

# Child and Youth Engagement Framework



© Commission for Children and Young People 2025

This work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission from the Commission for Children and Young People, Level 18, 570 Bourke Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000.

Also available at [www.ccyp.vic.gov.au](http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au)

ISBN: 978-1-7635304-2-3

Commission for Children and Young People

Level 18, 570 Bourke Street

Melbourne Victoria 3000

Phone (Free call) : 1300 78 29 78

Phone: (03) 8601 5281

Email: [contact@ccyp.vic.gov.au](mailto:contact@ccyp.vic.gov.au)

[www.ccyp.vic.gov.au](http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au)

The Commission for Children and Young People respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the country throughout Victoria and pays respect to the ongoing living cultures of First Peoples.

# Contents

<b>Messages from the Commissioners</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Engagement Framework</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Youth Council Foreword</b>	<b>6</b>	Trauma-informed approach to ensuring safe engagement	21
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>	Inclusive engagement with children and young people	21
A dynamic and evolving resource	7	<b>Engagement toolkit</b>	<b>27</b>
Definitions	7	Engagement checklist	27
<b>Why have an Engagement Framework?</b>	<b>8</b>	Engaging children and young people in work at the Commission	31
Children and young people have a right to speak up and be heard	8	Methods of engagement with children and young people	32
It is what we require of other organisations working with children and young people	9	<b>Engagement tools</b>	<b>33</b>
It benefits everyone	9	Internships/student placements, paid employment and consultancy	34
Understanding child and youth engagement and participation	9	Youth Advisory Group or Commission Youth Council	35
Models of participation	10	One-on-one discussions and interviews	37
<b>Engagement principles</b>	<b>13</b>	Group consultations/workshops	39
Principle 1: Culture is key	14	Forums and conferences	41
Principle 2: We leave our ego at the door	14	Yarning Circles	43
Principle 3: We ensure informed consent and confidentiality	15	Online forums	44
Principle 4: We do no harm	16	Phone discussions/SMS	46
Principle 5: We listen	16	Email	47
Principle 6: We understand the ‘why’ and the ‘who’	17	Surveys	48
Principle 7: We are genuine	17	Artistic expression	49
Principle 8: We partner where possible	18	<b>Resources</b>	<b>50</b>
Principle 9: We practise open and regular communication	18	Online resources	50
Principle 10: We adapt, innovate and evolve	19	Attachments	50
Principle 11: We are inclusive and culturally safe	20	Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement	51
Principle 12: We recognise, remunerate and celebrate	20	Guidance: Engaging with pre-school children	57

# Messages from the Commissioners

## Principal Commissioner

One of the best parts of my job is hearing and learning from children and young people. One of the many things children and young people have helped me with is what successful engagement with young people demands. It requires you to be clear in your intentions, open to different ways of doing things, prepared to share power and decision-making, and willing to be accountable for your commitments. It is not something that is 'mastered' but is a skill that is developed and refined over time.

All children and young people have a right to be heard and to have a say in decisions that impact them. We engage with children and young people who often tell us that it is hard to have their say within complex service systems relating to child protection, youth justice and out-of-home care and that important decisions are often made without their involvement or input. Ensuring these young people are given opportunities to understand and contribute to decisions about their lives not only benefits them personally, but also makes for stronger systems. All children and young people – whether in schools, health services, community organisations, sporting clubs and other settings – have much to offer organisations that are prepared to ask and listen.

At the Commission for Children and Young People, we advocate for the participation and empowerment of the children and young people to uphold their rights. We also oversee compliance with Child Safe Standards, which require certain organisations to empower and engage the young people they work with. It is important that we can lead by example and demonstrate best practice approaches to meaningful engagement. Our Child and Youth Engagement Framework provides us with the principles, guidance and practical tools to assist in this important work.



Meena Singh and Liana Buchanan

I am particularly proud of the process we have used to develop these resources, including the genuine collaboration with young people throughout the process. As each new method of engagement and tool was developed, we tested and tailored them in direct consultation with children and young people to make use of their expertise in how to make engagement with young people meaningful.

The Child and Youth Engagement Framework will ensure we have the confidence and necessary tools to embed engagement with children and young people into all aspects of our work. It will also make our advocacy for the rights and safety of children and young people more powerful.

I extend my thanks and gratitude to all the young people who have contributed their time and expertise to develop this important resource, which I know will be invaluable across our organisation and beyond.

**Liana Buchanan**  
Principal Commissioner

## Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

In my role as the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People I am fortunate to have the opportunity to regularly meet with and hear directly from young people across Victoria.

Aboriginal children and young people tell me about the importance of their connections to culture, community, and Country. They inspire me with their passion and knowledge when they tell me about their goals, aspirations, and successes. They tell me what they want me to advocate for, about the issues that affect their lives, and what it's like to be a young Aboriginal person in Victoria today. Their stories and their lived experience inform and enrich every aspect of my work.

The Child and Youth Engagement Framework provides guidance to meaningfully and respectfully connect and engage with children and young people. Most importantly, the guidance, and the practical resources in the Framework, have been developed through collaboration with Aboriginal children and young people themselves. The Framework reflects what they told us about how to value their time and expertise and connect and engage with Aboriginal children and young people in a way that is genuine, reciprocal and not extractive.

I have seen firsthand the ways in which these resources have empowered our staff to prepare for conversations, and to ensure that they are culturally safe. Although consultations can cover difficult subjects, what I have seen overwhelmingly, is Aboriginal children and young people who feel safe and supported to have their say. Many of them have been disappointed by government consultation processes in the past but leave our conversations feeling validated and respected. We also tend to have a lot of fun and laughter too.

What I am most committed to in my role is raising the voices of Aboriginal children and young people in the spaces where they have been historically excluded. I also advocate and work to create opportunities for young people to have a seat at those tables, and for them to have a say in conversations where adults are making decisions that affect their lives. I am proud that the resources in this Framework can give everyone strategies and support to do the same.

I want to thank everyone who contributed to this important piece of work and thank them for the way in which it has been developed. I am especially grateful to all of the Aboriginal children and young people who contributed their time, ideas, and experience. You made this possible. Thank you.

### Meena Singh

Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

# Youth Council Foreword

The Youth Council is a group of young people who bring their diverse backgrounds and lived experiences to the work of the Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission). We have been part of the Commission since 2020. We have input across the Commission in various pieces of work, although our main focus is on strengthening the Commission's engagement with children and young people and ensuring that the perspectives of children and young people are present in all that we do.

The Youth Council has had input into the Child and Youth Engagement Framework since we started at the Commission. It has evolved over the last three years and will continue evolving well into the future. Here's some thoughts from the Commission's Youth Council:

*This Framework is so important to understand what 'youth voice' really means. The significance of involving young people in decision-making processes and how it can be practically implemented without tokenism is reflected upon using practical strategies. I trust that learning and embracing these guidelines can help to shape a future where youth voices are heard, respected, and actively incorporated in making a genuine difference.*

*I really hope that this Framework helps people to not be so scared of engaging with children and young people, we're just people it's not impossible to talk to us.*


*Talking to young people shouldn't be a ticking the box thing, you should only engage if you truly want to and actually value our input. I think this Framework will help to ensure that the engagement is not just to tick a box.*

*Like everything, change is constant and the best ways to engage with young people will never be consistently the same, so it's super important for something like this Framework to be able to adapt over time.*

*Being flexible and providing options is super important for me, especially with engagement it can feel tokenistic and like the person wouldn't speak to you if they didn't HAVE to.*

*As a young person who has been engaged with CCYP for the last 5 years, this Framework focuses on the importance and benefits of partnering with young people, which is essential to create positive systemic change.*

# Introduction



We created this Framework for our staff at the Commission for Children and Young People, but we're sharing it more broadly to help others engage with children and young people in meaningful ways. We hope you find it useful.

