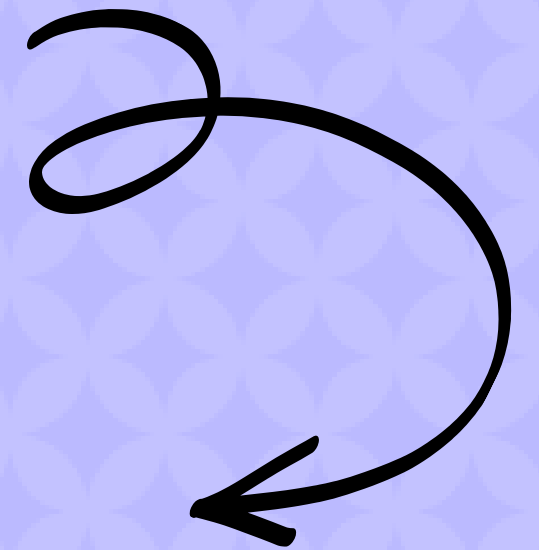
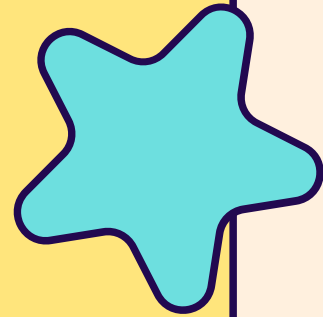




Participation Tips

for the workforce



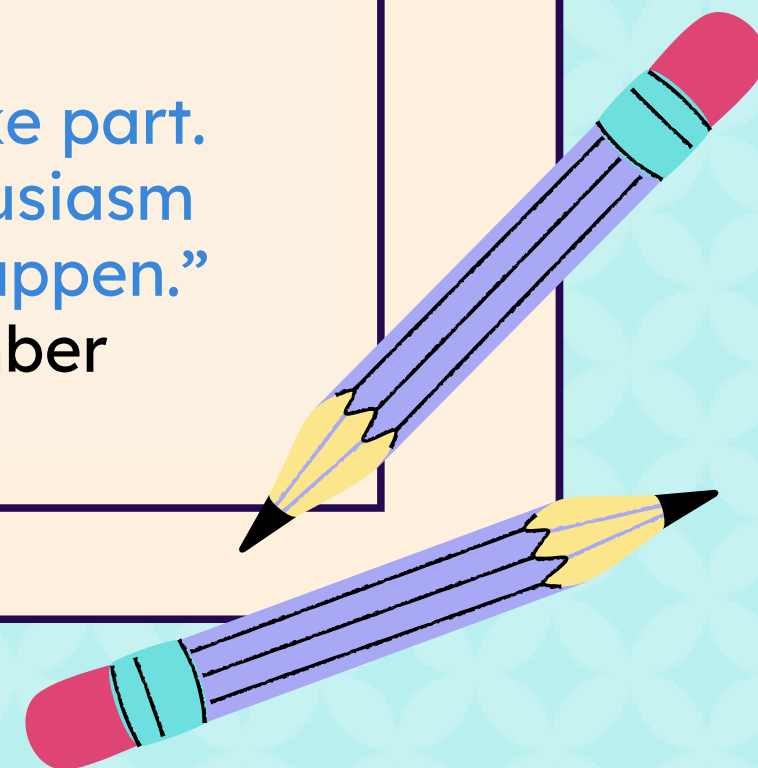
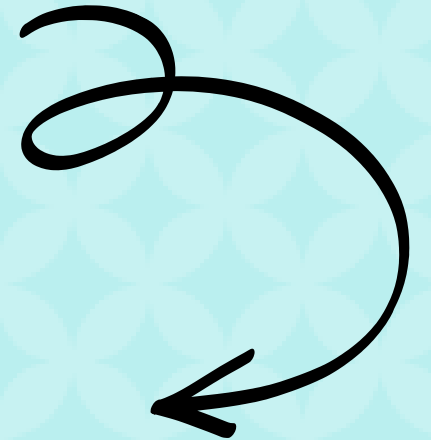
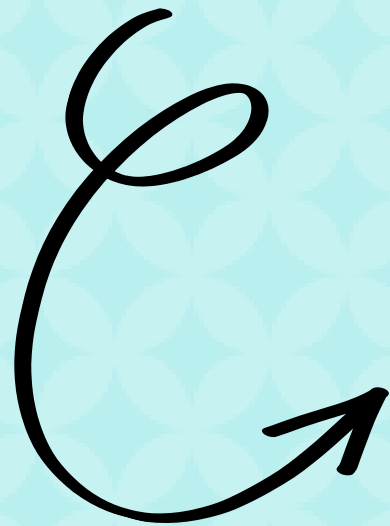


Introduction

These participation tips were co-produced by the Children and Families Panel of the Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework project team to provide ideas on how to effectively engage with children and young people to seek their views. We asked children and young people what they needed from adults to allow them to freely give their views and opinions on all matters that affect their lives.

