

A photograph of two young children, a boy and a girl, both smiling broadly and giving thumbs up. The boy is in the foreground, wearing a blue and white tracksuit. The girl is behind him, wearing a green top. A large pink circle is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing text.

# Involving children in decision making

→ Your quick, practical guide

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## Foreword

Children's participation is more than just asking them for their ideas and views. It's about listening to them, taking them seriously and turning their ideas and suggestions into reality. It is also about providing them with the ability to influence some of the things that affect them and at the same time helping adults understand children's issues through their lens.

It is well evidenced in the literature that the accounts and lived experiences of children and young people regarding their world and how they experience it can contribute significantly and meaningfully to new knowledge and in doing so can enhance services that are provided to children.

The aim of this guide is to provide organisations with guidelines and associated practical activities to involve children under the age of 12 years in decision making within their services. It has been developed in partnership with the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation and with the advice of key stakeholders from across Tasmania: Child and Family Centres, Department of Education, Lady Gowrie, Uniting Care, Tasmanian Association of Neighbourhood Houses, Kingborough and Hobart City Councils.

To ensure that the activities worked they were trialled and evaluated by Ravenswood Child and Family Centre, Uniting Care and Lady Gowrie. They provided valuable feedback in refining the activities from a child's perspective.

I would like to thank all of those involved for their ideas and practice wisdom and their willingness to road test the project in the safe and honest hands of children which has been invaluable in the development of the materials for this guide.

I hope that you find the guidelines and activities practical and useful in your endeavours to ensure that the voice of children is heard and acted upon in your services and programs that you deliver.



**Aileen Ashford**

(Commissioner for Children)



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The Guide can be accessed on both the Commissioner for Children's website and the Early Years Foundation website at:

**Commissioner for Children**  
[www.childcomm.tas.gov.au](http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au)

**Early Years Foundation**  
[www.earlyyears.org.au](http://www.earlyyears.org.au)

## Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation strongly believe that children should have the right to participate in decision making that affects their health, wellbeing and development

This belief is underpinned by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states that the views of children and young people should be taken into account in any decision that is likely to affect their wellbeing. UNICEF (2013)

The Commissioner for Children's Strategic Plan (2011-2013) mission statement: *'we promote the interests of children and young people in any decision or actions affecting their health, care, protection, development and education'* supports this position. Commissioner for Children Tasmania (2011)

The Commissioner for Children and the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation have collaborated to produce the participation toolkit for children under the age of 12 years to ensure that best practices are in place when children are involved in decision making.

The objectives of the participation guidelines are to provide resources for organisations, both government and non-government, to ensure that there is:

- » support for children's participation in the planning and development of their communities;
- » support for children's participation in decision making that may impact them;
- » encouraging organisations to seek participation of children and young people; and
- » provide organisations with a toolkit of best practice models.



## Why is children's participation important?

Participation is important for children because it gives them an opportunity to have a say about issues and decisions that affect them, learn new skills, have fun and develop a closer connection to their community. As a result programs and services created for children will better reflect their needs.

The involvement of children, as part of the community and users of services, can make sure agencies and organisations are relevant to them. Their participation ensures what is provided is what is needed, and children are more likely to support the outcome if they have been involved in developing it.

Good practice includes a listening culture among staff, clarity, flexibility, adequate resources, and skills development for staff, participating children and young people, inclusion of marginalized groups, feedback and evaluation. (Cavet & Sloper, 2004)

## Children's Participation Guidelines

This kit contains information for effective participation for service organisations and government agencies as well as practical ideas that organisations can apply to their services to better meet the needs of the children in decision making.

Participation of children in decision making will be enhanced if it includes the following steps:

- **Action 1** Consider whether to involve children in the work of your organisation
- **Action 2** Plan how the participation is to happen
- **Action 3** Making it Happen
- **Action 4** Evaluating the Process



## Characteristics of Effective and Genuine Participation

- » Issues are real and relevant to children themselves
- » Capacity to make a difference (where possible long term or organisational change)
- » Links to children direct day-to-day experience
- » Adequate time and resources made available
- » Realistic expectations of children
- » Clear goals and targets agreed with children
- » Address the promotion or protection of children's rights.

### Values

- » Honesty from adults about the issue and the process
- » Inclusive –equal opportunity for participation by all
- » Groups of interested children Equal respect for children of all ages, abilities, ethnicity, social background
- » Information is shared with the children to enable them to make real choices
- » Children's views are taken seriously
- » Voluntary nature of children's involvement
- » Decision-making is shared.

### Methodology

- » Clarity of purpose
- » Child-friendly meeting places, language and structures
- » Involvement of children from the earliest possible stages
- » Training provided to help children acquire necessary skills
- » Methods of involvement developed in collaboration with children
- » Adult support provided where needed
- » Strategy developed for sustainability.

*Gerison Lansdown (2001)*

# Action One

Consider whether to involve children in the work of your organisation

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# Step 1

## What would children's participation contribute to your organisation?

There are a number of questions organisations should consider when deciding whether to involve children in decision making. These include:

- » How does your organisation ensure its policies, programs and services are relevant to children?
- » How does your organisation ensure your targeted programs are based on validated need?
- » How does your organisation enable children to feel connected and that they have some part to play in policy development? How do you encourage children to support your organisation's outcomes?
- » How does your organisation support children develop new skills, increase confidence and have a better awareness of how organisations work so that they are empowered by the experience. How does your organisation support children to become more responsible adult decision-makers?

The following decision-making model illustrates the process of decision making for an organisation. This model maybe used to assist with determining at what stage children are involved in decision making and of what benefit their involvement is for the organisation and the children.

Finding opportunities for children's involvement begins with reflecting on the types of decisions that are made and assessing the appropriate method for involvement.

**Figure 1 : Typical Decision Making Process**

Decision Making Process
<p><b>1. Clarify the purpose and boundaries of decision-making?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <i>Who will make the decision?</i></li> <li>» <i>Who will be affected by the decision?</i></li> <li>» <i>What information is needed to make the decision?</i></li> <li>» <i>When should the decision be made?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Define how the decision will be made?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <i>Consensus</i></li> <li>» <i>Voting</i></li> <li>» <i>Negotiation</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Making the Decision</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <i>Document the integration, influence and prioritisation of ideas</i></li> <li>» <i>Who will implement decision?</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <i>Communicate the decision and the rationale</i></li> <li>» <i>Feedback to contributors how their input influenced decision</i></li> </ul>

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## 5. Implementing the Decision

- » *Define the steps and timeframe*
  - » *Define the reporting methods*
- 

## 6. Evaluation and revise

- » *Identify the processes for assessing impact*
  - » *Set target dates*
  - » *Review decisions and process*
- 

### How does this happen?

- » Start with clear goals and objectives that link the involvement of children to the objectives of your project
- » Include participation of children as a goal for your strategic plan or policy development
- » Allocate resources for setting up participation mechanisms
- » Recruit committed and skilled staff that believe participation of children and young people is an important part of your organisation

## Step 2

### Extent of their Involvement

There are many ways that children can participate in the decision-making processes of organisations but it may require extra commitment from the organisation, either by extra staff time or additional funding.

An initial planning meeting will clarify the aims, objectives, roles and parameters of involvement. It is important that staff is clear about the reasons for including children and young people.

The children who are involved should be from the target group that is affected by the work done through the organisation. However, it is important to make sure that decisions reflect the interests of all the children that are in the target group, for example, aboriginal children, children and young people with a disability, children from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and life experiences, children who are in care of the state.

The type of involvement that children take on will be different depending on the following:

- » **Type of decision to be made** – whether it is a small decision or a life changing decision.
- » **Age and ability of the children involved** – young children feel safe and secure with familiar surroundings and with adults that they know. Building a trusting relationship with a child is necessary to ensure that children can express themselves openly. Sometimes children's viewpoints may still be represented through advocacy.
- » **Timeline for involvement** – children need preparation before, support during and support after the decision making process. Preparation should be in a relaxed environment and with plenty of time to have the opportunity to express their views and concerns about the process.