The Child and Youth Engagement Framework (the Framework) sets out how and why we value and prioritise engagement with children and young people throughout our work.

The Framework provides guidance and resources to those engaging with children and young people in different contexts in ways that are:

- human rights based
- Child Safe Standards compliant
- safe, inclusive, meaningful, ethical and respectful
- trauma-informed.

## A dynamic and evolving resource

The Framework is not intended to be a prescriptive, static 'how-to' manual, because every engagement and every child and young person will be different. In particular, where we are engaging with a cohort

of children and young people for the first time, it may be important to ask *them* the best way to consult, rather than using a methodology that has been used in another context and assuming it is appropriate. Engagement is dynamic and should involve dialogue with young people – flexibility and continued innovation is key.

Creative innovation requires us to keep seeking the best ways to have children and young people involved in decision-making processes. Showing leadership, taking considered risks, and exploring different avenues to give children and young people the power to initiate and direct the work is ultimately the way that new and more effective pathways to engagement will be identified.<sup>1</sup>

## Definitions

In this document, unless otherwise specified, 'children and young people' is used as a broad term referring to people aged 0 to 25 years.

The term 'Aboriginal' in this document refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1 Crowley, A. & Moxon, D. (2017). [New and innovative forms of youth participation in decision-making processes.](#)



# Why have an Engagement Framework?

An illustration at the top of the page shows several hands of different colors (black, orange, white, green, red, blue) reaching up to hold a globe. The globe is partially visible at the top right, showing green and pink segments. The background is a light blue with concentric circles.

The Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) recognises that children and young people:

- are experts in their own lives
- have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them
- have experiences and recommendations that adults can learn from.

Our Framework is underpinned by our human rights and regulatory obligations and informed by international models about best practice child and youth participation. In this section we set out the reasons and the models that inform our approach.

*'It is a journey, not an end point. It is more important to put participation into practice and learn from it than to have a statement about it.'*

YOUNG PERSON, COMMISSION YOUTH PARTICIPATION FORUM, 2018

## Children and young people have a right to speak up and be heard

We begin the Framework by acknowledging the systemic barriers and inequalities that children and young people experiencing disadvantage face when attempting to access systems. We acknowledge the work yet to be done to change systems to ensure they are accessible to all children. We are committed to addressing these challenges alongside children and young people.

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that children and young people who are capable of forming their own views are given the right to express those views freely in relation to all matters affecting them and to have those views given due weight in decisions.

The Commission, as an organisation established to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in Victoria, plays an important role in upholding this right. We do this by:

- promoting the participation and empowerment of children and young people in decisions that impact their lives



## Why have an Engagement Framework?

- recommending service system improvements that focus on engaging with children and young people
- ensuring that children and young people are provided opportunities to be heard and their views incorporated into the Commission's work.

This is particularly important, given the Commission often represents the interests of children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced significant marginalisation and disadvantage. These children and young people are often far less likely to have an opportunity to express their views and to have them taken into account. The Commission has access to spaces that these children and young people are often excluded from. It is the Commission's responsibility to invite them to spaces where they aren't expected to be seen and to challenge the broader community to include the voices of children and young people who have experienced disadvantage.

## It is what we require of other organisations working with children and young people

As the regulator of the Child Safe Standards and the Reportable Conduct Scheme, monitoring and oversight body, and an advocate for children and young people, a critical part of the Commission's work is to hold organisations and individuals accountable for affording children and young people the right to express their views and to participate in decisions that affect them.

Having our own organisational Child and Youth Engagement Framework both signals that we are 'walking the talk' on youth engagement and participation and provides staff with clear expectations, principles and practical resources for how to do this.

## It benefits everyone

Children and young people gain knowledge and insight through their experiences and can share this to raise awareness and encourage action to better protect their needs. Through working with the Commission, children and young people can provide important new perspectives and ideas which leads to better decision-making and outcomes for children and young people and for the Commission and broader service system. They are able to effectively advocate from their own experiences and those of their peers, and contribute to the work of the Commission by sharing these experiences, identifying system failings and creating recommendations for service improvements.

Engagement can also benefit children and young people by providing a supportive, safe and empowering space in which they have their opinions and experiences heard. For many children and young people, it is also an opportunity to learn new skills and create important networks.

## Understanding child and youth engagement and participation

Historically, there has been a lack of understanding, respect and support for facilitating participation of children and young people, particularly those considered to be more vulnerable.<sup>2</sup> Their voices have not been valued within government and adult-centric structures.

However, in recent times there has been a shift to introduce opportunities for their involvement. Organisations are recognising that this is not only a human right, but importantly that children and young people add significant value to the work that these organisations do. As those doing it well can attest, engaging children and young people is essential.<sup>3</sup>

2 Oliver, L. (2014). [Elevating youth engagement](#).

3 Movshovich, J. (2014). [Children's participation in society; a key to development: children as essential actors in improving their lives and communities](#).

