



South Tyneside Council

Children and Young People's Directorate

Early Intervention and Safeguarding Participation Strategy

2006-2009

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Section One - Participation Policy

FOREWORD

The production of this Participation Policy is exciting and challenging to us all. It embodies the standards for our practice and guides our approach to respecting all children and young people in the work that we do.

The following points summarise my belief that we should be open to having our judgements and decisions informed by listening to what children and young people have to say:

- Children and young people's views are as important as everyone else's.
- We want to know what they think and feel.
- Children and young people will have choices about the way in which they give us information.
- We will ask them what they would like to happen and talk with them about whether this is possible.
- We will make sure children and young people know what is going to happen next and explain the decisions that have been made.

Participation is a brave step – brave because it is a sharing of the power that we hold as adults and professionals. Inevitably participation will require us to relinquish some of this control and create a more balanced approach where children and young people are encouraged constantly to communicate their views and wishes.

It is my responsibility to ensure that those views can be heard and that an appropriate response is given. This responsibility is shared with each employee of the Council, with an expectation that we will all ensure that we convey our desire for all children and young people to participate as fully as possible in the work we do with them.

This Participation Policy provides the theoretical underpinning to our work. It offers practice guidelines and the standards that are expected. The policy will guide us to provide effective ways to draw on the views of children and young people within our daily working environment and ensure that we create and deliver services, which are truly child focused.

Amanda Bradley
Head of Early Intervention and Safeguarding

INTRODUCTION

This policy and the practice guidance outline how we can actively involve children and young people in the decisions that affect them.

There is considerable evidence from psychological research that having a sense of control over our lives is associated with other measures of well being, both for adults and for children and young people (Maccoby, 1980). Providing young people with a chance to express their own thoughts and feelings, and creating opportunities for them to influence outcomes, can give them a feeling of being more in control and enable them to move on successfully in other areas of their lives.

“People expect young people to listen to everything they say but they don’t listen themselves.”

It is now widely accepted within our society that children and young people have a right to be heard and to have their views taken into account in decisions that affect them. (Children Act 1989/2004, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

This is essential if we are to promote well-being as well as protect children from harm. It is imperative within this to ensure that participation is inclusive and that we are effective in our ability to communicate with all children and young people including those young people who have a disability, or whose first language is not English.

There is evidence that allowing children and young people to influence decisions that affect them improves the quality of those decisions (Alderson 1993). Our services are likely to be better if they are designed, implemented and evaluated on the basis of the identified needs, knowledge and opinions of children and young people.

Participation is important, as it is likely to make good practice even better and improve the quality of our services.

Participation is a process in which listening and responding to children and young people becomes an integral part of our everyday practice.

“I am not really able to make decisions because I’m never given a chance to.”

Definitions of Participation

The following definitions are used to describe the *process of participation*. Although these activities are defined separately, they will overlap and merge.

Informed:

Giving clear and accurate information to young people is essential before effective consultation; involvement and active participation can take place. Information must be intelligible and useable to the young person – and workers should check that the important messages that have been passed to them are understood. It is worth noting that the written word is not necessarily always the most effective way to communicate and other more imaginative ways should be explored, for example by video or audio recordings, face to face discussion, or through pictures etc. the age and level of understanding of the young person should dictate the methods used.

Consulted:

After a young person has been fully informed they are in a position to give their opinion. Consultation is the process of obtaining this opinion or view. Seeking views is *a vital part* of the participation process but “consultation” is *not* participation or involvement – it is an essential ‘first step’. Consultation can take many forms but at the most basic level it is listening to young people – and taking what they have to say seriously.

Involved:

Young People’s *involvement* and *active participation* are closely related activities. The involvement of a young person may be passive and amount to having a non-contributory presence at meetings – i.e. hearing the information presented, understanding the issues involved and approving other people’s decisions. This means the young person is informed and involved but they may play very little role in decision making. This level is still very useful to the professionals as they are better placed to understand the issues affecting the young person and he/she is able to share their feelings etc.

Active Participation (or Partnership):

When involvement becomes increasingly active and when young people are asked to contribute to discussions and decision making on key issues, then they can be said to be active participants.

Principles of Active Participation

The young person needs to have a sense of **equality** with adults, a notion of **choice** in decisions and a share of **power** within a decision making group.

There are times when professionals have statutory responsibilities that they have to fulfil and powers that they have which safeguard the young person. These may restrict the elements of choice that would normally be desirable – and may even go against the express wishes of the young person.

“I do think my views are listened to but that doesn't mean I get what I want.”

However it remains important for their views to be heard and explanations provided even if they are unable to affect the decisions.

The important thing for young people is that if they are to influence what happens in their lives they must be fully informed of the options – **they need to know from the beginning the areas where there can be negotiation and where this is not possible**. This prevents raising young peoples expectations about how much choice and influence they can have and respects their need for workers to be honest and open.

For example the calling of a child protection conference may be non-negotiable but the day and time that it is held might be. Young people consequently can appreciate that there are some things that they are unable to change, because there are systems/laws/regulations outside of their control. However it is also clear that their views are being heard and that adults respect their views and opinions where possible.

To achieve active participation with young people there are a set of beliefs that we need to embody and promote:

- Young people are the best authority on their own lives
- Participation needs to be viewed as a right
- Participation depends on respect and honesty
- Participation needs to be accessible and inclusive
- Participation should be viewed as a dialogue to influence change
- Participation should be built into our structures and systems
- Participation is everyone's responsibility
- Participation benefits everyone

Legislative Requirements

Children's participation now has an unparalleled profile – the government has over recent years made a clear commitment to ensuring that children and young people are involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

Various new appointments demonstrate the governments undertaking to honour this principle. These posts include the Minister for Children, Young People and Families appointed in 2003, a Children's Rights Director within the Commission for Social Care Inspection in 2004 and a Children's Commissioner in 2005 to promote the views and interests of children.

“I got put in care at such a young age - I was only about 2 years old. I always thought my mam was dead when I was younger. But now I see her every 2 weeks.”