## TIPS

## TRAPS

Provide as much information and explanation as the child needs.

Use a range of ways to provide information - using simple language or graphics.

Not giving enough time to prepare.

Assuming young children or children with a disability cannot, or do not want to, participate in making decisions.

Give plenty of notice of meetings to everyone involved.

Remind children about the times of meetings for decision making.

Telling a child what the agenda is rather than allowing them to have a say.

Making the preparation time overly formal - should be in familiar and informal setting.

The younger the children are, the more tangible the topics for decisions needs to be.

Younger children are more likely to want to be involved in things they have experienced.

Timing of meetings - don't compete with other activities, which may be more exciting.

Be careful not to edit/filter children's thoughts and ideas.

Don't use jargon or abbreviations.

Important not to 'lead' children. Make sure the process is open.

Some children are not very verbal in a group so it is useful to use a variety of tools - art, discussion, observation.

Make sure you treat any work done by the children is treated with respect - if not the children will not engage again.

## Degree of power sharing

All participation work with children should be conducted respectfully and acknowledge participants views and rights.

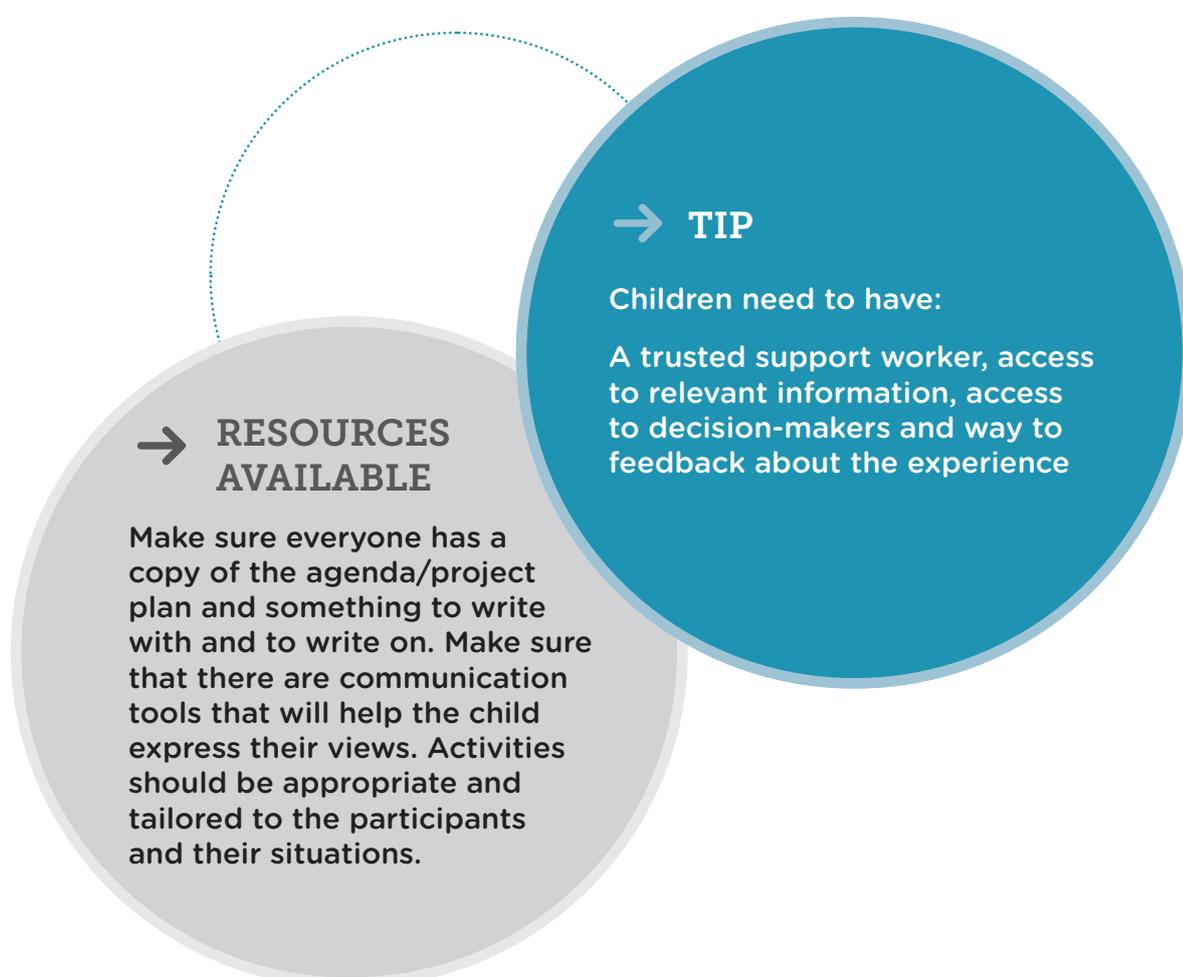
One of the benefits of children's participation is that it can lead to children feeling empowered. However, involving children in a tokenistic way can destroy trust and relationships if children do not have a genuine voice and a legitimate purpose in the decision making process.

It is important that the participation follow ethical guidelines as follows:

1. **Respect the right of everyone to participate or to refuse**
2. **Ensure and maintain their privacy**
3. **Make participation beneficial and cause no harm**
4. **Have a plan for how to deal with disclosure of illegal or harmful activities**

Finding opportunities for children's involvement begins with reflecting on the types of decisions that are made and assessing the appropriate method for involvement.

There are some instances when adults need to be in charge and have the final say on matters. However it is up to adults to also find appropriate decisions that children can be involved in making, allowing children to share some power and control over decisions that affect them.



## Step 3

### Planning for Children's involvement

Prior to involving children in the decision making process your organisation needs to have a plan to act on the involvement of children.

Once a child's views have been established, the weight given to them tends to vary with a number of factors:

- » How well a child's voice has been heard
- » The degree of consensus between the child's and adult's views
- » The degree of influence which other people have on decisions
- » The degree of control that adults want to maintain
- » The age of the child
- » The kind of decisions at issue
- » Any perceived risk to the child.

It is important to consider what you intend to do as a result of the children's involvement, what is realistic with the time and resources you have, what might prevent or limit the action, can barriers to action be overcome and is the action what children would want.

# Action Two

Plan how the participation is to happen

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# Step 1

## Getting Prepared

Finding ways to involve children's viewpoints to influence organisational change requires preparation and planning. An initial planning meeting will clarify the aims, objectives roles and parameters of children's involvement. Children who attend meetings generally say they feel supported and listened to in meetings when they have a good preparation for the meeting.

Prior to involving children in the decision making process, adults need to plan for children's involvement. Some tips which helps this process are:

- » Pre-gatherings with the children to discuss the reasons for the meeting, meeting dates and times and who will be at the meeting. This would also include documents and information about what is expected at the meetings.
- » Addressing any special needs that children may have.
- » Ensuring that the process is accessible to the children involved – *a listening culture among staff is essential so that children feel valued and respected, able to express their views at any time and that their views will be heard and acted upon. Commitment is required from organisations as is the early involvement of children and young people in issues and making their involvement central.*
- » Identifying support workers who the children are familiar with and can assist them – *Skills Development and training for staff around participation with young people assists with the staff being better support workers for the children and enhances their confidence and competence.*
- » Creating child friendly materials – *Flexibility is important as well as a wide range of methods and approaches. An informal atmosphere with a social aspect is recommended as is the employment of child friendly methods and environments.*
- » Making sure the role, boundaries and expectations are clear – *Clarity is necessary about adult involvement, about purpose, objectives and parameters for decision-making. When young people are recruited they need clear information about what to expect and honesty about the degree of power sharing available.*
- » Developing a timeframe for the work.
- » Identifying resources available – *Resources are important and sometimes are linked to the need for staff training or the need for projects to have longer term funding.*
- » Deciding the level of influence children will have on decisions.

