

Engaging the voices of children  
and families

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PRINCIPLES



## Context

The considerations and principles outlined in this document are intended to provide operational guidelines to organisations to support children and young people to participate in a variety of ways at different levels in environments familiar to them, for example, early learning settings, playgroup, community and health settings.

Organisations will be able to adapt these considerations with support from The Front Project, including The Apiary to their project design, and implementation where conversations and/or interactions with children occur. A project design involving children will require a Collaboration Agreement in place that will ensure each organisation is clear about expectations and requirements.

## Purpose

Establish engaging and ethical principles and practices for children and families to share their voices, views, opinions, and ideas using a number of methods and models.

Children and young people's right to effective participation and inclusion is one of the four guiding principles in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 12 provides that: States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Participation is also a key principle in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Under Article 18, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people expressly have the right to participate in decision making in matters that affect their rights.

The rights of Indigenous children are also given special attention at Article 22. Participation and consultation must be consistent with the principles of free, prior, and informed consent. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people must be respected and treated as key stakeholders in developing, designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating all policies and legislation that influences their wellbeing.

## Assumptions

- All children and young people have the capacity to participate.
- All children and young people have the right to participate.
- All children and young people have critical and unique perspectives in their lives.

(Engaging children and young people in your organisation, ACYP, 2019).

## Principles

- Be voluntary and informed.
- Bring them no harm.
- Take into account any ethical considerations at the outset.
- Should include continuous reflection.

- Recognise that children and young people are a diverse group.
- Acknowledge imbalances of power.
- Meaningful participation.
- Capture the diversity of views and experience.

(Engaging children and young people in your organisation, ACYP, 2019).

## Ethical considerations

When children and young people are participating in any experiences, interactions or activities associated with and/or organised by The Front Project, including The Apiary, all potential negative impacts on children will be evaluated and risks will be minimised to ensure that children are not at risk of harm physically or psychologically.

Consideration will be given to children being at risk:

- As a direct result of their experience (e.g., a child or young person may share personal information that causes them distress or anxiety).
- From the adults facilitating the experience, interaction, or activity.

Ethical Considerations supporting Children and Young People's participation:

- Duty of care approach will be used to minimise harm and decide how best to respond.
- There is a procedure in place for supporting any children and young people who experience distress or any other negative consequence as a direct result of their participation.
- All adults will ensure they are informed about the mandatory reporting responsibilities in the relevant State/Territory.
- All adults working directly with children and young people will ensure they meet the legal requirements in the relevant state/territory that assesses their suitability to have direct, unsupervised contact with children and young people, for example, in NSW a Working with Children Check (WWCC).
- The environment where consultations take place will be child safe and suitable for children and young people and include considerations for accessibility, access to toilets etc.
- The privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the children and young people participating will be protected at all times.
- The relevant privacy laws in each State/Territory will be used to inform the consent process.
- Power imbalance that may arise will be addressed by ensuring children and young people have all the information they need about the process prior to their participation, are clear about what to do if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe and have an opportunity to provide feedback or suggestions during and after the experience.

- Cultural sensitivity, safety and respect will be embedded throughout the design process to ensure that all experiences and activities are responsive to community the children, families, and community in which they occur.
- Data will be de-identified to protect the identity of the participants. Any data or recordings will be securely stored on a secure IT platform owned by The Front Project and password protected. Raw data will be destroyed in accordance with the relevant laws related to periods of time in the State/Territory in which the activities occurred.

## Core Principles of Consent

### **Consent will be informed.**

All children, young people, and parents/carers will be provided with clear and concise information, so they are able to understand what they are agreeing to.

All children and young people under the age of 18 must have permission or informed consent from their parent/carer to participate.

Even if a parent/carer has given permission or informed consent, a child or young person's decision not to participate will be respected. Children with informed consent will be invited to give assent and if they do not want to participate their decision will be respected.

### **Consent will be voluntary.**

Children and young people's decision about participation will be voluntary and free of any coercion or inducement.

### **Consent will be negotiable.**

If a child or young person decides at any time they wish to withdraw from participation they will be supported to do so.

### **Consent will be inclusive.**

Additional considerations will be included when working with children that have additional rights, for example, disability, living in out of home care, health and other community services etc. These may include consulting with a Case worker or adapting the physical environment to allow access.

### **Consent will be from a parent/carer and will include permission for:**

- participation
- photography
- video/audio recording
- other methods of capturing views
- publication and use
- storage and use of information captured.

- information about when photos and recordings will be destroyed.

## Confidentiality

Children and young people will not be identified in the project outcomes including but not limited to reports and presentations.

The information provided by the children and young people will be kept confidential so that they are not able to be identified.

When a group of children and young people participate together, ground rules will be established at the outset that include their responsibilities to each other regarding confidentiality.

In certain circumstances confidentiality may need to be breached. Such circumstances include when:

- As a direct result of their experience (e.g., a child or young person may share personal information that causes them distress or anxiety).
- A child or young person reveals they are in a situation where they could be seriously harmed.
- A child or young person discloses physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect.
- It is necessary to report to another person to assess a particular situation (e.g., medical condition).

Limits on confidentiality, such as when a child discloses being unsafe, will be made clear to children and young people at the outset of the project.

## Constraints and Risks

Children feeling distressed or anxious as a result of participating in the process and sharing, or hearing others share personal experiences is a moderate likelihood. A process or procedure for notifying a parent/career if the child becomes distressed will be developed.

## RESOURCES / REFERENCES

Harris, P., & Manatakis, H. (2013). Children's Voices: A principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners. University of South Australia in partnership with the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, Adelaide.

Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (January 2019). Report: [Engaging children and young people in your organisation](#)

Convention on the Rights of the Child, opened for signature 20 November 1989, 1577 UNTS 171 (entered into force 2 September 1990). [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, GA Res 61/295, UN Doc A/RES/61/295 (2 October 2007, adopted 13 September 2007). [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)

Early Childhood Australia. (2015). ECA Code of Ethics - Early Childhood Australia. <http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics>