



# Building a Culture of Participation

Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation

## HANDBOOK

Perpetua Kirby  
Claire Lanyon  
Kathleen Cronin  
&  
Ruth Sinclair

This Handbook was researched and written by the National Children's Bureau (NCB) and PK Research Consultancy (PKRC). For further information about the research contact Ruth Sinclair (Director of Research, NCB) or Perpetua Kirby (Director, PKRC).



National Children's Bureau  
8 Wakely Street  
Lodon EC1V 7QE  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7843 6000  
Fax: +44 (0)20 7278 9512  
enquiries@ncb.org.uk  
www.ncb.org.uk



PK Research Consultancy Ltd  
12 Sussex Road  
Hove BN3 2WD  
Tel: +44 (0)1273 728191  
info@pkrc.co.uk  
www.pkrc.co.uk

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# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary of Key Messages</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1.0 Vision for Change: Increased Child and Youth Participation</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 The Policy Shift: Involving Children and Young People	9
1.2 Practical Benefits to Services	10
1.3 Citizenship and Social Inclusion	12
1.4 Personal Development	13
<b>2.0 Participation and the Organisation</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 How Integral is Participation to your Organisation?	15
2.2 Why do you Want to Involve Children and Young People?	19
<b>3.0 Developing a Culture of Participation within Organisations</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Becoming a Learning Organisation	23
3.2 Developing Cultures of Participation	25
<b>4.0 Participation in Practice</b>	<b>41</b>
4.1 Developing Positive Relationships with Children and Young People	41
4.2 Fostering Other Relationships	52
4.3 Choosing How to Involve Children and Young People	55



# Introduction

Increasingly acceptance of the principle of children's involvement is being turned into practice through a variety of participation activities across a range of organisations. But some have difficulty in translating their commitment into practice that is meaningful for children and young people, which is effective in bringing about change and which becomes embedded within the organisational ethos.

This Handbook draws on the findings of a research study that explored the experiences of 29 organisations in seeking to listen to young people and to take action on what they said. The research points to this being most likely to succeed where organisations had worked to sustain and embed their participation activity. This Handbook and the accompanying research report *Building a Culture of Participation*\* both aim to stimulate thinking and to provide useful ideas about how to actively involve children and young people within services and policy making.

## The Aims of the Handbook

The Handbook focuses on how to listen to children and young people so that their views bring about change. It aims specifically to:

- Identify and illustrate the benefits of child and youth participation.
- Guide organisations in thinking about how to create appropriate environments in which children and young people can be involved in meaningful ways so that their views are listened to and acted upon.
- Help organisations explore how they can develop cultures and infrastructures which sustain and embed participation throughout all their activity.

## Who is the Handbook for?

This Handbook is aimed at a range of audiences, including organisations working with children and young people in different ways:

\* Kirby, P. et al (2003) *Building a Culture of Participation: Research Report*. London: Department for Education and Skills.

- Organisations providing services to children/young people on a daily basis (such as schools, health, play services, social care, advocacy).
- Youth work and child/youth voluntary organisations, including those dedicated to promoting youth participation and supporting young people through group work.
- Strategic bodies that plan, commission and deliver services used by children and young people.
- Research agencies and those developing products or resources for children and young people.

Different sections of the Handbook may be relevant to different people depending on their job and what they need to know more about.

- For the **benefits of involving children and young people** – including the benefits to your services and evidence of outcomes – see section 1.0 ‘Vision for Change: Increased Child and Youth Participation’. This section is particularly aimed at senior managers and policy makers.
- For those interested in looking at **how participation fits within different organisational cultures**, including the purpose of participation, see Section 2.0 ‘Participation and the Organisation’. This may be of particular interest to senior and middle managers, but also to trainers and researchers.
- For those interested in **how whole organisations can go about changing** to support new ways of working with children and young people – see Section 3.0 ‘Developing a Culture of Participation within Organisations’. Again, this is aimed at senior and middle managers, but also trainers and researchers.
- Participation depends on **building positive relationships**. How to do this is, and how to decide the most **appropriate participation activities**, are explored in Section 4.0 ‘Participation in Practice’. This section is aimed primarily at practitioners working with young people, but is also relevant to others: middle and senior managers, trainers and researchers.

## Further Suggested Activities

We want this Handbook to stimulate active engagement with ideas about why and how to involve children and young people. To provoke such thinking and reflection, we pose questions for the reader throughout the Handbook. Reports and guides, while useful, can only go part of the way to helping organisations develop new ways of working. We learn best by doing things and reflecting on our practice. We suggest some activities that can be used alongside the Handbook to encourage practice development and learning:

- Hold seminar/s to discuss the suggestions within this handbook for your organisation.
- Discuss with young people what they want and share your views about the ideas and questions within this Handbook.
- Organise on-going (not one-off) training, with opportunities to put into practice the ideas discussed.
- Encourage and support groups for staff/management to meet regularly from across and even between organisations to reflect and explore changing infrastructure and practice.

**For further information about on-going group reflection see:**

Waveinstein, K. (1995) *Action Learning*. London: Harper Collins.

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. and Snyder, W.M. (2002) *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.

## What do we mean by participation?

We use the term participation not simply to mean 'taking part' or 'being present' but as having some influence over decisions and action. We also use the terms 'involve' (passive verb) and 'participate' (active verb) interchangeably.

We are concerned with children and young people's participation in both personal and public decisions and use the Children & Young People's Unit's (CYPU) definition of these (see box).

## Children and Young People's Unit Definition of Participation

In encouraging departments to consider how children and young people should be involved we include action at a number of levels:

- **Where individual decisions are being taken about children's own lives.** For example, the Children Act 1989 says that looked after children should be involved in decisions about their care package, and statutory guidance is being developed to ensure that children and young people with special education needs are where possible involved in all decisions relating to their education.
- **Where services for, or used by, children are being developed or provided locally.** For example, many local partnerships and local authorities have discussion groups and special consultation events to influence the design and provision of play facilities, leisure, transport and guidance services.
- **Where national policies and services are being developed or evaluated.** For example, where departments are producing consultation documents and using website design to seek children and young people's views on policy proposals

From: CYPU (2001) *Learning to Listen: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People.*



# Summary of Key Messages

## Section 1.0 Vision for Change: Increased Child and Youth Participation

### **Acting on children and young people's views has positive outcomes.**

There is evidence that child/youth participation can lead to improved service development, increases in children and young people's citizenship and social inclusion, and also their wider personal development. Many organisations reflect and evaluate the process of participation, but too little attention is given to collecting systemic and rigorous evidence of outcomes.

## Section 2.0 Participation and the Organisation

### **There are different cultures of participation and organisations need to be clear about reasons for undertaking participation.**

The different cultures all have a place in enhancing children's participation, but only child/youth-focused organisations automatically assume that all children and young people will be involved in any decisions affecting their lives.

## Section 3.0: Developing a Culture of Participation within Organisations

### **Undertaking meaningful and sustainable participation requires organisations to change.**

This change is about the whole ethos and culture of the organisation and needs to happen within senior management, as well as within frontline staff, and across policy and practice. It is about developing new ways of working with children and young people. Developing the infrastructure and building organisational capacity needs dedicated commitment, sufficient staff support and an undertaking to adopt an organisational learning approach: all of which are more likely where there are champions of children's participation.

## Section 4.0: Participation in Practice

**Meaningful participation is a process, not simply the application of isolated participation activities or events.** This requires developing new child/youth-adult relationships: rooted in mutual trust and respect and

engaging in child-adult dialogue. Where relationships are positive, then children and young people's involvement is integral to daily practice, rather than an after-thought or an occasional tick box exercise.

**Strategies designed to address both personal and public decision-making are needed to fulfil children and young people's right, under the UNCRC, to be involved in *all* decisions affecting their lives.** More is needed to encourage and enable their involvement in personal decisions, as well as having a greater say about public decisions. This helps to put *all* children and young people at the centre of organisations.

**There are many ways to involve children and young people in different types of decisions.** The appropriate activities and level of participation are dependent on a number of factors: including the type and content of decisions, the context and children/young people. Using a variety of informal and formal activities helps include everyone in ways that suit their needs.

**Listening needs to influence change.** Meaningful participation is about listening to children and young people AND ensuring their views and experiences influence change (where this is suggested).