## Step 2

### Who needs to be involved

Children's involvement in decision making will vary based on their experience, interest and ability to be involved. To ensure that all children have opportunities to express their viewpoints, there needs to be a variety of ways for their viewpoint to be heard.

One to one discussions, group activities and anonymous responses all provide ways for children to be involved as much or as little as they want. Some play and art therapy techniques can be useful resources for providing ways for children to voice their opinion about things which concern them but lack language or abstract thinking skills to express.

In considering who should be involved look at the community within which your organisation is based, services your organisation provide and the groups of children that your policies may impact.

## Step 3

### Engagement of children and young people

To make the most of children's contributions to decision making, organisations must create an environment in which children feel comfortable to participate and which fits with the organisation's way of conducting business.

Children often feel more comfortable in groups when there are unfamiliar adults present. However, consideration should be given to the adult/child ratio to ensure support and safety.

To engage children agencies need to:

- » Given enough information to make a choice about whether they want to take part (may have child friendly booklets or fact sheets).
- » Have options of how to engage - a range of participatory activities - to make meetings as fun and interesting as possible.
- » Ensure that what children tell us is kept confidential and that children are able to trust and have support of the adults involved.

## WHAT MAKES IT HARDER FOR CHILDREN:

Feeling that are being 'put on the spot'

Having to discuss personal things with strangers

Not knowing what will be said or who will be there

Meetings that go on for too long

## WHAT MAKES IT EASIER FOR CHILDREN:

Knowing everyone at the get together or meeting

Being prepared and supported

Being given a choice of how they take part

Having time to say what they think or feel, or express themselves in a way appropriate to the individual child

### See Activities Section

- » **Planning Activity 1:** Butcher paper pictures
- » **Planning Activity 2:** Word Tree
- » **Planning Activity 3:** Balloon (Action Planning)

# Action Three

Making it happen



3

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## Child Friendly Practice

If children are going to be included in decision-making, real commitment and changes in attitudes, practices and policies are needed at many levels. This can be achieved by:

- » Information sessions for staff to let the adults know what children think. These seminars could include training or creative communication with children and dealing with conflicts between 'best interests' and the voice of the child.
- » Further review of existing engagement with children and what influences the level of participation of children.
- » Real changes in policies and practices to include participation of children as a requirement of the organisation.
- » Guidance and training material about including children in decision-making processes.

The leader or manager of the organisation should establish effective structures and processes for children's participation in decision making. This may include policies or guidelines about children's participation in projects.

Committed and skilled staff members who believe in the principle and support the practice of participation of children in the organisation can make a big difference to the success of the process. Staff involved in projects where participation of children is required should have the following skills and qualities:

**Skills** – active listening, facilitation, problem solving, communication and able to relate to children, observation, being reflective.

**Qualities** – a sense of humour, energy, enthusiasm, understanding, flexibility.

Senior staff who are enthusiastic about children's involvement in decision-making set the stage for effective participation.

**'Senior staff can reinforce the culture of inclusion by meeting with children and young people involved in the work of their organisation and listening carefully to what they have to say'**

*(NSW participation toolkit)*

## Communication

One of the benefits of children's participation is that it can lead to children feeling empowered. However involving children in a tokenistic way can destroy trust and relationships if children do not have a genuine voice and a legitimate purpose in the decision making process.

There are four conditions that should be met for children to feel empowered through the experience:

- » A trusted support person in the organisation
- » Access to relevant information
- » Access to decision makers
- » A means to provide feedback.

Involving children in decision-making should be part of working practice not just a one-off event. This can be very challenging when children have difficulty with verbal communication. However body-language, gestures and facial expressions are also forms of communication that can express the child's view.

- » Plan your communication – giving and getting information.
- » Children tend to have a say in little decisions, whereas adults have more input in bigger decisions. As children get older they gain more confidence, are given better explanations and have more say in decisions.

Positive communication skills are important to ensure children feel safe to tell adults what they think. To achieve this adults need to:

- » Really tune in to what the child is saying and the emotions behind the words.
- » Look the child in the eye – this helps you avoid conflict and allows you to see what the child might be feeling or thinking. At different ages some children are uncomfortable making eye contact but by repeating back what you think they have said they will know that you have an understanding of what they are meaning.
- » Be actively listening which helps children cope with young emotions. They tend to get frustrated a lot, especially when they can't express themselves as well as they would like. By allowing them time to finish sentences and repeating back what they have said it makes them feel respected and their thoughts valued.
- » Ask open ended questions to encourage children to speak freely in the discussion.
- » Be honest – when we lie to them, we lose their trust.
- » Don't criticise the children for using incorrect words. The idea is to give the child the chance for free expression.

### See Activities Section

- » **Making It Happen Activity 1:** The Run Around Game
- » **Making It Happen Activity 2:** The Decision Tree
- » **Making It Happen Activity 3:** Diamond Ranking

# Action Four

Evaluating the process



Evaluation is about finding out about why something worked or didn't work and identifying anything unexpected that helped it work or caused a problem. Evaluation is a way of seeing if a project is doing what it said it would – and it is an ongoing process.

## The Benefits of Evaluation

- » It can find out if as the project progresses if it is on the way to meeting its aims.
- » Prove that the project is meeting its aims.
- » Identify things that don't work or gaps in provision.
- » Learn more about why something is working well.
- » Find out what the children (and their parents/carers) think about the project.
- » Plan for the future, based on what is working well and what needs to be done differently.
- » Collect evidence about the value of the project that can be used for monitoring reports.
- » Provide information for future projects.

Evaluation that involves children can benefit them by providing opportunities for:

- » **Social inclusion and citizenship** – asking what a child wants and thinks about something is a powerful way of telling them they are important and involving them.
- » **Increased ownership** – children and young people who are involved in evaluating a project or process often feel more involved and committed to the project and its aims – it helps them understand what the project is about.
- » **Personal and social skills development** – learning to express their ideas and views, having the confidence to say what they think and being able to listen to others' points of view.

## Models of Participation in Evaluation



<b>One-way information</b>	→	Children know the results of the evaluation	→	We tell the children what we are going to do as a result of our evaluation – such as, everyone hated doing cooking last week so we won't be doing it again
<b>Consultation</b>	→	Children are asked about predetermined issues	→	We ask the children about some issues like what activities they want to do instead of cooking
<b>Discussion about the evaluation</b>	→	Children are involved in the design of the evaluation and some of the key issues it covers	→	Children are involved in planning how to find out what was best and worst about cooking
<b>Doing some of the evaluation</b>	→	Children carry out parts of the evaluation or data collection	→	Children interview each other about the cooking session
<b>Doing most of the evaluation</b>	→	Children are involved in the examining the findings and making recommendations	→	Children talk about the interviews and help identify what went well, what didn't work and why. This will help plan future sessions
<b>Doing the evaluation together</b>	→	Children and adults are jointly responsible for designing the evaluation, carrying it out, examining findings and advising on any changes needed	→	Children will take turns to choose what is cooked, everyone gets a turn to do different things

## Feedback

After any type of decision-making interaction, children have the right to receive feedback on how their input has influenced the decisions that were made. The feedback should be made in a timely fashion and either be given through direct communication with the children or indirectly through child-friendly understandable documents.

Regular assessment provides a means of measuring the work to see if it is effective and is on track in terms of meeting the aims and objectives. Evaluation can be a useful tool to examine lessons learned and to develop improvements. Children often have a view on the work and ideas for improvement. Evaluation tools can take the form of stories, activities, questionnaires and role play.

