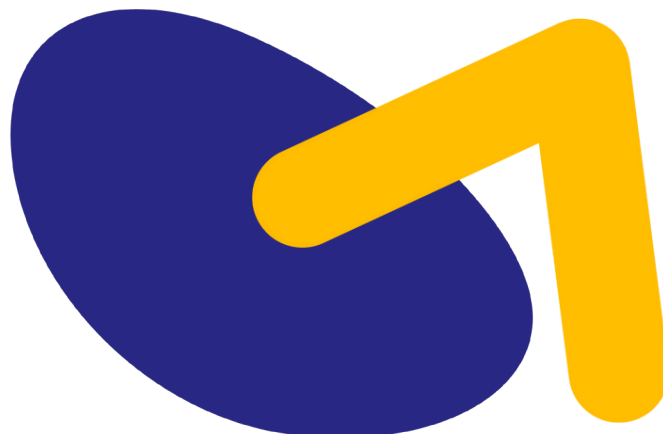


Foundations of successful engagement

To create successful engagement, we believe that participation needs to be meaningful, strategic, inclusive, embedded and sustainable. Here are some ideas of what we mean by this and what it looks like.

	What it means	What it looks like
Meaningful	In meaningful participation, every question we ask young people has a purpose and there is a clear plan for how their contributions will be used. We don't ask children and young people what they think for the sake of it.	→ Children and young people understand their role, see the relevance of their contributions and know how their contributions will be used.
Strategic	Being involved in strategic participation means that children and young people have an influence on not only their own lives but on the lives of other children and young people by being involved in changing the actual services, not just their own immediate experiences.	→ Children and young people are involved in decision making about the planning, operation, and delivery of the services they rely on. → The involvement of children and young people in these services is built into long term planning.
Inclusive	Inclusive participation work includes and amplifies a diverse range of voices. Participants, their individual characteristics and experiences are valued. Inclusive participation is also about providing a safe space for children and young people to question and challenge existing structures.	→ A diverse range of voices are involved in decision making. → Participations can contribute to in diverse and flexible ways depending on their individual needs and preferences. → Children and young people feel comfortable in the space and are supported to share their views and experiences.

	What it means	What it looks like
Embedded	When participation and co-production become embedded in our work, it is an integral and ongoing part of our processes, systems and practices. There is a continuous cycle of co-production it is not just one moment.	<p>→ Participation work is built into medium and long-term planning.</p> <p>→ There are well-understood practises and processes for engaging children and young people in organisational work, and these are implemented across the organisation.</p>
Sustainable	The more embedded it is in your standard practice the more sustainable it will be as it becomes the natural way of working. Participation and co-production work must be manageable: if it is too complicated it won't make sense to staff or to children and young people. Work must also be consistently evaluated to make sure outcomes are being met and that we have the evidence to back this up.	<p>→ The aims and outcomes of participation and co-production work are easily explainable to all stakeholders, including children and young people.</p> <p>→ All stakeholders understand the purpose and value of the work and want it to continue.</p> <p>→ The value of the work is made clear through robust and consistent evaluation processes.</p>



Engagement

Recognition, reward and development

Recognition

An essential part of voice and influence work is how we say 'thank you' to the children and young people who have taken the time to work with us. There are different ways in which you can do this.

Remuneration

By the nature of the work we do, most of the children and young people we work with are 'experts by experience' – we want them to share their experience-based views and opinions so we can improve the lives of all children and young people.

Being able to pay children and young people allows us to acknowledge the skills of the people that we consult and engage with, in the same way that we would do for adults. This is a way of thinking that has been more widely adopted across the sector, both

with organisations and funders.

When we work with children and young people, we are mindful that they are experts by lived experience. You can recognise this through giving vouchers or payment to children and young people when they engage in work with you.

At CDC, for advisory group meetings, we pay based on the length of the meeting at the National Living Wage for the young people.