**"We need more opportunities to take part.
We have so much energy and enthusiasm
and we want to make cool things happen."**

Children and Families Panel member



How can I actively listen to children and young people?



“When adults don’t listen to me, I feel worthless and like I don’t matter.”
Children and Families Panel member

- Create space and time to give your full attention to the children and young people talking to you — switch all phones off.
- Make sure you are not distracted by other demands — make it explicitly clear that the children and young people are your priority during this period.
- Be mindful of your body language, your volume and your tone when talking to children and young people.

How can I actively listen to children and young people?



“When adults don’t listen to me, I feel worthless and like I don’t matter.”
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- Ensure you are picking up on non-verbal communication — body language, facial expressions, gestures.
- Listen carefully and avoid interrupting children and young people.
- Repeat back to children and young people what they have said to check that you have fully understood what they want to express.

How can I ensure that I treat children and young people with respect?



“Don’t tower over us and don’t shout at us.”
Children and Families Panel member

- Be aware of any preconceptions you might have of children and young people/an individual child.
- Engage with children and young people as capable individuals with valid opinions and their own life experiences — do not make assumptions.
- Communicate with children and young people the same way you would speak to another adult, be polite but not patronising.

How can I ensure that I treat children and young people with respect?



“Don’t tower over us and don’t shout at us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Using first names removes a barrier standing between adults and children and young people. It shifts the power balance away from adults, conveying that we are all equal.
- Make it clear that you are exploring things together. Simply using the word “we” conveys that you are all on an equal footing and all in the discussion together.

How can I ensure that I treat children and young people with respect?



“Don’t tower over us and don’t shout at us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Explicitly tell children and young people how important their voices are and that their life experiences and ideas can help improve things.
- Ensure that you get back to them to provide child friendly feedback on what happened as a result of their engagement. This can be done in person, by video or short email updates.
- When it is not possible to accommodate children and young people’s requests, always explain the reason.

How can I provide a safe space where children and young people feel comfortable?



“Get down to my level and don’t talk down to me.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Create or find an environment that is safe, comfortable and quiet – somewhere without disruption where children and young people can talk freely.
- Is the room setting appropriate? Traditional board room or meeting room styles are usually not best suited for engagement with children and young people.
- Check in with children and young people whether they feel comfortable and at ease.

How can I provide a safe space where children and young people feel comfortable?



“Get down to my level and don’t talk down to me.”

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- Think about ways you can make sure everyone feels on an equal footing within the space — sitting in a circle and at the same level is a good start.
- Avoid positioning yourself as someone presenting to an audience.
- Make it clear it is okay for children and young people to be accompanied by a trusted adult. There may also be times when having a friend or sibling with them is appropriate and helpful for a child.

How can I ensure that activities meet individual needs and provide opportunities for children and young people to express themselves in a variety of ways?



“You need to feel included to participate with adults, and see the person is interested in you and your opinions matter.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Think carefully about what activities will engage individual children and young people in your group, and what they need to express themselves. Consider all needs e.g. reasonable adjustments for disabled children and young people, varied learning methods and support for quieter children.
- Be mindful of any possible additional support required, which may not always be obvious. You may get this information from the child’s teachers, parents or carers, or the children and young people may volunteer information themselves.

How can I ensure that activities meet individual needs and provide opportunities for children and young people to express themselves in a variety of ways?



“You need to feel included to participate with adults, and see the person is interested in you and your opinions matter.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Some children and young people may not have formal diagnoses of specific learning difficulties, but they may find certain tasks challenging. Ask the children and young people if they need any help such as for you to read or write anything for them.
- Children and young people often prefer to have another child do this for them.
- English might not be the child’s first language. Interpreters, including British Sign Language practitioners, might be required.

How can I ensure that activities meet individual needs and provide opportunities for children and young people to express themselves in a variety of ways?



“You need to feel included to participate with adults, and see the person is interested in you and your opinions matter.”
Children and Families Panel member

- Make your engagement activities accessible by using a combination of methods. Not all children and young people prefer to share their ideas in writing.
- Is the information you are sharing with children and young people also accessible and age appropriate? Check everything is in plain English, do not use jargon or abbreviations, use non-discriminatory language, and use pictures to explain complex concepts.

How can I ensure that activities meet individual needs and provide opportunities for children and young people to express themselves in a variety of ways?



“You need to feel included to participate with adults, and see the person is interested in you and your opinions matter.”
Children and Families Panel member

- Explain things calmly and check that children and young people have understood your questions, don't assume.
- Allow adequate time for children and young people to respond and to ask their own questions.
- Ask children and young people for feedback to check that you are addressing their individual needs.