Adults need to be clear when explaining to children about how the information gathered from the evaluation will be used and the influence it will have on working practice (Surrey).

Children need to see that their contribution affect the decision making process and make a difference. They should receive regular feedback on their earlier suggestions and recommendations or they may not be interested in participating in the future.

Ensure that you are sincere and real when giving feedback and use the child's own words in your reflection.

Feedback for the organisation

Through team meetings, newsletters, individuals and managers

## Making Sure You Have Delivered

It is important that you deliver on what you agreed on in the beginning.

Be prepared to:

- » Show evidence to children of what you have done or the ways their views have influenced decision making.
- » Explain delays that have occurred or reasons why something different happened.

As an organisation develops, the way that children participate may also evolve. It is important to regularly review how well children's participation is working for them and for the organisation.

The review should allow everyone involved to reflect upon their involvement and voice how they feel it is working.

By providing a variety of opportunities, children will continue to be interested in participating. Providing different opportunities will also encourage a broader range of children to get involved and give the organisation a wide range of views.

### See Activities Section

- » **Evaluation Activity 1:** Evaluation Targets
- » **Evaluation Activity 2:** Space and Simple Ranking
- » **Evaluation Activity 3:** Jars of Importance
- » **Evaluation Activity 4:** Stones in the Pond

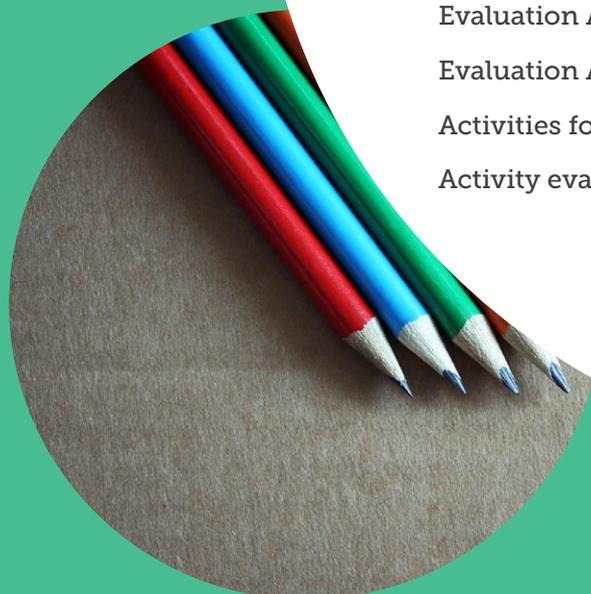
See Activities for helping Children express their Views

# Activities



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## Planning Activity 1:

### Butcher paper pictures

- 
**Aim** For participants to clarify and express visually their feelings on a particular issue
- 
**Do this with** A group, 3 to 15 participants (aged 3 to 12 years)
- 
**Good for** Works best with affective/emotional stuff, like how participants feel about themselves, or friends, or school.
- 
**Time** 30 minutes
- 
**What you will need** Butcher's paper, textas, coloured pencils, crayons, magazines for pictures
- 
**How to do it**
  1. Decide the problem/issues you want to look at and turn the problem/ issue into a question eg how can we ensure children are safe?
  2. Split the larger group into small groups of 2 or 3 participants.
  3. Explain that you want the children to find a space in the room and draw what you think is important to them about the topic ie yourself, friends, school, home.
  4. Tell the children that 'You can use words, draw pictures, stick down images, make a comic strip - whatever you want.'
  5. Let the group work on their pictures. Remind them regularly of how much time they have left.
  6. When the group has finished, get each small group, if they want to, to explain their picture to the larger group.



## Planning Activity 2:

### Word Tree

- 
**Aim** To explore concepts and preconceived notions about a topic or word
- 
**Do this with** A group of up to 20 participants (any age, aged 3 to 12 years)
- 
**Good for** This technique is best used as a lead into another activity – it is a good way of getting people to focus on a particular topic or idea
- 
**Time** 30 minutes
- 
**What you will need** Butcher's paper, textas, a pen and pencil for each participant
- 
**How to do it**
  1. Write the word or topic you wish to explore eg leadership, in the middle of a piece of butcher's paper
  2. Give participants a few minutes to think about what the word means to them and other words they associate with it (they can write their ideas on a piece of paper).
  3. Go around the group asking for one word from each group member. Write the words eg communication, trust, friendship, strength etc on the butchers paper as branches of the Word tree. Some words may branch off other words – eg good voice and body language may branch off communication. You will need to judge this and discuss it with the group as you go. Keep asking for ideas from everyone in the group – words that are written up may give them new ideas.
  4. Now you have a visual description of the groups ideas around the word.



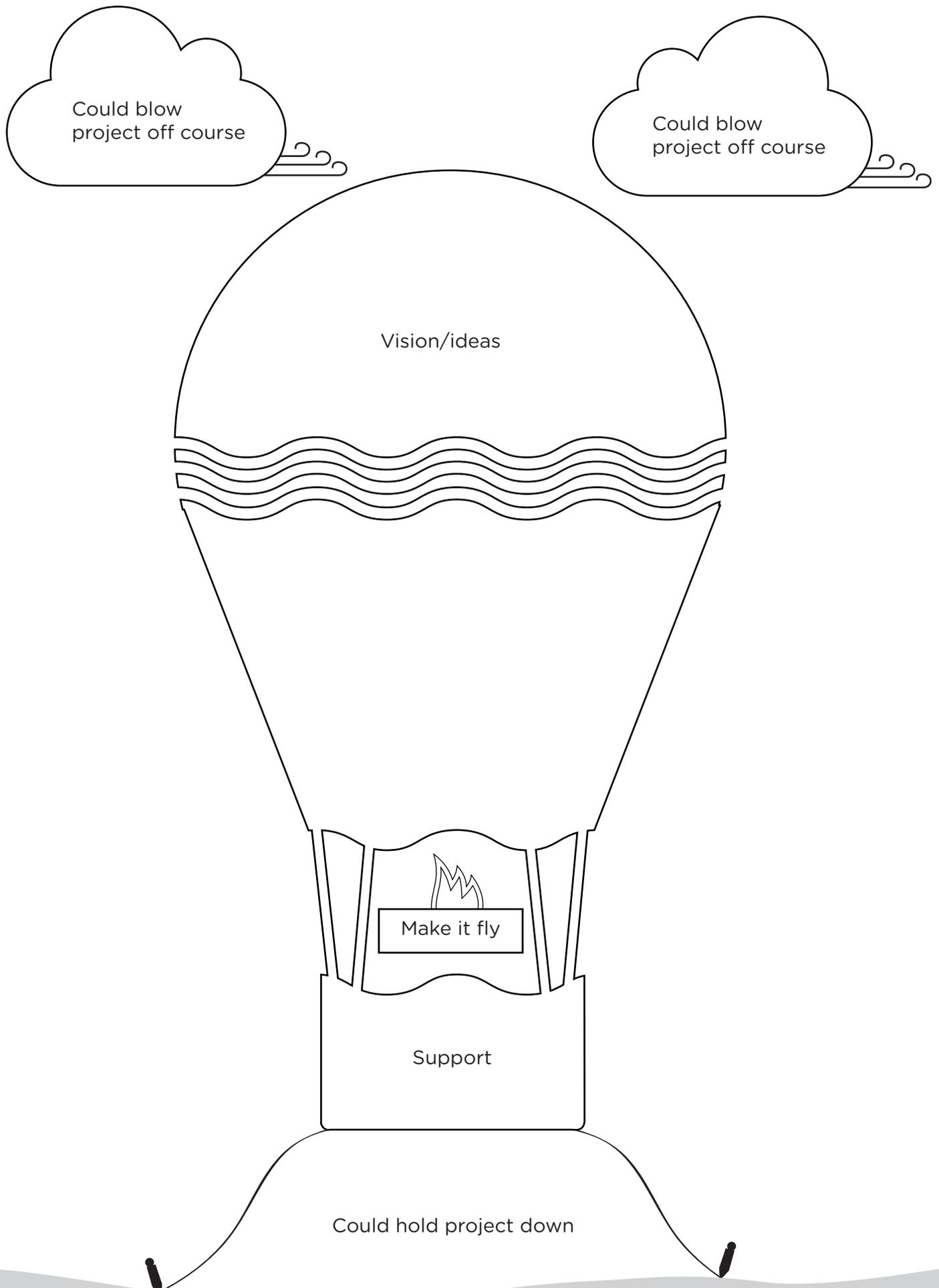
## Planning Activity 3: Balloon (Action Planning)