The principle of the child's right to have their wishes and feelings heard was first legislated within the Children Act 1989. The Act required that the ascertainable wishes and feelings of children who were involved in legal proceedings should be sought. The Children Act 2004 extends this requirement to all children in need and requires that their wishes and feelings are ascertained and used to inform decision-making.

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child asserts that right by stating that children have the right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

Locally we have made our own commitment to involving children and young people. The authority has signed up to 'Hear by Right' and is dedicated to increasing the participation and involvement of children and young people across all services. South Tyneside is the only council in England to have agreed this across the whole council. This means that all directorates (Regeneration and Resources and Neighbourhood Services as well as Children and Young People) are concerned about children and young people's views and the decisions that are made about the style and quality of the services they offer.

Additionally the MALAP within the Children and Young People Directorate views participation as a key theme. The Participation Task Group consists of representatives from each service to act as 'Champions for Participation'.

Their role is to ensure that the involvement of children and young people is actively considered within all action plans and to promote participation within their own service area.

Key Obligations

- The Children Act 1989 for England and Wales recognises children as citizens with the right to be heard.
- Young People's Participation is necessary to fulfil legal responsibilities, the rights of children to be consulted and included are written into: the Children Act 2004 and the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child.
- Participation and involvement is a theme, which not only runs through all recent government legislation but is also included in the new inspection framework.
- We are required to meet Performance Indicators for the involvement of children and young people in their Looked After Reviews.
- South Tyneside is signed up to 'Hear By Right' This provides a template for mapping and planning organisational change in relation to standards for the active involvement of children and young people. This is a target for the whole council.
- "Increasing children and young people's participation and engagement" is one of the ten priority objectives for the 'Children and Young People's Plan' and 'Local Area Agreement'.
- Working in partnership with young people and encouraging their participation is not an end in itself; the objective must be to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child, optimising best outcomes.
- Participation gives children and young people a level of influence and an element of choice about the provision offered and can help them understand their own needs and wants.
- Participation leads to more accurate, relevant decisions, which are therefore better informed.
- Participation is an important aid to protection; a recurring theme of successive inquiries into abuse has been the failure to listen to children and young people.
- Effective participation can provide a sense of self-efficacy and raise self-esteem.
- Participation and involvement enables organisations to better identify needs and provide more relevant and appropriate services, therefore improving outcomes for the children and young people with whom they have contact.

Theoretical Models

A number of theoretical models of participation have been considered as a means to underpin the philosophy we wish to represent. Roger Hart's "Ladder of Participation" (Hart R 1982) offered a basic understanding of differing levels of participation. However this model was criticised for its simplicity and a further model was identified which we envisage as a useable tool for individuals and teams to enhance participation throughout our work with children and young people. Both models are fully illustrated within the Appendix.

Shier's (Harry Shier, 2001) model considers three stages of commitment:

- **Openings**
- **Opportunities**
- **Obligations.**

The model is based on five levels of participation:

- 1) **Children are listened to.**
- 2) **Children are supported in expressing their views.**
- 3) **Children's views are taken into account.**
- 4) **Children are involved in decision-making processes.**
- 5) **Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.**

At each level, **an opening** occurs when a worker is ready to operate at that level, i.e. they make a personal commitment, or statement of intent to work in a certain way.

An opportunity occurs when the worker or organisation is enabled to operate at this level in practice. This may include resources, (including staff time), skills, knowledge, and development of new procedures or new approaches.

Finally **an obligation** is established when it becomes the agreed policy of the organisation that staff should operate at this level: an obligation that staff must comply with. Participation then becomes built in to the system.

The model provides a simple question at each stage of every level. The answer determines the current position of an individual, team's or organisation's practice and will identify the next steps to increase the level of participation.

The model is probably most helpful when discussions occur and the answer to a question is "no". Then it can be asked:

- "Should we be able to answer yes?"
- "What do we need to do to answer "yes"?"
- "Can we make these changes?"
- "Are we prepared for the consequences?"

An example of how to follow this through in practice is highlighted below for Level One. The complete model is demonstrated in Appendix 1.

Level 1: Children are listened to

This level requires only that when children take it upon themselves to express a view, this is listened to, with due care and attention, by the responsible adults.

No organised efforts are made to ascertain what views they have on key decisions, and if no views are forthcoming, this is not seen as a cause for concern.

A commonly expressed belief is that children are not interested in having a say in decisions, and would rather be left to play, or whatever. This belief is however, contradicted by many reports where children, when asked, have strongly expressed a desire to have more say in things.

