engaging children in decision making

A guide for consulting children

A combined initiative of **Ballarat, Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Melton & Wyndham** City Councils, **the Western Metro Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Kurunjang Primary School.** © Copyright 2013

This guide was developed through the combined effort of individuals & organisations wanting to acknowledge and embed the voices of children within their workplaces and communities.

It is expected that users of this guide will develop it to meet their own requirements. It provides a starting point for services to adapt it to suit their specific purposes and context so that it is relevant to their community.

We have included information that has been sourced from around the world, gained from peak bodies, and received via feedback from our collective communities.

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- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- The Office of the Child Safety Commissioner
- The Victorian Cooperative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups
- The Association for Children with a Disability
- The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.
- Dr. Jonathan Sargeant
- John Tobin

As adults, we must work with children to create systems and process that allow for kids views to be heard; for their views to influence decisions wemake that affect them and to explain to them why we have made those decisions. We have to recognize that sometimes we actually have to devolve decision making to children, to share it with them collaboratively and other times to take responsibility for them.

John Tobin: Vic Chapter - Asia Pacific Child Friendly Cities network meeting presentation at Moreland City Council held on10 August 2012

We would also like to thank all others who provided input and feedback throughout the process of developing this guide.

The guide is a collaboration by:

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There is much to be gained by listening to children – taking their words, interpreting and analysing their responses, understanding their concerns, wants and desires. Developing an understanding of the nature of children's concerns and perspectives for the future will benefit and have a significant impact on (and perhaps, change) the way we think about children and provide services and education that considers their perspective.
(Sargeant 2010)

Introduction 4
When to consult 5
Why consult 5
The rights of the child 7
Professional ethics 8
Communicating with parents/carers 11
Best practice 12
Consulting with specific groups of children 14
Consultation methods 24
Appendices 26
References 35

table of contents

introduction

This is a practical guide for organisations, government departments, local government, community groups and individuals who are interested in practical ideas in engaging children up to the age of 12 in effective decision-making. It outlines a range of opportunities to consult with children and issues to consider as part of best practice.

Giving children a voice means giving them a say in things that affect them (eg research about them, planning for them or decisions about them) and acknowledging that what the child says should be heard (*Clark 2000*).

Children's participation is vital in order to improve and develop services, and be able to respond to their needs. Children have a right and an ability to help shape their own environments. Children are experts about their own experiences and aspirations. This is acknowledged and promoted in law and in policy and best practice guidelines including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (2009), and the National Early Years Learning Framework for Australia `Belonging; Being & Becoming' (2009).

Consultation is more than just asking children for their ideas and views. It's about listening to them, taking them seriously and ensuring their ideas and suggestions are considered. Involving children in decision-making means they can influence some of the things that affect them and offer a different perspective from adults. It supports adults in understanding children's issues, enables policies and services to be reflective of childrens needs, and acknowledges their important role in society. It also helps children and young people to gain new skills and knowledge, and build their confidence in other processes including democracy.

The recent increased interest in giving children a voice in decisions and services for them has accompanied the emergence of a new conception of children as active citizens.

when to consult

Organisations should consider consulting with children:

- Before developing plans, strategies and budgets
- Before designing any environments that children will use
- When developing, evaluating and reviewing environments, programs and services that children use
- When there is broad community consultation about issues that affect them
- During the review phase of planning (prior to implementation)

why consult

Consultation:

- Is a child's right.
- Is an opportunity to understand children's issues and needs better, as children bring new perspectives and knowledge.
- Assists children to develop skills in expressing their ideas.
- Enables community spaces to meet changing needs, interests and reflect preferences as defined by users.
- Allows social and political skills to be developed. Debate, communication, negotiation, individual and group decision-making processes are all fostered.
- Encourages children to be active creators rather than passive consumers.
- Fosters input in decision-making at the local level and is preparation for participation in the wider society. It encourages democratic procedures and respect for the principles and ideals of democratic life.
- Encourages co-operation and communication between different age and cultural groups.
- Is an opportunity for children to hear the diversity of needs and views of their peers and from others in their community.
- Encourages services, activities and projects to be targeted more closely to providing what children need and want, and increase the likelihood of the success of these activities.
- Acknowledges our collective responsibility under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Australian is a signatory to.
- Recognises and acknowledges children as active citizens.

the rights of the child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) says that children everywhere have the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. It reflects the belief that children are equal citizens with equal rights in a world often dominated by adults and puts the onus on governments, policy makers, families, teachers, and anybody with responsibility for children, to ensure their rights are upheld.