Upskilling

At CDC, we focus on the value of upskilling our young people whilst working with them, as a means of recognising and rewarding their commitment. This can include various sessions such as understanding the general election,

careers advice, CV writing, chairing events, and presentation skills. This can take place in the form of sessions during advisory groups, sessions sent to wider engagement networks for their group leaders to use, or through active involvement in opportunities. Prior to events, we will host pre-event briefings and help children and young people build their confidence in things like presenting and chairing.

Evidencing

Evidencing the work of children and young people can be done in a variety of ways. One way this can be done is through records of achievement. This can be a certificate or ongoing document that records all the skills and knowledge young people have gained through their work with us. It helps children and young people to understand the skills and development journey they have been through.

Accreditation

Accreditations are another way in which we can support

children and young people to use their engagement work for qualifications. For example, evidencing young people's work for [Duke of Edinburgh](#) accreditations.

Here are some accreditation programmes that may fit into your work:

- [Prince's Trust Education Hub](#)
- [Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network](#)

Removing barriers to engagement

There may be many reasons why children and young people feel unable to engage in decision-making. The number of barriers children and young people encounter can be intersectional, and we know that for disabled children and young people, and for children and young people with special educational needs, the barriers increase significantly.

Some of the barriers children and young people encounter can be mitigated with some forethought

and investment from organisations. This includes:

Digital poverty

Support to access hardware and data, enabling attendance at online meetings, access materials to prepare for discussion topics, and create content for our social media and website. Vodafone offer [free mobile connectivity to charities](#) to help tackle digital exclusion.

Skill Gaps

Sessions should include various ways for young people to contribute and should be adapted to meet support needs. You could use a mixed methodology incorporating a range of group sizes, verbal discussion, apps, mixed media activities, written work, and play-based tasks.

Travel anxiety

Support to plan convenient routes, involving children and young people in the planning, ensuring they are kept up to date with disruptions. Where needed you could pay for a friend/ family as a travel companion, ensuring support enroute.

Financial hardship/constraints

Lack of funds is one of the biggest barriers to participating in advisory board opportunities. You can purchase travel and hotel accommodation upfront, eliminating financial burden. At CDC, wherever possible, we cover travel and accommodation costs and pay for these upfront. We also recommend that you provide appropriate lunch in line with any dietary/medical needs.

Financial loss

Many children and young people need part time jobs, preventing them from participation in the same way as others. CDC remunerates all young people for their participation, treating children and young people and professionals alike.

Health needs

We recommend working to understand any physical, sensory, dietary, neurodiversity, or mental health support needs of participants, using the knowledge to plan accessible and inclusive sessions.

Pressures on time

Children and young people lead very busy lives; it is important to recognise the range of demands on their time by planning meetings and engagement work at conveniently identified times.

Understanding commitment

Ensure that prior to engagement, children and young people are aware of what they are committing to, what it entails and are reminded of informed decision making.

Minimum standards of good engagement

As participation and engagement practitioners we often speak to children and young people about what 'good' participation looks like. We've taken these conversations and summarised what children and young people have told us into a concise checklist (*please see on next page*).



Good participation checklist

Put children and young people's voices at the centre

Build a supportive environment by:

Normalising support needs

Building trust through honesty, respecting children's needs and wishes, and taking action to make improvements

Being flexible

Reviewing practices

Address barriers to participation where possible by:

Ensuring children are aware it's their right to participate and support them to develop a meaningful role in participation

Creating space for participation through structures which report and respond to children's opinions and ideas

Facilitating children's engagement through convenient venues and timings, access to transport, and flexible methods for input

Upskilling children and providing accessible information on the context and purpose of work

Taking access needs into consideration

Deliver engaging and accessible opportunities for engagement by:

Efficiently managing meeting logistics

Treating everyone as equal and being aware of power dynamics

Being open-minded and receptive to criticism

Establish an effective feedback loop

Resources for Making Participation Work

- [Factsheet #4: Barriers to Participation](#)
- [Factsheet #5: Involving Children and Young People in Formal Meetings](#)
- [Factsheet #6: Developing a Supportive Environment](#)
- [Participation Strategy Exemplar](#)
- [Factsheet #3: The Participation Process](#)



Communication

There are lots of different methods and forums available to facilitate communication between us and the young people we are engaging with. The way we approach this will depend on:

The **access needs of the individual young people** we are working with. For example, phone calls might be more accessible than emails or texts, or vice versa.