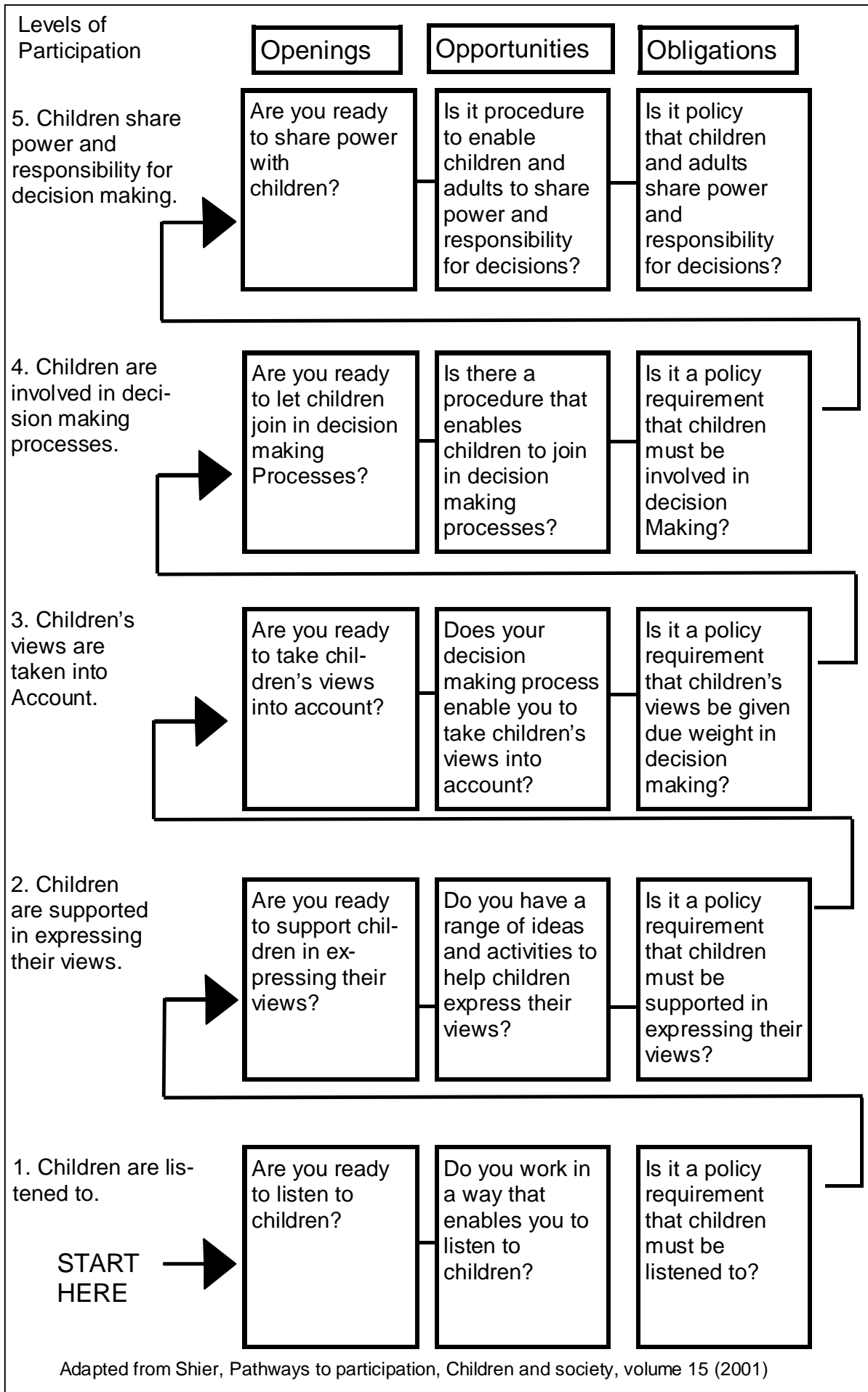
“People don’t listen to what I have to say, they hear it but they don’t do anything about it.”

Stage one therefore requires only being ready to listen to children and young people. **(Opening)**

Stage two expects a procedure to enable children and young people to be listened to. This might involve, for example, having access to a quiet time and place to talk things over, having an arrangement for staff to cover for one another so that a worker can take time to listen to an individual child, or providing training in listening skills for all workers.

(Opportunity)

Stage three requires that listening to children becomes the stated policy of the organisation, thus making it an obligation to listen carefully to what children have to say. **(Obligation)**



Integrating the Model - Moving Forward

Many of the opportunities to promote participation arise from obligations (duties/responsibilities) imposed by law. It is important for all of us to consider participation in terms of its legal framework – it is a duty imposed in the same way that there is a duty to act in children’s best interests.

Reflecting on our practice with young people and assessing our capacity to encourage them to participate may be an uncomfortable activity. However, Shier’s model is helpful in this task. It helps us to identify where our responsibilities lie to create **openings**, where the organisation has **opportunities** but is not facilitating this with a procedure because it has not responded to the **obligation** by producing a policy.

The Participation Strategy is a good example of the organisation accepting its duty to promote participation by developing a policy. However, there are of course many areas for development. There may be instances where the procedures to enable children and young people to share power and responsibility for decisions are to be developed, or those that exist are not robust enough. It may be the case that procedures exist but are not being implemented to their full potential.

Ascertaining the views of children and young people is one aspect of participation. A beginning. Much of the work involved in considering children and young people’s views falls to practitioners delivering services directly. They are likely to have the first direct contact with children and families who are referred, for whatever reason, and because of this, they are the professionals who will have significant impact.

“I only talk to people that I trust and none of the staff qualify.”

This work is crucial to the development of participation within the organisation as with increased participation, young people gain confidence and competence and increase their capacity to be involved and challenge us if they think they are not being involved enough! Thus young people are empowered to challenge the existing culture of the organisation which should naturally change and adapt as a consequence, leading to more practitioners supporting and championing children’s rights to participate and be involved in their own lives.

“I see my social worker every month for a short time but he talks to me without the interpreter and I do not know what he is saying to me.”

When children and young people’s views are sensitively sought, when their opinions are listened to and valued, at the point of first contact, they are more likely to have a positive experience. Having had this positive experience all other contact will involve these expectations - they will expect to be listened to, to be taken seriously, and to have rights.

All direct work with children, young people and their families is influenced by the skills of the practitioner to communicate effectively with the child, young person and family and a corollary to this is that communication is a key factor in a participative approach.

The Assessment Framework, (department of Health et al, 2000, Para 3.42) which is now familiar to most, sets out five critical components of direct work with children;

- **Seeing Children**
- **Observing Children**
- **Engaging Children**
- **Talking to Children**
- **Activities with Children**

“I see my social worker every six months but I would like to see him more”

The importance of the above was further emphasised by the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report, which placed direct contact with children at the heart of social work assessment and keeping children safe.

With this very much in mind and the acceptance that good communication is a pre requisite for participation the following guide (recommended by **Ready Steady Change**) is set out here to aid all work undertaken with children and young people, including assessments, holding meetings, statutory home visits, consultations and life story work. It is the aim that this guide be integrated into individual practice in order that participative working becomes a way of being rather than a particular professional tool we pick up and put down.

Section two - Good Practice Guides

Effective Communication with Children and Young People

Attitude and approach

Part of helping children and young people to play an active part is clearly about creating opportunities – ensuring a comfortable enabling environment – in which they can participate. From the outset therefore, we need to be clear about how we will communicate with children and young people and the reasons for making assessments. They need explanations to understand the reasons for asking questions about their lives, what they think and feel or why we are involved in a current crisis.