In relation to this guide, UNCROC specifically advocates that all children have the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them and to have their views taken seriously (Article 12); to get and share information (Article 13); and to have access to reliable information that is important to their well-being (Article 17).
The Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006 Section 15 further supports this right that 'Every person has the right to freedom of expression which includes the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds' and Section 38 which states that 'it is unlawful for a public authority to act in a way that is incompatible with a human right or, in making a decision, to fail to give proper consideration to a relevant human right.' *Version No. 003, Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, No. 43 of 2006Version as at 1 January 2008*

The Federal and Victorian governments support and endorse UNCROC, and documents state that by working in partnership with organisations and the community, the rights of children will be reflected in our individual and broader communities.

Giving children a voice is 'not simply about the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it is about having the power to influence change' (*West, 2004*). Meaningful involvement of students means 'validating and authorising them to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge and experiences throughout education in order to improve our schools' (*Fletcher, 2005*).
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 'Effective Schools are Engaging Schools'(2009).

Australia has introduced its first national Early Years Learning and Development framework for early childhood services, staff and parents. The National Framework 'Belonging; Being & Becoming' (2009) is designed to reinforce the principles laid out in UNCROC. Therefore, it is an optimum time to work in partnership with children and their families about the services provided and the community in which they live.
The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) (2009) promotes best practice to achieve the following common outcomes for all children:

- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of well-being
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators

Both the national and state frameworks acknowledge parents as children's first and most influential educators, and highlight the importance for children to be meaningfully consulted about their world and their community on all issues that affect them.

professional ethics

This guide endorses the Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics (2006) which provides a guide for professional behaviour, and principles to inform individual and collective decision-making. Inherent in this code is the understanding that children learn within their family and community groups, bringing rich knowledge, a diversity of experiences and identities to their learning. (Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics)
The following values and processes are considered central to the Code of Ethics:

respect
democracy
honesty
integrity
justice
courage
inclusivity
social and cultural responsiveness
education

In the Code of Ethics, the protection and well-being of children is paramount, and therefore speaking out or taking action about unethical practice is highlighted as an essential professional responsibility.

In relation to children, the code states that professionals will:

- Act in the best interests of all children
- Respect the rights of children as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and commit to advocating for these rights
- Recognise children as active citizens participating in different communities such as family, children's services and schools
- Work with children to help them understand that they are global citizens with shared responsibilities to the environment and humanity
- Respect the special relationship between children and their families and incorporate this perspective in all interactions with children
- Create and maintain safe, healthy environments, spaces and places, which enhance children's learning, development, engagement, initiative, self-worth, dignity, and show respect for their contributions
- Work to ensure children and families with additional needs can exercise their rights
- Acknowledge the uniqueness and potential of all children, in recognition that enjoying their childhood without undue pressure is important
- Acknowledge the holistic nature of children's learning and the significance of children's cultural and linguistic identities
- Work to ensure children are not discriminated against on the basis of gender, age, ability, economic status, family structure, lifestyle, ethnicity, religion, language, culture, or national origin
- Acknowledge children as competent learners, and build active communities of engagement and inquiry
- Honour children's right to play, as both a process and context for learning

The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics also outlines specific ethical considerations for conducting research and evaluation.

communicating with parents/carers

Involving parents, guardians and/or carers in the consultation process is vital. It can extend beyond informing them about the consultation process, to involving them in the design and implementation of a consultation to ensure it is tailored to meet the needs of their children. However, consideration needs to be given to ensure that children can still express their views freely and independently.
Involving parents, guardians and/or carers in the consultation process may make the process of consultation easier for organisations. There are many reasons for this, including:

- If parents and children have a better understanding of the purpose of consultation, they may be more likely to contribute to it via data collection processes (eg surveys, focus groups and interviews).
- By becoming involved in the consultation process, parents and children may feel they have a greater investment in it and be more willing to contribute.
- Parents and children who are involved in the consultation process may demystify the process for other parents and children and thereby increase overall participation.

Parents, guardians and/or carers can become involved in the consultation in a formal way such as participating in consultation meetings and committees with staff, or in an informal way like sharing ideas and opinions as they participate in program activities during lunch or coffee breaks. It is important to provide information about the:

- Skills and background of the people conducting the consultation
- Purpose of the consultation
- Consultation process and the role of children
- Children's information and how it will be used
- Process for dealing with disclosures
- Storage of information

Depending on the type and content of the consultation, it may involve informing parents/carers about:

- Their children's participation
- The design and implementation of strategies developed
- Getting verbal consent to use information
- Getting written consent, especially if media is involved

It is important to ensure that parents understand that while children can and should express their views, this does not undermine their role as parents (Article 3 UNCROC)

best practice

Planning a best practice approach in children's consultation means working alongside children, treating them as equal stakeholders and valuing their knowledge and expertise. It is imperative that children feel safe and comfortable, and that the person conducting the consultation has built a rapport with them. It is also important to consider language, comprehension, experience, knowledge base on the topic, appropriate content, space, and time.