-  **Aim** To help with the planning process for a project.
-  **Do this with** A group of 4-8 people (aged 6 to 12 years)
-  **Good for** Sorts out how the project will work and the practicalities such as people and resources needed for it to work. Some of the most creative approaches to planning can often be the most fun.
-  **What you will need** Butcher paper, pens, post-it notes.
-  **How to do it**
  1. Explain the aim of the group e.g. to plan a project or piece of work. The balloon represents the project or piece of work.
  2. Then take each topic in turn.
  3. Get participants to write or draw ideas on post-it notes and stick them on the relevant bit of the butcher paper.
  4. Clarify ideas and group similar ones before moving on to the next topic.

Description of the diagram:

- » On the balloon - issues and factors that will be needed for the proposal to fly what needs to be in place for the project to take off.
- » In the basket - write the name of people or organisations who can help and support your aims or who needs to be on board.
- » Ropes - what will hold it back, before the balloon/project has started?
- » Clouds - what could push the balloon off course? (once the project has started)
- » Making it fly - above the balloon write factors that will make things happen and work (e.g. commitment, enthusiasm)

### Planning Activity 3: Balloon (Action Planning)



## Making it Happen Activity 1:

### The run around game

- 
**Aim** To provide a way for children to explore a particular issue.
- 
**Do this with** A group of up to 30 participants (aged 3 to 8 years old).
- 
**Good for** An energetic group, involving everyone, finding out what children have learned about a particular issue.
- 
**Time** 15 to 30 minutes, depending on how energetic and interested the group is.
- 
**What you will need** A large space where children can run about safely. Optional extra would be a pretend microphone (the children could make one from cardboard and paint it).
- 
**How to do it**
  1. Explain the aim of the activity and how to play the game. It is about getting their views on something in a fun way. Stress there is no right or wrong answers. As the game involves running about, you may need to set a few safety rules, such as 'be aware of others whilst running.'
  2. Identify the issue the group will be working on (eg what we eat). Then think up a list of choices around the issue - cereals or toast, jam or vegemite, fruit or ice cream - get the children to think of some too.
  3. Call out each set of choices one by one - so for example the first set might be jacket potatoes or chips - allocate one end of the room or space to jacket potatoes and the other end to chips. Ask the group to choose one and run to that end of the room.
  4. Invite a child to be an interviewer and use the microphone to interview some of the children about why they made that choice. Encourage them to keep the interviews and answers short - a bit like television interviews in the street.
  5. Go to the next set of choices until you have finished the list or the children have run out of steam. Keep changing the interviewers so that lots of children get a go.

#### TIPS

**It is important to keep the game moving along quite fast so that there is lots of running about.**

**Some groups like to have a 'Don't mind' bit of the room or space for those who can't decide what to choose.**

## Making it Happen Activity 2:

### The decision tree

-  **Aim** To teach children about decision making and different options and consequences.
-  **Do this with** A group of 10 to 15 participants (aged 3 to 12 years).
-  **Good for** Finding out what children think about decision making.  
Reviewing issues arising during the project and possible solutions.  
Using the start of the project to help children identify a particular issue or difficulty and possible solutions.
-  **Time** 30 minutes to an hour (depending on the size and interest of the group).
-  **What you will need** Large sheets of paper, coloured pencils, glue, post it notes.
-  **How to do it**
1. Explain the aim of the activity and how you will do it.
  2. Draw a large tree on a sheet of paper with the group, showing the roots, trunk and leaves. The bigger the paper the better and it helps to get the group involved in doing the drawing.
  3. Write the question at the top of the tree in such a way that it may be answered with either yes or no.
  4. Below the question, write 'yes' on one side and 'no' on the other side.
  5. Under the yes and no, have the children list all the possible consequences of each decision.
  6. Have the children consider all the consequences and come to a decision.
  7. In cases where the question is not a 'yes/no' use several branches for the different options and consequences listed for each.
  8. Again, the consequences are carefully considered and a decision may be made.

#### TIPS

Instead of using words use pictures or drawings



## Making it Happen Activity 3: Diamond Ranking

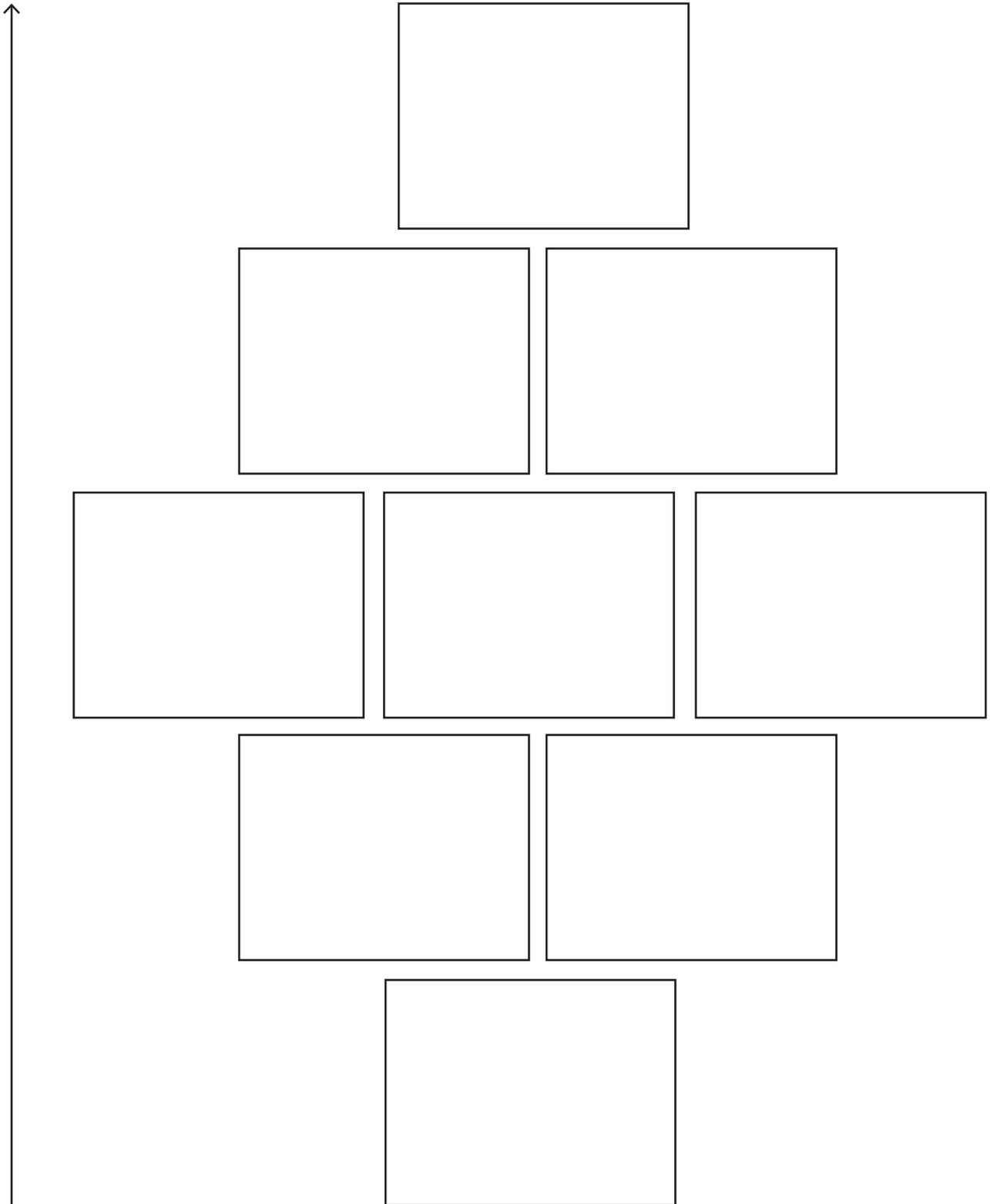
- 
**Aim** To put issues in priority order.
- 
**Do this with** Groups of 4 to 6 participants (aged 3 to 12 years).
- 
**Good for** Children to learn how to prioritise and to show them the importance of cooperation.
- 
**Time** 15 to 30 minutes.
- 
**What you will need** Post it notes, A4 paper, pens, diamond formation drawn on butchers paper.
- 
**How to do it**
  1. Following an ideas storming discussion where nine ideas are selected to be priority ideas divide the group into smaller groups of 3 to 4 participants.
  2. Ask each group to arrange their top nine ideas (they can add other ideas if the group decides they should be one of the nine and drop off one of the ideas from the large group) in a diamond formation with the priority at the top, two in 2<sup>nd</sup>, three in 3<sup>rd</sup>, two in 4<sup>th</sup> and their lowest at the bottom.
  3. They need to get consensus as a group and can move the ideas around until they reach an order with which they all agree.
  4. For consensus to work the group must understand that everyone must not have an objection. So the majority may agree, but if one person disagreed then this is not a consensus. The people disagreeing must remember that the aim is cooperation and not to be argumentative.
  5. It might be useful to emphasise that ideas that come towards the bottom of the formation are the ninth most important issue overall and not the least.