Be clear and open

- Introduce yourself and explain your role in relation to improving children's and young people's lives.
- Check the child or young person is happy to talk with you right now.
- Check how much time she or he has. At intervals check to make sure the child or young person is happy to stay talking with you – give them permission to say 'I've had enough'.
- If the meeting (or assessment) is statutory or must meet certain requirements, or if the child or young person has requested the contact, check that you both know and agree the purpose of the contact.
- Explain and clarify organisational and decision-making processes as appropriate, particularly what is in the child's or young person's and your power to decide and what is not.

This explanation needs to include the purpose of the assessment and what the possible outcomes of the assessment might be. A careful balance should be achieved here in terms of giving enough information to enable children and young people to grasp the situation but not too much to cause them anxiety. It is also important to reassure them throughout the process and help them handle any uncertainty whilst plans are being formulated. If you don't know the answer to something, don't be afraid to say so. If you say you will find out – do so and let them know. Young people have more respect for professionals who are honest about what they do and do not know.

- Explain if any information will be recorded from this contact, and how it might be used. Explain if there are any limitations to confidentiality.
- If you must take notes, explain why, and how they will be used and who will see them. Give the child or young person the chance to check the notes before you leave.

Providing this kind of information is your responsibility and receiving it is the child or young person’s right.

Transparency shows respect and reduces power differences.

Be ‘real’

- Being authentic demonstrates openness and honesty. Try to be as friendly, informal and relaxed as possible, but don’t try to use currently fashionable youthful phrases, if that’s not who you are. You will sound and look inappropriate.
- Be respectful and non-judgemental (see below).

Acceptance encourages openness and trust.

Preparation

Before you meet with a young person, think about their method of communication. You can use this information to influence how you will alter your communication to meet their needs. This is a crucial factor, which will influence the responses you get from young people; quite often it is not that young people cannot communicate, it is that they are not being listening to “on all channels” – that means that you accept that everything is communication and not just the spoken word. This can be a challenge, as many of us rely totally on the spoken word as the only means of communication and in doing so we fail to listen to those whose speech is impaired or restricted, or who use other methods to communicate. This is especially relevant to disabled children and young people.

- Make sure you have sufficient time to get to know the child or young person you are having contact with, and their preferred means of communication.
- Be ready with as many methods as possible to support the child or young person to communicate their views.

Consider alternative ways of explaining what an assessment is and why you are undertaking this – share a little bit of yourself, give an example of a piece of work you may have done with another young person, or use examples from young people who have been part of research projects that you may have read about, things that children and young people can relate to – use drawings, play a game, use a book or anything that would be appropriate for the individual child or young person who is in front of you. You need to think about this before hand as it will require preparation – you may need materials to help you such as pens, paper, and pictures.

The Service Development Team has resources available, which can be used by practitioners to support them in their work. Included are specially photocopied sheets designed to help practitioners work directly with young people to obtain their views or explain a complex matter.

Language

- Use clear language.
- Avoid jargon, and explain terms that the child or young person may need to understand.
- Talk in a clear voice (do not mumble) and slow down your pace of speaking. This can put at ease a nervous child or young person or calm an angry one.
- Ease into the conversation if possible, especially with younger children, or children and young people who are distressed, or have a learning impairment. Spend time doing something the child or young person is interested in or enjoys
- Don't interrupt and don't finish sentences for the child or young person.

The following are some comments made by children and young people who are disabled to assist adults to communicate with them;

‘Don’t blame us or have a go at us’
‘We do have feelings’
‘We’re just like other children’
‘Show respect, and don’t patronise us’
‘Take your time and make sure you understand’
‘If you don’t understand, ask for it to be repeated.’
‘Really listen and understand’
‘Make sure you really understand us because I have seen carers, parents and other people who didn’t even know or can’t be bothered to find out how we say yes or no. Sometimes people say later, later, because they think we’re asking for attention.’
‘Keep calm and get on with it’
‘Don’t be scared’
‘Learn from young people’
‘Show and interest in us, make it more than just a job’
Two Way Street - Communicating with Children and Young People with Disabilities. Triangle/NSPCC 2001

The following list was compiled by the South Tyneside TME group (Talking Meeting Eating Group – the reference group for children with disabilities) in May 06 and outlines the qualities they would look for when communicating with staff:

‘Be friendly’
‘Find something we have in common early on’
‘Have an awareness of disabilities’
‘Be easy to talk to’
‘Keep good eye contact with us ‘
‘Don’t interrupt us – even if we’re struggling to talk’
‘Concentrate on what we’re saying’
‘Don’t treat us like babies’
‘Ask us questions if you don’t understand something’
‘Talk to us not our parents (or carers)’
‘Listen to what we have to say’
‘Try to understand what being young is like’
‘Be clear when you are talking to us’

Empathy and rapport

Building rapport with a child or young person encourages them to communicate more openly. With younger children this may mean playing or drawing together.

Rapport may be developed through any of the approaches outlined here, because they all demonstrate respect for the child or young person:

- Show empathy – the capacity to understand something from the other person’s view. This can encourage self-expression more strongly than any other technique.
- Ask open questions that encourage an explanation from the child or young person’s perspective, e.g. ‘please tell me from your point of view why you called X a name’; ‘please tell me from your point of view what you think might cause you to get dizzy’; ‘please tell me from your point of view how it feels to see your parents argue’. Children and young people can often see and experience a situation quite differently to an adult.
- Avoid leading questions, as this will only encourage the child or young person to say what they think you want to hear.
- Do not assume you can understand everything the child or young person says. Rephrase something to check you understand the meaning. E.g. ‘are you saying that...or did you mean something else’; ‘please explain that again as I really want to understand’. This ensures understanding and also demonstrates that you are listening and taking the child or young person seriously.
- Re-explain a complex idea by repeating it in different words or from a different perspective. Check that you have been understood. Let the child or young person know that you don’t mind explaining something again as you obviously are not being clear.
- Acknowledge feelings by reflecting them back, e.g. ‘I guess that made you feel scared/excited/relieved’.
- Try to remember that a display of anger, aggression or any strong emotion is usually an expression of fear or frustration at the current situation rather than a personal attack.
- Maintaining your self-respect as well as respect for the child or young person can demonstrate a new way of responding to conflict.

