

Ethical Considerations

There are consent and ethical considerations that you will need to think about before you engage with children. Here is some basic guidance to support you to engage in a way that is both meaningful and safe for children.

1. Do you have consent?

You must always ask children for their consent. Children need to be provided with age appropriate material that tells them the types of questions that will be asked and what their information will be used for. It should be clear to them that they are allowed to change their mind about participating at any time during the process.

Young people 16 years and over can legally make many decisions on their own without parental permission, including major decisions like leaving home and school. Therefore, you do not need to seek parental consent to gather the views of this age group. Their informed consent is sufficient (unless there are reasons to believe the young person needs support to make informed decisions, e.g. due to a severe learning disability).

For children and young people 15 years and younger, whether you seek parental consent (in addition to the child's consent) depends on:

- the nature of the questions (i.e. whether a question could be considered sensitive for some children to discuss);
- the engagement methods you choose (i.e. an online survey, or focus group); and
- the ability of the children to make informed consent decisions.

For non-sensitive topics, it may be ok to inform parents or caregivers of the engagement in advance without seeking their consent (e.g. an anonymous survey asking children their views on recreation activities they would like to have in their community). If you are unsure about whether parental consent is required we advise you to seek parental consent to be safe.

2. Is your engagement ethical?

Your engagement with children should never cause them harm. As well as seeking consent, you will need to ensure that:

- adults working directly with children are experienced or trained to work with children, and they are screened and police vetted.
- if the nature of your enquiry is deeply personal for the child or young person you seek ethical advice and approval from an ethics committee.
- when children share information that identifies risks to themselves or others, the right support is provided to them.
- children are not stigmatised or discriminated against in your process.
- individual children are not identified when you report your results.
- when possible, you should report back to the children how the information influenced decision making.

3. Will your engagement with children be inclusive of all children?

Children are diverse in age, ethnicity, culture, vulnerabilities, and disabilities. You should consider how your engagement activities will be inclusive for all children. This may require individuals who have the experience and expertise to engage with some child population groups.