# Section 1.0 Vision for Change: Increased Child and Youth Participation

**Section 1.0 covers the following:**

- **The growing shift in UK policy requiring children and young people's participation.**
- **The benefits of participation including:**
  - **practical benefits to services**
  - **citizenship and social inclusion**
  - **personal development**

**The primary audience for this section is policy makers and senior management.**

## 1.1 The Policy Shift: Involving Children and Young People

**In this section you will find:**

- An overview of the growing shift in UK policy requiring children and youth people's participation in decisions.

The Government has made its commitment to children's participation clear:

*'The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use.'* (CYPUP, 2001)

There are now many requirements for organisations to involve children and young people:

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Children Act 1989
- Health and Social Care Act 2001

- Modernising Local Government
- Education Act 2002
- Learning to Listen Core Principles (CYPUP, 2001)
- Emerging Children's National Service Framework.

But there are several reasons why organisations are increasingly committed to children and young people's involvement in decision-making: a child's right to be involved in matters that affect them; the recognition that children are users of services and should be involved as other users are; the better allocation of resources if services are informed by users; the growing evidence of positive outcomes from young people's involvement – for organisations, for adults, for children.

The research study found many examples of benefits from involving young people. Much was not formally documented and was based on the perceptions of those involved, but nonetheless it provides convincing support for the benefits of involving young people for services, the community and young people. Useful though this evidence is, more rigorous evaluation and research on the impact of participation is greatly needed.

**For further information on evaluation evidence see:**

Kirby, P. and Bryson, S. (2002) *Measuring the Magic: Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision making*. London: Carnegie Young People's Initiative. [www.carnegie-youth.org.uk](http://www.carnegie-youth.org.uk)

## 1.2 Practical Benefits to Services

**In this section you will find:**

- Examples of the practical benefits to services achieved by listening to children and young people.

## Examples of practical benefits to services

- **Improved service development** – services and practices changed and improved, and new services were introduced, which better met the needs of service users.
- **Improved client support** – listening to children in personal decisions enabled services to better meet individual needs.
- **Increased access and use of services** – involving and listening to young people helped increase their access, use and positive experience of services.
- **Increased participatory practice** – services developed their knowledge, attitudes and skills to be able to involve children and young people more within services.

### Improved knowledge and practice for clinical care of young people (Collingham Gardens Child & Family Psychiatric Unit)

Research was undertaken with children about their experience of this psychiatric service and managers were surprised by the findings. The research highlighted how the children's therapeutic engagement can be undermined by their expectation of themselves taking a passive role in the process. This provided valuable learning, which has been translated into practice. It has developed a hypothesis about how to engage children better in the therapeutic process, thereby improving their clinical outcome.

#### **For Further Information on outcomes for services,**

including evidence and examples: see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT CHAPTER 8 'Practical benefits to services'.

## 1.3 Citizenship and Social Inclusion

### In this section you will find:

- Examples of the ways in which children and young people's participation can lead to increased citizenship and social inclusion.

### Examples of increased citizenship and social inclusion

- **Children's rights** – involving children helped fulfill their rights under Article 12 of the UNCRC.
- **Empowerment** – increased belief in their ability to create change and levels of control over elements of their lives.
- **Citizenship and Political Education** – increased children and young people's political and social knowledge, and awareness of rights.
- **Responsibility** – increased levels of responsibility.
- **Relationships** – improved relationships and the perception of young people amongst communities, professionals and peers.

### Corporate interest in participation

An investment bank part funded participation work in one school because of the synergy between encouraging children and young people to be active agents of change, and having the responsibility for making decisions, with shifts within the business sector. Firstly, there is a push for greater corporate responsibility following a decline in confidence in business to regulate itself and the active citizenship agenda fits with this. Also, the bank requires workers to have team skills and the ability to think independently to help identify new areas for business growth.

### For Further Information

For more detailed discussion, evidence and examples of citizenship and social inclusion outcomes see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT, chapter 9 'Citizenship and Social Inclusion'.

## 1.4 Personal Development

### In this section you will find:

- Examples of the ways in which participation can benefit children and young people's personal development.

Nearly all the organisations in the research cited personal development as an outcome for the young people involved in participatory activities. This included:

- ***Increased confidence and self-belief***
- ***Developing group skills***
- ***Promoting pro-social behaviour***
- ***Positive career choices (including for those considered at risk)***
- ***Future active involvement and greater responsibility***
- ***Gaining practical skills***

*'Getting involved in participatory activities has given him responsibility and motivation to become a youth worker. No other service worked for him.'* (Mother of a young person)

*'I have learnt to listen better, not to be shy and to speak out loud, that it is important to listen.'* (Young person)

*'A particularly good feature is that all pupils feel valued and respected members of the school community, which helps them to develop confidence and self-esteem.'*  
(Middle Street School nursery Ofsted report)

## Practical skills

- *Technical skills:* filming, editing, website design, information technology.
- *Organisational skills:* presentations, facilitation, recruitment and selection, minute-taking.
- *Creative skills:* acting and writing newsletters.
- *Workplace skills and experience:* applying oneself in a working environment, adhering to meeting guidelines, attending meetings, working in a large business environment, assertiveness, coping with stress and time management.
- *Presentation and language skills*
- *Other skills:* decision-making, public speaking and media relations.

### Young People's Personal Development (Saying Power, Save the Children)

The Saying Power project supported young people to undertake a community project with their peers. An independent evaluation demonstrated increased confidence. In graph form, displaying time and confidence, participants retrospectively drew a 'confidence line' for the period of the project and were asked to explain why the line dipped or peaked. For example, a young refugee's line dipped at a point when she was not attending meetings and peaked when she went to Parliament and had an interview with the BBC.



## 2.0 Participation and the Organisation

**Section 2.0 covers the following:**

- **Three cultures of participation within different types of organisations.**
- **The importance of being clear about your reasons for involving children and young people in participation.**

**The primary audience for this section is senior and middle management, trainers and researchers.**

**For further information on different cultures of participation,** including case study examples, see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT CHAPTER 3 'Cultures of Participation'.

### 2.1 How integral is participation to your organisation?

**In this section you will find:**

- A description of three cultures of participation found within different types of organisations.
- Discussion on which culture type may be most appropriate for your organisation.

#### What are cultures of participation?

A culture of participation describes how participation sits within an organisation. It reflects the values that underpin participatory practice and the reasons for involving young people, when and how participation is used, and the extent to which young people are listened to and appropriate action is taken.

We have identified three types of culture within organisations that involve young people in decision-making. The boundaries between these are blurred, as organisations move between types and there may be differences between departments. The categories however are non-hierarchical, as each can be appropriate within different organisations or settings.

## **Cultures of Participation**

***Consultation-focused organisations:*** these organisations consult children and young people to inform services, policy and product development (e.g. website design). Consultations usually take place one-off or occasionally, but can be repeated or regular events.

***Participation-focused organisations:*** these organisations consult young people and involve them in making decisions within higher-level participation activities. These activities are limited to certain areas of work: they are time-bound (e.g. advisory group or recruitment panel) or context specific (e.g. youth forum, school council). Usually a sample rather than all children and young people are involved in making decisions.

***Child/youth-focused organisations:*** participation is central to all practice with children and young people within these organisations. They establish a culture in which it is assumed that all children and young people will be listened to about all decisions – both personal and public – that affect their lives.

## **Which culture type is appropriate for your organisation?**

Different types of organisation may choose to involve children and young people in different ways, depending on how much they work with young people, the nature of their service and the underlying values and aims of the service. Think about what might be the appropriate culture of participation for your organisation.

## **Does your organisation work regularly and directly with children and young people?**

- All organisations delivering services directly to young people should aim to be child/youth focused, so that children and young people's views and experiences influence decisions about their personal care as well as input into public decisions about how services are delivered to them as a group.
- These organisations rely on positive relationships between staff and young people; they benefit from working participatively as this changes the nature of these relationships (see Section 4.0).

## **Does your organisation primarily undertake strategic planning, policy work and/or fund others?**

- If your organisation plans and commissions (but only occasionally delivers) services used by children and young people, you may find being participation-focused helps ensure they are meaningfully involved within specific contexts (e.g. when drafting policies that impact on their lives).
- If your work has a large impact on children and young people's lives you may decide that it is more appropriate that the whole organisation (or relevant departments) should be child/youth focused so it is automatically assumed their perspectives will be kept central to service and policy planning, and your organisation will promote their fuller involvement in services.