Non-verbal communication

- Body language can communicate far more than anything you say, so if your feeling impatient or disinterested, children and young people (including babies and very young children) will be able to feel this, despite your best language techniques.
- Eye contact – without staring – shows that you are listening.
- Smiling and nodding can also show that you are fully engaged.
- Remember the child or young person will communicate non-verbally as well as verbally to you – be ready to pick up on cues and messages. Check out your interpretation.

Ending

- Summarise clearly what has been said. Check you haven't forgotten anything.
- Explore choices and options and try to agree on decisions and any follow-up together.
- Explain the possible consequences of decisions.
- Explain actions and any outcomes.
- Thank the child or young person for talking with you.
- Say when you will next see each other. Be honest. If you don't know when – say so. Also, tell the child or young person if you are unlikely to meet again.

Environment

Dedicated area

- Check that the child or young person is happy to talk in the setting you are in.
- The location for a conversation with a child or young person should usually be in a dedicated area that allows for privacy and confidentiality. E.g. an important discussion should not take place in the reception area or corridor.
- This area should be comfortable, with windows and appropriate seating.
- Avoid sitting at a desk/table; if a desk/table is necessary, try to sit on the same side together. This again reduces barriers and power differences.
- There should be pictures, magazines, books and toys that are age appropriate to create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere.

And finally once we have ascertained the views of children and young people it is our responsibility to incorporate these views into the assessment in a way that is meaningful to all who will read it but does not compromise the content.

For example if the piece of work a young person has done is a drawing, then this should be shared with all who need to see it. It would also be good practice to evidence this piece of work within the assessment by describing what it is, and the context in which it was produced.

Practitioners may also feel it is appropriate to comment on other factors such as mood, body language etc of the young person when they were working with them. However, as noted earlier, we need to be mindful of our own impact on the child or young person, and the status and power, which is implicit in our professional's role. Such issues may well influence young people's responses and mood and we need to be careful not to attribute everything to their current situation.

We need to be explicit with children and young people who will represent their views, how they will be communicated and who will make decisions.

Establishing a child or young person's wishes and feelings is a first step towards enabling their participation. Developing an effective relationship with them may take time and there are no short cuts.

Viewpoint – Participation, Consultation and Good Practice

Viewpoint is an interactive consultation tool. It is one of many ways to consult with children and young people. In South Tyneside Viewpoint is currently used to ascertain the views of children who are looked after by the local authority.

Presently Viewpoint is available to children who are placed either out of borough or who are in borough in a residential placement. The children and young people who use it are between 5 and 15 +. We are considering ways to make this available in the future to all children aged from four years who are looked after including disabled children and young people.

Viewpoint is implemented in this borough in a child-focused way, which embodies the principles of participation. Young people are encouraged to participate but we respect their decision if they do not want to complete it. They may prefer other ways of participating. It is therefore important that they have choices about how they communicate and to whom.

An explanation is given to young people, beforehand, about the way in which the completed questionnaire will be used and who will have a copy, why their views are important and the importance of planning for their review.

They are also advised that their responses will be stored (on the Viewpoint Data base) and how the information is used, both on an individual level and to develop services. This information is explained to young people before they begin, as they have to consent to the process (by clicking on the PC) their agreement.

It is also important to ensure that they understand the safety element and confidentiality in terms of any disclosure they may make and the consequences that would follow. Children and young people need to be clear that we would have to respond in a way to protect their safety and promote their best interests.

These matters would be referred to as '**critical information**' and as such would be responded to as part of safeguarding procedures and a broader monitoring system, which has been developed solely for Viewpoint.

Letters and communication methods have been developed that promote the involvement of young people in the process. Young people are invited to complete the questionnaire themselves, in their own words, without changes being made - correcting they're spelling (for example), or changing the way they express themselves unless they ask for support.

If they ask for support, for example, they may not want to use the laptop, responses to questions are typed verbatim and then the facility of 'read out loud' within the programme is available to reassure them that there is a record of exactly what they have said.

There are occasions when young people struggle to express themselves and need to be given encouragement and time to explore what they want to say. This means that the length of time required for completion is variable due to the level of support required. Obviously, the more times young people use the tool, the greater their

technical skill and this can speed up the process but a lot depends on what has happened in their lives in the previous six months.

During contact children and young people are given advice about the complaints process and how to access this. Examples are provided about the sort of things children and young people complain about. This helps them to explore their understanding and is a way to promote their rights of safety as well as their rights to a good standard of corporate parenting.

The discussion about complaints leads to the introduction of advocacy. Advocates can help them to express their view – irrespective of what that view is. This is a different concept to that of other professionals who will work, very positively, to promote their best interest.

Literature is available to give out to young people, providing more information and a contact telephone number. The advocacy service also has a link via the Doucare website. Young people can ask their carer or Social Worker to support them to make a referral should they wish. They are also advised that they can contact the Service Development Team who will also refer them directly.

There is a balance to be achieved when introducing this concept to young people. It is important that young people understand that they have a right to be heard but that they also need to be safeguarded. Both exist in parallel.

It is explained to young people that a copy of the report will be emailed to their social worker and IRO and that any responses will be clarified in this email. Generally during the process there are discussions about responses and young people are asked to clarify any ambiguous statements and an explanation given if their comments need clarification.

A copy of the report is sent to the young person with a letter explaining a copy has also been sent to the social worker, and independent reviewing officer. At the young person's request (only) a copy will be forwarded to their carer.

When a young person completes Viewpoint for the second time, the person visiting takes the last completed report with them. Experience and feedback from young people, indicates that they think this is a good idea as it follows up on what they said last time. A monitoring system has been devised to consider issues that recur on the Viewpoint questionnaire.