Factors to consider

Principles

- Understand why it is important that children are given a say in decisions that affect them and have good reasons why any child or group of children is excluded.
- Inform children about their role in the consultation process.
- Inform children that they have a right not to participate and can opt out at any time.
- Plan individual participation exercises so that they are done openly and visibly – preferably with more than one facilitator.
- Ensure facilitators know what to do if they see or hear something that raises concerns about a child's safety.
- Be respectful and open to children's views.
- Recognise that children, like adults, may have different views.
- Acknowledge different cultures and values.
- Be honest and upfront about the limits and boundaries of the consultation process.

Confidentiality and media

- Provide parents/carers with information about the consultation and the children's participation and role.
- Organise consent for the child's parent/carer and the child. Additional consent must be gained for any media or public display.
- Before you invite children to participate, let them know whether their individual contribution will be treated as private and confidential or if it may be published or shown to others. If it is the latter, determine whether their names or other identifying information will be revealed.
- If applicable, allow the children to choose a pseudonym rather than their given name.

Developmentally appropriate consultation

- Use a consultation method that is appropriate for the age group you are working with.
- Work with facilitators that are experienced in working with children.
- Plan activities that the children will find enjoyable and rewarding.
- Ask about issues that are important to children – children are able to contribute more effectively when asked about things they are interested in or that are part of their day-to-day experiences.
- Choose a child-friendly or familiar venue.
- Use language that is clear, age appropriate and jargon free.

Methodology

- Have realistic expectations about the length of time an effective consultation will take. Allow more time than you think might be necessary.
- Plan a variety of engagement methods to enable a variety of children to be given the opportunity to participate.
- Link with other departments and networks to facilitate access to groups of children and families.
- Involve children early in the consultation process – ideally at the design stage.
- Consider the timing of the consultation and factor in things like school holidays and religious festivals.
- Consider food, drink, rest breaks, transport and expenses.

Feedback

- Inform children that their views have been taken seriously and plan a variety of ways to give them feedback.
- Distribute written documentation to children and adults, ensuring it is age appropriate.
- Acknowledge the children's contribution of time and expertise as you would with others.
- Confirm the accuracy and interpretation of the consultation with the children.
- Ensure children and their parents/carers can provide feedback on the process and outcome of the consultation.

consulting with specific groups of children

Children in Victoria have unique experiences of life based on their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, ability, locality, living circumstances and life history. It is important to tailor consultation methods to meet the needs of specific groups of children. The consultation process should include children from a diverse range of backgrounds, experiences and abilities to ensure that their ideas and interests are heard and to encourage difference.

Below are some examples of specific groups, the issues relevant to them, and ways to support their participation.

Very Young Children

Even very young children (birth - 5years) can be involved in consultation as long as careful thought is given to planning and supporting their participation.

Factors to consider

- The children's cognitive and social developmental level.
- The safety and familiarity of the situation where the participation will take place.
- The availability and proximity of parents and caregivers.

Young children can be supported by:

- Making sure topics are practical rather than abstract.
- Discussing things that children can relate to on a local level, rather than a national level.
- Working with facilitators experienced in working with the age group, and preferably who the children know and trust.
- Using imaginative techniques such as dolls and puppets or art, to communicate.

Children from Indigenous backgrounds

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent or who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he (she) lives. *(Three-part Definition of Aboriginal Identity, 1981).*

> *'The Victorian Indigenous community comprises a number of communities and extended family networks. (DHS, 2005) 'Protocols are appropriate ways of behaving, communicating and showing respect for diversity of history and culture. This involves understanding and appreciating the cultural identity and knowledge held by Indigenous people'. (Department of Human Sservices, 2005)*

Factors to consider

- Respect and acknowledgement – the unique role of Indigenous people needs to be recognised and acknowledged as a first step.
- Relationships – adequate and appropriate engagement relies on relationships built on trust. This is essential to creating an environment for engagement to occur.
- The most appropriate and effective way to consult with Indigenous people is to visit their community and meet in a place of their choosing. Ensure an appropriate introduction to the community by seeking permission in advance. Access can be gained through primary organisations that represent the community such as councils and cooperatives, or through community Elders (*Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated - VAEAI - 2002).*
- Negotiate and announce your arrival well ahead of time to ensure your visit will not clash with other priorities the community might have *(VAEAI 2002).*
- Local Aboriginal Educational Consultancy Groups should be involved in all stages of planning and consultation. This could include assisting with preparation, providing advice, acting as interpreters, conducting interviews and facilitating discussion groups *(VAEAI 2002).*
- Written material is not always the most appropriate method of information dissemination in Indigenous communities. This is because the emphasis in Indigenous culture is on verbal rather than written forms of communication *(VAEAI 2002).*
- Sensitive issues are not often widely discussed among Indigenous people, let alone with members outside their own community. For example, Indigenous people are reluctant to discuss sensitive health and welfare issues with mainstream service providers *(VAEAI 2002).*

Indigenous children can be supported by:

- Providing an Indigenous facilitator.
- Using Local Aboriginal Educational Consultancy Groups in all stages of planning and consultation. This could include assisting with preparation, providing advice, acting as interpreters, conducting interviews and facilitating discussion groups *(VAEAI 2002).*
- Providing information in appropriate formats.