## Why have an Engagement Framework?

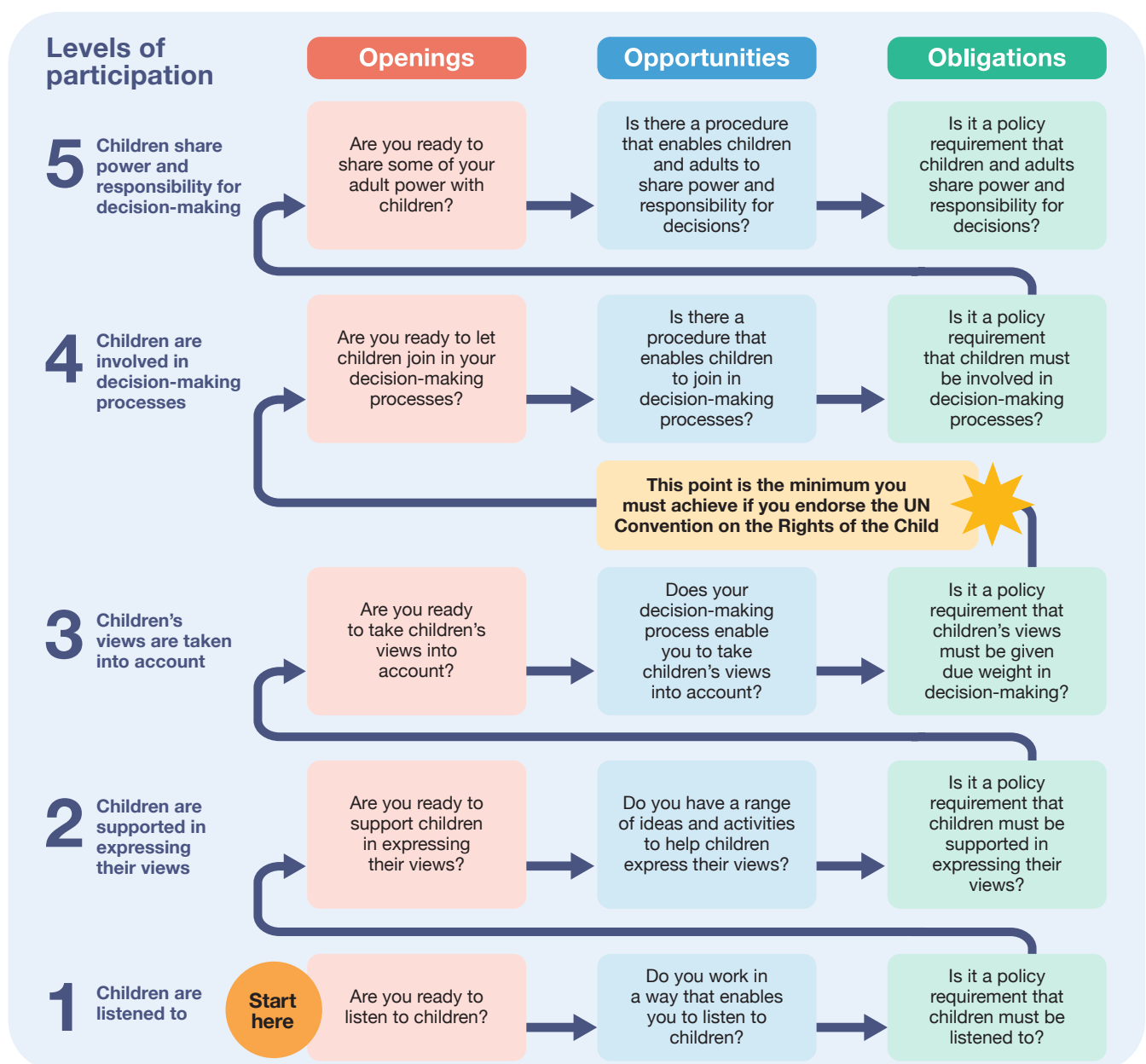
While child and youth participation has become better understood in recent years, there is a broad spectrum of how it is practised in different contexts.

On one end of the spectrum participation can be tokenistic or even exploitative; at the other end participation is entirely youth developed and led and there is an equal partnership between adults and the children and young people who are involved.

## Models of participation

The spectrum of participation was first depicted as a ladder by sociologist Roger Hart<sup>4</sup> but it has widely been noted (including by Hart himself) that representing participation as a ladder can be misleading as it gives the impression that everyone should be aiming for ‘the top’ – a true and equal partnership in all decision-making processes.

Figure 1: Shier’s pathways to participation



4 Roger Hart (1992): Children's participation: from tokenism to citizenship. Essay for UNICEF (Innocenti Essay No 4).

## Why have an Engagement Framework?

An alternative model was developed by Harry Shier<sup>5</sup> which sets out a pathway to participation based on five levels (see [Figure 1](#)). This shows that in reality, while manipulation and tokenism should always be avoided, it is often the case that entirely youth-led and devised participation may not be possible or appropriate in some contexts.

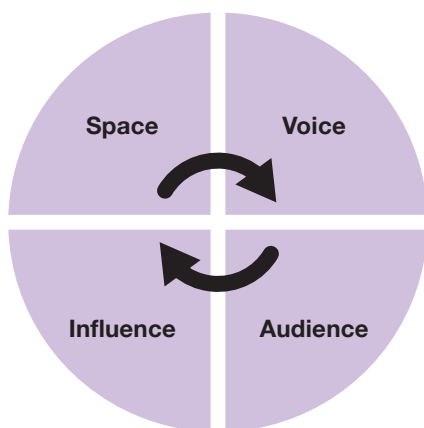
Another helpful way of explaining participation in the context of an organisation such as the Commission is the Treseder model of participation.<sup>6</sup> The Treseder model highlights that participation is contextual rather than hierarchical, with the appropriate degrees of participation being assessed and applied depending on the context.<sup>7</sup>

Treseder's model allows us to conceptualise various ways in which children and young people can influence the work of the Commission, depending on context.

Treseder's model outlines five types of participation, as set out on the following page.

Laura Lundy's model of participation provides a way to understand how we engage within every context (see [Figure 2](#)).

**Figure 2: Lundy's model of participation**



Lundy noted that there are four key areas in participation:

- **Voice:** Children and young people are facilitated to express their views.
- **Audience:** Children and young people's views are listened to.
- **Influence:** Children and young people's views are acted upon as appropriate.
- **Space:** Children and young people are given safe and inclusive opportunities to form and express their own views.

This model is useful in considering engagement across the realm of work children and young people can be actively involved in. Lundy's model depicts all four elements being closely inter-related.

There are useful tools to help conceptualise these four key elements within specific projects, these can be found in the [CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide](#).

These models complement each other in the Commission's work and allow the Commission to offer various avenues for children and young people to have input into the work, all in ways that we ensure are genuine, informed and safe.

5 Harry Shier (2001): Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations. In: *Children and Society* Vol 15.

6 Adapted from Treseder, P. (1997). *Empowering children and young people*. London: Save the Children

7 Foley, P. & Leverett, S. (2008). [Connecting with children: developing working relationships](#).

Treseder model of participation

**Consulted and informed**

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

**Practice example:**

As part of the process of preparing a submission to the Royal Commission into Mental Health, the Commission spoke to young people to hear about their lived experiences of the mental health system and reflect these in the final submission.

**Assigned but informed**

Adults decide on the project and young people are involved in it. The young people understand the project, and they know who decides to involve them and why. Adults respect young people's views.

**Practice example:**

The Commission's strategic planning process includes working with young people on their views about how to frame priorities relating to youth engagement and youth voice.

**Adult-initiated shared decisions with young people**

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

**Practice example:**

The Commission developed an [on-demand video](#) to support organisations to comply with the 11 Child Safe Standards. We knew that including young people's voices throughout the video was so vitally important. We provided a small group of young people with some context around the Standards and asked them to reflect on what each Standard means to them, and what they would say to challenge organisations to do better. It was important that their reflections came from the heart and were not scripted by the Commission. The young people were filmed sharing their reflections and challenges to organisations, which were then incorporated throughout the video.

**Young people-initiated and directed decisions**

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

**Practice example:**

The Commission's Youth Council had the idea of a Youth Network to extend the Commission's reach and capacity to engage with a broader range of young people around Victoria. This Youth Network is now established on an ongoing basis and is driven by the members of the Youth Council.

**Young people-initiated shared decisions with adults**

Young people have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct but offer their expertise for young people to consider.

**Practice example:**

The Commission's Instagram account was developed in response to a recommendation of the Youth Council. Content is often initiated and created by Youth Council members to highlight the work of the Commission and opportunities for other young people to get involved.

# Engagement principles

These principles have been created specifically for the Commission for Children and Young People. You might like to create your own principles or adapt these to suit your own organisation and the children and young people you engage with.