*'Part of what we can do is with every single thing we fund and every project we set up have aspects about children's participation and requiring groups and organisations to operate in a certain way and to involve children in what they do, to tell us and give us evidence of how they do that and how they change as a result.'*  
*(Brighton & Hove Children's Fund manager)*

### **Does your organisation sell its services and/or produce resources for children and young people (e.g. books, websites, toys)?**

- You may choose to rely on consultations to ensure you meet with consumers' preferences and tastes, in the same way that market research is used, without necessarily developing higher levels of participation.
- You may want to become more participatory if this fits with your organisation's underlying values and ethos (see Section 2.2).

### **Does your organisation undertake research on issues relevant to children and young people's lives?**

- You should, at the very least, involve children and young people within research relevant to their lives.
- When engaging directly with those being researched ('subjects') you should adopt a child/youth-focused approach (see Section 4.0).
- You may also choose to include young people in commissioning, undertaking and disseminating research projects (e.g. on research advisory groups or as interviewers).

#### **Consider**

- Q** How integral is youth participation to your organisational culture?
- Q** Which cultural type/s best describe how participation currently fits within your organisation?
- Q** What culture type would you like your organisation to become?

## 2.2 Why do you want to involve children and young people?

### **In this section you will find:**

Discussion on the purpose of involving children and young people, including:

- defining organisational values and aims
- developing objectives for specific participation activities
- promoting cultures of participation.

### **Developing Clear Aims and Values**

In order to ensure children and young people's meaningful participation it is important to be clear about why you want to involve them; what values underpin your participation work and what you hope to achieve.

Some reasons for involving children and young people are value-based: it is good to empower children and to fulfill their rights. Other reasons are based on achieving specific outcomes: for example, you want their views to inform the design of new services and/or develop young people's skills.

### **Aims and Values for Involving Children and Young People**

#### ***Practical benefits to services***

- Improve service/product development.
- Improve support to ensure individuals' best interests (e.g. enhance learning, improve health, ensure appropriate court decision).
- Improve experience of services (e.g. increase emotional well-being, reduce stress and feelings of security).
- Improve access to and use of services.
- Improve service accountability.

### ***Citizenship and social inclusion***

- Provide inclusive practice that draws in those often excluded (e.g. young children, carers, asylum seekers and disabled young people).
- Meet UNCRC expectations for the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Help ensure the right to be treated with respect, to be safe and protected from harm.
- Empower through being included; develop skills and knowledge to get heard and deeper self-belief in ability to create change.
- Enhance citizenship and political education, including knowledge of children's rights, structures, services, etc.
- Increase independence and responsibility for actions.
- Increase ownership and care for services.
- Develop more positive community relationships between young peers and between children and adults.
- Improve sense of community and belonging.

### ***Personal and social development for children and young people***

- Increase confidence and self-belief in specific areas.
- Increase knowledge, understanding and change attitudes.
- Increase skills.
- Improve education and employment opportunities.
- Heighten aspirations and plans.
- Increase opportunities to have fun and meet new people.
- Increase opportunities to help their communities.
- Provide payment or other incentives.

### Consider

- Q** What do you hope to achieve: for services, professionals, children, young people, the community?
- Q** Do you have a policy statement that outlines your underlying values and aims for involving young people?

Aims and values will be related to your organisational culture (or the culture you are working towards).

#### ***Consultation-focused organisations***

Tend to stress benefits to services, particularly improved service development (including product design), and increased access and use of services.

#### ***Participation-focused organisations***

Aim to improve services by involving children and young people, but equally aim to be inclusive. Often have other intended outcomes too.

#### ***Child/youth-focused organisations***

Accommodate a range of interests by having multiple reasons for involving children and young people. This includes improved services – for individuals and more generally – also young people’s citizenship and social inclusion.

## Developing Objectives

Once you are clear about why you want to involve young people within your organisation, it can help to define specific objectives for the different participation activities undertaken (e.g. youth forums, complaints procedures) or at least to be clear about how these activities will help to achieve your aims or fit in with your underlying values. This helps to clarify thinking and ensure a shared understanding between young people, staff and partner organisations. Ideally, young people should be involved in developing objectives. Be prepared that their priorities may differ to yours.

### **Consider**

- Q** What are the objectives for current or planned participation activities?
- Q** How can young people be involved in agreeing these?
- Q** How will any differences in priorities be accommodated?

## **Promoting Cultures of Participation**

You may be undertaking participation activities partly to help develop a culture of participation within your own or other organisations. If so, be clear about what you want to change: skills, knowledge, attitudes, confidence, practice and/or infrastructure. Work that aims to 'build capacity' needs to plan how knowledge and skills will be transferred between colleagues or partners.

### **Consider**

- Q** Do you want to influence change within your own organisation?
- Q** Do you want to influence other organisations?
- Q** How do you plan to achieve this?



## 3.0 Developing a Culture of Participation within Organisations

**Section 3.0 covers the following:**

- **What needs to change organisationally for participation to be meaningful.**
- **How to develop a culture of participation within your organisation.**

**This section is aimed primarily at policy makers, senior managers, researchers and trainers, but is also relevant for practitioners.**

*'We started saying we don't know how to do this and everything we have done we have developed with young people. We started off as a learning organisation and we have been able to sustain that and I think that makes us exciting to work with from the young people's point of view.'* (Manager, community regeneration)

### 3.1 Becoming a Learning Organisation

**In this section you will find:**

- Discussion on the need to become a learning organisation to adopt new ways of working with children and young people.

To develop meaningful participatory practice organisations have to change, so that they are willing and able to listen to young people and then act on what they say. You need to establish the infrastructure that will promote and support this new way of working. Managing a process of change, which may face resistance, requires becoming a learning organisation that experiments and reflects on practice. Change needs to happen at different levels; we all have a role to play in changing our organisations.

## Change at different organisational levels

### **Senior management**

To back new ways of working, lead these through the organisation, meet with and listen directly to children and young people, and help to ensure their ideas are put into action.

### **Staff**

To develop positive relationships and engage in dialogue with children and young people (see Section 4.0). Including those working directly with younger people, those with occasional contact or whose work impacts on their lives.

### **Policy**

To help ensure change becomes an openly stated and expected part of the way the organisation works into the future.

Building participatory cultures is a complex and dynamic process. Change has to be negotiated between policy makers, senior managers, other staff and younger people and may be unpredictable. This is a creative process that involves eliciting and fostering enthusiasm, sharing ideas and learning through doing. Only by discussing, listening to each other, trying things out, and continuing to do so, will it be possible to decide each next step. It is a process that highlights that older and younger people have something to learn from and with each other, not least how to work well together.

#### **For further examples of how to develop a whole organisation's commitment to children and young people's participation,**

including a deputy head teacher's diary, see: Bragg, S. and Fielding, M. (2003) *Students as Researchers: Making a Difference*, Cambridge: Pearsons.

## 3.2 Developing Cultures of Participation

### In this section you will find:

A process of change that gives practical guidance and manageable steps on:<sup>1</sup>

- How to unfreeze existing attitudes and practice
- How to establish catalysts for change
- How to internalise new ways of working
- How to institutionalise participation

### For further information on developing participatory cultures,

including case study examples, see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT CHAPTER 5 'Institutionalising participation'.

## Unfreezing existing practice and attitudes

### In this section you will find:

Examples of how to UNFREEZE existing ways of working including the importance of:

- External pressures and internal drives
- Highlighting the need for change

Different factors may signal the need to change, including **external pressures** and **internal drives** pushing individuals to change.

1 This section draws heavily on a framework developed by Kath Pasteur (2001) *Changing Organisations for Sustainable Livelihoods: a map to guide change*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

## Factors that help to unfreeze existing practice

- |                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| <b>External pressures</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Government agenda and policy requirements.</li><li>● Funding criteria and partnership requirements.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Internal drives</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Professional belief about the value and importance of participation for your discipline.</li><li>● Exposure to participatory practice and seeing the benefits of this.</li></ul> |

It can be beneficial to **highlight the need for change**, by promoting the case for involving young people using research or other evidence, and highlighting links to relevant policy requirements.

### Examples of how to highlight the need for change

- Disseminate research on the benefits of participation.
- Evaluate a pilot project and promote learning.
- Visit or invite professionals and young people from other organisations to observe and talk about their work.
- Identify and highlight links within relevant local, national and international policy requirements to participation.
- Highlight any associated career benefits to staff.
- Hold discussions about the possible need for change: identify levels of support and concerns, allay false perceptions and discuss ways to overcome real barriers.

#### Consider

- Q Are people across your organisation convinced of the need to change?
- Q What drives participation in your organisation?
- Q How can you highlight the need to change?

