



Guide to

Child Friendly Communication at Events



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GUIDE TO CHILD FRIENDLY COMMUNICATION AT EVENTS

The aim should be to create an atmosphere in which children ⁽¹⁾ feel comfortable, respected and valued, and that they belong. An atmosphere that is too formal may be limiting and the children may feel unsure of how they fit, what their role and obligations are and may feel like a token child. It might be useful to reflect back on what you were like as a child and how you would have coped at an event like this if asked to participate. The following document offers some guidance on how you might do this in a safe, interactive and friendly way.

Important points to note:

- Children are involved in the event because they are entitled to express their views and have them taken seriously on all matters affecting them: their views and experiences are important to hear, alongside adults.
- Most children attending events will have some experience of the main issues. They have been invited to attend through their supporting organisation, will have been working hard to prepare for the event, and will have received training from their supporting organisations, such as confidence building, public speaking skills, and other practical help with financial assistance, to be present. They are not token children chosen at random to be there.
- Supporting organisations will also be responsible for obtaining and logging the children's, and their parents' consents, which will specify the boundaries and limitations of their participation.

⁽¹⁾ Persons below 18 years old



1. BEFORE THE EVENT: Guidance for organisers

Children are not all the same and may require differing levels of support and involvement according to their age and other needs. Some children may need extra support and time to deliver their messages and may need more comfort breaks, for example, if they have language and translation needs, a disability, or need help to understand a question, operate technology and/or make their presentations. Those organising an event should:

- consult with children and their supporting organisations to include their views in the design of events and choice of methods that would work for them and their communication needs,
- be prepared to adapt existing working methods to make events as age-appropriate and accessible as possible,
- ensure that the venue/platform is and feels comfortable and safe. This may require giving children a tour (perhaps virtual) of the venue/platform
- prepare an age-appropriate and accessible summary to inform children and young people about the event, what they need to do, what is expected of them and what may happen,
- provide information and/or photographs of the adults they will be sharing a panel/platform with,
- introduce children to each other, the safeguarding team and other adults with whom they will work.

Safeguarding

It is crucial that everyone attending an event is aware of the important role of the child protection and safeguarding team. They should have a prominent place, and be easy to access, at all events and be in attendance during every panel session and side event in case a child needs their assistance.

Participants should be made aware that if they feel a child has been treated unfairly, have concerns about a child's safety, or another issue relating to engaging with children at this event, they must contact any member of the safeguarding team. Other practical steps to be taken:

- Add photos and details of child protection leads, support leads and/or event organisers, to the event literature.
- At the start of the event, introduce the safeguarding team and highlight their important role.
- Signpost participants to the safeguarding person, desk, room etc.
- Inform those attending that the event organisers reserve the right to remove/block access for anyone not following these guidelines, behaving in an inappropriate way, or posing a danger to children.

2. DURING THE EVENT: Guidance for adult attendees

Please check that a child is happy to engage with you voluntarily and that you are doing so in a way that makes the child feel comfortable. This includes asking the child and checking with the safeguarding team on issues such as photography and whether the child wishes to be acknowledged for their work. Some children want, and need, to be credited for the good work that they do. Others may be speaking out about a controversial or political issue in their country and may be placed at risk if they were to be identified. It is important to liaise with the safeguarding team to check what the children (and their parents) have consented to.

Voluntary engagement

You can ensure that children are engaging voluntarily and are comfortable by following the guidance below

- Appreciate that all participants are expressing their views and opinion. **Do not put any pressure** on children to speak on behalf of their generation, their school, children in their country etc.
- Children **should never be coerced**. Always **check consents** with the child and the safeguarding team. Do not take photographs or screen shots of children or their work without **prior permission** to avoid any exploitation.
- Think before you post/publish. Unless agreed in advance with the child and their supporting organisation, do not mention children's last name, location or any other data that would make it possible to **identify them** in your social media messages, reports and any other documents. This could **put them at risk**.

REMEMBER: Children's participation at the event is voluntary and their safety and comfort is of utmost importance. They are not paid nor contracted to be here. They are attending because they are enthusiastic, passionate, and want to make a difference by sharing their experiences and knowledge with adults in a position to help. They should be accommodated to express themselves in many ways, for example, through drawing, speaking or in a video.

- **If online** - they can turn off the camera and microphone at any point. They may use the chat function if it makes them more comfortable but written text can risk losing their emotional intent, so adults should ask them before jumping to conclusions about what they have written in the chat.
- **If offline** - they can leave the event, panel, discussion room, at any time. A 'trusted adult' from the safeguarding team or the child's supporting organisation will attend each panel and will look after them.



Communicating in a Child Friendly Way: Guidance for adult attendees

Children should feel comfortable engaging at all times. The guidance is here to make sure that children are not and do not feel coerced, manipulated, exploited, not taken seriously and/or placed at risk, all of which will prevent them from expressing their views freely.

- Participation can enhance the personal development of each child. Please help to make them feel welcome and see that their opinion is valued.
- The working language of the majority of events may be English. For some children this may be a second language and some may not speak the language at all. Try to speak slowly and clearly. Use short simple sentences and avoid jargon and acronyms.
- Please be patient, as some children may need more time to form their thoughts or get help with expressing these.
- Children will express their views on matters that affect them. Please listen attentively when they are speaking in a panel or smaller group. Do not look bored, chat to others, or check your phone unnecessarily, as this may make you come across as disingenuous and the children may feel degraded.
- Please be respectful when engaging with the children or asking them questions. Do not patronise them. Treat them as respectfully as you would treat adults at an event. Use the same respectful tone of voice as you use when addressing an adult speaker.
- During discussions, a child may ask you a question or ask you to clarify your position on a topic. Please answer truthfully, provide realistic comments and tell them what is possible. Do not laugh, sigh, brush them off, or make any other sign of disapproval in reaction to their question.
- When a child has spoken, and you understand their view, make it known in your response show your approval and appreciation by making positive gestures, such as smiling, nodding and thanking them for their contribution.
- When you ask a question, avoid long introductions, keep your information relevant and to the point, or you risk losing the children's attention.
- If the children do not understand what you are saying, please seek the help of the event organisers, safeguarding team or the supporting organisation so they can help translate for you, in a form that the children understand. The children's peers can help with this too and may also offer their assistance.

3. AFTER THE EVENT

Guidance for organisers

It is important to demonstrate the impact of children's participation. Children are entitled to know how their views have been interpreted and whether and how you intend to use these.

All children who attended should be thanked for their contribution and should receive a child-friendly summary of the proceedings.

Event organisers should develop an evaluation tool and collect the views of adult and child participants, anonymously, on what worked well and what could be improved. This will help to capture learning and gather ideas on better ways of communicating. Suggestions should be considered carefully and taken on board (if practical and appropriate to do so) to improve child and adult interaction at future events. Children should be informed about how their suggestions will be taken on board at future events.

Guidance for adult attendees

A child may say or demonstrate something that resonates with an attendee and which could be useful or used in their work.

- Please check with the child if they wish to be acknowledged, and please acknowledge their contribution.
- You may wish to keep in contact with a child participant (via their supporting organisation) because you are interested in their continued work or you need to provide feedback to them on how their participation at this event has influenced you and any outcomes associated with your work. The safeguarding team can liaise with the child and their supporting organisation on your behalf and help in passing any messages and responding to them.



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