The following principles for engaging and exchanging ideas with children and young people have been developed alongside children and young people and staff across the Commission.

- Principle 1: Culture is key
- Principle 2: We leave our ego at the door
- Principle 3: We ensure informed consent and confidentiality
- Principle 4: We do no harm
- Principle 5: We listen
- Principle 6: We understand the 'why' and the 'who'
- Principle 7: We are genuine
- Principle 8: We partner where possible
- Principle 9: We practise open and regular communication
- Principle 10: We adapt, innovate and evolve

- Principle 11: We are inclusive and culturally safe
- Principle 12: We recognise, remunerate and celebrate

These principles should be used to guide and inform the work of the Commission when engaging with children and young people. The resources developed as part of this Framework draw heavily on these principles.

***Valuing the voices and perspectives of children and young people needs to happen across the board, it should not be restricted to one person or one team.***

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

## Principle 1: Culture is key

*There is definitely an imbalance of power in every organisation where it always feels like they are trying to keep something, transparency is a very important factor to consider when dealing with young people and children.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Creating a positive workplace culture that involves and encourages involvement from children and young people.
- People in positions of power working with children and young people and supporting other areas of the organisation to prioritise youth engagement.
- Sharing some of your power with young people including them in decision-making processes, seeing us as equal participants and providing leadership opportunities.

## Principle 2: We leave our ego at the door

*You can tell when someone is entering a conversation with a view that they are above you and are more important than you. It should be equal, it's a conversation, a two-way street. You need to remember that you are both just people that should be respected equally.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Creating an equal and open space when engaging with children and young people wherever possible.
- Engaging from the position of being a human rather than what your job title is.
- Acknowledging and apologising to children and young people when you haven't engaged well or made a mistake (for example using the wrong pronouns). This transparency shows children and young people it's okay to make mistakes.
- You may have some assumptions, ideas or beliefs about the young people you're working with, or the way things should be done. Approach engagement with curiosity and be prepared for young people to challenge you and bring their own ways of thinking and doing.
- Self-reflection into your own practice and processes, is this something that young people can be supporting you to do rather than the other way round?

### **Principle 3: We ensure informed consent and confidentiality**

*It's important to inform people that you engage with that they do not 'HAVE' to do or say anything that they don't want to, part of this involves telling them what is happening with what they are sharing.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- We ensure that informed consent is obtained and the limits to confidentiality are explained.
- Children and young people know they can opt out of any discussion at any point they choose.
- Providing children and young people with detailed information about the project or task so that they:
  - can make an informed decision about whether to participate or contribute
  - know that if they choose not to be involved or want to stop participating at any time that they will not be penalised or treated any differently
  - know they can ask for their identity to remain anonymous if they wish
  - know that their story will always belong to them, and if we are seeking to use it as part of different pieces of work, we will ask for their consent first.
- Explaining confidentiality to children and young people and its limitations, including our processes for referral and follow up, and information we may need to share with other organisations, where we are concerned for their wellbeing and safety.



## Principle 4: We do no harm

*Just because you have done successful engagement on a piece of work with one young person in a certain way, it won't necessarily work for the next young person. You need to have options, be flexible and remember that everyone is different. Autonomy is key and if possible, allowing the young person to have options and choices can be good, again, it won't work for everyone but can make a big difference!*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Having supports in place to make sure children and young people have their voices heard in a way that is trauma-informed and safe for them by:
  - preparing and creating culturally inclusive safe spaces for them to contribute and participate in our work, including asking children and young people what they need to feel safe and not assuming you know
  - allowing conversations where possible to be led by the child or young person, including only having conversations about what they feel comfortable talking about and stopping when they want to
  - offering different ways to contribute and providing referrals and supports where necessary
  - having clear processes for referral and follow up where safety concerns arise
  - having clear processes for complaints to be made about you/your approach if they are unhappy with our approach.

## Principle 5: We listen

*As a young person, it's often difficult to give your perspective on a situation if you feel as if you are not being heard fully. Sometimes this can happen when the people you are speaking to have preconceived ideas that you lack understanding.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Acknowledging that children and young people are the experts in their own lives by:
  - ensuring that they are heard and are empowered to speak frankly and openly in their interactions with us
  - wherever possible, seeking their input and advice on our work and our priorities
  - supporting involvement by encouraging them to take the lead wherever possible
  - capturing what children and young people say verbatim, where possible, to make it as accurate as possible, or paraphrasing to check our understanding of what they are saying.

## **Principle 6: We understand the 'why' and the 'who'**

*A lot of the time people leave talking to young people to the last minute, you can tell it's been rushed. It's important to think about why you want to talk to young people and who you would like to engage with before you figure out exactly how to do it.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Not expecting or wanting children and young people to change the way they would normally speak to fit in with adults or the organisation.
- Understanding the reasons for engaging with children and young people.
- Being clear about why we are engaging with children and young people before we approach them.
- Ensuring that we are speaking to the most appropriate children and young people for the project or task.
- Engaging with children and young people in a way that is meaningful to them and the Commission.
- Providing a platform for lived experiences of children and young people experiencing disadvantage and who aren't usually listened to.
- Acknowledging the risk of bringing lived experiences into the space whilst not letting it become a barrier to meaningful involvement.
- Recognising one young person can't speak on behalf of all young people, it's important to not put an entire community's representation on one young person. Involve lots of different children and young people with different views or be clear about the fact that you only spoke to a few.

## **Principle 7: We are genuine**

*When I have often contributed to organisations it has felt tokenistic due to my involvement based on the short-term needs of the organisation. This tends to leave an impact of feeling disposable and unheard.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Recognising the value that young people bring to our work.
- Empowering children and young people to be equal partners in conversations.
- Not making assumptions about the skills and knowledge of any child, young person or group.
- Engaging without judgement
- Being transparent with children and young people about how we will reflect their views and the likely outcomes of our engagement
- We make it a routine part of our practice.

## **Principle 8: We partner where possible**

*If you are familiar with engagement processes due to experiences with other organisations, engaging in conversation can often become a lot more comfortable and easier to engage in.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Instead of developing or replicating pre-existing engagement mechanisms, we partner with organisations who have already developed proven methods for youth engagement.
- Partnering where possible with trusted adults and organisations already working with children and young people to give them options in how they contribute to our work.

## **Principle 9: We practise open and regular communication**

*Transparency is super important for me, when starting a project being told what it is and how I can be involved is crucial, even if the people in charge don't know exactly how it will look they just need to make that clear, nothing is perfect and that is OK but communicate that!*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Creating a clear and shared understanding with children or young people about:
  - the purpose of the engagement
  - how we will use information collected through the engagement and always giving the option to opt out
  - how and when they will be involved throughout the life of a project. For example, will their story be included in a report? Will their input be sought on drafts? Will they be asked to participate in communicating outcomes? Will they lead the project?
  - how we will provide feedback to them, including the impact of the consultation and the actions we have undertaken as a result of the work they have contributed to
  - what they can gain or benefit from their participation with the Commission
  - if there is ongoing involvement throughout a project, ensuring opportunities to regularly check in with the children or young people
  - sharing a bit of yourself with children and young people to make sure it's not one sided.

