



**Children and
Young Peoples
Participation
Framework**

Enable, Empower and Embed

Introduction

Involving children and young people in the decision-making process can profoundly affect their lives, their views should influence any decisions that are made about them.

Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child; listen to what they say, take their views seriously; and work with them and their families collaboratively when deciding how to support their needs. Evidence suggests that children and young people are empowered through participation and often develop an increase in confidence. It is essential therefore that children and young people are 'enabled' by professionals to participate in matters that affect them. Participation is often referred to as 'the voice of the child'.




Defining participation

All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account, when decisions are being taken about their life.

These decisions could be about their family, school or life in the community. This right is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been adopted into United Kingdom legislation, such as the Children's Act 2004, and all services and agencies have a duty to comply with this right.

The definition to the right makes the distinction between individual children and young people's involvement and public or collective involvement in decisions that affect children as a group or cohort. The examples below describe how this may work in practice.



Participation is the active involvement of children and young people in experiences, opportunities and decisions that affect their lives and their ability to fulfil their potential. A distinction has been made between children and young people's involvement in personal decisions, affecting them as individuals, and public decisions affecting children and young people as a group

(Kirby et al, 2003; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009).

Individual participation examples

- 1 One-to-one consultation with their social worker (or another worker)
- 2 Using an advocate to bring their views to the attention of the decision-makers
- 3 Children involved in their EHCP (education and health care plans)
- 4 Children and young people chairing reviews
- 5 Children and young people involved in writing their plans



Collective participation examples

- 1 Children and young people involved in the recruitment process including interviewing staff
- 2 Young people involved in policy making
- 3 Children and young people involved in the development and delivery of training
- 4 Children and young people's councils or specific issue forums, for example the 'all of us' forum for SEND children.



Cumbria's Principles

Cumbria has agreed a set of underpinning principles for participation. The principles have been developed to inform the way we deliver participation in the Council. The principles state what children and young people and others can expect of the Council in children and young people's participation practice. We will ensure that these principles underpin all that we do.

- 1** We will ensure that all children and young people, especially those that are most vulnerable, are able to participate in decision making, if they choose to do so.
- 2** We will listen to children and young people and ensure that their views inform our work.
- 3** We will enable children and young people through supporting them to acquire the necessary skills to develop and deliver their own participation activities.
- 4** We will ensure that children and young people receive feedback about any decision making that they have been involved with.
- 5** We will provide accessible, supportive, meaningful opportunities so that all children and young people can make informed decisions about their lives.
- 6** We will involve children and young people at the earliest opportunity engaging them in the development and design stages of participation activity.
- 7** We will ensure a sufficient range of resources and incentives are made available to support the participation of children and young people.
- 8** We will ensure the children and young people's workforce acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to involve children and young people in decision making appropriately.
- 9** We will safeguard all children and young people through creating safe and friendly environments for participation activity.
- 10** We will recognise that children and young people's participation is voluntary, and we will respect that they have other commitments.

Priorities

Achieving best practice in all our participation work will be an ongoing process, to help us to do this we have agreed a set of five key priorities, and for each priority some specific actions to deliver them.

- 1 Embed a culture of participation
- 2 Enable children and young people to participate
- 3 A Coherent structure for the voice of children and young people to be heard, with clear pathways of influence.
- 4 A visible participation 'offer'



Priority 1









Embed a culture of participation

A culture of participation is an organisation that creates an environment where the voices, of children and young people are listened to in different and active ways throughout an organisation.

It is where participation enters the ways of thinking and everyone in the organisation and becomes the norm rather than a special type of activity. It is also where the behaviours of meaningful engagement of children and young people is everyone's responsibility, it is embedded into policy and practice.

Understanding what participation means in practice is key for staff at all levels and in all positions. We will create opportunities for sharing good practice around participation activity through sharing and learning what works. We will create a network or community of participation champions that are engaged in participation to lead the process of embedding participation across the organisation.

