

**“IF YOU DON’T LISTEN TO US, YOU
WON’T GET IT RIGHT FOR US”**

Youth Voice in Strategic Change



University of
Bedfordshire

research
in practice

The
Children's
Society

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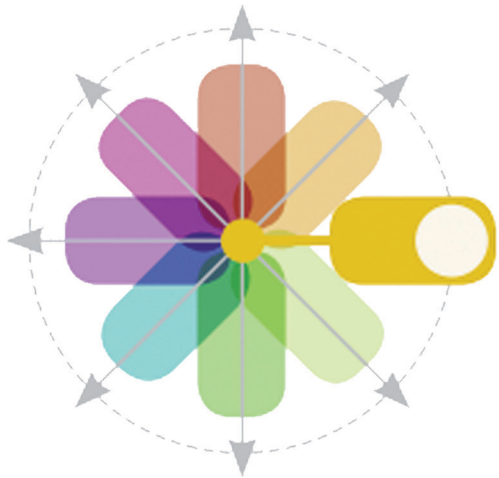
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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The eight **Practice Principles** have been developed to guide ways of working for multi-agency professionals responding to child exploitation and extra-familial harm.

Download here: <https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk>



This particular resource focuses on the principle of respecting the voice, experience and expertise of children and young people.



WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

This booklet contains a series of messages for **strategic leaders** illustrating how to meaningfully include children and young people in **strategic-level change**.

The images have been designed by a young person, and the messages have been developed from a review of existing literature, learning from the Tackling Child Exploitation programme, interviews with senior leaders responsible for youth voice work in their organisations and most importantly in consultation with children and young people.

The quotes throughout this document are a mixture of direct and composite quotes, drawn from consultation interviews with children and young people across three youth organisations in England.

WHY SHOULD THIS MATTER TO STRATEGIC LEADERS?

Recognising the importance of youth voice involves **listening to, responding to, learning from and acting on** children and young people's views and ideas.

By doing this, strategic leaders can provide support and safeguarding services with the potential for meaningful, wide-reaching benefits for **individuals, organisations and communities**.

Such as:

1. **A deeper understanding** of child exploitation and extra-familial harm to proactively protect children and young people
2. **Informed development of services** to meet the needs of children and young people and ensure they are places of safety and trust
3. **An increase in skills**, knowledge, confidence and self-efficacy of children and young people
4. **Enabling better professional engagement** and support of children and young people in safeguarding work. This may also promote staff satisfaction through a greater sense of meaning and reward
5. **More informed and effective decision-making** to improve service provision, workforce development and partnership working

Children and young people have great ideas about **increasing their safety**.

By closely working with them, you can **improve the effectiveness** of your **protective and supportive actions**.


'If you don't listen to us, you won't get it right for us.'

PARTICIPATION is PROTECTIVE

CALL TO ACTION

Embed participation **at all levels**. Children and young people's participation approaches and plans should be **closely connected to your local safeguarding strategy**, weaving **meaningful participation into all activities from direct support to senior leadership meetings**.

Ensure children and young people are **involved in plan development** both for their **individual safety and for wider, place-based and local area plans alongside** parents and carers.



'Don't put me in a box and conclude that all my issues are like any other young person's.'

It is **essential** to listen to the voices of **widely diverse children and young people**, throughout **all** participation activity.




