

Tips for including children from birth to 5 years in decision-making

Here are some good practice tips to help you involve children from birth to 5 years in decision-making. These tips come from children and adults, early years educators and specialists, and key messages from the National Participation Framework

Use these good practice tips in your work with children from birth to 5 years.

- 1 Make it part of everything you do:** Build the involvement of children in decision-making into everything you do and make it a central approach in your professional practice every day. Create spaces where children feel safe to express their views and have them acted on.
- 2 Keep it real:** Be in the here and now. Young children make decisions based on how they feel, what they think and what they want to do in real time on live and concrete happenings in their lives.
- 3 Support children:** Make sure that you and other key adults support and contribute to children's participation in decision-making. Relationships with trusted adults are a cornerstone of early childhood and participation in decision-making should be viewed as an interdependent process between adults and young children. This process should be based on adults building fair and respectful relationships with children.
- 4 Allow time:** Invite children to participate in decision-making using slow approaches in which they are interacting with trusted adults over time. Very young children need time to give their views and positive interaction with adults while giving their views.
- 5 Respect children's differences:** Be inclusive and responsive to the individual stage of development, ability, needs (including additional needs), views and interests of each child so that all children can take part in decision-making. It is important to take account of individual variations in the capacities of children of the same age and of their ways of reacting to situations. Be aware of the evolving capacities of children noted in Article 5 of the UNCRC, which refers to processes of maturing and learning as children gradually develop knowledge, competencies and understanding, including understanding their rights and how they can be realised.
- 6 Vary methods:** Use a variety of methods and approaches to involve children in decision-making to enable individual children to contribute in ways that suit their personality, interests and stage of development. Children may give their views on one decision using a lot of different methods or ways. Young children may be pre-verbal or choose not to speak, and it is essential we listen to the many ways that they can communicate their views.
- 7 Offer children choices:** Give children the choice to take part in decision-making or not to take part and remember that silence and non-participation are forms of decision-making. The opportunity to choose not to participate in decision-making is critical to a true understanding of child rights.
- 8 Use observation:** Use observation to translate the views of very young children. The good practice examples illustrate ways that early year's educators and other practitioners used observation to record children's views and reactions so they could translate and act on children's views.
- 9 Seek children's blue sky thinking:** Get children's own original views and thoughts rather than giving them the opinions of other people, which can limit their thinking. Remember there is always a power imbalance between children and adults and children are likely to be strongly influenced by adult views.
- 10 Use children's strengths:** Use children's own knowledge and experience in the ways you involve them in decision-making. Always use methods that enable children to give their views in ways that respect their competence, skills and understanding.
- 11 Translate children's views:** Avoid placing adult interpretations on children's views, drawings and other ways they communicate. Ask them what they mean when possible and write children's ideas on post its or the back of their drawings rather than interpreting or guessing what children mean.
- 12 Give feedback to children:** Children have a right to be given feedback on what happened to their views. Sometimes children's suggestions cannot be acted on or implemented, and it is important they know why. Lundy has proposed [a model of 'Four Fs' to guide decision-makers on how to give effective feedback](#) to children after their views have been heard. In this model feedback to children must be full, friendly, fast, and followed-up.
- 13 Check it's working:** Evaluate the ways you involve children in decision-making to check if and how well those methods are working. Use verbal and non-verbal ways to discover if the participation methods you use are effectively giving children a voice in decision-making and if children enjoy those methods. It is also important to self-evaluate and get the views of your colleagues about how well participation methods are working.
- 14 Reflect on your practice:** Use the Everyday Spaces Checklist every day to reflect on your own practice and support you to build children's participation in decision-making into every part of your work and daily routine.
- 15 Seek further guidance:** Read and use the guidance from the Participation Framework and guidance from your own sector.