## Establishing catalysts for change

### In this section you will find:

Examples of how to CATALYSE for change within organisations, including how to:

- Identify existing champions
- Establish new champions
- Build senior management support
- Develop a vision and commitment
- Organise and plan for change
- Develop partnerships and networks
- Involve children and young people early on
- Identify funding
- Understand culture and politics of organisations

Key catalysts are champions of participation. **Identify existing champions** within your organisation, those who are already deeply committed and working hard to develop participation. Where they do not exist it will be necessary to **establish new champions of participation**.

Champions can be the 'conscience' within organisations, reminding others of the importance of including young people. They can bring new ways of thinking and working, and help create space to be innovative and take risks. Their role is to support change across the organisation, not to be the only ones working in a participatory way.

## Consider

- Q** Do you have existing champions of participation? What are their positions?
- Q** How are they supported to network and promote their vision and knowledge?
- Q** If necessary, what are the most appropriate ways to create new champions within your organisation?

<b><i>Ways of establishing new champions</i></b>	<b><i>Advantages</i></b>	<b><i>Challenges</i></b>
Designate senior manager/s	Senior management support is essential for ensuring new ways of working are sustainable and roll out across the organisation.	Top down if senior management alone involved. Staff and young people also need to share responsibility for changing organisations.
Identifying existing staff to become champions	Change driven from within and relevant to organisational context. Existing positive relationships with young people and links with other staff.	Unsustainable if expected to be done on top of existing workload. Staff may not have skills and knowledge to develop new work unsupported. Need to include senior staff, or have access to management, to ensure role taken seriously.

<b><i>Ways of establishing new champions</i></b>	<b><i>Advantages</i></b>	<b><i>Challenges</i></b>
Employ specialist participation worker/s to promote and support young people's involvement	Ensures champion has sufficient knowledge and experience. Dedicated time to support participation initiatives and promote new ways of working.	May be seen as the only people who involve young people, and all participation initiatives referred to them. Harder to ensure role is seen as supporting other staff to work in new ways. May become marginalised.
Establishing a specialist participation department or team	Demonstrates organisational commitment to participation and increases capacity to work in new ways.	As above.
Establish staff planning groups	Enables staff from across the organisation and at different levels to be part of planning process. Important that staff also feel consulted, if they are to listen to young people. Helps ensure plans developed from bottom-up.	May not have specialist knowledge and skills to develop participation work. Initially involving external consultants or partner agency may help to fill gap. Include senior management to ensure group decisions are implemented.

<b><i>Ways of establishing new champions</i></b>	<b><i>Advantages</i></b>	<b><i>Challenges</i></b>
Commissioning external organisations and/or working in partnership with others.	Specialist skills and knowledge, particularly beneficial when organisations starting to develop participation initiatives. Provides additional staff input.	Cannot ensure all children and young people within an organisation involved and cannot build long-term relationships. Usually unsustainable and best viewed as short-term capacity-building intervention.
Establish young people as champions	Ensures young people involved early on in the planning. Puts participation into practice and demonstrates a genuine commitment.	Young people alone may not have sufficient knowledge and clout to push through organisational change. Other champions also needed.

**Senior management support** is a key catalyst for developing participation; it creates the climate that allows change to take place. They can encourage new ways of working, offer support and advice, and ensure young people's ideas are acted upon.

It is important to **develop a vision and commitment** to increasing children and young people's participation if change is to be effective. This requires a clear understanding of the underlying values and aims for their involvement, as discussed in Section 2.2.

Change needs a level of **organisation and planning**, while also remaining flexible enough to incorporate young people's views, respond to the unexpected and accept a level of unpredictability. New organisations can be monitored to work in participatory ways and new staff selected for their commitment to participation. Established organisations will take more time to change.



**Involving children and young people early on** helps to ensure plans are child/youth focused.

**Consider**

- Q** How do senior managers actively demonstrate support and commitment for youth participation?
- Q** Where is change most likely to be achieved in your organisation?
- Q** How can young people be involved early on in planning for change?

**Partnership working** has benefits for sharing skills, knowledge and practice. Difficulties exist if agencies have very different views and ways of working with young people. Develop a contract detailing a vision and commitment to participation. Participation activities jointly funded (e.g. by health, social services and education) enable young people's own agendas to be included, rather than being restricted to topics relevant to one agency.

Developing **networks with other professionals**, targeting information and advocacy helps disseminate young people's ideas widely and influence change across a range of organisations.

When pricing participation work consider the cost of undertaking participation activities and acting on young people's ideas. **Funding** should not focus solely on creating an elite workforce of participation workers, but help support all those delivering services to children and young people to work in new ways.

**Consider**

- Q** How clear and committed are all partners to child and youth participation?
- Q** How can information from children and young people be disseminated so it is widely used for developing services and policies?
- Q** Is the available funding for short-term initiatives or for introducing sustainable organisational changes?

*'They want to know our opinions but as soon as it costs money they don't want to know.'* (Young person)

Plans have to be rooted in an **understanding of the culture and politics of organisations**. Participation is a political process about shifting power and changing relationships. This operates on a number of levels within organisations and the wider community.

*'The principles of pupil voice are something that extend throughout the whole school community. It's not just listening to children, it's respecting the views of everybody in the organisation. Because schools are just people.'* (Senior manager)

## Cultural and Political Considerations

### ***Within your organisation***

Together with children and young people, identify what factors constrain their ability to participate more fully in decisions about their own care and services generally (see Section 4.1).

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Ensure young people have access to those in power so that their views influence change.

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Ensure all staff also have a voice and involve them in planning organisational changes.

### ***Within other organisations***

Consider wider relationships between young people and other professionals. The involvement of outside organisations may encourage or dissuade young people from wanting to get involved, depending on how those organisations are viewed locally.

### ***Within wider community***

Consider relationships between young people and the wider community and whether there is a pressing need to build more positive relationships between certain community groups.

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Some groups of young people may be most excluded and need to be targeted.

## Cultural and Political Considerations – *continued*

It may be necessary to develop an understanding of the cultural or support needs of some excluded groups and develop appropriate strategies to involve them, including outreach to those young people and their families.

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Parents and other carers are particularly influential in younger children's lives; they may want additional reassurance before consenting to their child's involvement.

### **Young people and adults on joint Executive Group (Dumfries & Galloway Youth Strategy Executive Group, D&G YSEG)**

The D&G YSEG is a working group of the Council's Executive Committee – attended by both young people and adults – and is at the centre of the council in the Office of the Chief Executive. The young people have substantial influence on council decisions, primarily because they are placed within the Executive Committee – the most powerful council committee. The Chair of the group has always been a young person. This means that it is a young person who has the casting vote in relation to any split vote.

#### **Consider**

- Q** How well linked are children and young people to those in power?
- Q** What other power or cultural issues impact on their participation?

## Internalising new ways of working

### **In this section you will find:**

Examples of how to INTERNALISE new participatory ways of working with children and young people including how to:

- Communicate and develop a common vision
- Develop understanding of participation in practice
- Build capacity
- Motivate and sustain
- Manage conflict and opposition
- Be organised
- Reflect and evaluate

**Communicating and developing a broad-based shared vision** about why and how young people are involved, can be done together with children and young people, for example:

- *Repeating the message as often and as widely as possible.*
- *Holding awareness raising events.*
- *Encouraging all staff to have contact with young people.*

## Encouraging staff contact with children and young people

- Require a commitment to children and young people's participation in all job descriptions.
- Involve staff in undertaking direct sessions/projects with young people.
- Ensure senior management take part in some participation activities.
- Organise work experience for young people within the project.
- Involve young people in staff training/workshops.
- Involve young people in recruiting staff/commissioning consultants.

*'As a participation organisation it is essential that all staff are involved with children and young people, particularly management staff, who can easily become removed from the issues affecting children and young people without regular face to face contact.'*  
(Voluntary sector professional)

Support staff and managers to **understand what participation means in practice**. This is about having a different outlook and approach to engaging with children and young people; implications for practice can be glaringly obvious but sometimes quite subtle.

### Consider

- Q How is a common vision developed and communicated across the organisation?
- Q How are managers and staff across the organisation encouraged to involve young people?
- Q How are they supported to develop their understanding of participation in practice?

There are a number of ways in which organisations can **build staff capacity** so that they develop their knowledge, attitudes and skills, and the confidence to start working in new ways.