How can I make engagement fun, innovative and inspiring?



“Don’t be so serious. Be creative, fun, a bit goofy. Lighten up and have a laugh with us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Begin all engagement sessions with a check in and introduction and/or personal news sharing.
- Involve children and young people in planning sessions — they have the best ideas.
- Factor in enough time for relationships to develop.
- Ask children and young people about their interests and what a fun activity means to them. What skills could individual children and young people share with the group? Could one of them lead on an activity?

How can I make engagement fun, innovative and inspiring?



“Don’t be so serious. Be creative, fun, a bit goofy. Lighten up and have a laugh with us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Use creative art activities as you chat to let conversations flow.
- Think about playdough and clay models for children and young people who find it hard to use pens or pencils to express their views.
- Give children and young people space when they need it - sometimes this means not saying anything.
- Model positive and fun behaviour. Children and young people said that they wished adults would be more enthusiastic.

How can I make engagement fun, innovative and inspiring?



“Don’t be so serious. Be creative, fun, a bit goofy. Lighten up and have a laugh with us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Make it relevant — children and young people (and adults) are more motivated when they understand how and why an issue affects them or others.
- Be patient if children and young people digress or lose focus slightly. Be prepared to be flexible and build in breaks and games. Let children and young people have time out.
- Be innovative and adaptable — be prepared to rip up your plans and try something different if things aren’t working.

How can I make engagement fun,
innovative and inspiring?



“Don’t be so serious. Be creative, fun,
a bit goofy. Lighten up and have a
laugh with us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Think carefully about the timing of engagement. If children and young people are tired or have been stuck at a desk for hours they may feel too tired to engage. Is it possible to get outdoors? Could you start with a physical game?
- The ideal time for engagement during the school day is the session after break and before lunch, as children and young people will have been outside for exercise and a snack and will be better able to focus.

How can I make engagement fun, innovative and inspiring?



“Don’t be so serious. Be creative, fun, a bit goofy. Lighten up and have a laugh with us.”

Children and Families Panel member

- Get in touch with your inner child and discuss your own childhood — this shows empathy and helps children and young people see you as an equal.
- Regularly reflect on your practice and seek feedback from children and young people at the end of sessions with three quick questions:
 - What worked today?
 - What didn’t work?
 - What would have made it more fun?
- When children and young people feel engaged and involved, they are much more likely to participate meaningfully.

How can I ensure that children and young people's privacy is respected and be mindful of wider issues in their lives?



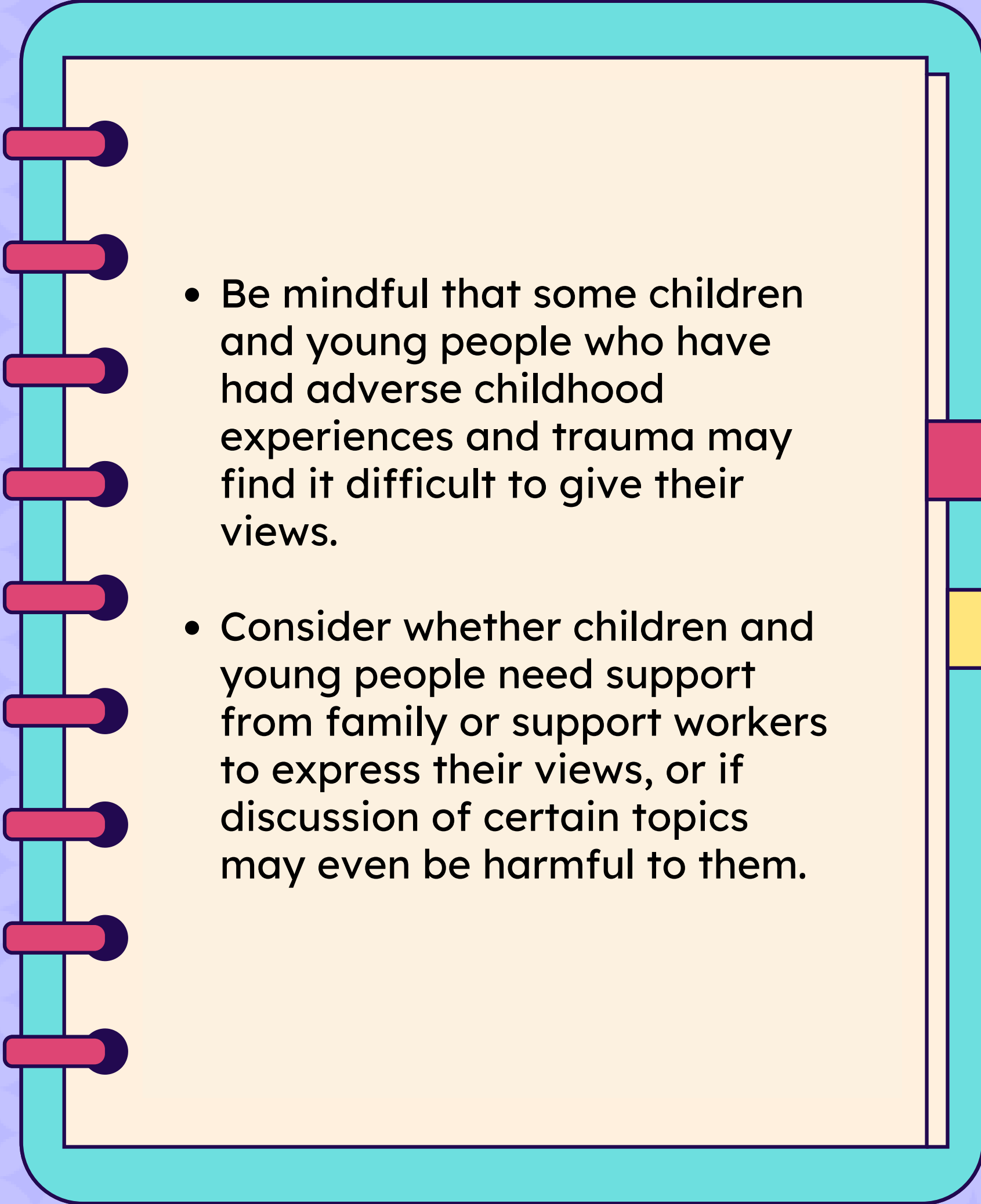
“If we don't want to talk about stuff, just leave it. There might be some things we don't feel comfortable telling you.”
Children and Families Panel member