Children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) refers to the wide range of cultural groups that make up the Australian population and communities. These groups and individuals differ according to religion and spirituality, racial background and ethnicity, as well as language. Children from CALD backgrounds include those born in Australia who identify with their ethnic heritage, recent migrants or refugees, and who speak a language other than English.

Factors to consider

- The diversity not only between different ethnic groups but also within these groups.
- Some cultural groups have important tribal, kinship, religious or racial groupings.
- Some cultural groups have important communication protocols and processes. In developing consultative processes issues such as kinship, roles of elders and community leaders, and pre-established processes should be considered. This might include the structure and location of meetings, language needs and communication methods as well as meeting processes.
- In some cultures it is unusual to seek the views of children independently of adults. Children may have a stronger collective sense of self/identity compared with the dominant Australian culture. Children may relate more to collective rather than individual goals or needs.
- Expressing negative feedback can be very uncomfortable for some cultures, particularly if this is across age differences.

Children from CALD backgrounds can be supported by:

- Providing a facilitator from the same cultural and language background as the children.
- Using existing culturally specific organisations and networks such as refugee and migrant associations, churches and other places of worship to get their ideas about involving children.
- Providing information in appropriate formats and languages.
- Using translations and interpreters where appropriate and using interpreters who are conscious of their potential impact on feedback given their age or status in the community.
- Acknowledging that single sex groups may be appropriate.

Children from refugee backgrounds

Children from refugee backgrounds include those born in Australia whose parents are refugees, and children who themselves have come to Australia as refugees. Most of these children will have experienced some degree of dislocation, deprivation, oppression, trauma, disruption and loss. Many refugee children may also have experienced disrupted or no schooling, a loss of safety, years of insecurity, a dangerous journey to Australia, and possibly detention in Australia or another country.

Factors to consider

- Family relationships are often changed by the refugee experience. Children may have lost family members and/or living with extended or non-biological family.
- Families may be highly protective of their children, and suspicious or fearful of the motivation of others.
- Expressing opinions or making judgements may be difficult due to past refugee experiences.
- Attention spans and capacity to stay on task may be affected.
- Oral language capacity may be stronger than written language skills.

Children from a refugee background can be supported by:

- Allowing extra time to ensure that children and their families understand the purpose of the consultation.
- Giving reassurance that there will not be negative repercussions for the child or their family for participating.
- Paying extra attention to the design to ensure children and their families have a sense of safety and control.
- Having an environment that is calm and relaxed by avoiding over stimulation, large groups and loud sudden noises.

Children with disabilities

If your engagement process involves children with disabilities, you need to adopt an 'ability approach' rather than focus on their impairments, limitations or special needs. When consulting with children with a disability, consulting with the child's parent or another person who knows them well will assist in determining the following factors for individual children.

Factors to consider

- The developmental status and chronological age of the children and their capacity.
- The nature and severity of their impairment – not simply the category of impairment, but how it affects their communication and what support is needed to assist communication.
- An understanding of the nature of children's thinking about the world, their understanding of what is going on, and their ability to reflect on their experience.
- Knowledge of the kinds of experiences they have had in collaborating and being consulted.

Children with disabilities can be supported by:

- Recognising that some children with disabilities may choose to be in groups with others of the same ethnicity, age or gender that may or may not have diverse abilities.
- Including children with disabilities in decision-making on the same range of topics as other children.
- Providing information well in advance and in appropriate formats.
- Encouraging participation within a physically and emotionally safe setting.
- Identifying any physical barriers and removing or minimising them.

Children from families experiencing vulnerability

Families experience vulnerability for many reasons. Among these are unstable housing, family violence, parents with mental illness, drug and/or alcohol issues, or a disability. Children from families experiencing vulnerability can be under-represented in community surveys/consultations unless specific mechanisms are put in place to enable their inclusion.

Factors to consider

- Children who have had difficult life experiences may be less likely to have the confidence and self esteem to participate.
- Children may be living out of home or in kinship care.
- You may need permission from Department of Human Services or community services organisations and agencies to work with this group of children.