*'[Good support workers] are really friendly and non-judgemental. Bad support people don't listen to what you're saying. You can tell when someone's not listening to you; people who don't listen, people who are arrogant and ignorant; and people who haven't got a lot of time for you.'* (Young person)

## **Ideas for building staff capacity**

- Ensure all staff have sufficient time to actively listen to young people. Specialist staff can undertake specific tasks (e.g. survey analysis, organising events).
- Include a commitment to participation within staff recruitment criteria. Involve young people on recruitment panels to help assess staff suitability.
- Provide initial induction and on-going training for staff at all levels: including practice experience, underlying principles and methods.
- Discuss participation work in supervision and staff meetings: including overcoming barriers to participation.
- Encourage and support staff to have a go and experiment. Reassure them it is safe to make mistakes.
- Provide opportunities and encourage discussion of practice with others both internally and externally.
- Document practice and learning.

*'I suppose we find people who think similarly and we give them the skills that we've found useful. And we actively encourage them to involve young people.'* (Senior manager)

Once participation is underway, the challenge is to **motivate and sustain** enthusiasm to ensure people do not lose momentum and the work is sustainable.

## Ideas for motivating and sustaining commitment

- Celebrate achievements with staff and young people.
- Celebrate outside recognition (e.g. visitors, references, good project reputation, positive inspection or evaluation).
- Enter award schemes that recognise high standards of participation.
- Provide professional rewards and incentives for those that demonstrate changed attitudes and practice: profiling their work, bonuses (e.g. visits to overseas projects) and promotion.
- Provide on-going training and discussion opportunities.
- Stress benefits and gains to staff and the organisation.

Inevitably, within a process of change, there will be the need to **acknowledge resistance and conflict** between the old and new ways of working, and where possible resolve differences.

## Ideas for addressing conflict and resistance

- Support staff to reflect on their practice and ask questions about how this could be developed.
- Continually promote the vision of participation and view capacity building as an on-going process.
- Seek senior management backing to help remove organisational barriers and actively resolve conflicts.
- Work with those who resist change to come on board later.
- Work around those who will not change.
- Challenge staff whose attitudes or behaviour is harmful.
- Monitor and review pilot projects to deal with real and perceived concerns.
- Demonstrate that you are serious to young people by quickly implementing some of their ideas and making sure they know what action is taken.
- Support parents to find out more and to get involved (see Section 4.1)

*'The circle group [facilitated by year 6] I think have helped colleagues to see that if you ask an open question, the children genuinely think they're going to be listened to, they don't give you rubbish back . . . for teachers that may feel threatened, it helps them to observe how it's done and develop their understanding of working with children, rather than delivering to them.'* (Teacher)

### Consider

- Q** How are management and staff supported to develop their capacity to work in participatory ways?
- Q** How much recognition is participatory practice given within your organisation?
- Q** Do you acknowledge conflicting views about participation and how is this addressed?



Participatory settings have to be **highly organised**, with solid organisational foundations, to help contain those who are very young or may be experiencing chaos in the rest of their lives. This includes providing varied and rich opportunities, ensuring activities have sufficient structure (while remaining flexible), and being clear about roles and responsibilities.

### **Consider**

- Q** How much structure is appropriate for the different children and young people you work with?
- Q** How well planned and organised are the participatory settings in your organisation?

On-going **reflection and self-evaluation** by staff, children and young people on participatory practice can help to increase positive outcomes. Busy practitioners often do not have time to stop and reflect on what they do. Many need encouragement and support, including time and systems that prioritise a reflective approach to developing participatory ways of working.

### **Ideas for internal reflection and evaluation:**

- Notebook to jot down thoughts and observations.
- Sessional staff observation and recording sheets.
- End of session or activity feedback from young people – which is then discussed in staff meetings.
- Occasional 'snap shot' survey feedback from young people.
- Organisational meetings with young people to discuss and reflect on practice.
- Regular away day for project workers to examine practice.
- Internal action research.
- Independent formative evaluation to inform practice.

### Consider

- Q Do you know what children, managers, staff, parents and partners think of participatory practice in your organisation?
- Q Are staff supported to take time out to reflect on the way they work with children and young people?
- Q Is your organisation equally receptive to finding out what does and does not work well?

## Institutionalising new ways of working

### In this section you will find:

Examples of how to INSTITUTIONALISE new ways of working particularly the value of policies and standards.

In order to ensure participation is institutionalised it will be necessary to ensure appropriate practice is developed across the organisation and beyond:

- *Introducing internal policy and guidance is an indicator of change.* Policies that enshrine good practice are important and can help to encourage and ensure staff implement new ways of working. Policy is insufficient without also providing support and building the commitment and skills to develop new ways of working.
- *Agreed standard and kite marks for services* can help ensure the participatory approach scales out to many organisations. It establishes participation as the accepted way of working and encourages agencies to opt in.

### Questions to Consider

- Q What internal policy and guidance exists requiring your organisation to ensure children and young people's participation?
- Q Is this translated into practice across the organisation?

### For further information on standards see:

Cutler, D. (2003) *Standard! Organisational Standards and Young People's Participation in Public Decision Making*. London: Carnegie Young People's Initiative. [www.carnegie-youth.org.uk](http://www.carnegie-youth.org.uk)

## 4.0 Participation in Practice

**Section 4.0 covers the following:**

- **The importance of developing positive relationships within organisations between children, young people and adults, and between young peers, to ensure meaningful participation.**

**The primary intended audience is practitioners, middle managers, trainers and researchers, but it is also relevant for senior managers.**

**For further information on the themes discussed in this chapter**  
see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT, chapter 6 'Developing Positive Relationships'.

### 4.1 Developing Positive Relationships with Children and Young People

**In this section you will find:**

Guidance on the building blocks for developing positive relationships with children and young people in your organisation:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Dialogue
- Action and Feedback
- Reducing power imbalances
- Support for children and young people
- Providing appropriate choices.

We will also examine relationships within consultation-, participation- and child/youth-focused organisations.

**For further information on developing positive relationships and the importance of these for emotional wellbeing see:**

Park, J., et al (2003) *The Emotional Literacy Handbook*. London: David Fulton Publishers.  
www.antidote.org.uk (Aimed at schools but also relevant to others organisations.)

Participatory practice is about developing positive and caring relationships between adults and children and young people. Listening to others is central to caring for them.

## **Building Block 1: Building Mutual Trust and Respect**

The reciprocation of trust and respect is important in order to enable a relationship of mutuality in which the child or young person (and adults) can develop. Without this shared respect they are unlikely to engage openly with adults. This requires positive worker attitudes, showing a genuine interest in them, as well as being interesting!

**Interviewer:**

*'What is it about the organisation that helps you have your say?'*

**Child:**

*'I think it's the staff. They don't interfere but they ask if we're ok. We can trust them to keep it to themselves.'*

**Interviewer:**

*'What do you think makes a good worker?'*

**Child:**

*'That you can really trust them. Being able to listen to what you have to say and understanding [our situations].'*

## **Examples of how to demonstrate an interest and be interesting**

- Be an active listener; take the time to sit down and really listen to what children and young people have to say.
- When talking to younger children, sit or crouch down so that you are at eye level with them.
- Reflect back what children and young people communicate to demonstrate listening and check understanding.
- Do not pass judgment on what they say but offer your opinions (which may differ).
- Find out what they are interested in and offer something that meets these interests (e.g. bring along pictures or toys related to young children's favourite things).
- Create enjoyable experiences.

Part of being respectful is recognising children and young people's individuality and responding to them on this level. This means moving past stereotypes, putting aside judgments and values, and being guided by their expressed needs and interests.

## **Respecting individuality**

- Ask the children and young people what issues are of concern for them, rather than making assumptions.
- Learn about their individual strengths through discussion and observation of their individual and group work.
- Discuss activities or tasks, offer options, and encourage them to find their preferred ways of getting involved.

### Consider

- Q How do you demonstrate interest and respect for children and young people?
- Q What do you offer that is of interest to them?
- Q How do you assess their individual abilities and interests?

## Building Block 2: Dialogue

*'[In one lesson] you are not actually allowed to speak . . . we have to work in silence, it is the most boring lesson in the world.'*  
(Young person)

Having conversations with children and young people enables them to play an active role in their relationships with adults. Both have something to offer and learn from each other; neither has all the answers. The best way for children and young people to communicate their needs and ideas, and for adults to respond appropriately is through positive dialogue:

- listening to each other
- learning from each other
- attempting to understand others' perspectives
- responding constructively to each other
- adults being open and up front about what they can offer.