The **content and scope of the project**. For example, more complex piece of work might require more accessible information to be produced, and a longer-term project could mean establishing a plan for facilitating communication throughout.

As well as reflecting on how we

communicate with children and young people, it is also important to consider how these young people can share their voices and opinions. This can apply in focus groups or advisory group meetings, where, as facilitators we need to support the participants to share their ideas. The ways to most effectively and inclusively do this will depend on the access needs of each participant, as well as the scope and the content of the project.

Some ways you might choose to do this are:

- By offering a combination of visual, verbal, non-verbal, and written communication options.

- Providing the option to receive information about the session in advance to support participants to prepare beforehand.
- Making use of digital tools if the meeting is online, or if the meeting is in-person, making use of face-to-face methods.

Outside of the focus or advisory group context, you may consider providing a platform for children and young people to communicate with a wider audience, such as other young people, professionals, or decision-makers.

This could include:

- Delivering young person-led or co-delivered training or workshops at events.
- Producing social media content, such as a campaign on a specific issue.
- Designing resources to share their expertise.
- Producing digital communications, such as a podcast series or blogs.

Digital vs face-to-face

Digital engagement has become

much more popular in recent years, both with organisations and children and young people. Both approaches to engagement can have significant benefits, and there may be individual children and young people who will benefit more from one over the other. However, the approaches can differ significantly, in terms of provision, preparation, delivery, and safeguarding.

Delivery considerations

Types of activities

If you are running online sessions, services such as Mentimeter, digital whiteboards, Canva and Miro can be excellent tools to engage children and young people. However, it is important to know what kind of device young people are joining the meeting on as they may not be able to access the activities if they are using their phone.

The structure of engagement sessions

For both digital and face-to-face engagement sessions, there are a few structural tips to help plan your

sessions. It is important to leave time at the start of a session to allow for arrivals and leave space to sort out any digital issues that you may encounter.

Welcome, introduction and ground rules help to establish a safe space for the session and encourage young people to respect each other with some simple rules.

We also like to include an icebreaker at the start of the session. It is important to schedule in breaks and share the schedule ahead of the day so that young people can know what to expect. At the end of the session, it is important to share what the next steps are and how their voices will be used, as well as complete session evaluations, and distribute/ arrange vouchers if you are remunerating the young people for their time.

Risk assessments and safeguarding

For both types of engagement sessions, you will need to have risk assessments and safeguarding procedures in place. You will also need to ensure adequate ratio of staff to CYP and at least one will

need an enhanced DBS.

For online sessions, you will need to consider the following:

- Checking platform to see if young people can privately message each other or adults directly and disabling this option
- Ensuring young people and other visitors do not have permission to end the meeting
- Ensuring a second adult is present to be a co-host and to support if a young person needs support in a breakout room
- A member of staff to monitor the chat and remove any inappropriate comments or untrusted external links
- Ensuring young people are dressed appropriately, in a quiet space and preferably not in a bedroom
- If you are using any software to caption or transcribe the meeting, you need to be aware of the privacy implications and where this information is being stored after the meeting.

For in-person sessions, you will need to consider the following:

- The nearest emergency services locations e.g. the nearest hospital and local police station
- First-aid trained staff
- Accessibility of the building
- What is going on in the local area, e.g. are any protests planned
- A safe space to eat lunch
- Dietary and medical requirements of the children and young people attending.

For both in-person and online sessions, you will need to consider the following:

- You need to be mindful to only store the data that is necessary for the session to ensure privacy and data protection.

Using physical vs digital space

It is important when planning meetings to consider what space you will need. For in-person meetings, it is helpful to have a quiet room for children and young people to access if they need some space from a meeting. This can also

be done by using breakout rooms in online meetings.