## Principle 10: We adapt, innovate and evolve

*Every young person is different and has had diverse experiences, how someone presents or puts forward a thought shouldn't be judged. Not everyone can talk corporate.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Being flexible about where, when and how we engage.
- Developing tools and resources to help us engage appropriately.
- Providing agency to children and young people where possible to suggest places most appropriate and safe for them.
- Allowing children and young people to communicate in the way they feel most comfortable.
- Actively seeking feedback from children and young people we work with to ensure we make spaces accessible for a diverse range of children and young people.
- Seeking regular input and feedback from young people about their experiences engaging with us.
- Changing our engagement approach if they tell us it is not working.
- Committing to constantly reviewing and developing our work alongside children and young people.
- Listening to their ideas to create new and innovative ways of engagement to ensure they are influencing our work directly.

### **Principle 11: We are inclusive and culturally safe**

*As an individual from a diverse background, I have observed a lack of representation for various cultural backgrounds. Organisations often make acknowledgements or discuss the experiences of marginalised groups such as Aboriginal people but fail to actively involve them in speaking about their own culture.*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Listening to the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalised children and young people by:
  - ensuring that our engagement reflects the diversity of the Victorian community, including those living with disability, those from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background and children and young people living in out-of-home care
  - allowing time to use different channels and methods to make sure we reach those who may not be easily accessible
  - ensuring that our approaches are relevant, safe and appropriate for Aboriginal children and young people
  - ensuring the expertise of Aboriginal people, both within the Commission and in the community, informs our engagement with Aboriginal children and young people
  - ensuring that we are inclusive and safe for children and young people within the LGBTQIA+ community
  - providing flexibility and support for children and young people to be involved.

### **Principle 12: We recognise, remunerate and celebrate**

*Recognition of input doesn't have to be some massive celebration but it does need to be genuine, I think people forget that you can tell when someone isn't being genuine. Being fairly remunerated for involvement in work is definitely important but a genuine thank you and being seen as involved in the work rather than as a side piece is also needed!*

YOUTH COUNCIL MEMBER

In practice this means:

- Showing children and young people that we value their contributions and telling them how they will benefit from the engagement. This may include payment, vouchers or other forms of recognition where appropriate.
- Inviting children and young people to celebrate success in work they have been involved in (for example launches of reports).

# Engagement Framework



## Trauma-informed approach to ensuring safe engagement

Many of the children and young people who engage with the Commission have been involved in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems and often have lived experiences of complex trauma.

This can impact how children and young people process information and react to different environments and to people they have not met before. It may mean, for example, that they need frequent breaks during conversations or consultations. It may also mean that they cannot contribute to group discussions, or that unexpected things, words or discussions may be distressing for them. This also means offering young people the option to bring a support person with them while they engage with the Commission.

It is important that staff are prepared to support engagement with children and young people in a way that is trauma-informed. Resources co-developed with Blue Knot Foundation, together with this Framework, provide guidance about the impacts of trauma and strategies for creating safe spaces for children and young people when engaging with them.

## Inclusive engagement with children and young people

The Commission's priority is to ensure children and young people who experience disadvantage, marginalisation or vulnerability are heard. It is also our responsibility to create and open up safe spaces so that no children or young people are excluded from involvement in decisions that impact them.

In any engagement planning process, it is important to consider the groups of children and young people who are frequently not involved, seen or heard. This exclusion may be due to identity, for example children and young people who:

- are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- are otherwise from culturally diverse backgrounds
- live with disability
- identify as LGBTQIA+.

Exclusion may also occur due to location, for example, children and young people who live in rural or remote areas, and/or who may not have ready access to the internet.



Engagement planning should also consider what day-to-day challenges young people may be encountering that will or may impact their capacity to be involved including:

- mental health illness or mental ill health
- alcohol and/or drug addiction
- poverty
- housing instability or homelessness
- current or past lived experience of the child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice systems.

Tailored approaches and flexibility is required in order to ensure that engagement is accessible to as many children and young people as possible.

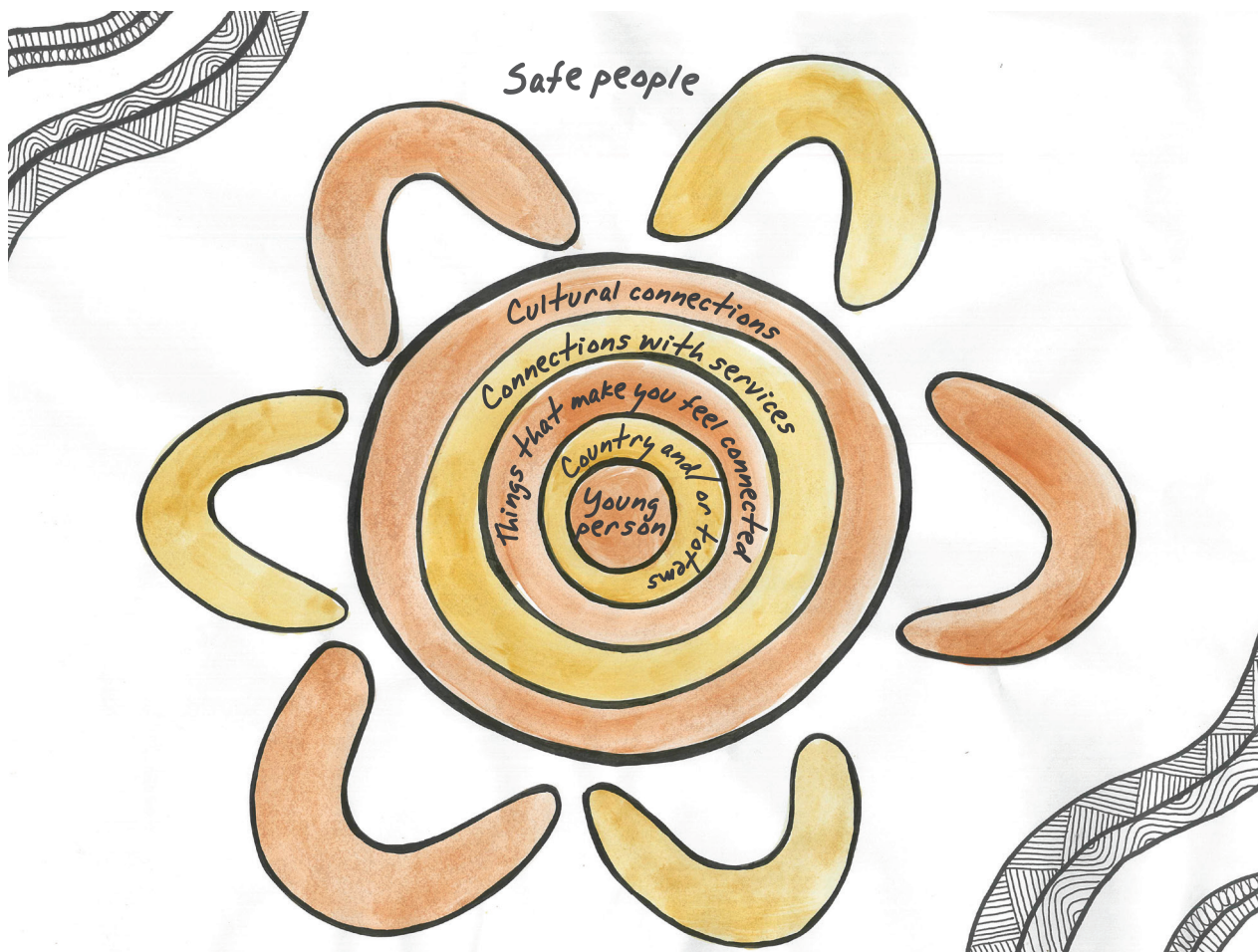
In the interest of cultural safety, the Commission aims to begin all of our consultations with the gathering circle (see Figure 3). The gathering circle is a symbol used by Aboriginal communities to depict the gathering of people around a campfire. This suggests safety in conversation and the connection of culture through elders and family that sit around the fire.