(see following diagram)



### Making it Happen Activity 3: Diamond Ranking

Most important



## Evaluation Activity 1: Evaluation Targets

-  **Aim** To get a quick and clear image of the success of a one-off activity.
-  **Do this with** A group of up to 30 participants (aged 3 to 12 years).
-  **Good for** Getting a quick response.  
Giving a really clear picture of success.  
Asking just a few questions.
-  **Time** 5 minutes.
-  **What you will need** Some large sheets of paper, Blu-tack or masking tape, sticky dots, a felt tip pen.
-  **How to do it**
1. Decide on some questions about the session. For example:
    - » Was it fun?
    - » Did you get a go at everything?
    - » Should we do this again?
    - » Did you do an activity with a friend?
  2. Write each question on a piece of paper – but keep them simple. On each piece of paper draw a target like a dartboard but keep it to four circles only: excellent, good, OK, boring. Place the paper on the wall, a table or the floor.
  3. Give everyone some sticky dots and explain that the middle circle means they agree completely, the next one means it was nearly there, the next one means it was OK and the last one means absolutely no way do they agree with the question.
  4. Ask everyone to put their dots on the circle they think best describes their answer to the question.
  5. Thank everyone and tell them what you are going to do with the information.
  6. Depending on the questions you ask, you could keep the target sheets (make sure you date them) and record change over a period of weeks, or just record what children did or didn't like.



## Evaluation Activity 1: Evaluation Targets

Were we on target?



## Evaluation Activity 2: Space and Simple Ranking

-  **Aim** To find out what is most and least important about an issue or project.
-  **Do this with** A group of up to 20 participants (aged 3 to 12 years).
-  **Good for** Groups who know each other quite well.  
End of activity evaluation.  
Getting a quick list of likes and dislikes.
-  **Time** 5 minutes each for space ranking and simple ranking.
-  **What you will need** Large sheet of paper, pens, post it notes, chalk, Jelly beans, Photographs of activities, a large room or area for space ranking.
-  **How to do it** This activity involves the group in deciding what they most or least like about something and can include explaining why they are putting it in that order. It can be done in a number of ways and you can adapt the way you do it to the preferences of the group you are working with, the time and space available.
- » **Space ranking** – in a large room, playground or field tell the group that one side of the room is for ‘Yes’, the middle for ‘not sure’ and the other end is for ‘no’. Ask the group a question such as ‘Should we do this activity again?’ or ‘Did everyone get a fair chance to have a go at today’s activity’ and ask them to stand in the part of the room that reflects their opinion. You can do this with all sorts of questions and answers but try not to make them controversial – this activity is for getting a quick, lively response, not an in-depth discussion. Why not ask the group what questions they would like to ask?
  - » **Simple ranking** – Give everyone some post-it notes and a pen. Decide what you want to find out about (for example, what people thought about a session or activity). Place a large piece of paper on a table with the following headings written (or drawn with smiley/neutral/sad faces):  
  
One thing I liked; One thing that was ok; One thing I didn’t like  
  
Ask children to write (or draw) something for each heading and place it on the piece of paper under the appropriate heading.

### TIPS

Take care that you have enough space to this activity safely.

## Evaluation Activity 3: Jars of Importance

-  **Aim** To provide a way for children to explore a particular issue or give feedback about a session or activity.
-  **Do this with** A group of up to 30 participants divided into small groups of two or three children (aged 3 to 12 years old)
-  **Good for** Getting children to identify what is most important to them  
Keeping a visual reminder of what children think at a particular time
-  **Time** 20 to 30 minutes
-  **What you will need** Large sheets of paper (flip chart size or bigger), Glue (a couple of glue sticks are good), Felt tipped pens, Scissors, A4 sheets of paper.
-  **How to do it**
1. Explain that the aim of the activity is for children to decide what they think about an issue (eg keeping healthy) or something that they have done (eg recent activity). Stress that there is no right or wrong answers – you just want to know what they think. Keep reminding the children of this throughout the activity. Organise the children into small groups of two or three.
  2. Ask each small group to draw three large jars on a sheet of flip chart paper and label them:
    - » Very important
    - » Important
    - » Not important
  3. Put the sheets on a table, the floor or wall so that each small group can see and reach them.
  4. On the A4 paper write a series of either comments about an issue (eg young carers) or responses to a question (eg what have we learned about how to keep healthy? Or what should the group do next term?). Make sure the writing is easy to read. You can prepare this bit of the activity before the group begins but you will need to ask the group for any comments that they would like to add. It can be very useful to invite the group to think up the comments themselves.



5. Cut the comments up so each comment is on a separate piece of paper.
6. Ask the groups to decide which jars they think each comment should go in and once agreed, they glue the comment to that jar.  
**The discussion among the group is very important** and you might want to keep a few notes about why the children think some comments should go in which jar.
7. With the whole group, look at the jars again and talk about them.  
**Is there anything missing?**
8. You can keep these jars to use in project evaluation, for example, to help identify issues to address in future planning or to display at events or keep as a portfolio of evidence about the work of the project and what children see as important. **The children might also want to leave them on display for a while.**

**TIPS**

You can prepare the sheets of paper with the jars drawn on them in advance if time is short.



## Evaluation Activity 4: Stones in the Pond

-  **Aim** To get feedback about a process
-  **Do this with** A group of up to 30 participants – but will work with a large or small group
-  **Good for** To get quick response to the process and then talk about the consequences of the feedback. Helps the children to look at the outcomes and what happens next
-  **Time** 20 minutes
-  **What you will need** Post it notes, pens, large sheets of butcher's paper
-  **How to do it**
  1. Ask the children to visualise a pond on the floor.
  2. Ask them to write 'one thing they will take from today' on a piece of paper (their stone), crush it up into a ball like a stone and take it in turns to toss their stone into the pond.
  3. They can choose whether or not they want to tell others what they wrote.
  4. After they've all tossed in their imaginary stones you can talk about the ripples that everyone's actions can make.