Children from families experiencing vulnerability can be supported by:

- Trusted professionals in schools or community organisations who can provide links with families experiencing vulnerability.
- Ensuring that processes are sensitive, respect privacy and build confidence.
- Making sure the setting is accessible and provides participants with a sense of psychological as well as physical security.

consultation methods

The following methods may be adapted to suit the different age and ability levels of the children you are consulting. Many of these methods are examples of best practice and should be considered when consulting with all children. Please seek advice from an experienced early years educator if you are unsure what would be suitable for the children you are engaging.

Some practical ideas for consulting with children include:

- Face-to-face discussions with small groups of children
- Interactive websites
- Social media
- Written questionnaires and feedback forms
- Art, posters, drama and interactive exercises
- Story telling activities
- Photos, videos and audiotapes
- Visual communication tools
- Community consultation sessions
- Brainstorming sessions
- Child representation on advisory groups
- External reference groups
- Question time sessions
- Surveys
- Speak out sessions
- Focus groups
- Inviting comments on budget allocation
- Inviting feedback on scale models of venues
- Adopting the subject as a project for a school class or other existing group.

There are many opportunities where we can involve children in decision-making within existing services, programs and venues they use. These include:

- Sporting events and clubs
- Early education and care services
- Schools
- Playgroups
- Libraries
- Community events and expos
- Sporting events
- Children's events
- Council forums
- Annual events
- Advisory networks
- Speak out sessions
- Focus groups

See Appendix 2 for different methods that can be adapted to suit children's different ages and abilities.

appendix 1
project checklist

The purpose of consulting with children

- [ ] Are you clear about the purpose of the consultation?
- [ ] Have you determined how to inform children about their role in the consultation process?

Location

- [ ] Is the place of consultation familiar to children?
- [ ] Is it easy to access for participants?
- [ ] Is the location child friendly? (ie. comfortable and safe with child appropriate equipment such as chairs and tables)

Facilitators

- [ ] Do the facilitator(s) have appropriate qualifications/skills?
- [ ] Do the facilitator(s) have an existing rapport with the children?
- [ ] If the facilitator(s) are not known to children, will trust building activities be used?

Timing

- [ ] Have you determined the duration of the consultation process? (ie. one-off, ongoing or over several weeks)
- [ ] Have timing considerations such as holidays and religious festivals been taken into account?
- [ ] Does the day, time and date suit the participants? (eg. after school or before nap time)

Recruiting participants

- [ ] Have you determined the target group(s)?
- [ ] Have you decided how to recruit participants?
- [ ] Have you determined how you will ensure a range of children are consulted? (ie. age, gender, ethnicity & abilities)
- [ ] Have you determined how many children you wish to consult with? Do you have a target for consultation?
- [ ] Have you linked with relevant organisations to facilitate access to groups of children?

Budget

- [ ] Have you considered all resources that may be required and the budget available? (eg. facilitators' costs, meeting space hire, materials to conduct consultation, reward for participation and promotion activities)

Consultation activities

- Are the consultation methods appropriate for the age group(s) you are working with?
- Will children find the planned activities fun and rewarding?
- Are questions clear, age appropriate and free from jargon?
- Has a suitable timeframe been allocated to complete the activity?
- Is there flexibility in the consultation strategy to enable a variety of children to participate?
- Is it appropriate for parents/carers to participate directly in the consultation process?

Data collection, storage and dissemination considerations

- Have parents/carers been informed about the consultation process, and the children's participation and role?
- Has a method for obtaining parental/carer consent been put in place?
- Has additional consent for media or public display been obtained from a parent/carer? (if required)
- Have you determined how the information will be stored?
- Have privacy and confidentiality issues been considered where appropriate?
- Have you informed children how their responses will be used? (This includes the need to be realistic about what will be achievable from the consultation process).
- Have you determined how you will feedback to children the outcome of the consultation process?

Disclosures

- Is there a documented process in place for dealing with disclosures?
- Are facilitators aware of what to do if they see or hear something that raises concerns about a child's safety?

Evaluation

- Has an evaluation technique been chosen and scheduled into the process?
- Have you determined how children and their parents/carers will be able to provide feedback on the process and outcome of the consultation?

Acknowledgement

- Have you determined how you will acknowledge the children's contribution of time and expertise? (ie. award, certificate or voucher)

appendix 2
practical ideas

The following ideas are suitable for different age groups and ability levels. This will need to be considered when choosing an appropriate method of engaging with children.
For younger children many of these ideas would need a small group, and a leader to record the information provided by children.

Ideas for Implementation

Agree/disagree or like/dislike

Place four signs around the room. The signs read 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly agree' and 'strongly disagree'. Read out statements or questions and ask the children to go to a label that best reflects how they feel. For young children, use two signs – yes/no or black/white.