This is also a strengths-based tool that can be kept after the consultation to remind the children and young people participating of their supports and resilience.

The gathering circle is used to ask questions about:

- who they are:
  - their name
  - their family group name

Figure 3: Gathering circle





## Engagement Framework

- what their connections are:
  - ‘Who’s your mob?’
  - totem
  - land
- their connection to culture:
  - how the young person connects to their culture or how they would like to. For example: dancing, youth group, language
- their service connection:
  - how the young person connects to services or how they would like to. For example: education, extracurricular activities (if in custody: what programs are they involved with)
- safety
  - people they acknowledge as safe people they can yarn to if they need. For example: family, a worker, service provider, friends
  - ways they are made to feel safe by them. For example: good listener, have fun with, take their mind off everything
  - safe places around them
- what keeps them going, how are they resilient.

### Engaging with Aboriginal children and young people

Ensuring our engagement with Aboriginal children and young people is culturally safe and appropriate is of particular importance to the Commission, given the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the service systems the Commission monitors. Engagement with Aboriginal children and young people should:

- respect Aboriginal culture, families, and communities as a strength and protective factor
- recognise the ongoing negative impacts of colonisation and policies which saw the removal of Aboriginal people from their lands and resources, the forced removal of children from loving families, and the suppression of culture and language

- understand the ongoing impacts of systemic and institutional racism on Aboriginal children and young people and their families and communities
- be done in accordance with the principle of self-determination.

In practice this means actively creating opportunities for Aboriginal voice and presence within the Commission – in our planning, policies and activities. Expertise from Aboriginal people should be sought wherever possible when engaging and working with Aboriginal children and young people, families and communities.

It is important to understand and respect cultural load and consultation fatigue when working with Aboriginal people and not over-rely on a specific group or number of young people for engagement. Aboriginal Victorians are one of the most consulted groups by government, and that can become taxing. Try to be especially mindful of how the process of engaging with Aboriginal young people can be reciprocal and not extractive. Think about how to differentiate yourself from the many other government employees who could have spoken to them about their experiences. This will support Aboriginal young people to participate.

***Self-determination encompasses a spectrum of rights that are important for Aboriginal children and young people to achieve social, economic and cultural equity. It includes their rights to enjoy culture and heritage, make decisions that impact their lives and design and deliver solutions to problems on their own terms.<sup>8</sup>***

<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal Victoria (2018) [Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023](#).

In conducting engagement activities with Aboriginal children and young people the following components should be incorporated wherever possible:

Component	Description
<b>Led by an Aboriginal person</b>	<p>When consulting specifically with Aboriginal children and young people, it will be led by Aboriginal members from the Commission. There will be a minimum of two staff members present at every consultation, and the second staff member will record the young person's experience while the Aboriginal staff member leads the conversation (beginning with an acknowledgement of country).</p> <p>Where it is not possible for an Aboriginal staff member from the Commission to lead the consultation, they will provide staff with advice leading into the consultation. When this is not possible, the Commission will make every attempt to engage with Aboriginal community partners to assist in the consultation with the children and young people.</p>
<b>A culturally safe space</b>	<p>Meeting and consulting with Aboriginal children and young people should be conducted in culturally safe community locations and gathering spaces.</p> <p>Where this is not possible, Aboriginal staff members will support the children and young people to determine an appropriate location.</p>
<b>Culturally specific sensory items</b>	<p>The team plans to provide culturally specific sensory items, including background music, for use and comfort during consultation. Physical items may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• map of Aboriginal countries</li> <li>• message sticks</li> <li>• mangrooks</li> <li>• possum skins</li> <li>• clapsticks</li> <li>• emu feathers</li> </ul>
<b>A designated culturally safe retreat space</b>	<p>Staff should designate a safe space for any children or young people that wish to retreat from consultations which may include (where possible):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a social and emotional wellbeing worker from the hosting community</li> <li>• art supplies and mindfulness colouring books designed by an Aboriginal artist</li> <li>• baskets and basket weaving</li> </ul>

Staff conducting consultations with Aboriginal children and young people should also consult the Commission's Child Safe Standards guide in relation to ensuring [Aboriginal cultural safety](#).

### Engaging with children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

The 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics data revealed that 49.1% of Victorians were either born overseas or had a least one parent who was born overseas.<sup>9</sup> This indicates that CALD children and young people make up a significant proportion of the population and should be equally represented in any consultations that relate to children and young people.

The Commission is committed to ensuring that culturally diverse children and young people are represented in all of its work, wherever appropriate. When determining how best to engage with children and young people from CALD backgrounds, the following should be considered:

- What are the cultural safety needs of the individual child or young person?
- What do I need to be aware of before I engage with the child or young person (or group of children and young people)? Are there particular community or cultural rules, processes or expectations I need to think about?
- Are their cultural behaviours that I should be aware of and understand that will influence how I undertake the engagement?
- What organisations and other supports are available to help me engage appropriately with culturally diverse children and young people?
- Are there potential language barriers I need to overcome? Am I excluding the voice of children and young people whose first language is not English?
- What translation services are available?
- Have I thought about creative ways of engaging culturally diverse children and young people that do not necessarily rely on a written or spoken response, such as communicating through art or music?

For more tips and guidance see the Centre for Multicultural Youth's [Inclusive Organisations: A guide to good practice strategies for engaging young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in services and programs](#).

### Engaging with children and young people with disability

Traditional systems have often excluded children and young people with disability from being involved or engaged in their processes. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that children and young people with disability were more likely to be abused in organisations, less likely to disclose abuse, and less likely to be believed when they did disclose.<sup>10</sup> The Commission's monitoring work in relation to the Child Protection and out-of-home care systems confirms that children and young people with disability are overrepresented in those systems and often not provided with adequate supports.

It is therefore essential that children and young people with disability are given opportunities to participate and have their voice heard.

Accessibility shouldn't be an afterthought; it should be built in from the start. When determining how best to engage with children and young people with disability, consider the following:

- Are my assumptions about consulting with children and young people with disability based on what they cannot do or on what support they need so that they can participate effectively?
- What organisations and other supports are available to help me engage with children and young people with disability? For example, if I want to engage with a young person who is hearing impaired, have I arranged an Auslan interpreter?

<sup>9</sup> [Demographic information from Victorian Government website](#).

<sup>10</sup> [Summary of the Final Report of the Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse](#).