CALL TO ACTION

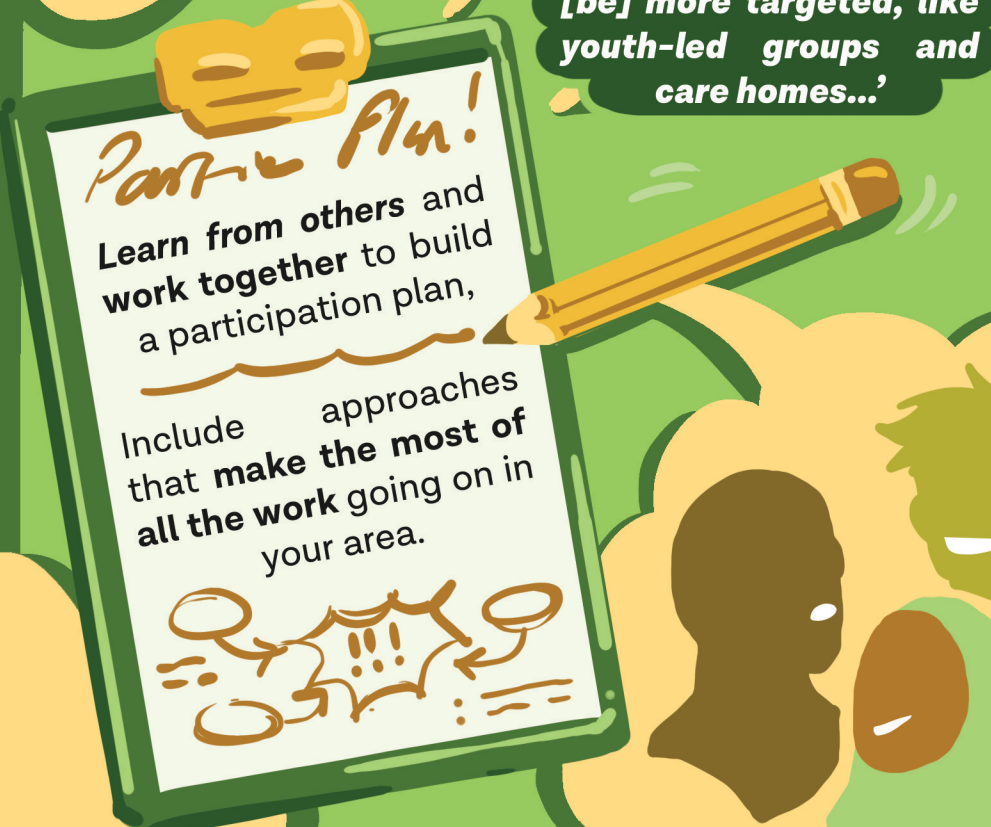
One size does not fit all. Consider different participation methods, e.g. the need to **prioritise access**, and create a **variety of platforms** to make an effort to **hear lesser-heard voices**, as well as those that don't communicate by voice.

Your participation practice and plans **must** include a commitment to listening to children and young people of, for example, **diverse ages, cultures, ethnicities, sexualities, gender identities, visible and non-visible disabilities, neurodiversity, and experiences.**

Invest in a **widely diverse workforce** and provide training, **ensuring resources are accessible** to enable participatory practices/activities.




'Talk to more people, ask more widely and also [be] more targeted, like youth-led groups and care homes...'



Participation Plan!
Learn from others and work together to build a participation plan,

Include approaches that **make the most of all the work** going on in your area.



'...Develop relationships with people who support young people in those places and take their lead on how best to engage and encourage participation.'

CALL TO ACTION

Listen, engage and work with other organisations and local young people to create a participation plan with **relevant approaches** that **have resonance** across your local area.

Make use of **local findings, skills and published participation research and resources** to create a **solid foundation** from which to build a plan **alongside** children and young people.

'Give us a chance to express what we want, but also be patient enough to give us the time to think about what we want as well...'

Investing time and resources to develop **meaningful** children and young people's participation could **transform practice and organisational culture**.

There are likely to be some quick wins, and other **significant ones that emerge over time**.

'...Not everybody knows straightaway what they want or how you could help them. You need to be patient.'


CALL TO ACTION

Young people need **time, support, feedback and transparent processes** to participate **meaningfully and effectively**, and to influence change.

Professionals will also need **time and support** to **transform their ways of working** and to develop a culture in which **children and young people's participation is woven throughout all activity**.

Work with other leaders in your organisation to create a **long-term, organisation-wide commitment** that **protects children and young people's participation work** from **changes in personnel, funding and policy**.

???



Once you hear it,
you must act on it.