Balloons

Children can draw their ideas on balloons and then decide as a group whether they 'release' or 'pop' an idea.
NB Consider using biodegradable balloons

Postcards

Children write their ideas on postcards and put them in a suggestion box.

Bead or ball boxes

Children vote by placing a bead or ball in a pot or box.

Speech bubbles

Put up a picture to represent what you want feedback on. The children can draw their thoughts and ideas in speech bubbles on the display.

Graffiti board

Hang large sheets of paper on a wall and invite the children to write, draw or paint on the sheets in the form of graffiti and then discuss their ideas.

Ideas avalanche

Set a topic for discussion and ask for suggestions. As children call out their ideas write them up on a flip chart. Once the avalanche of ideas is over you can discuss which ideas are most practical, whether any are impossible, and which should be discussed further.

Post-it ideas storm

Divide into groups and give each child post-it notes and a pen.

Write the question to be discussed on a flip chart. Ask the group to write their ideas onto a post-it note (one idea per post-it note). Collect the notes and stick them on the flip chart, clumping similar ideas together for discussion.

Dot voting

Create a list of possible answers in response to a question or statement on a flip chart. For example, things children do in their spare time. Leave space next to each answer. Give everyone three sticky dots and ask them to place their dots next to three activities they do most often. You can see immediately which activities are the most popular.

Star voting

Brainstorm ideas with a small group of children about the selected topic. From these ideas, create picturegrams of the different options. Invite children to put a star on the ones they like. Children can put as many stars as they like. Count the stars to find out which options are most popular.

Freeze frame

Put the children into small groups of about five to seven and challenge them to pose in a freeze frame of a scene. Give them a theme such as 'children enjoying themselves'. They should use their imaginations to decide as a group what they are trying to depict and then devise a way to represent it as a freeze frame.

Arty mural

Set a topic or theme for a mural. For example 'what children in the area do in their spare time' or 'the best playground ever'. Then encourage the children to express their views on that topic by drawing or painting a picture or creating a collage.

Diamond ranking

Set a question and have nine ideas for children to prioritise. Write each idea on a post-it note and ask each group to arrange their nine ideas in a diamond shape with their priority at the top, next two ideas in second place, the next three ideas in third place, two ideas in fourth place and their lowest priority idea at the bottom. They need to get a consensus as a group and can move the ideas around until they reach an order that they all agree on.

Pop quiz

Devise a quiz in the style of those used in magazines and newspapers on the consultation topic. For each question the child is given a scenario and three options - A, B or C.

Board game

A board game is designed to match the chosen topic. Players roll a dice to move along squares. When they stop, a card is selected that contains a question relating to the consultation topic. Make the questions open-ended, unfinished sentences, or agree/disagree statements. Offer a prize for the winner who is first past the finishing line.

Making a rap

Children produce a simple rap talking about their views, experiences and suggestions.

Photo/video/audio

Provide children with equipment, like a disposable camera, to record their views on the selected topic. Ask children to tell you about the recordings they have made.

Happy and sad mats

Place happy and sad mats in the room. Ask a question and the children respond by sitting on the corresponding mat.

Plus/minus/interesting (PMI)

Draw up three columns on a piece of paper with plus (positive), minus (negative) or interesting (what could happen if you make this decision). Ask questions on the chosen topic and let the children decide if it is positive, negative or interesting.

Collage/construction work

Provide materials for children to build or construct their ideas in 3D models.

Observations

These are particulary good for young children. Record actions like accepting or refusing things that are offered, turning toward or reaching out to objects or people, facial expressions, pointing or grasping and body movements.

appendix 3
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
in child friendly language

'Rights' are things that every child should have or be able to do. All children have the same rights. These rights are listed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Almost every country has agreed to these rights. All the rights are connected to each other, and all are equally important. Sometimes, we have to think about the rights in terms of what is best for children in a situation, and what is critical to life and protection from harm. As you grow, you have more responsibility to make choices and exercise your rights.

Article 1
Everyone under 18 has these rights.

Article 2
All children have these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what their parents do, what language they speak, what their religion is, whether they are a boy or girl, what their culture is, whether they have a disability, whether they are rich or poor. No child should be treated unfairly on any basis.

Article 3
All adults should do what is best for you. When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children.

Article 4
The government has a responsibility to make sure your rights are protected. They must help your family to protect your rights and create an environment where you can grow and reach your potential.

Article 5
Your family has the responsibility to help you learn to exercise your rights, and to ensure that your rights are protected.

Article 6
You have the right to be alive.

Article 7
You have the right to a name, and this should be officially recognised by the government. You have the right to a nationality (to belong to a country).

Article 8
You have the right to an identity – an official record of who you are. No one should take this away from you.