To embed this priority into our practice we will:

-  Implement the seven golden rules (developed by young people)
-  Involve children and young people in the commissioning cycle. Involvement of children and young people will be an integral part of the different stages of the commissioning cycle. We will co-produce a participation policy for commissioning with young people.
-  Provide training and development opportunities for staff including practice experience underlying principles and methods
-  Support staff to reflect and evaluate their participation practice
-  Discuss participation work in supervision and staff meetings including overcoming the barriers to participation
-  Create a network of participation champions
-  Provide opportunities and encourage discussion around participation practice with others both internally and externally
-  Carry out regular assessments of children and young people's participation activities

Priority 2

Enable children and young people to participate

The quality of children and young people's participation and their ability to benefit from it are strongly influenced by the efforts made to create a positive environment for their participation.

Young people express the importance of relationships that are based on trust, respect, and non-judgement. Having strong links with partner organisations who specialise in supporting children and young people is essential as their practitioners have pre-existing relationships with the children and young people.

To embed this priority into our practice we will:

▶ Ensure that our ways of working build the confidence and self-esteem of children and young people so that they feel they are valued and able to contribute their experiences and views.

- ▶ Provide support where necessary to build skills and capacity to enable children and young people, individually and collectively, to participate effectively
- ▶ Ensure that our participation activities are age appropriate
- ▶ Work alongside practitioners who have pre-existing relationships with children and young people
- ▶ Implement the seven golden rules (developed by young people)



Priority 3


A Coherent structure for the voice of children and young people to be heard, with clear pathways of influence.

We will implement a coherent structure where children and young people are empowered, and participation activity will influence and change services for children and young people. A structure which influences local, regional, and national decision making.

The engagement of young people in local democratic processes is essential; it fosters a sense of belonging and allows communities to become stronger. The structure will have direct links to local area committees allowing children and young people to influence decisions in their local communities.

To support a joined-up approach across the Cumbria County Council departments including community, youth offending service, inclusion, education and children and families, we will identify a 'strategic lead for participation, who will take a lead on the process of embedding participation across the organisation.

To embed this priority into our practice we will:

 Use the voice of children and young people to enhance the work of the established partnerships for example, Childrens Trust



Board and the CSCP (Cumbria Safeguarding Children partnership), HWB (health and wellbeing board), Safer Cumbria



Use the voice of children and young people to strengthen the Corporate Parenting Board



Identify a strategic lead for participation who oversees the theme of participation in the Children and Young People's Plan & the work within the Council



Create opportunities for children and young people to have stronger links with elected members and links to Local Area Committees

Priority 4

Governance

It is vitally important that children and young people know how their voices have been listened to and what actions have been taken as a result of their involvement. It is equally as important for them to understand how and where this will be reported and what impact their contribution has made.

To embed this priority into our practice we will:

- ▶ Establish monitoring, reporting, and recording systems that will allow us to monitor and evidence participation activity and its impact.
- ▶ Publish annual reports on performance and participation activity
- ▶ Engage senior leadership through reporting to children's DMT on a quarterly basis
- ▶ Encourage evaluation to measure the impact of participation
- ▶ Carry out independent monitoring of performance by involving children and young people in review and assessment.



Priority 5

A visible participation ‘offer’

To help us to internalise this new way of working we will work alongside children and young people to co-produce a vision for Cumbria. This will ensure that everyone understands why and how children and young people are involved in participation throughout the organisation.

To embed this priority into our practice we will:

- ▶ Co-produce a participation ‘Vision for Cumbria’ with children and young people
- ▶ Develop a Communications Strategy which includes:
 - ▶ showcasing and celebrating of achievements
 - ▶ regular publication of priorities and achievements
 - ▶ website regularly updated with interactive consultation opportunities and appropriate use of new social media to promote the activities
 - ▶ engaging with schools, colleges, and academies
 - ▶ annual report on participation activities



References

Kirby, P and others (2003) Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation. Research report and handbook. London: NCB.

