

Web Resource

All children and young people have views about issues that affect them and young children are no exception to this. Children have a right to participate in decisions that affect them. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states: Children should be listened to on any matter that concerns them. They know what is important to them and have to live with the consequences of any decisions made! This participation helps children to develop skills of communication, debate, negotiation and compromise and so to achieve a balance between their own needs and those of others.

There are increasing opportunities for young people and children to be heard and to have their say, but young children are often forgotten. It is perceived that they are unable to voice their opinions, but there are many ways to encourage children to tell and show how they interpret their experiences, their likes and dislikes and their views on how things can be better.

Why should we involve young children in our work?

- It is their right to be listened to and to have their views and experiences taken seriously
- To recognise young children as experts in their own lives
- To promote a listening culture
- To improve services and practices
- To raise self esteem, and build confidence.
- To develop new skills and understanding, it enables them to explore the ways in which they perceive the world, and provides opportunities for them to express their views, opinions and aspirations.
- To develop independence, the more opportunities children are given to participate and be involved, the more capable and powerful they feel.
- To challenge assumptions, seeing and hearing children express their interests and priorities can give surprise insights into their capabilities.

How can we involve young children in our work?

There are many ways to get children involved in our work, and to find out the things that are important to young children, below are some methods we have used on our training course.

Effective Listening

Age range all

Good consultation and participation requires you to listen to children and take the time to understand what they mean, and have the willingness to act on their views.

Research shows that only 7 per cent of communication is verbal (by words) and 38 per cent is vocal (including tone of voice and other sounds), whilst 55 per cent is non verbal (body language). Therefore to listen effectively we need to be aware of all the messages that children are giving out.

- Always make eye contact and get down to the child's level.
- Give them time and try not to interrupt or finish sentences.
- Don't worry if there are long pauses – silence does not always have to be filled.
- When the child has finished reflect back to make sure you understand.
- Be honest; don't make assumptions. If you are not sure you have understood correctly ask again.
- Talk respectfully; children know when they are being patronised.
- Don't feel you have to have all the answers.
- Show that you value what's being said.
- Be aware of the difference between open and closed questions. Closed questions tend to have a yes/ no or correct answers, they can help you introduce a topic or check that you have understood what a child has said but they mean you, not the child do most of the talking. An open question, e.g. "Tell me what you like at nursery" encourages the child to talk and lead the conversation.

Observation

Age range all

This is a powerful tool and can give so much information. The resources needed for this is time, you need to take yourself out of the staff equation and just watch and note what children show an interest in, what they avoid, where they play – and with whom, how they communicate, how they behave in particular situations and with different people.

Observations can be difficult;

- There are lots of things happening at the same time,
- Your interpretation of what you are observing is subjective,
- And just by you being there can change what happens.

But it can also be so **valuable**, observation allows us to see how learning is embedded in those activities and situations which have meaning for children and will enable us to gain an understanding to an individual child's or a whole groups needs and experiences It can inform us of how to set up an environment to be child centered.

Using Cameras and DVD

Cameras are a great medium for involving children in evaluating a project, building scrap books, creating a visual map, planning and designing spaces and services.

Child led tours

Age range 3+

This gives children an opportunity to share their views about the strength and weaknesses of a setting
Children can be given a camera (digital or a Polaroid camera have the advantage of producing instant pictures and the photographs can be talked about immediately, children have often forgotten why they took the photo if they have to wait for the film to be developed) and asked to lead an adult around taking photos of different areas of the setting and telling the adult why they taking the photo, if they like the place, what happens there. This offers

the adult a unique glimpse into the child's world and what a child's experiences from a child's perspective.

This activity encourages lots of dialogue about what the child likes and dislikes and what can be changed to make it better.

Walking around and being in control means the child decided what is talked about or photographed, they are not influenced by peers it is the opportunity to express their own feelings, they are empowered and this helps to increase self confidence and self esteem.

It is important to listen and to give the child time to explain why the photo is taken, not to make assumptions.

These tours can be used to find out what the children coming to the setting experience, their interests and concerns and their views on how things can be better or different, can inform planning of sessions.

Cameras can also be used to create visual maps of a setting, the pictures can be placed on a wall freeze, children can be given sticky dots and asked put dots next to their favourite activities.

Photos can used in a circle time activity, have two boxes, one with a smiley face and the other with a sad face, go through the photos with the children asking them to put them in the box that reflects how they feel about what's in that photo.