Article 9
You have the right to live with your parent(s), unless it is bad for you. You have the right to live with a family who cares for you.

Article 10
If you live in a different country than your parents do, you have the right to be together in the same place.

Article 11
You have the right to be protected from kidnapping.

Article 12
You have the right to give your opinion, and for adults to listen and take it seriously.

Article 13
You have the right to find out things and share what you think with others, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms or offends other people.

Article 14
You have the right to choose your own religion and beliefs. Your parents should help you decide what is right and wrong, and what is best for you.

Article 15
You have the right to choose your own friends and join or set up groups, as long as it isn't harmful to others.

Article 16
You have the right to privacy.

Article 17
You have the right to get information that is important to your well-being, from radio, newspapers, books, computers and other sources. Adults should make sure that the information you are getting is not harmful, and help you find and understand the information you need.

Article 18
You have the right to be raised by your parent(s) if possible.

Article 19
You have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, in body or mind.

Article 20
You have the right to special care and help if you cannot live with your parents.

Article 21
You have the right to care and protection if you are adopted or in foster care.

Article 22
You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee (if you have been forced to leave your home and live in another country), as well as all the rights in this convention.

Article 23
You have the right to special education and care if you have a disability, as well as all the rights in this convention, so that you can live a full life.

Article 24
You have the right to the best health care possible, safe water to drink, nutritious food, a clean and safe environment, and information to help you stay well.

Article 25
If you live in care or in other situations away from home, you have the right to have these living arrangements looked at regularly to see if they are the most appropriate.

Article 26
You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.

Article 27
You have the right to food, clothing, a safe place to live and to have your basic needs met. You should not be disadvantaged so that you can't do many of the things other kids can do.

Article 28
You have the right to a good quality education. You should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level you can.

Article 29
Your education should help you use and develop your talents and abilities. It should also help you learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people.

Article 30
You have the right to practice your own culture, language and religion – or any you choose. Minority and indigenous groups need special protection of this right.

Article 31
You have the right to play and rest.

Article 32
You have the right to protection from work that harms you, or is bad for your health and education. If you work, you have the right to be safe and paid fairly.

Article 33
You have the right to protection from harmful drugs and from the drug trade.

Article 34
You have the right to be free from sexual abuse.

Article 35
No one is allowed to kidnap or sell you.

Article 36
You have the right to protection from any kind of exploitation (being taken advantage of).

Article 37
No one is allowed to punish you in a cruel and harmful way.

Article 38
You have the right to protection and freedom from war. Children under 15 years cannot be forced to go into the army or take part in war.

Article 39
You have the right to help if you've been hurt, neglected, or badly treated.

Article 40
You have the right to legal help and fair treatment in the justice system that respects your rights.

Article 41
If the laws of your country provide better protection of your right than the articles in this convention, those laws should apply.

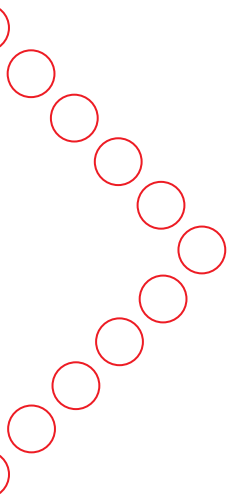
Article 42
You have the right to know your rights! Adults should know about these rights and help you learn about them, too.

Article 43 to 54
These articles explain how governments and international organisations like UNICEF will work to ensure children are protected with their rights.