Children's Commissioner. Are we there yet? A report for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. December 2020

Frameworks for child participation in social care, ESSS Outline, Annelies Allcock, Published on 8 May 2018



What are the 7 Golden Rules for Participation?

They are a set of principles designed to help anyone working with, and for, children and young people to support them to understand, experience and exercise their participation rights. The Golden Rules inform adults what children and young people's participation should involve and feel like. They have been developed by us through:

- Consultation with children and young people
- Research with professional adults, reflecting the knowledge and experience of those working to promote participation.

The Golden Rules are directly informed by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment No. 12 (2009) and support the requirements necessary to achieve effective, meaningful and ethical implementation of participation rights.

The Golden Rules resource is not a tokenistic exercise or a set of 7 rules to tick off one-by-one. Instead, they are fundamental principles to be used within your day-to-day work with children and young people. Building participation into your practice is about building respectful relationships with children and young people you work with. It's not about holding 'one off' events or consultations.

Rule 1 Understand my rights

Adults should learn about children's rights, and why it is important to truly listen to me when making decisions that affect me. I should be given information about all of my rights in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (U-N-C-R-C for short).

I need to understand what my participation rights are, why it is important that I am listened to, and have my views taken seriously.

Remember that I have a right to have a voice today, not just in the future when I am older.

Adults who work with me must know that my participation in all decisions that affect me is my right. This is their responsibility.

Rule 2 A chance to be involved

Be honest. Don't ask for my opinion if it won't make any difference. I may need extra help, and I should be given this.

Use activities that are fun and creative and suit my abilities and interests.

Always treat me fairly and don't judge me.

Make me welcome, while also thinking about my age, ethnicity, ability, language, culture, religion, where I live, and anything else that is important.

Remember that I should be able to say what I think about things in my day-to-day life, as well as bigger things in my school, community and country.

I am different; we are all different.

Recognise and celebrate this.

Rule 3 Remember it's my choice

Make sure I can easily understand information about what you want me to do.

Tell me at the start what difference my taking part might make.

Before asking me to agree to take part make sure I understand:

- What the point of taking part is
- What change might come out of it
- If taking part could be harmful or risky for me in any way.

Give me the chance to take part in a way that is right for me, not you.

Remember that it is my choice to participate.

I may choose not to take part – make sure that it is okay for me to do this at any point that I want or need to. Let me bring my own ideas and talents to how we explore things together.

Rule 4 Value me

Involve me right from the start.

Show me that you are listening to me, and are taking me seriously.

Tell me how important my voice is, but always be honest about the difference I can make.

If I take part, please use what I tell you to help you make decisions.

Make sure that you use the things I have said to make my life and the lives of other children and young people better, and to change the things that need to be changed.

If you do not use the things that I have said to make changes, please explain to me why not.

Don't put me in situations where I might be told what I can, or should say by adults.

Don't ignore me because it is too hard for you to hear what I have to say.

Rule 5 Support me

Think carefully about how to communicate with me in a way that I will understand, and don't give up until I do.

Check with me that I understand, and don't assume that I do.

Remember that I might need somebody to speak with me, or for me, at times.

Give me a chance to ask questions.

Answer me honestly.

Support me to say what I think in ways that suit me best.

Consider any risks to me that expressing my views might involve, discuss these with me and make sure I am safe.

Rule 6 Work Together

I can learn from you, you can learn from me, we can learn from each other.

It is important that we respect each other.

Don't lead me to say things you want me to say.

Check that what you think I said is what I actually said.

Respect that we will sometimes disagree, and make time where it is okay to talk about this.

Be honest with me about what difference my voice will make, and be clear about what is possible from the very start.

Rule 7 Keep in touch

Explain to me what decisions or changes have been made, or not made, and why.

Give me a chance to ask you questions about this.

Agree with me how we will keep in touch about what is happening.

Tell me how to contact you if I want or need to.

Tell me what you will do, or what will happen next.

(Children and young people's commissioner for Scotland)



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