*'We like adults to be honest with us. Quite a lot of the time we get, like, 'Oh yeah, we can do this for you.' And six months down the line maybe it's not so possible. [We'd] sooner you say, 'Well, it's a bit iffy – maybe go around it in a different way.'* (Young person)

Adults need to share something of themselves if they are to have meaningful relationships with children and young people. This includes your views, experiences and knowledge, and offering appropriate direction. Sharing information and asking questions can also help develop critical thinking skills, important for making decisions.

**Consider**

- Q** How much is interaction with children and young people a dialogue with both participating?
- Q** How do you share your views without forcing them on children and young people?

### **Building Block 3: Action and Feedback**

Integral to meaningful participation is listening to children and young people AND ensuring their views and experiences influence change (where change is suggested). This happens too rarely. If you are not genuinely prepared to take on board what they say their involvement will be token. If you are, then you need to plan from the start how you will respond and act on suggested changes and the boundaries to young people's influence.

*'Sometimes when you ask for something to be changed they don't do anything. They don't give you a reply. They don't listen to you. They should at least give us a reply.'* (Children's focus group)

Feedback to children and young people is also essential. This cannot be an afterthought or something that happens long after a piece of work. Feedback has to be on-going. They need to know how their views are taken into account in any decisions. Lack of feedback can breed resentment and an unwillingness to become involved in future. Feedback can be given informally, individually and in groups, or more formally through presentations, meetings and in writing.

## Pointers for feedback

- Respond immediately to what children and young people say.
- Inform them of how their ideas will be taken forward.
- Inform them of how their ideas are taken into account.
- Inform them if they did not influence change and why.
- Have feedback discussions and enable them to ask questions.

### Consider

- Q** Have you planned from the start for children and young people to have genuine influence?
- Q** Have you ensured they understand the extent to which their views can influence decisions?
- Q** Are feedback mechanisms built into your work with children and young people?

## Building Block 4: Reducing Power Imbalances

To develop more positive and equitable relationships with children and young people, adults need to address imbalances in power. This does not mean equal power in all situations but it means moving away from structures and practices which seek to control young people, to more flexible environments in which they feel safe and able to have a say.

This can be done simply through everyday behaviour, by bringing down some of the barriers that symbolize power differentiation.



## Examples of bringing down traditional barriers

- Attempt to see the world from the child and young person's perspective.
- Write all correspondence to them, even young children; include a photograph of the worker who will be visiting.
- Ensure children and young people, as well as parents/carers, give their consent.
- Think about the physical location – is it accessible, will they feel comfortable, is seating equal?
- Contribute your views, but take care not to dominate conversations.
- Participate in games and other activities with children and young people, rather than watching on.
- Eat the same lunch menu together and wait in queues alongside children and young people.
- Be attentive to the different ways in which children communicate verbally and non-verbally.
- Watch your language: be clear and age-appropriate, ask straight not leading questions, be firm but do not shout.
- Check your understanding back with the child.
- Think about what your body language is saying: how you stand, sit, look and move can all be used to assert power.

*'They [workers] don't treat you like kids, they treat us like adults. It's different to other youth clubs who just put on activities and we just do them. Here they listen to us and help us and we get to say what we want to do.'* (Child)

Adults can also support children to increase their power in areas where traditionally they have little. They can act as brokers between younger and older people.

### **The adult broker role**

- Preparing children and young people for a meeting with external adults: including information on common jargon and the meeting format, and role-playing interactions.
- Being a familiar face and being there to answer any questions.
- Facilitating discussions with external adults.

## **Building Block 5: Support for children and young people**

Informal support can be important for developing understanding and relationships between children and young people and adults. Formal support for groups may take place through meetings, workshops and training. For individuals, it may include supervision, one to one meetings to discuss care, adult mentors, advocacy and training.

### **Examples of Informal Support**

- Take time to stop – even if briefly – to have a chat in the corridor or over a cup of tea.
- If busy, make dedicated times when children and young people know you are available to listen.
- Agree places where they can leave written notes about concerns or suggestions, which will be picked up by adults.
- Take part in activities outside your formal environment together with children and young people and interact informally (e.g. attend after school clubs, attend social events).
- Allow opportunities for them to speak about things on their mind without necessarily receiving direction from adults.

## Building Block 6: Appropriate Choices

Respecting children and young people's competency to make decisions, with support, is integral to participation. This means increasing opportunities to have a say, where previously they have not. They are often barred from making even simple choices that adults take for granted. If rules exist that stop them from doing things, think carefully about why these are in place and whose interests they serve.

*'They [students] want to have water. There is some research that suggests that helps learning. Quite a few staff are open to that, but the pace of change is slow, we're learning that. Next term, there will be a trial for students to have clear water bottles in lessons.'* (Teacher)

Enabling young people to make decisions does not necessarily mean providing limitless choices. Instead it is about appropriate and genuine options, based on what is achievable and sometimes using adults' knowledge of children's abilities and preferences.

*'If it's like maths, where you have different activities according to what the children can do, I'd say to the children there are three different activities, this is what they are, you select the one that is most appropriate for you, and they do that. They always go for the one that is right for them or a bit more challenging than they can cope with.'* (Teacher)

Children and young people must have the option not to participate. This may be difficult in settings where attendance is often compulsory (e.g. school and health services), but here participation can still be meaningful, rather than passive: keep them informed, ask opinions, provide choices and offer increased responsibility.

If children do not want to participate that is fine. Think carefully however about why they may not want to get involved and how the context could be changed in future to make it more appealing and appropriate.

## Choosing how to participate

A young person does not want to attend a six monthly formal review at which several adults attend. Accept their decision but also ask why they do not want to go. Consider the arrangements for the review; does it need a large formal meeting? Discuss possible options about how their views could be included in planning their care, including whom they would like to talk to.

### Consider

- Q** Do you work with children and young people to agree rules?
- Q** Are choices appropriate or is there a risk of raising expectations or over-burdening some children?
- Q** Are all children and young people required to participate in the same activity or can they choose?

## Developing positive relationships within different organisations

### In this section you will find:

- Key factors necessary to establishing positive relationships with children and young people within consultation-, participation- and child/youth-focused organisations.

### ***Consultation-focused organisations***

- Though children and young people are involved only briefly, it is important they feel respected and able to trust you.
- Consultations undertaken as a tick box exercise or to justify already decided action do not respect participants.
- Keep consultations sufficiently open so that children and young people can also introduce their own agendas.

- Actively support participants to make informed consent and ensure they know this can be withdrawn at any time.
- Do not privilege adults' knowledge and objectives; shares with participants the consultation aims, process, results and how these have been fed into decisions.

### ***Participation-focused organisations***

- Recognise the whole person; do not use them by taking just what is wanted for the purpose of the participation activity.
- If issues arise that fall outside the specific activity, offer support and assist them to find the help they need.
- Staff working directly with the children and young people need adequate time to support them appropriately.

### ***Child-focused organisations***

- These organisations cater to the whole child or young person: supporting them in personal and public decision making.
- On-going positive relationships with children and young people are fundamental and can develop over time.
- Children and young people receive on-going formal and informal support from staff.

*'I have a job remit, but at times it has to go beyond that. I've always found that you have to deal with the whole of the young person's life; it's no good just taking out the bit that you want to use and abuse. It's about taking a more holistic approach to young people.'*  
(Youth development worker)

## 4.2 Fostering other relationships

### **In this section you will find:**

Discussion on the importance of developing wider relationships:

- between children and young people
- with parents and carers
- with the wider community

Developing **relationships with other children and young people** is hugely important. Opportunities to interact, make new friends and develop a social group, including those with common life experiences, are an integral part of much participation work. It encourages children and young people to take responsibility for each other and to actively participate in developing positive peer relationships and community well-being. It is also valuable for them to take on responsibility without adult intervention, either alone or as a peer group.

### **Examples of ways to develop peer relationships**

- Group and pair work
- Circle time
- Social activities and opportunities to chat
- Older young people facilitate a mixed-age group
- Children supported to resolve their own peer conflicts in mini circle time discussions
- Youth groups undertake their own social action projects
- Groups take responsibility for individual actions
- Exchanges and visits to other youth organisations.

### Consider

- Q How do you encourage positive peer relationships?
- Q Have you allowed time for them to have some unstructured social time?
- Q Do you encourage group problem solving rather than adults sorting out issues?