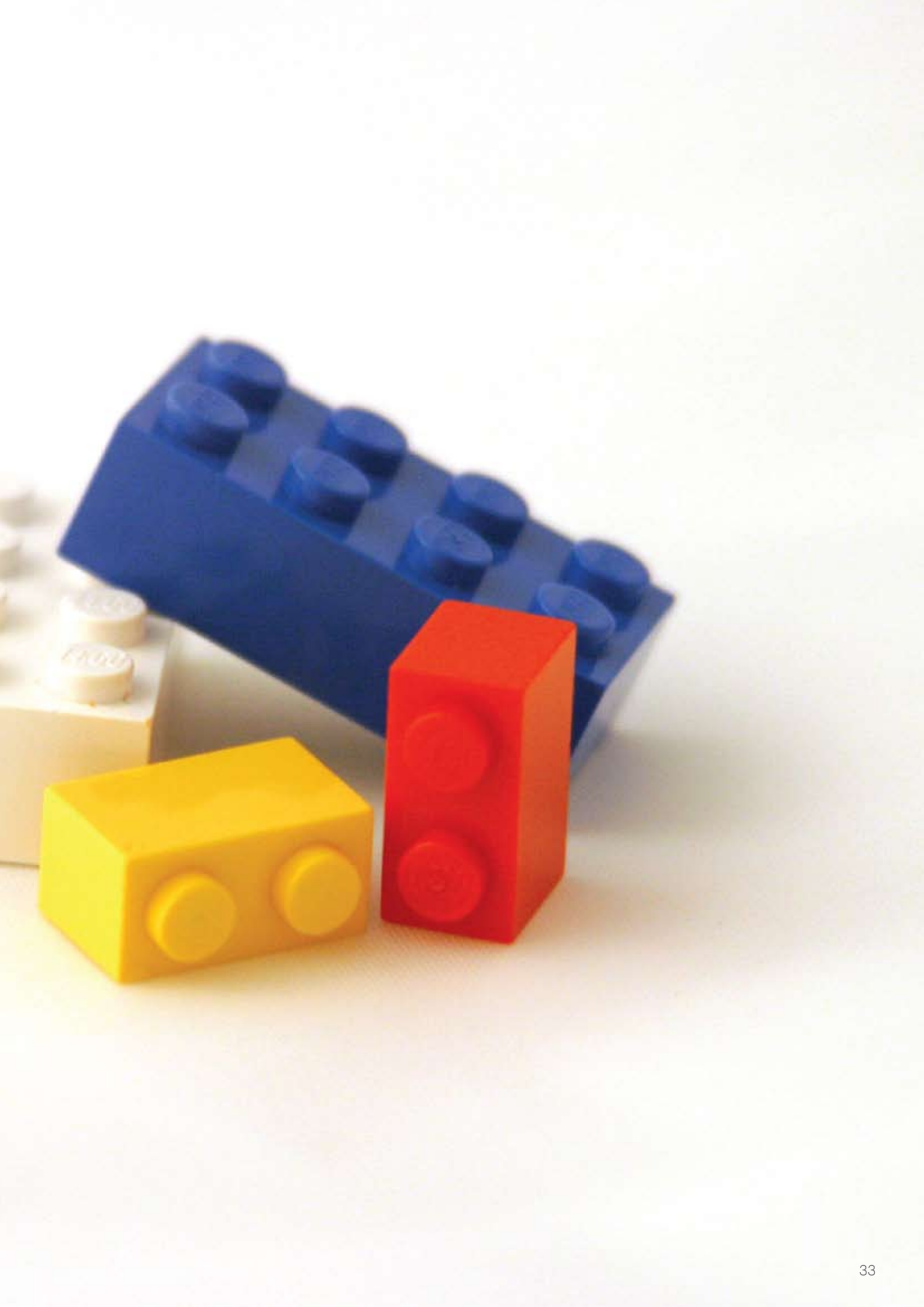
To read the full version of the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child visit: www.unicef.org/crc

appendix 4
pathways to participation

Adapted from Harry Shier 2001
Reference: Harry Shier, *Children and Society,* Volume 15 (2) Pages 107-117.



Levels of Participation	Openings	Opportunities	Obligations
Start Here **1** Children are listened to	Are you ready to listen to children?	Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?
2 Children are supported in expressing their views	Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?	Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?
3 Children's views are taken into account	Are you ready to take children's views into account?	Does your decision-making process enable you to take children's views into account?	Is it a policy requirement that children's views must be given due weight in decision-making?
	This point is the minimum you must achieve if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child		
4 Children are involved in decision-making processes	Are you ready to let children join in your decision-making processes?	Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes?	Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decisionmaking processes?
5 Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.	Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?	Is there a procedure that enables children and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?	Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?



Other helpful resources and websites include:

Clarke, A. & Moss, P. (2001). Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach. London, UK: National Children's Bureau and Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

This book sets out the techniques that the researchers use to understand children's ideas and opinions, including child interviews, child directed centre tours, mapping the environment, and children taking photographs of what is important to them.

Clarke, A., Kjorholt, A.T. & Moss, P. (2005). Beyond Listening: Children's Perspectives on Early Childhood Services. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

The suggestions in this book include giving children happy and sad face stickers to put on a survey board to represent where they liked to play and where they didn't, and giving the children dolls representing staff and asking them where they would like them to go. This book examines ways to access children's perspectives, and the challenges in doing so.

Lancaster, Y.P. & Broadbent, V. (2003). Listening To Young Children. Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press.

This is a kit, with a guide, several booklets and a DVD that outlines reasons for encouraging children to participate in decision-making, and ways that this can be achieved. The methods include drawing, the wish catcher, walking and talking (where the child takes a digital camera - adult optional - and talks about the central environment), and creative design and problem solving (where children are encouraged to use a variety of materials to explore possible solutions to a specific problem).

(provided by Carol Rasborsek who is undertaking Masters of Teaching in Early Childhood at Melbourne University)

Child Friendly Asia Pacific

www.childfriendlyasiapacific.net

Child Friendly Cities UNICEF

www.childfriendlycities.org

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