Scrap Books

Age range 3+

Children can create a scrap book all about them. These can be made using photos, drawings, cut out pictures. Pictures of themselves, their family and friends. Their favourite toys, places, what they like to eat, or don't like, favourite things about the setting, best thing about the setting, where they feel safe, or unsafe.

Children can use these scrapbooks as a communication tool they can look at the book with an adult and talk about things they like and don't like. They can be used to reflect back on their progress.

“The Wind Blows”

Age range all

This is a game to focus everyone on the project or issue to be discussed, and enables information to be gathered on the attitudes of children and adults in a fun and non-threatening way. The exercise is a light-hearted way for the workers and children to join in together.

How to play

The group sits in circle, preferably with chairs but not necessarily. The facilitator starts by saying “the wind blows everyone who...” (Name a category), and any one who fits this category will get up and move about like a leaf blowing in the wind and change seats with someone else. Start off choosing general categories that will have most participants moving, and then move towards questions that are more relevant to the project or issue.

For example, the wind blows all those who:

- Like chocolate
- Have a pet
- Enjoy coming to the setting
- Play football
- Like building dens
- Like meeting their friends here
- Like playing outside
- Everyone who had breakfast this morning

The game can be used in many different ways – as an icebreaker, to focus the group on the issue to be discussed or as a fun way to evaluate a session. It can be good asking useful and quite specific questions. The game can be adapted to using musical instruments, if running around is difficult, or waving flags and it can also be played with a parachute

Story telling

Age range 3+

This is a good activity to use when evaluating a project. The activity starts with the children sitting in a circle. They are shown a picture of a character. This can be a drawn picture of a child or a cartoon character, the children are introduced to the character the character and from here we build a story, e.g.

This is Poppy; she is going to come to the nursery and is a bit scared can you tell her what happens here? The children will talk about the daily routine of nursery. The story can then move to add other issues such as:

- Can you play outside?
- Can mummy stay?
- Will Poppy like coming?
- What happens when you are upset?
- What is the best part about coming to the nursery?
- What is the worst part about coming to the nursery?
- If Poppy could make changes in the nursery what would they be?
- What will be Poppy's favourite place at nursery?
- What will be the part of nursery that Poppy won't like?
- Poppy is sad, what has made her sad?
- Poppy is happy what has made her happy?

This activity can be used in all kinds of situations such as evaluation of a project, but also talking about sensitive issues i.e. bullying or conflict resolution. It is a useful consultation method as children can open up and talk about issues that are affecting (real to) them through a third party. The story and life of the character can change to fit what you are consulting about.

Feeling games

Age range 2+

Emotional cards

Draw or get picture of faces showing different emotions e.g. happy sad, angry etc. Show the faces to the children to find what they think the emotion the picture is showing. Then give the children a

situation, verbally or using pictures, and ask them to point to a picture that shows how they would feel in that situation for example How do you feel when:

- you are coming to nursery
- grown ups shout
- playing outside
- it's dinner time
- it's time to go home

You can then discuss why they feel that way.

Don't have too many faces as this can be confusing. Thomas the Tank faces are very good because of the friendly faces with exaggerated expressions. Children feel safe as Thomas is familiar. Or use cartoon characters as angry photos of real people can be frightening.

I like it when.... Game

Age range 3+

This is a game you can use fun way of evaluating the nursery or a service, instead of a questionnaire! This can be done in circle time or with small groups

For this you need to create some cards, on one side of the card write statements such as:

- I like it when...
- I don't like it when...
- I get scared when...
- The best part of the day is...
- The worst part of the day is...
- If only...
- If only grown ups...
- Nursery would be better if....
- I think we should be allowed...

And any other questions you wish to ask. The cards can have pictures as well as words

On the other side of the card place the numbers on a dice (if the dice has dots you need to use dots on the back of the card).

Separate the cards in to piles, ask the children to role the dice and pick a card with the same number on it and finish the statement on the card.

Fishing Game

Age range 3+

This a game that can be used when creating rules for the setting. Cut out fish shapes from card write one rule on each fish, include some rules that you don't have in your group, attach a paper clip on each fish and place in a pond (the children could make a pond for the setting). On a piece of paper draw a keep net and a 'back in the pond bucket.

Then the children can go fishing with a magnet fishing rod, they catch a fish, the rule is read out and the children decide if this is a good rule for the group. You can go on and discuss why you need the rule, dose every body keep the rules are there other rules the group needs.