Real action **must** follow, otherwise participation activity becomes **tokenistic and performative** and can **undermine children and young people's trust**

'I think the big thing is actually taking on what we say, take it to heart and listen. Then do something about it and feed that back to us...'


'...Just because we've got less life experience doesn't mean that our feelings or our thoughts are any less valid.'



CALL TO ACTION

Create **meaningful and transparent feedback processes** as part of your participation plan and activities. **Introduce cycles of listening and feedback** to ensure **children and young people can see and feel the outcomes** and are **kept updated** through ongoing conversations about change, **however small.**

Be clear and honest about **how and when you will respond** to what you hear, including where suggestions are not possible to enact. **Keep your word**, even if you're uncertain about what the change may be.



Change is a key indicator of impact. Ask children and young people what positive impact and change looks like for them.

Some types of impact may appear **more difficult to measure**. Understanding and tracking impact is part of *an ongoing journey*.

CALL TO ACTION

Alongside children and young people, think about the **impact** you want participation activity to have on **various levels** (such as **individual, service, organisational and partnership levels**), and how you can **measure that impact**.

A Theory of Change will help you articulate the change you want to see. **Ensure your measurement actions are clearly defined, purposeful, recorded and tracked over time.**

'If I feel heard and respected then I feel more accepted and not judged...'

'...Being treated as a competent person, equal to my youth worker, is important for building a strong, lasting relationship.'

WHAT IMPACT COULD EMBEDDING THIS APPROACH HAVE?

Children and young people have been consulted on the development of this booklet at multiple stages. Once the key messages were drafted, we fed back to them and asked them what difference it would make if strategic leaders acted on these key messages.

This is what they shared with us:



“Feedback on what action has been taken is so important; it confirms to us that our time and opinions are valued. Feedback makes a big difference on the engagement of young people, it builds our confidence, self-worth, and passion for continuing to be involved in making change.”

“All professionals can improve their understanding and knowledge of what young people need by listening to them directly. They can do this today. Ask young people what they need to know, listen and work from there.”

“Strategic leaders listening to the things we have written here would completely revolutionise services, our understanding and can also support young people in their recovery through meaningful participation.”



“There may be a period of change within organisations if the ideas in the resource are to be taken on, as they may cause changes to policy/protocol, but the results of this will be very positive in both a corporate sense and also in that of the communities, especially the young communities, towards which they are focused.”

“We are the experts; providing young people with a diverse representation of our voices is not only empowering for us but can provide a vast source of knowledge from our lived experiences. Young people must feel represented and like services are with them, not against them.”

“When young people are taken seriously, it helps us to honestly feel valued and listened to by those providing care. We feel able to trust organisations that we might not have previously and are more likely to recommend and reach out to services if we know they’ve benefitted others.”



“Feeling in control and feeling like you can have an impact is so purposeful. When young people have experienced trauma and feel like they have lost control over their lives, meaningful participation can feel protective and help them recover. It can make us feel powerful - when we feel safe to speak, listen!”

“Services which are designed by adults or people who don’t use them only, can be outdated and unrelatable. If we know that young people are involved in developing services, this makes them more appealing. Young people can help design better thought-out services that meet our needs.”

“Strategic leaders must ensure that all staff understand the importance of involving young people in decision-making. All staff should support this way of working to make participation effective.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Lastly, to *Natasha Poland* for her dedication, professionalism and innovation to bring these key messages to life in the design of this booklet and the accompanying poster.

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• ILLUSTRATION & ANIMATION •

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Youth Voice in Levering Strategic Change Poster

What the Practice Principles Mean to Children, Young People, Parents and Carers

The Potential Impact of the Practice Principles from the Perspective of Children, Young People, Parents and Carers

Advice to Professionals on Implementing the Practice Principles from Children, Young People, Parents and Carers

Participation is Protective poster

Reflective Questions for Strategic Leaders

“What will you do today to make sure children and young people are included in strategic change?”



@researchIP #TCEProgramme

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