For example there are sometimes issues about family contact. It would be an expectation that this situation would have changed in the six months after it was raised through Viewpoint.

If the young person feels that this has not been resolved at the following Viewpoint session the matter will be referred as a 'recurring issue' to the Independent Reviewing Officer and the Monitoring Officer in Children's Services. This information is collated for quality management purposes.

This forms part of a larger monitoring procedure that seeks to support young people and avoid 'drift'. The monitoring procedure is also triggered by issues that relate to

staff conduct, placement standards and any other matters that would be cause for concern but do not fall within the parameters of critical information.

Lessons Learned

Whilst every effort was made to ensure that Viewpoint was and is administered in a child centred way, some of the above practice was developed as a consequence of interactions with children and young people, their comments on the service we provided and consulting with other local authorities that are also using Viewpoint.

There are parts of Viewpoint that, in our experience, do not work well for young people. But we would like young people's views before we make any major changes.

The questionnaires are to be reviewed - it is likely that we may work in collaboration with neighbouring authorities to do this but we pledge to involve young people in this process and in the wider developments that are in progress in respect of Looked after Reviews.

Working With Groups

Under fives

Communication with under fives is likely to be most successful coming from someone with a long-term relationship with younger children. Using many different methods that are interactive and fun will hopefully keep children interested. Using photographs to help the children choose between options can be a useful way to help them make their choices. Sticky dots or thumbs up can be used to indicate their preferences. Sentence completion - for example, "I like my foster carer because....." - may work with this group also.

Working with 5- to 11-year-olds

Children will need to feel at ease with the adult they are working with. When children are working in groups, consider what composition would make them feel most comfortable: working with friends, in single-sex groups, etc. Please note that this may be very different for each group!

A variety of interactive methods keep the work interesting. Some examples are given below:

- Try walking round an area with the children, getting them to point out (and/or mark) things that they like or don't like.
- Get them to draw how they would like things to be.
- Circle time is a method used by many primary schools, and gives children the chance to express their views in a way that they are already familiar with. Children sit in a circle and an object is passed round. Whoever is holding the object is the one whose turn it is to speak.
- Taking photographs of things they enjoy or would like to change may give an interesting insight

Working with 12- to 19-year-olds

Young people of this age may be very cynical, either through their previous experiences of consultation and involvement, or because they just feel that their views do not count and will not be taken seriously. Young people are likely to judge you by the experience they have had with other professionals e.g. if you are their 10th social worker. It's important to try not to take things personally. It's also important to remember that choosing not to be involved is also a valid choice – as long as they have all the important information available to make that choice. Below are some points to consider:

- Be open and honest about what can be achieved and the scope of the project.
- Be real about constraints upon their options or upon the work you would like them to do e.g. if you only have an hour with them, tell them this and why.
- If possible, work with someone who already has a relationship with the young people.
- Consider where the best place to meet young people is - think about where they already go or are comfortable with.
- This age group are less likely to want to work with groups who are a couple of years younger than them.

- Don't assume that all young people's views are the same. It might be necessary to think about how to target specific groups of young people, for example, young women or young people in residential settings or out of borough placements, through focus groups, etc.
- Use a combination of methods to keep it interesting.

Working with disabled children and young people

Many disabled children and young people may not need to be involved in a separate or different way from other young people. Find out in advance about any special needs and whether these can be incorporated into mainstream work. It may require you to think about issues concerning access and communication.

Access

- Venue suitability
- Transport links

Communication

- Written resources - these may need to be provided in large print or Braille
- A young person's preferred method of communication - for example, signing or makaton
- Symbols packages can be a useful way of communicating with young people who do not use verbal communication
- Pictures, photographs or video recordings may be good methods to use.
- Communication passports are a good way of recording a young person's means of communication; for example this would indicate how a young person says "yes" or "no", how they might indicate they want a break or that they are unhappy about something.

Working with young people who are not fluent in English

Fluency in spoken English tends to come before fluency in reading or writing, so you will need to consider whether written communication is appropriate. If young people are refugees, or asylum-seekers who have recently arrived in the country, there may be additional issues to take into account. Innovative use of video and audio material can be good ways of involving young people who are not fluent in English. Consider using specially trained interpreters.

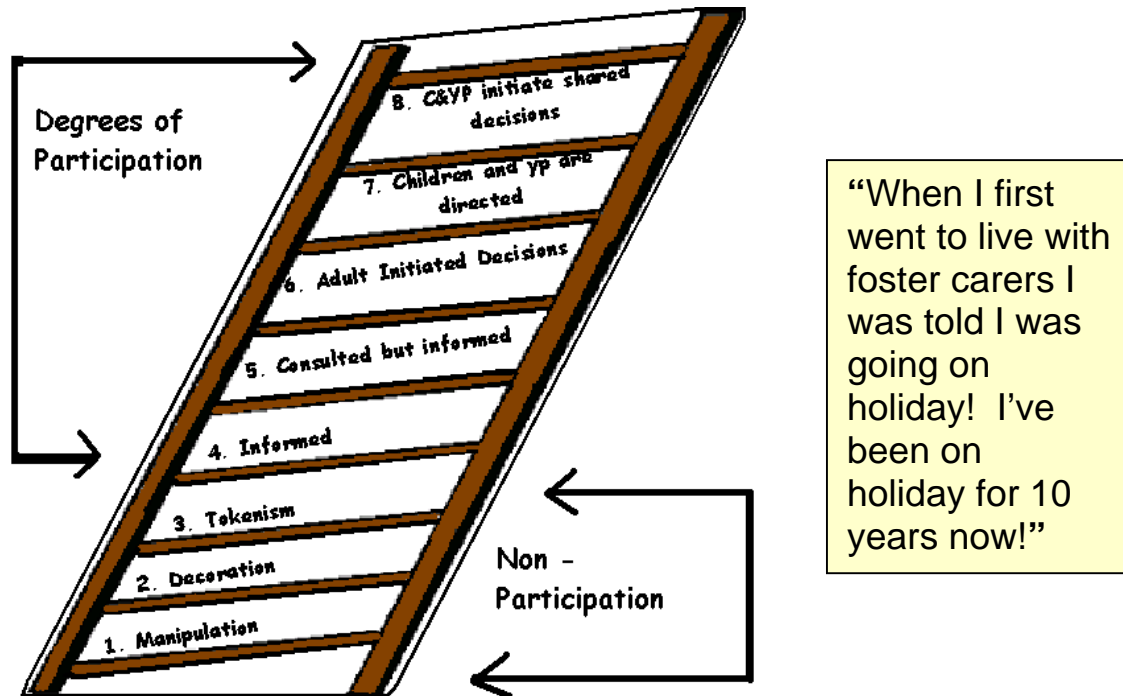
Working with young people from diverse ethnic backgrounds

