

Ethical Issues to consider for research or consultation with children and young people

Confidentiality

Children have a right to privacy and confidentiality, but in the context of child protection. This needs to be clear from the start.

Consent

Informed consent is the ideal but to exclude children who are unable to understand denies the right to be heard to the most vulnerable people. People who cannot consent can be involved by assent i.e. when they voluntarily take part in an activity or by being observed in their natural environment.

Where children cannot give informed consent, parental consent should be gained.

Children from around the age of 12 are considered to be able to give informed consent, however younger children may have sufficient understanding, and some older children may not.

Expectations

Expectations should be managed from the start, children should know what may or may not change from their involvement.

Exploitation

Children should not be used to advance the cause of others if they have no understanding of the issues and will not gain personally. (Such as toddlers carrying petitions).

Rights

Everyone (from a new baby to someone with profound and complex needs) can express themselves in some way. Every child has the right to be 'heard' in decisions which affect them, with due weight being given in accordance to age and maturity. (Article 12 UNCRC 1989)

Representational

While no one can represent another person's view point, if whole groups of children are under-represented you will not have a full picture. Groups should be approximately representational of the target population in terms of gender, age, ability, culture and socio-economic status.

Value

Payment can be coercive especially for children who may be keen to please to 'earn' their reward. However, children's contribution should be valued through offering a good venue, snacks, activities, materials etc.

Variety

A range of methods of expression need to be offered to children as language/literacy should not be a barrier.

A range of activities should be offered, children's contribution is voluntary and should be fun and interesting to the individuals taking part.

Finishing

Children and young people should see the final report/policy/evaluation/plan as a draft to ensure they are happy their views have been accurately represented.

Feedback

Feedback to children should always include thanks for their contribution, sight of any final report, hard information about what will change as a result of their contribution and how this will be reviewed.