**Parental and carer** involvement in supporting participatory practice, particularly with younger children, can be highly valuable. Sometimes it is important to support parents and carers to let their children engage in activities without their intervention. To ensure dialogue can occur between parents/carers and workers, a relationship based on the best interests of their child must be established.

### Building relationships with parents/carers includes

- Respecting parents'/carers' role in their children's lives
- Asking their views
- Providing opportunities for them to visit your organisation
- Making home visits
- Providing adequate information and answering questions
- Providing an evening telephone number.

Building strong links between children, young people and others in the **wider community** is integral to much participation work and helps to develop wider positive relationships, including redressing inter-generational conflict.

## **Building relationships with the wider community**

- Open days at local community projects/events
- Young people volunteer in the local area
- Community adults volunteer in child and youth services
- Young people gain work experience in local businesses
- Young people shadow adults working in the community (e.g. police officers)
- Consult community residents/businesses
- Encourage adults and young people to work together on inter-generational community projects.

### **Consider**

- Q** How can parents best be involved and supported?
- Q** What opportunities exist for engaging with the wider community?
- Q** Have children/young people identified community issues of concern to themselves?



## 4.3 Choosing How to Involve Children and Young People

### In this section you will find:

Questions to help you choose how to involve children and young people:

- What is the focus of the decision-making: public or private?
- What is the content of decision-making?
- What is the level of decision-making power?
- What is the nature of participation: formal or informal?
- How frequently are children and young people involved?
- Which children and young people will be included?

Plus examples of participation activities.

### For further information on the multi-layered nature of participation

see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT CHAPTER 1 'What do we mean by participation' and CHAPTER 7 'Participation Activities'.

'How do we *do* participation?' is a common question. Participation activities should be decided once you are clear what you aim to achieve, there is a commitment for establishing positive relationships with children and young people, and activities are viewed as part of a wider plan to develop a culture of participation within your organisation.

### What is the focus of the decision-making: public or private?

### In this section you will find:

- Discussion on the importance of involving children and young people in both personal and public decision making.

Organisations beginning participation work often place a greater emphasis on older young people’s involvement in making *public* decisions. The private realm is equally important. A child/youth-focus approach ensures children and young people are involved in making both.

<b><i>Examples of personal decision making</i></b>	<b><i>Examples of public decision making</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consenting to participate</li> <li>● Choosing which play and leisure activities to do</li> <li>● Deciding own learning goals</li> <li>● Negotiating type of health intervention and care support</li> <li>● Inputting into decisions regarding child protection and family law proceedings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Planning new and existing service development (strategic)</li> <li>● Designing new and existing services (operational)</li> <li>● Developing resources (e.g. videos, leaflets, research tools) (operational)</li> <li>● Delivering services (e.g. youth employee, training staff, undertaking research) (operational)</li> <li>● Writing organisational policies (strategic)</li> <li>● Evaluating services (strategic)</li> </ul>

All organisations, including those that do not often work directly with children and young people (e.g. strategic, policy and research organisations), can influence others to involve them more in both personal and public decisions.

## Ways to promote children and young people's participation

- Fund and promote organisations that involve children and young people in *all* decisions affecting their lives.
- Promote complaints procedures in which they can complain about personal support and services more generally.
- Promote children and young people's involvement in staff recruitment to ensure they help select those who will listen.
- Require evaluations to involve their views.
- Research children and young people's involvement in decision making.

### Consider

- Q Do you involve children and young people in making personal decisions?
- Q Do you involve them in public decisions?
- Q Do you promote their involvement in both types of decisions?

## What is the content of decision-making?

### In this section you will find:

- Discussion on the importance of involving children in all decisions relevant to their lives, whatever the content.

The extent or level of children's involvement in decision-making is not consistent across different subjects or sectors. It is recommended, as good practice and as their right, that they be involved in making all decisions that affect their lives. Reflect carefully on why you involve them in certain decisions but not in others, and whose interest it serves to exclude them.

Decisions vary in terms of their complexity and sensitivity. Personal decisions such as what to eat, when to take medication or which parent

to live with are very different. Public decisions similarly vary. Children and young people can be involved in a range of decisions but the ways they are involved will differ.

### **Involving children in their personal care (Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospital NHS Trust)**

Moves have been made to enable older young people to have more involvement in taking responsibility for their medication. For example, being responsible for injecting themselves, ordering their medication from GPs, and deciding when to take their medication. This was in response to user consultation in which young people said they wanted more involvement in the ward-based care:

*'We should try and get more independence [in our care] and be able to ask doctors more; not to be shy and find easier ways to ask for more information about [our treatment].'* (Young person)

#### **Consider**

- Q** Which issues do children and young people have a say in?
- Q** Do you involve them in sensitive issues?
- Q** Do you involve them in issues where their views may challenge adult ideas?

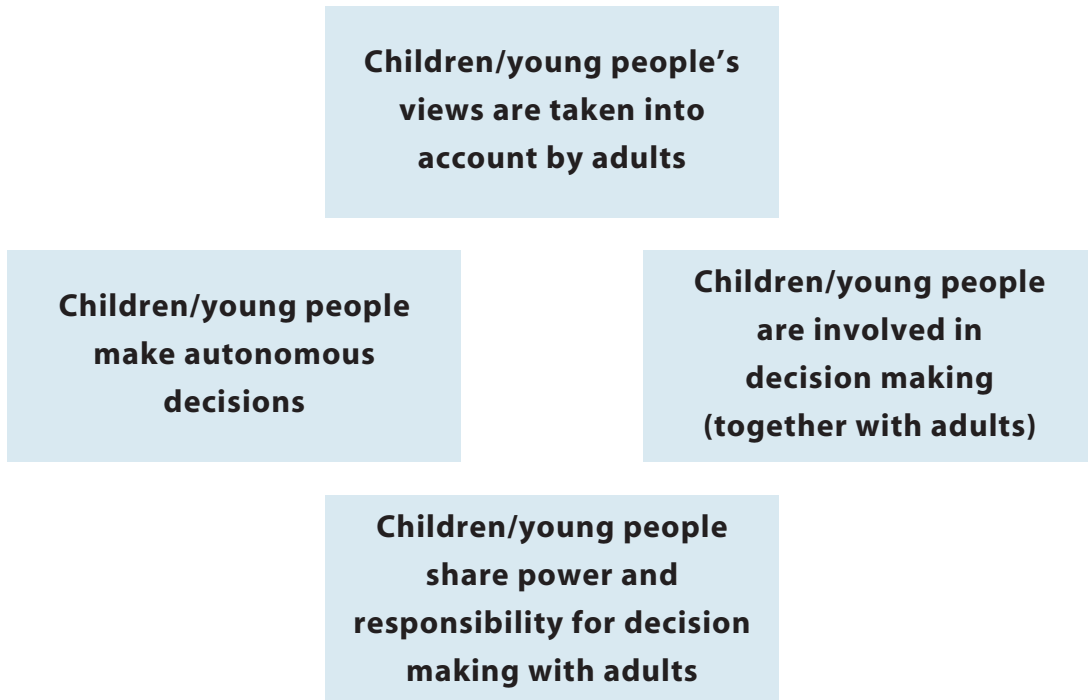
## **What is the level of decision-making power?**

### **In this section you will find:**

- Four levels of influence that children and young people can meaningfully have on decisions.

Participation varies in the extent to which children and young people are both listened to and their views taken into account. A non-hierarchical model below depicts four meaningful levels of participation.

**Figure 1.0 Levels of participation<sup>2</sup>**



### **Definition of terms**

- *Children and young people's views are taken into account:* the information children provide (whether volunteered or sought by adults) is one source, amongst others, that adults use to make a decision.
- *Children and young people are involved in decision-making:* they are actively involved where decisions are made, and children and adults discuss views together. Adults hold ultimate responsibility, but children steer decisions.
- *Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making:* the difference between this and the previous level is often a matter of degrees in how much influence children have on decisions. Decisions made by negotiation, consensus or voting.
- *Children and young people make autonomous decisions:* recognising they often require input from adults and decisions are dependent on adult structures, responsibility and power.

2 This model draws heavily on Shier's (2001) 'Pathways to participation' model, in *Children & Society*, vol. 15, pp. 107-117.

You may choose to use a variety of participation levels at different times and in different contexts. None is better or worse than another. The context, tasks, decision and participants determine the appropriate level. Individual children and young people may participate in different ways depending on their abilities, interest and availability.