- Do not make assumptions if children and young people are not participating fully or as you would have hoped.
- Understand that there are other things going on in children and young people's wider lives. They may have worries at home, in school or elsewhere that make giving their views difficult.
- Ensure that children and young people know that participation is always voluntary, and that they can decide to stop participating at any time.

How can I ensure that children and young people's privacy is respected and be mindful of wider issues in their lives?



“If we don’t want to talk about stuff, just leave it. There might be some things we don’t feel comfortable telling you.”
Children and Families Panel member

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- A spiral-bound notebook with a teal cover and pink rings. The notebook is open to a blank page with a light beige background. On the right side of the page, there are two yellow tabs. The text is written on the page in a black, sans-serif font.
- Be mindful that some children and young people who have had adverse childhood experiences and trauma may find it difficult to give their views.
 - Consider whether children and young people need support from family or support workers to express their views, or if discussion of certain topics may even be harmful to them.

How can I ensure that children and young people's privacy is respected and be mindful of wider issues in their lives?



“If we don't want to talk about stuff, just leave it. There might be some things we don't feel comfortable telling you.”
Children and Families Panel member

- Some children and young people may not want to join in individual conversations but may still want to be involved in wider participation.
- Ensure there is a space for such children and young people to have time out and then rejoin the group when they feel comfortable.
- A mindful colouring table or chill out area with bean bags works well.

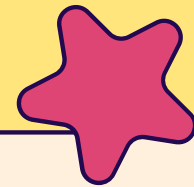
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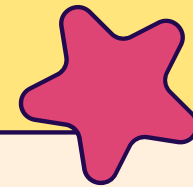
- Ensure there are opportunities for children and young people to speak to you away from the group.
- This allows them to tell you privately if there are barriers to their participation, or to let you know of any reasons that they may feel unable to discuss certain subjects.

Following participation



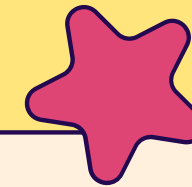
Explain

If you are unable to use the things that children and young people tell you to make positive changes, ensure that you tell them the reasons why.



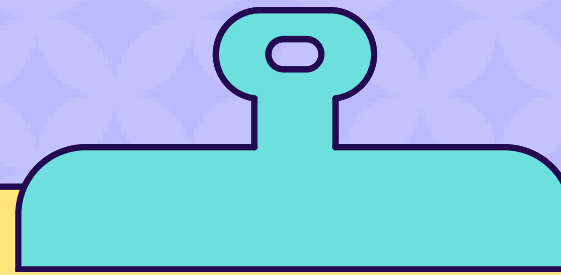
Feedback

Ensure you keep your promises to children and young people and always provide feedback on the results of their participation. If this will be some months in the future, explain this and provide children and young people with regular updates.



Reflect

Regularly reflect on your participation practice and ask children and young people for feedback during and at the end of participation. What worked? What didn't work? What would have made it more fun?



Involve children and young people's views at every stage of the process.

"Just ask us directly, we will tell you what we need."
Children and Families Panel member



This resource was developed as part of the Children's Rights Skills and Knowledge Framework project funded by Scottish Government.