For in-person meetings, it is important to check that the venue is accessible and meets the needs of the young people you are working with. For example, you can check in advance if the lifts are big enough for wheelchair users and if they have suitable accessible toilets.

Cohesion and belonging

Fostering a sense of belonging in meetings is essential to make children and young people feel safe and comfortable sharing their views. Ensuring that your meeting is inclusive and accessible will help to foster this feeling of belonging.

We recommend sending agendas and topic guides in advance to ensure that young people are prepared, aware of what topics will be covered, and have the option to ask questions in advance.

We also use things like icebreakers and energisers in both online and in-person meetings to build relationships and understanding of each other's communication styles.

Sense of community

Being together in-person can foster a sense of belonging and community to build and foster relationships as a group.

Social Interaction

Can be great for making in-person friendships but can be difficult for more introverted people to navigate.

Face-to-face Engagement

Body Language

In-person meetings allow children and young people to observe and interpret body language more accurately, helping them develop social and emotional understanding.

Activities

In-person meetings allow for movement, additional space and more options of different activities.

Finance

Saving on venue costs and travel, but you may need to buy licenses for platforms and associated apps.

Feedback

Young people can use the chat to type their comments if they are not feeling confident to speak. There are also different platforms where young people can add their views anonymously.

Time

Having meetings online allows for less time travelling to and from venues.

Digital Engagement

Geographical locations

Using digital communication can be beneficial to bring together people from across the country.

Stores feedback instantly

Using technology, it can be easier to capture all the comments said in an online meeting and store data instantly.

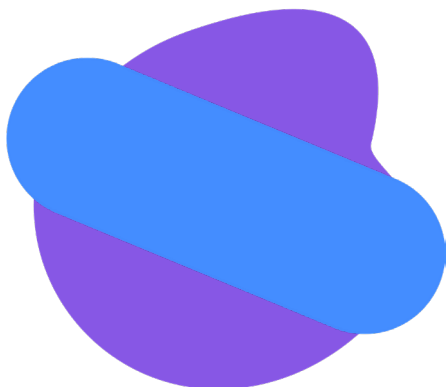
✧ Impact of good engagement

Case studies

The National Youth Voice Matters Conference

[Youth Voice Matters](#) is a conference that offers children and young people a safe space to develop their confidence, participation and advocacy skills by workshopping and presenting to other young people, charity leaders and decision makers.

Our workshops are designed and delivered by and for children and young people on various topics, from using social media for awareness-raising, to guidance on how to request the right support and adjustments at school, cascading their experience and knowledge. The conference also offers skills-building opportunities such as to be a volunteer reporter, on-the-day.



Making Ourselves Heard

[Making Ourselves Heard \(MOH\)](#) is CDC's national network, working to ensure that disabled children's right to be heard becomes a reality. We offer training opportunities that equip disabled children and young people to train and advise practitioners and policymakers on ways to make decision-making in local services more inclusive.

Our inclusion activities have included helping practitioners implement new SEND reforms, promoting effective practices to reduce bullying of children with SEND, and interactive training sessions & toolkits through the [Your Rights, Your Future](#) toolkit.

Our Turn to Talk podcast

[Our Turn to Talk](#) is our youth-led podcast: interviewing inspiring young changemakers, to talk about their lived experiences and catalyse and enthuse change for countless children and young people across the UK. Our latest episodes have focused on urgent priorities of

children and young people, such as: **Signposting**

- Autism and friendships
- Support for CYP with SEND
- Education, Health, and Care Plans
- Child poverty
- Accessing mental health services
- Social media and beauty standards

There are lots of other toolkits and guides to support participation, these are just some of the ones we have most recently found and used.

- [Young Minds – Supporting the participation of children and young people experiencing extra vulnerabilities](#)
- [Mind – The Influence and Participation Toolkit](#)
- [UNICEF UK - Tools and Resources](#)



UNITED FOR A BETTER CHILDHOOD

The **Council for Disabled Children** is part of the National Children's Bureau family. We are the umbrella body for the disabled children's sector with a membership of over 300 voluntary and community organisations and an active network of practitioners that spans education, health and social care.



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