### TIPS

Take care that you have enough space to this activity safely.



## Activities for helping children express their views

The following games may be used at various times to enable children to express their viewpoints. Children are not experienced at having opinions about specific topics and these games can help them to explore their feelings and verbalise their views.

### Circle with Chairs

Everyone stands in a circle with enough chairs for participants minus one. One person who is in the middle makes a statement and those children who agree stand up and change chairs. The person in the middle tries to get a vacated chair which then leaves someone without, who then stands in the middle. This 'new' person in the middle makes a statement and the game progresses. If no one stands up, meaning no one agrees, people in the circle applaud because this shows their individuality.

### Leader of the Group

Everyone stands in a circle with their eyes shut. One person explains that he/she will walk around the outside of the group and tap one or two individuals and those people will be the leaders. The person or people who have been tapped do not tell anyone, and everyone in the group has to guess who the leader is without verbal cues. Following the guessing, a second round is done and more people are tapped. Following the second round of guessing a discussion of what makes leaders and what qualities are needed to be leaders.

### Knots (10 to 20 minutes with up to 30 people)

The aim is to encourage group communication and team work.

Ask the group to stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder. The circle should then put both hands in the air, so that they are pointing to the opposite side of the circle. Ask the group to take baby steps until the group gets smaller and smaller, they should grab someone else's hands. Once everyone is holding another hand, ask the group to untangle themselves without breaking the chain.

It usually works best when the group work together and unchain themselves section by section.

### Famous People (20+ minutes, any number of people)

The facilitator writes famous people on post it notes. Each child in the group has a post it notes on their backs (or forehead). The aim is to meet as many people and ask them one question about the person named on their back

# Activity Evaluation Form

(Please complete for each activity undertaken)

.....  
**Organisation:**

.....  
**Activity:**

.....  
**Age of Children:**

.....  
**No of Children:**

.....  
**Was the Guide useful? Yes / No**

.....  
**Why or Why Not?**

.....  
**Which activities did you choose to trial?**

.....  
**Why?**

.....  
**What were you hoping to achieve by the activity?**

.....  
**Did you achieve what you set out to do?**

.....  
**Is there anything that you would change or add to the activity?**

.....  
**What are the learnings from the activity for the organisation?**

***Thank you for undertaking the trial and completing the evaluation form.***

***Please return the evaluation form to:***

(insert name of contact person and contact details)

# Trailing the Activities – Evaluation Feedback

As part of developing the kit the activities were trialled by community sector organisations who work with children under the age of 12 years. The organisations selected activities from planning, making it happen and evaluation sections and trialled them with different age groups. Following is the feedback from the trial.

		The Run Around Game	The Run Around Game	Butcher Paper Pictures	Word Tree
Organisation		Lady Gowrie, Lansdowne OSHC	Lady Gowrie Tasmania OSHC	Lady Gowrie, Mt Nelson OSHC	Lady Gowrie, Albuera Street OSHC
Age of Children (years)		4 to 12	6 to 8	5 to 10	8 to 10
Number of children	71	19	9	8	6
No of Evaluation Form	7	01	03	02	04
Q1. Was the guide useful?	71%	Y	Y	Y	Y
Why or Why Not?		Instructions clear	Explained well activity, some of the activities I didn't really follow though may need some further or clearer explanations	Introduction bit too wordy but some good points. Good mix of activities – some a bit like school and could be made more for recreational leisure to suit age	it explains the theory behind the process and the rationale for it
Q2. Activity – why?		It looked fun & a good way to get to know children	Used it for healthy food choices – it seemed fun way to gather evidence of current knowledge	Suited topic and group and was a good timeframe	Because I understood the purpose and process of the activity
Q3. What were you hoping to achieve by the activity?		Have fun, get to know the children. Allow them to understand their choices – self discovery for them.  Allow them to know each other better to discuss similarities & differences	To see what understanding the children had about healthy options in order to then discuss menu suggestions for upcoming weeks	To have an open discussion about bullying and how this affects children, increase their knowledge of how to deal with it when it happens to them.	To gain insight into what was valued by children at vacation care
Q4. Did you achieve it?		Children did tend to follow their friends – good to know more about the children in a fun way	Yes, it was informative and helped focus the children to make very sensible suggestions for menu planning	Children lost interest quickly but I did reach objective	Yes, the children were forthcoming with their perception of their vacation care experiences
Q5. is there anything you would change or add to the activity?		I think the microphone & interviewing could be optional as it breaks up the activity	No, it worked really well and you could use it for lots of different topics	The children wanted to write sentences and it became more of a brainstorming session	No, this activity was short and sweet and achieved its goal
Other Comments					I didn't find all the activities easy to understand – I made some notes

# Trailing the Activities – Evaluation Feedback

## Continued

		Mind Stretchers (not an activity listed)	Butcher Paper Pictures	The Run Around Game
Organisation		Scots Early Learning Centre	NewPIN Family Futures	Ravenswood Child and Family Centre
Age of Children (years)		3 to 4	3 to 5	4 to 5 years
Number of children	71	15	4	10
No of Evaluation Form	7	05	06	07
Q1. Was the guide useful?	71%	N	N	Y
Why or Why Not?		This is a project that started a month before we received the guide	Because it wasn't age appropriate for our children who are all under the age of 5. We modified it to suit children's ages.	The actions were well explained - makes the process quite logical
Q2. Activity - why?		As part of the EYLF and work by Claire Warden we were already implementing giving children a voice in decision making	Because it was able to be modified to our children's ages	This activity was suited to our cohort
Q3. What were you hoping to achieve by the activity?		To create a playground designed by children so that they would be able to enjoy creative play	For the children to be able to express their feelings about various foods visually	To get a decision from the children on what they would like set up for outside play
Q4. Did you achieve it?		Yes, the children enjoyed the experience and had lots of ideas. They enjoyed 'reading' the 'big book' they created while working on playground ideas.	Yes, we conducted the activity twice: the first time with the mums' involvement and the second time without. When the children were allowed to choose for themselves they chose different foods to when their mum was present.	Yes, the children decided for that day that they wanted climbing and jumping equipment
Q5. Is there anything you would change or add to the activity?		We only worked with children who came on one particular day. Due to its success we will extend this activity to add the voices of the children who attend the centre on the other four days.	No.	You can add more items to the activity depending on the size of the group and what you want them to decide on.
Other Comments		That children place a different value on some things to adults i.e. the children see slides and swings as an important part of the playground.		For our cohort we didn't do the interviewing by the children but the group facilitator asked some of the children why they had made the choice they had.

**Examples of good practice**

**Glossary**

**Reference list**



## Examples of good practice

### Getting the Views of Children

Children from a primary school were involved in developing a video to give them a voice in their community. The project was developed in partnership with the local family support agency working with the primary school to involve parents and children together. Gains for the children were that they had a voice and influenced the project, self-determination for the children, social and political education and they became creators not just consumers.

### Community Planning

A community organisation wanted to develop a strategic action plan about children's participation in their organisation. They employed a youth worker to establish a reference group which included children that the organisation provided services for. One of the children co-chaired the meetings of the reference group. This allowed the children to develop leadership skills, improve self-determination and have a child friendly policy.

### Looking at Child Focused Issues

Children co-facilitated with teachers workshops at their local school with different class rooms about cyber-bullying. From these sessions a brochure, which included guidelines and school policy, was produced for the school that the whole school community use.