Be aware of the power relationships and cultural traditions within the communities you are working with. Specific steps might need to be taken to involve young people from different backgrounds, such as running events aimed at attracting a particular group. Make links with organisations providing services to the black and ethnic minority communities and make use of their experience and knowledge of working within those communities. Ensure that work does not conflict with particular religious or cultural festivals.

Appendix 1

The Ladder Of Participation

The ‘Ladder of Participation’ illustrates the differing levels of participation and describes the process of decision making from a young person’s point of view.



The Ladder of Participation adapted from "Children's Participation; from Tokenism to Citizenship", by Roger Hart, published by UNICEF, 1992

1. Manipulation

Children and young People do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues or are asked what they think. Adults use some of their ideas but do not tell them what influence they have on the final decision.

2. Decoration

Children and young people take part in an event, e.g. by singing, dancing or wearing t-shirts with logos on, but they do not really understand the issue.

3. Tokenism

Children and young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or choice about the way that they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.

4. Assigned but Informed

Adults decided on the project and children and young people volunteer for it. Adults respect their views.

5. Consulted but Informed

The project is designed and run by adults but children and young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

6. Adult Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults

Adults have the initial idea but children and young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but also they are also involved in taking the decisions.

7. Children and Young People are directed

Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

8. Children and Young People Initiated Shared Decisions with Adults

Children and Young people have the ideas, set up the projects and invite adults to join with them in making the decisions.

“My social workers have helped me and even though most of the time you may feel that the social workers don't care, they really do!”

One of the criticisms levelled at Hart's ladder of participation is its simplicity.

The image of a ladder suggests that practitioners will progress from one level to the next. However at each level of participation individuals and organisations may have differing degrees of commitment to the process of empowerment, and may be at different levels depending on the activity.

Appendix 2

Shier's model of Participation

Harry Shier presented an alternative model of participation in his article, *Pathways to Participation*, (2001, *Children & Society Volume 15*). Shier's model attempts to clarify this by identifying three stages of commitment at each level: **openings, opportunities and obligations.**

The following explanation of the model is taken from the above article.

The model is based on five levels of participation:

- 6) **Children are listened to.**
- 7) **Children are supported in expressing their views.**
- 8) **Children's views are taken into account.**
- 9) **Children are involved in decision-making processes.**
- 10) **Children share power and responsibility for decision-making.**

At each level, an opening occurs when a worker is ready to operate at that level, i.e. they make a personal commitment, or statement of intent to work in a certain way. It is only an opening because at this stage the opportunity may not be available.

The second stage, an opportunity, occurs when the needs are met that will enable the worker or organisation to operate at this level in practice. These needs may include resources, (including staff time), skills and knowledge, development of new procedures or new approaches.

Finally an obligation is established when it becomes the agreed policy of the organisation or setting that staff should operate at this level. It becomes an obligation on the staff that they must do so. Participation thus becomes built in to the system.

The model provides a simple question for each stage of each level. By answering the questions, the reader can determine their current position and easily identify the next steps they can take to increase the level of participation.

In reality, it is unlikely that a worker (or an organisation) will be neatly positioned at a single point on the diagram. They may be at different stages at different levels. Also they may be at different positions in respect of different tasks or aspects of their work.

Level 1: Children are listened to

This level requires only that when children take it upon themselves to express a view, this is listened to, with due care and attention, by the responsible adults.

However, what distinguishes this level from the next level up, is that this listening occurs only in so far as children take it upon themselves to express a view. No organised efforts are made to ascertain what views they have on key decisions, and if no views are forthcoming, this is not seen as a cause for concern. It is a commonly expressed belief that children are not interested in having a say in decisions, and would rather be left to play, or whatever. This belief is however, contradicted by many reports where children, when asked, have strongly expressed a desire to have more say in things.

At this level, stage one simply requires that the worker/team is ready to listen. Stage two requires that they work in a way that enables them to listen. This might involve, for example, having access to a quiet time and place to talk things over, having an arrangement for staff to cover for one another so that a worker can take time to listen to an individual child, or having training in listening skills for all workers.

Stage three requires that listening to children becomes the stated policy of the organisation, thus making it an obligation, the duty of all staff, to listen carefully to what children have to say.

Level 2: Children are supported in expressing their views

This model recognises that there are many reasons why children, who have opinions on many issues, may not express those opinions to adults working with them. The long list of possible reasons includes lack of confidence, shyness, low self esteem, previous experience of not being listened to, or that expressing opinions is unproductive, no culture of participation or inadequate skills (on the part of the staff as much as the child: workers not knowing the child's first language, unable to use sign language etc.)

It is therefore recognised that, in order for children to be able to express their views openly and confidently, adults working with them must take positive action to support and enable this and in doing so to overcome those barriers that may prevent children's views from being expressed. Level two is distinguished from level one by this commitment to positive action to elicit children's views and to support them in expressing those views.

At this level, stage one, the opening, again simply requires that the worker/organisation is ready to take action to help children express their views. Stage two, however, requires that the opportunities be provided for children to express their views. The question therefore asks whether the worker/organisation has a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views. This should include age appropriate techniques for consulting children, which could involve creative visual methods using games and art activities as well as surveys and interviews. It will also require the workers to have effective communication skills for eliciting the opinions of disabled children or those whose first language is not English. Again to achieve this stage may require specific training for workers in how to facilitate participation.