### **Examples of how children and young people’s level of influence may vary depending on content of decisions**

(Note: these are examples, not recommended levels of influence)

<b><i>Content of decision</i></b>	<b><i>Children’s level of influence</i></b>	<b><i>Young people’s level of influence</i></b>
Choosing friends	Autonomous decision	Autonomous decision
Consenting to be interviewed	Initial parental consent then child’s autonomous decision	Autonomous decision
Choosing which parent to live with	Views taken into account by court	Involved in court decision
Selecting staff	Views taken into account through consultation on what makes good staff	Jointly negotiated with adults on recruitment panel
Cutting service budgets	Views taken into account through consultation about existing services	Views taken into account through consultation on existing services
Deciding what action to take on a community issue	Jointly negotiated with adults	Autonomous decision in youth group OR jointly negotiated in inter-generational campaign group

The level of influence will also vary depending on the culture of participation that your organisation has or is working towards.

## Levels of participation within different organisational cultures of participation

Views taken into account	Level of Participation			Culture of Participation
	Involved in making decisions	Autonomous decisions	Shared power for decisions	
✓ and	✓ and	✓ and	✓	= child-focused
✓ and	✓ or	✓ or	✓	= participation-focused
✓				= consultation-focused

### Consider

- Q** In what ways are children and young people involved at different levels in your organisation?
- Q** Does the level vary between tasks?
- Q** Does it vary between individual children and young people?

## What is the nature of participation: formal or informal?

### In this section you will find:

- Formal and informal ways of involving children and young people in decisions.

When involving children and young people in making decisions about their own care and services it is necessary to understand their perspective of the world, their experiences, feelings and views. This can be done formally or informally.

- Formal mechanisms provide designated opportunities to influence decisions and are used most commonly (though not exclusively) for involving young people in public decision making.

- Informal mechanisms are part of day-to-day child/youth-focused practice: they enable children and young people to be listened to, as and when they feel it is appropriate. They inform decisions about personal care and services as a whole.

### ***Informal Listening***

- Spending time alongside children and young people
- On-going dialogue
- Observation
- Listening to spontaneous communication

### ***Formal Listening***

- Dedicated mechanisms and activities such as one-off consultations; regular group meetings; suggestion boxes.

## **Communication Passports (Triangle)**

Triangle provides outreach support to children whose behaviour is causing serious concern. They feel it is essential to spend time alongside their clients, in their different settings, in order to build up a picture of how the child experiences their world. Triangle also works with the children to develop their own care plan in the form of a 'passport' which are laminated booklets detailing their communication, behaviour and support requirements. This enables them to communicate to any staff their own needs and preferences quickly and easily, so that these can be taken into account.

### **Consider**

- Q** What formal mechanisms does your organisation use for involving children and young people?
- Q** What informal mechanisms does your organisation use?



**For further information on communicating with disabled children and young people see:**

Triangle (2002) *Two-Way Street: Training video and Handbook about Communicating with Disabled Children and Young People*. Hove: Triangle. [www.triangle-services.co.uk](http://www.triangle-services.co.uk)

Only certain children and young people will want to, or feel able to, be involved in formal mechanisms. Think about how you will involve all others.

Staff working with and actively listening to children and young people will know a lot about their lives, including expressed needs and experience of services. This valuable information informs decisions about their personal care and can also be collated and used to inform organisational decisions. This bottom up approach helps prevent unnecessary over-consultation, and involves everyone: including those who do not want to participate in formal activities, or for whom it may not be appropriate.

### **Bottom-up approach to public decision making**

- Record and monitor concerns, questions or ideas raised by children and young people related to their care and services.
- Hold regular meetings with staff and children/young people to discuss and interpret the monitored information.
- Disseminate identified issues across the organisation and to other relevant agencies that can act on the information.

## **How often are children and young people involved?**

### **In this section you will find:**

- Discussion on the different frequency and duration of children and young people's participation.

Children and young people's power is also affected by how often and for how long they are enabled to influence decisions. Different activities vary in frequency and duration. Formal activities are often regular events

(e.g. forums), some of which are time-limited (e.g. advisory groups), while others continue indefinitely (e.g. school councils and suggestion boxes). Consultations are often one-off or irregular events. Informal mechanisms can be used frequently and part of everyday practice.

### Consider

- Q Do you involve children and young people in making decisions daily, regularly or occasionally?
- Q Could you involve them more frequently in making decisions?

*'Children have a right to be INVOLVED ALL the time not just when it is convenient for adults or as a tick box to say 'yes we have consulted with under fives.'* (Voluntary sector organisation)

## Which children and young people will be included?

### In this section you will find:

- Discussion on how many and which children and young people get to participate.

Some participatory organisations or initiatives seek to serve particular groups (e.g. looked after or refugee children); or different ages (teenagers; older children; young children). Others are open to all or many groups, or those living within a certain area. Often children, and particularly younger children, are not included. If you work with children and young people on a regular basis then you are likely to want to involve them all in decisions.

It is necessary to design forms of engagement and dialogue that start from the position of the child. The appropriate activity will depend on their age, ability, available time and level of interest, the context and so on.

### Consider

- Q Which children and young people do you aim to involve?
- Q Are some groups more excluded than others?
- Q Do you offer opportunities to participate in different ways?



## Now choose the participation activities

### In this section you will find:

- Examples of different participation activities that can be used to involve children and young people in decisions.

Fundamentally, participatory practice is about engaging with children and young people in ways described in Section 4.0. We have listed a number of activities below that can also be used to offer children and young people opportunities to articulate their views and participate in decisions. The table highlights how these can be used for different types of decisions, levels of participation, frequency of involvement and to include varying numbers of children and young people.

### For further information about group activities

see *Participation Spice it Up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations*. Cardiff: Save the Children and Dynamix. [www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

### For further information about these participation activities

see the FULL RESEARCH REPORT CHAPTER 7 'Participation Activities'.

<b>Participation Activities</b>	<b>Personal or Public Decisions</b>	<b>Formal or informal</b>	<b>Level of participation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>How many involved?</b>
Actively listening, observing and informal dialogue	Personal and Public	Informal	Views taken into account	On-going	All
Focused dialogue on a specific issue (e.g. court decision, learning goals, medication)	Personal	Informal and formal	Various (depending on context)	Varies: on-going, occasional or one-off	All
Communication systems and tools (e.g. symbols, communication passport, Makaton)	Personal and Public	Formal system (can be used informally)	Views taken into account	On-going	All
Visual and written presentations	Personal and Public	Formal	Views taken into account	One-off; occasional	All
Advocacy (with and for children and young people)	Personal	Formal	Influence decisions	On-going	All
Complaints procedures	Personal and Public	Formal	Views taken into account	On-going	All
Group peer support (education, emotional, mini-circle time)	Personal	Formal	Autonomous decisions	Regular	All/Group
Suggestion box	Public	Formal	Views taken into account	On-going	All
Young employees/award holders/volunteers	Public	Formal	Autonomous	On-going	Group/ Individuals
Board, management and governor youth representatives	Public	Formal	Share power and responsibility	Regular	Group
Youth forums/councils (area-wide; organisational)	Public	Formal	Share power and responsibility; Autonomous	Regular	Group
Social action groups (including inter-generational groups)	Public	Formal	Autonomous (Share power and responsibility)	Regular	Group
Whole group meetings (e.g. circle time, class councils, Jerry Springer assemblies)	Public and Personal	Informal	Share power and responsibility	Regular	Group
Advisory groups (e.g. for organisation, project, research)	Public	Formal	Involved in decision-making	Regular (time limited)	Group
Creative youth groups (e.g. video, newsletters, drama, arts)	Public and Personal	Formal	Views taken into account	Regular	Group
Conferences and presentations (verbal, written, visual)	Public and Personal	Formal	Views taken into account	One-off/ Occasional	Group/ Individuals
Youth representation on recruitment and grant panels, staff training	Public	Formal	Involved in decision-making	One-off/ occasional	Many
Research and consultation	Public	Formal	Views taken into account	One-off/ Occasional;	Many/All
Evaluation	Public	Formal	Views taken into account	One-off/ Occasional/Regular	Group
Youth researchers/evaluators (ie young people undertaking research)	Public	Formal	Varies	One-off/ Occasional; Regular	Group/ Individuals

Key: 'Individuals' refers to one, two or perhaps three children and young people; 'Group' refers to approximately 4 to 30 children and young people who meet together. 'Many' refers to tens, hundreds or thousands of young people; 'All' refers to all those in a target population (e.g. all service users or all those living in a geographic area)

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