- Are there any physical barriers to children and young people with disability participating in my project? Can they physically access the meeting space for face-to-face discussions? Are my icebreakers accessible to everyone?
- Are there any potential communication barriers that I might need to overcome? Am I excluding children and young people with disability as I might struggle to understand them?
- Have I thought about creative ways of engaging children and young people with disability that do not necessarily rely on a written or spoken response, such as communicating through Boardmaker symbols, art or technology?
- Am I using person first or identity first language? For example, person with a disability or disabled person. What do the children and young people I'm working with prefer?

Remember that not all disabilities are visible. Be sure to ask all children and young people is there anything that they need in this space to make it accessible and safe?

For more tips and guidance see the Youth Disability Advocacy Service online resource [Together: Building an Inclusive Youth Sector](#).

### Engaging with LGBTQIA+ young people

When engaging with any young person or group of young people, it is important to start with what your pronouns are (see [Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement](#) in the Resource section). By doing this you are showing to LGBTQIA+ young people that this is an inclusive space and there are no assumptions being made. This is the beginning of ensuring a young person feels included as an equal within the engagement. Some tips around positive engagement with LGBTQIA+ children and young people:

- Start sessions and introductions by introducing yourself along with your pronouns
- Where possible, include simple signs to show it is an inclusive space, such as rainbow flags and stickers

- Creating a range of signals that the space is a safe space for LGBTQIA+ young people will assist in feeling safe and rapport building. This can be as simple as signs with inclusive language, initial interactions being clear around the inclusive nature of our workplace and the principles we are guided by
- Does the space you're working in have a gender-neutral toilet? If not make sure to tell young people where the accessible toilet is. When pointing young people to the bathroom don't assume which one they will use – instead point to where all the bathrooms are. Avoid making any assumptions about sexuality or gender identity. Be open to acknowledging each individual young person and their identity, while also acknowledging other aspects of their life
- Avoid any assumptions about whether someone is in a relationship or not. Rather than asking any specific questions around this, a more appropriate question would be *'who are the important people in your life at the moment?'*
- If they do provide information about a relationship avoid making any assumptions about the gender of the person they are in a relationship with. For example refer to them as a partner not girlfriend/boyfriend
- When capturing information about the young people, ensure that options are present on every form that are inclusive of non-binary and gender diverse young people. Don't provide the male/female/other option this excludes and others people who don't fit in to the gender binary. Instead provide a space where young people can write what their gender and pronouns are
- Avoid asking people their preferred pronouns, instead just ask what their pronouns are.

For more tips see this resource from the [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) and more from [Rainbow Health Australia](#).

# Engagement toolkit



## Engagement checklist

The purpose of this engagement checklist is to help Commission staff consider the most effective engagement strategy and assist them to answer the question: 'Where can young people effectively influence this particular piece of work?' It should be noted that this checklist is not exhaustive and there will always be other elements to consider, however

this checklist has been developed throughout the various engagement opportunities the Commission has undertaken to date and has been useful to inform our work alongside children and young people.

Wherever possible, the Commission should strive to involve children and young people in the formulation of purpose and role, as that involvement is incredibly valuable in shaping the engagement.

### Your purpose

- I am clear about the purpose of engaging with children and young people for this particular piece of work
- I have thought about the role I want them to play (e.g. consultation on a topic, sharing personal/lived experience, providing advice, co-creating a report, resource or process)
- I have used the [Treseder model](#) to help me clarify the purpose of engagement
- I have updated the Commission's privacy and consent forms to reflect the purpose of the engagement.

### Why this is important

Clarifying your purpose will help to determine which approach or methodology you want to take. It will assist you to allow enough time for engagement in the context of the work you are doing to ensure that you can explain your purpose and the way in which you will be using information to young people.

### Recognition of young people's time and expertise

- I will recognise the child or young person's involvement and expertise in an appropriate manner. This may include gift vouchers, travel/accommodation expenses, payment of an honorarium or professional development or training opportunities.

### Why this is important

Young people should be recognised for the expertise, skills and knowledge they bring to the work. It is important to consider the most appropriate way to recognise this in the particular project and context they have been involved in.

### Engagement method/s

- I have considered the most appropriate method of engagement (developmentally appropriate, fit to the project etc)
- If the engagement involves children under 6 years old, I have used the [Guidance: Engaging with pre-school children](#) document (in the Resources section) to assist in communicating in a child friendly manner
- I have considered whether multiple methods of engagement should be used to allow for flexibility
- I have sought input from children and young people, where appropriate, to develop this process
- I have considered who the children and young people participating are and used the information in the section [Inclusive engagement with children and young people](#) in this Framework to decide on appropriate engagement methods.

### Why this is important

Understanding the most appropriate method/s to involve young people for the context is important as it will play a role in:

- ensuring they are safe and comfortable and play a key role in the quality of the work you are undertaking
- understanding and organising the resources needed to effectively engage.

### Privacy and confidentiality

- Prior to any engagement activity, I have explained what information I am seeking and how I intend to use it, and I have checked that the child or young person understands this information
- I have received the informed consent of the child or young person to participate in the activity
- I have explained clearly what the Commission will do to keep their identity and personal information private and also how the Commission will treat disclosures (see the list of available templates in the [Resources](#) section)
- I have considered the context of the consultation, whether in person or online and made relevant adjustments to take account of privacy and confidentiality.

### Why this is important

To ethically work alongside or consult with children and young people, privacy and confidentiality is essential and must be given priority. Children and young people may have had less exposure to processes of obtaining informed consent, so flexibility in delivering these messages and ensuring they are understood is paramount.

### Considering and managing risks

- Prior to any engagement activity, I have considered the relevant risks and how they will be managed<sup>11</sup>
- I have completed the Risk assessment and management template and submitted this to my manager.

### Why this is important

Children and young people need to be able to trust that the Commission will take all necessary steps to manage any actual or potential risks to them and staff need to feel safe and supported when engaging with children and young people. The Commission needs to show the community how important it is to understand and mitigate risks when engaging with children and young people.

<sup>11</sup> Risks may include disclosures of harm, children and young people becoming distressed, confidential information being disclosed outside a session, and children and young people complaining about Commission staff behaviour.



### Safety considerations

- I have considered how I will ensure the safety of the child or young person contributing to my work. This means ensuring that the engagement process used will allow them to speak openly and be confident that their information will be treated appropriately and with respect
- I have advised the child/young person that they can opt-out, take breaks and/or contribute in a variety of ways
- If in person engagement is being used, I have followed the guidance set out in [Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement](#)
- I have read the relevant resources that relate to safety considerations (see the [Resources](#) section)
- I have considered the specific risks of using third party contractors including external facilitators or interpreters and organisations providing spaces for hire prior to engaging them and have ensured Working With Children Checks are held and those engaged are appropriately trained in working with children and young people.

### Why this is important

Safety of children and young people is of core importance to the Commission. Ensuring children and young people are safe prior to, during and after engagement in our work is imperative. As a regulator of Child Safe Standards, we need to show leadership in this space; this can ultimately empower others to follow suit.

## Engaging children and young people in work at the Commission

All Commission staff are encouraged to consider not only how best to involve young people but also why they have decided *not* to involve young people. As the image below illustrates, this should occur from the beginning of planning processes on.