You could use plastic ducks with hooks on their backs instead of fish, or use the game to discuss other things, helping to choose equipment, planning sessions etc

Wish tree

Age range 2+

The wish tree is a drawing or a model of a tree children write or draw their wishes on a leaf or a closed bud and when the wish is realised then the leaf or bud transforms in to a flower, such as:

"I would like more toys for outside play"

"I want to do my own coat up"

This is a powerful and visual way of displaying children's wishes and showing the tree blossom, it acknowledges and values children's hopes even when it is not possible to meet their aspirations. It shows the children we are listening!

Talking Mats

Age range 2+

This is a tool that was originally designed to help people with communication difficulties. But the concept works really well with young children, a Talking Mat kit can be bought, or you could make your own and tailor it to your own setting. It could be used to evaluate your setting.

The mat itself can be a door mat (not the hairy type!)

Draw a happy face and a sad face, using Velcro tabs stick them to either corner of the mat.

Take photos or drawings of the setting, including the space (the entrance the toilets etc), and the activities. Attach Velcro to the backs of the pictures.

The child will then either have a photo of them or draw a picture of themselves, this picture is placed at the bottom of the mat.

The child then looks at the pictures of the setting and places them under the smiley face or sad face.

It creates a space for discussion and can give feedback on how the child is feeling.

The mat can be used to plan sessions, it can be used in conjunction with other emotional faces to get an indication of how children are feeling about different situations.

Useful books, training and resources

Never Too Young

This practical resource has tools and techniques to help young children take part, make decisions and take responsibility for their actions. Never Too Young provides early years workers with information about why participation works, and explores tried and tested techniques for involving children in decisions that affect them

by Judy Miller

ISBN 1 841870757



Listening to Young Children

The pack consists of five parts:

Getting Started - the introductory guide;

Promoting Listening to Young Children - the reader;

Listening and Looking - the practitioner handbook;



Eleven shared experiences - individual case study booklets;
and a CD-ROM with audiovisual material to illustrate the case
studies.

Each part complements the others through links, offering stepping-
stones by addressing why, when and how to listen to young
children.

by Y. Penny Lancaster Vanessa Broadbent
ISBN 9780335213726

Listening as a way of life

This is a series of 6 leaflets published by the NCB on **listening** to
young children, with details of research, practice and methods.
To download the leaflets visit www.ncb.org.uk

Starting with choice

Inclusive Strategies for consulting young children.

Starting with Choice provides early years workers with
clear, practical guidance on consulting young children, and a range
of techniques that help young children to express their views and
make choices. It also looks at when consultation can be effective,
at how it fits in to the foundation stage guidance, and at how to
train and support early years workers to gain the skills they need.
This guide shows that innovative and exciting solutions can be
found so that all children can participate in group decision-making.

by Mary Dickins

Save the Children

ISBN 1 84187 085 4



Participation Spice it up

A user-friendly practical toolkit for engaging children and young
people in planning and consultations. Crammed with activities to
make participation fun.

Dynamix Ltd 2002

Tel: 01792 466231

Email: dynamix@seriousfun.demon.co.uk

ISBN 1 84187 062 5



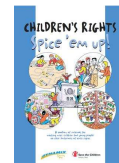
'Children's Rights: Spice Em Up'

Dynamix and Save the Children have produced a toolbox of methods for working with children and young people to raise awareness of their rights
Dynamix Ltd 2002

Tel: 01792 466231

Email: dynamix@seriousfun.demon.co.uk

ISBN 1 84187 062 5



Talking mats

Talking Mats can help people arrive at a decision by providing a structure where information is presented in small chunks supported by symbols. It gives people time and space to think about information, work out what it means and say what they feel in a visual way that can be easily recorded.

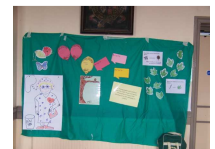
by Sally Boa and Joan Murphy

www.talkingmats.com



Sticky walls

Each training session we have had many comments about the display walls (sticky walls) these are lengths of rip stop material which have been sprayed with spray mount adhesive. This fabric allows the convenient display of work, pictures etc. It's easy to fold, travel with, and use over and over again.



If you are interested in information on, or attending the

Making a Difference **Listening to Young Children**

(Practical tools for involving children and young people in your work)

Please contact:

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Helen Miller. March 2010