The Commissioner for Children has a Children's Consultative Council of children and young people across Tasmania. The groups are school representative councils that talk about relevant current issues that affect children. The SRCs consult with the wider school community about the issue. The views of the children are then documented in a report and forwarded to the Minister for Children. For one issue, tattoo and piercing legislation of children and young people under the age of 18, the report has informed the new legislation as to what is the appropriate age for children to be able to have a tattoo and piercing. Children are given the opportunity to express their views and develop leadership skills and see that there are outcomes resulting from their participation.

## **Developing a Creative Festival of Children**

The aim of the event was to raise awareness and recognition of the diversity of children's culture, children's achievements and citizenship. Up to 40 children led the planning of the festival. Different organisations provided children with access to IT facilities, information, workshops and videos. Arts and creative activities were set up at the festival and children had an opportunity to try different art, music and physical activities throughout the festival.

## **Multicultural Statewide Youth Forum**

Children and young people from a youth group of different cultural backgrounds co-facilitated a workshop for children and young people to celebrate & share cultures, identify & prioritizing issues and to create a positive image of multicultural young people in our communities.

This was a partnership project between a local council and the Multicultural Resource Centre and it was free for all young people participating. Children from different groups were contacted through their schools and youth groups to attend.

The outcomes from the workshop formed a report that was presented at the local council meeting and at the board of the multicultural centre. It gave the children an opportunity to work together, recognize the different cultures and to some positive stories about the children.

## Local Council Consultations

Creating Child Friendly Urban Spaces - "Kids Allowed in Kingborough"	
<b>Where</b>	<p><b>Kingston Main Street</b></p> <p>Kingborough Council is currently designing an upgrade to the main street and this project has provided important material for consideration by Council's engineers and designers. One of the goals of the main street upgrade is to create a more pedestrian friendly environment within a currently car dominated environment.</p> <p>As a step towards a 'child friendly' city paradigm, it was felt that children need to be consulted in a meaningful way. The "Kids Allowed in Kingborough" project used the arts as an innovative model for consulting with children (6 years and under). This target group have not traditionally been consulted about urban planning issues and yet they have very specific needs to ensure that urban spaces are made 'child friendly'. While Council has a Youth Development team and Youth Participation Strategy, there was a need to be inclusive of children's voices.</p>
<b>How many Children required</b>	Up to 4 class groups of small groups of 4 to 6 supervised by their teachers. 90 in total were consulted.
<b>Age of children</b>	Between 4-6 years age
<b>When</b>	During the day - school day
<b>Time to do Activity</b>	2 hours over a number of days with different groups of children.
<b>Adults to be involved</b>	<p>School or child care centre support (teachers and parents) and relevant Council staff - approx. 5-6 adults.</p> <p>Parents will need to give consent for the children to go on excursion.</p>
<b>Process</b>	<p>The Kids Allowed in Kingborough project was an initiative of Kingborough Council, supported by the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation to employ an artist to work collaboratively with children at local schools (kinder) and child care centres to explore the concept of a 'child friendly place'.</p> <p>The artist worked with groups of children 5 years and under to explore what a welcoming place feels and looks like, through drawings, discussions, paintings and clay work. Their ideas were interpreted into what a main street needs, to make it an interesting and welcoming place for children. The artist used those concepts to create a 'pop-up' art installation that was exhibited on the main street of Kingston for a day to showcase how these elements could transform an uninviting environment.</p> <p>A concurrent photographic and children's art exhibition was held at the Council Civic Centre which also demonstrated the concepts of a child friendly place.</p> <p>Key stakeholders were invited to attend and hear children's ideas on influencing future planning for urban spaces.</p>

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## Potential Benefits & Outcomes

- ### Project Objectives
- » To enable children to provide a voice into Council's planning of the main street in Kingston – this project promotes children's active involvement in an issue that affects them e.g. creating a child friendly main street.
  - » To installation a 'pop-up' art work in the main street to enable key decision makers (planners, engineers, urban designers and developers) to view a main street design from a child's perspective.
  - » To provide parents, teachers and other care givers the opportunity to understand the importance of citizenship and the need for children to be able to participate in civic life and have their views considered in decision making processes.
  - » To affirm community citizenship and celebration by creating a sense of pride, community engagement, social inclusion and cohesion, as well as raising public awareness of issues for marginalised groups such as children.

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## Project Outcomes

- » Following the visit to the main street, children were able to work closely with a professional artist to express their ideas on what would make the main street a better place – they did this through drawing, painting and clay work.
- » Council's urban planner participated in the field trips with the various groups of children to observe how they interacted with the street and was available to talk to the children and hear their ideas directly.
- » The art works created by the children were displayed in an art exhibition in the Council Civic Centre as a way to show members of the community how the children were able to articulate their ideas.
- » The pop-up art exhibition on the main street provided key stakeholders such as politicians (federal, state and local); local and state government representatives; developers and local business with a firsthand example of how the main street could be transformed into a more welcoming place for all people.
- » To create the pop up art exhibition, the artist amplified the artwork that the children had made into larger than life images. When the children visited the exhibition, they were able to recognise their work which provided further recognition of their input and inspiration. Ultimately, this positive recognition could assist in creating more active citizens of the future.
- » The artist, schools and child care centres have benefited from working with the Council in that they have established a partnership with the Council that could lead to further collaboration.
- » By bringing the children to the main street during both the field visits and the pop up art exhibition was observing the change in the way other pedestrians and cars interacted with the street. There seemed to be greater consideration from motorists and pedestrians were less rushed with many willing to stop at the site and chat while they watched the children play.

As a result of the project:

- » The Tasmanian Early Years Foundation supported the development of the “What a Child Friendly place needs” poster
- » Artwork from the ‘pop-up’ art exhibition was used in the Hobart office window of the Tasmanian Early Years Foundation for a period of 3 months
- » The project was showcased at the Creativity in the Early Years Conference in Launceston in March 2012
- » A Kids Allowed ‘pop up’ shop has been set up at Channel Court Shopping Centre in an unused shop. The shop has been inspired by the “What a Child Friendly place needs” and a pilot project of art workshops held at the shop for children have been extremely popular.

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**Potential Risks for the Children**

Needs to provide time to get consent from the parents/guardians. Children to be allowed to choose to take part in the activity.

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**Feedback to the Children**

The children were able to see their ideas implemented in the pop up art exhibition. A professional artist amplified their artwork so they could see it larger than life on the main street. Their original artwork was on display in an art exhibition in the Council Civic Centre and a photographic exhibition of their participation was also exhibited.

The celebration of the project was catered with child friendly food and the children could see all the adults looking at their ideas. The Mayor and key guest speakers thanked the children for their input.

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# Glossary

## Children

The document focuses on the age range of children up to the age of 12 years. However, the participation model and methodology can be adapted across a variety of age ranges.

## Decision-making

The many ways that children can influence change directly or indirectly, using a variety of tools together including art, discussion, observation, writing.

## Informed

Allowing children enough time to digest information and formulate their own opinions in order to contribute to decision-making.

## Listening Culture

A listening culture is one in which listening to individual experiences and views are identified as a core feature of the setting's approach and ethos. It involves practitioners and staff interacting respectively with young children and adults and documenting the listening process, including resultant change. It is an environment in which everyone values the importance of listening, are aware of and reflective about how they listen, and acknowledge and respond to experiences and views without discrimination.

We listen to young children for a number of reasons:

- » It nurtures respectful and confident relationships
- » It supports and enhances learning and sustained thinking
- » It may reveal inequalities – makes sure the setting is fully inclusive
- » It contributes to quality improvement.

## Organisation

An organisation is a government or non-government organisation, profit or non-profit, that provides services to different groups within the community. In this case an organisation is an organisation that provides services to children under the age of 12 years.

## Participation

Participation is interacting with children in ways that allow children to express their views and feelings, with the purpose of influencing decisions. It involves providing opportunities for children to take responsibility and feel a sense of ownership, leading to empowerment. Participation is much more than choosing which game to play.

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