The third stage again requires that this way of working be established as the organisation's policy, so that workers are obliged to take the necessary range of actions to ensure children are enabled and supported in expressing their views.

Level 3: Children's views are taken into account

Whilst level two goes further than level one in actively seeking out children's views, it offers no guarantee that these views will be taken into account or influence the organisation's decision making. It may be argued that there is no point in enabling children to express their views if they are not going to be taken into account. However, there are so many reported instances of tokenism and manipulation, this cannot be assumed. For example, an out of school worker was quoted as saying, "it's good to do this so the children have the feeling that we are listening to them." (Ball, 1998). That is why taking children's views into account marks the third level of this model.

It is important to note that this is the level of participation that is mandatory for any authority or organisation that has adopted or endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12.1 states that every child who is capable of forming his or her own views has "the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child." (Equivalent to the second level of participation in this model), "the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (equivalent to level three).

Taking children's views into account in decision-making does not imply that every decision must be made in accordance with children's wishes, or that adults are bound to implement whatever children ask for. Children's views are one of several factors that will have to be taken into account in many policy decisions. Even when we ensure that the children's views are "given due weight", other factors may still outweigh this, and the children may not get what they ask for. As Penelope Leach so neatly put it, "children must be given their say, but they do not always have to be given their way".

Although the United Nations Convention does not mention the giving of feedback to children who have expressed their views, several authorities have pointed out that this is good practice. Particularly where adults have decided there is some over-riding reason why children's wishes should not be carried out, it is important to let the children know why this decision has been made and why, where appropriate, to help them explore alternative ways to achieve their objectives.

As with the previous levels, the model has three stages at level three. The opening occurs once the worker/organisation is ready to take children's views into account. The opportunities arise when the organisation has a decision making process that enables children's views to be taken into account. And the obligation exists when the organisation makes it its policy to implement Article 12 of the United Nations Convention; that it to ensure that children's views are given due weight in its decision-making.

Level 4: Children are involved in decision-making

This level can be seen as marking the transition from consultation to active participation in decision-making. Hart's model regards consulting as a legitimate form of participation. However the crucial distinction is that at the lower levels, the children participate by providing an input (their views) to aid the decision-making process, but do not participate at the stage where decisions are actually made, and therefore do not have any real decision making power. Thus at the lower levels children can be said to be "empowered" only in the weaker sense meaning "strengthened" or "supported", but not in the stronger sense meaning that those who hold the power give up some of it in their favour. Decision-making remains the province of adults.

At level four this begins to change, because children are directly involved at the point where decisions are made. For example the staff team in a residential unit wish to draw up a holiday activity program. If they organised a survey of all the young people to find out what they wanted to do, then met as a team to devise the program and in doing so gave serious consideration to the young people's ideas, this would be level three (and fully in keeping with the letter of UNC). If however, a group comprising staff and young people met together and jointly planned the program, this would be level four.

As noted earlier, the United Nations convention does not make it mandatory to have children involved at the actual point of decision-making. It only requires that adults find out what the children's views are and give them due weight when they make their decisions. Why then should organisations seek to operate at these higher levels?

Children's Participation in decision-making has been shown to be beneficial in many ways. The benefits include improving the quality of service provision, increasing children's sense of ownership and belonging, increasing self esteem, increasing empathy and responsibility, laying the groundwork for citizenship and democratic participation, and thus helping to safeguard and strengthen democracy.

The first of these benefits, improving service provision, can be achieved with lower levels of participation, along the lines of market research (equivalent to levels one and two). All other benefits, however, can only really come into play when children become actively involved in the decision-making process. Thus even though not strictly required by the United Nations Convention, the case for children's active involvement in decision-making is a powerful one.

The three stages of level four allow the same pattern as the previous levels. An opening occurs when the worker/organisation is ready to let children join in its decision-making processes (which may require a greater degree of willingness to accept change than the previous levels). Opportunities arise when a procedure is established to make it possible for children to join in decision-making. Again this may require significant changes in the way an organisation is run. The times, venues, procedures, paperwork, jargon, ethos and mode of operation of most decision making committees are extremely un-child friendly. It tends to be easier to involve children in decisions relating to activities that they are involved in (behaviour code in a play centre, or program of activities at an after school club, for example). It is more difficult to find non-tokenistic ways to involve children in planning and policy making at regional or national level (Shier, 1998).

The third stage, obligation, is achieved when the organisation makes it a policy requirement that children *must* be involved in decision making and therefore commits itself to overcoming the obstacles that stand in the way of this.

Level 5: Children share power and responsibility for decision-making

There is, perhaps less of a clear distinction between level four and five. The difference is more a matter of degree. At level four, children can be actively involved in a decision making process, but without any real power over the decisions that are made. This occurs, for example when young people are given a number of seats on an adult committee. If they are confident and articulate, they can put forward their views, and the adults will generally listen respectfully. However they are clearly outnumbered and the adults have an effective veto.

To fully achieve level five, therefore requires an explicit commitment on the parts of adults to share their power, that is, to give some of it away.

As with level four, there is no obligation under the united-nations convention for adults to share their power with children. Decisions about how and when to share power must be based on risks and benefits of doing so. The benefits have been mentioned earlier and many of these will be multiplied when children have the experience of genuinely sharing decision-making power with adults. It is particularly important that at this level, we are talking about sharing power and responsibility for decisions. There is always a risk that a decision made in this way may have adverse consequences, and then adults and children also have to learn to share responsibility for the decision.

This model makes no suggestion that children should be pressed to take responsibility they do not want, or that is inappropriate for their level of development and understanding. However, in practice, adults are more likely to deny children developmentally appropriate degrees of responsibility than to force too much responsibility on them.

At level five the opening occurs when the worker/organisation is ready to share decision-making power with the children. Opportunities arise when there is a procedure that enables this to happen, and an obligation is created when it becomes the organisation's policy that children and adults should share power and responsibility, at least in certain areas, of decision-making.

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