

Checklist of ethical and practical issues when planning research with children and young people

Adapted from UNICEF 2002: We the children: meeting the promises of the world summit for children. United Nations

There are a number of useful questions worth considering before engaging in research with and by children and young people (adapted from Unicef, 2002):

1. What is the purpose of your research?

Is the topic worthwhile, will it add to what is already know and will it benefit children? If the findings are intended to support decision-making, who do they target and what will children's roles be in this decision making?

2. What are the costs and hoped-for benefits?

What contributions are children being asked to make? What cost might there be to them – time, intrusion of privacy, fear of repercussion etc? What might be the benefits – skills or knowledge development, satisfaction? What are the risks involved in the research process of causing potential harm to those taking part? How have they been assessed and what measures have been taken place to reduce or remove these risks?

3. How will issues of privacy and confidentiality be managed?

Will children be given privacy, or can they have parents / carers present if they choose? If a child shares a confidence which raises safeguarding concerns who will they report this to? Will there be a discussion with the child first? Is there clear guidance in place and has this ben explained to the children taking part? Will names be shared in reports? How will confidential data collected be stored? Have there been checks to ensure researchers in direct contact with the children do not represent a risk?

4. Selection, inclusion and exclusion

Is it clear how and why the children concerned have been selected to take part? Have efforts been made to engage marginalised or disadvantaged children? Does the methodology accommodate differing capacities of some groups of children? Have some children been excluded, and can these exclusions be justified? Are the findings intended to be representative or typical of a certain group of children? If so, have the children in the study been sufficiently well selected to support these claims? Can children involved at any stage refuse to continue or withdraw?

5. Funding

Does funding allow for children's and parents' or carers' expenses to be repaid? Should children be paid or given some reward after helping with the activity? Is the role of the children play in the research process a factor as to whether they should be paid? How do the practices of paying children compare with payment of adults involved?

6. Process of review and revision of the methodological proposal

Have children helped to plan or comment on the methodological proposal and methods to be used? Have they been involved in the reviewing the ethical considerations, such as whether the methodological design in any way is unhelpful or unkind to children? Does the research design allow for taking into account comments and improving the design? Are the researchers accountable to anyone? Is there an agreed method of dealing with complaints?

7. Informing children, parents and other carers

Are the children and adults concerned given details about the purpose and nature of the research, the methods and timing, and the possible benefits, harms and outcomes? Are they given this information in an accessible format dependent on their level of understanding or literacy skills? If children are not informed, how is this justified? Are key concepts, such as 'consent', explained clearly? Does the information shared contain contact names of the research team and how and what to do if they wish to make a complaint?

8. Consent

Has consent been obtained where possible? If children are not asked for their consent, how is this justified? If it is not possible to obtain consent is this justified and alternative methods of 'assent' been explored? Are children told that they can consent or refuse to take part in the research at any stage? Do they know that if they refuse or withdraw that there will be no repercussions? Are parents or guardians asked to give consent? How will the situation be handled if a child wants to volunteer but the parents refuse?

9. Dissemination

Will the children and adults involved receive a report on the main findings? Are the capacities of children and their choice about how to receive feedback taken into consideration?

10. Impact on children

Has the possible impact on children been considered? Besides the children involved, how might the conclusions affect larger groups of children? Is the approach reflexive, in that those involved in data collection and analysis critically discuss their own prejudices and impact on the study?