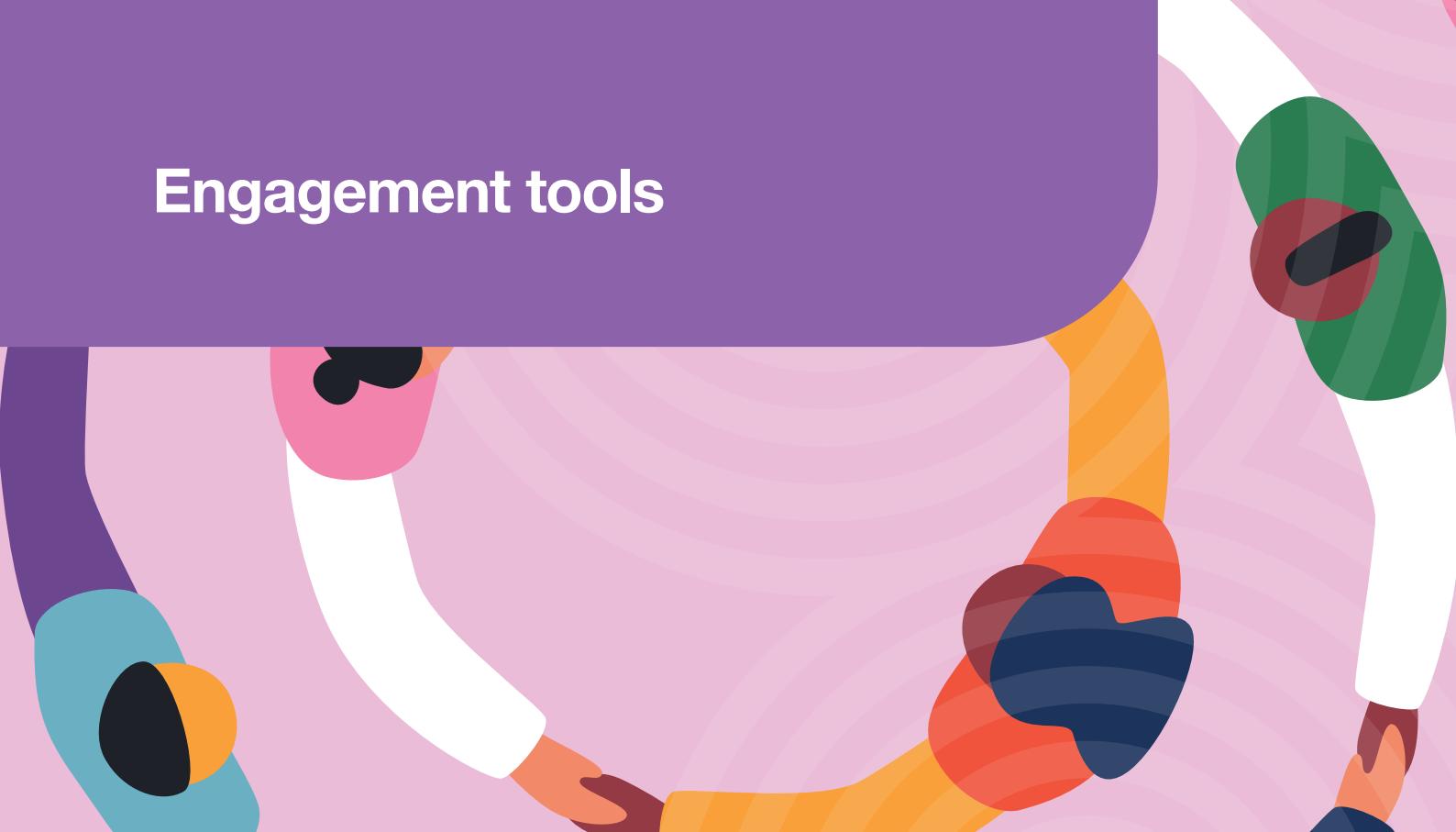
## Methods of engagement with children and young people

Engaging with children and young people can be done in a wide variety of ways. The following tables outline methods that have been used by the Commission to date, along with some key considerations and relevant Commission resources to support each methodology. With every method of engagement, it is expected that the risk assessment template be undertaken to specifically identify and mitigate potential risks of child abuse or harm. This will be noted in each engagement method table. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list and should be built on as we further our engagement with children and young people.

There are several considerations that apply to the outlined methods. These include:

- the preferences of the child or young person you are engaging with, wherever practical
  - the purpose of the engagement (e.g. are you doing it because you think you have to? If so, it may be tokenistic – reflect on how you can turn it into something meaningful for you and for young people)
  - the stage of the project in which you will seek young people’s input (e.g. if it is at the end of a project where young people can’t really influence the outcome, it may be tokenistic)
  - available options for the child or young person to consider before they make a decision as to how they wish to engage
  - how best to obtain informed consent (consider the age of the child or young person and their understanding of the information, how it will be used and what the purpose of their participation is)
- ensuring that the method of payment/reimbursement is made clear at the beginning of any interaction (including if there is not going to be payment/reimbursement and what alternative form of recognition has been agreed)
  - whether the child or young person identifies as Aboriginal or not, and if so the additional considerations and actions required to ensure cultural safety throughout the engagement.

# Engagement tools



There are several engagement tools that can apply to each method of engagement and will assist staff in undertaking all engagement activities. There is no prescriptive advice for when and how to use these tools. For example, the gathering circle engagement tool is a cultural symbol for Aboriginal people but can be explained to and used when engaging with non-Aboriginal young people as well. An element of discretion will always need to be applied when selecting the most appropriate engagement tools depending on the wants and needs of the young people present at the time.

## Internships/student placements, paid employment and consultancy

Involving young people in your work can also provide them with development and learning opportunities. Internships and student placements may be part of a course of study. Paid employment or consultancy work is another way of working with young people. There are both advantages and limitations to working with young people in these ways, as the table below illustrates.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Builds young people’s skills and knowledge base</li> <li>• Provides genuine opportunities for young people to shape our work</li> <li>• Enables young people to be directly involved in decision-making processes</li> <li>• Allows direct access and input from young people when adults are looking at making decisions or recommendations impacting young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Won’t be fully representative of the children and young people that the Commission works to support</li> <li>• Can be resource-intensive as the young people will require ongoing support and mentoring as well as generally monetary recognition</li> <li>• If taking young people on in paid positions such as on a board or as youth advisers, planning must take place to ensure the organisation is prepared and able to support the positions</li> <li>• Support from across the Commission is available, not left to a sole person</li> <li>• Clarity is required around expectations, both for the young person and for the Commission</li> <li>• For under 18 year olds, a risk assessment must be completed</li> <li>• For under 15 year olds, the Commission would require a child employment permit</li> <li>• If the young person identifies as Aboriginal, seek support and advice around recruitment and ongoing support options from the Koori Advisory and Engagement team.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Adviser</li> <li>• Child Youth Engagement Project Officer</li> <li>• Social work student placements</li> <li>• VPS graduate positions</li> <li>• Consulting Y-Change Berry Street to develop our youth engagement planning</li> <li>• Young person contracted as a consultant to co-facilitate staff strategic planning workshops.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whenever the organisation has capacity and resources to support it</li> </ul>
<p><b>Online resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li> </ul>

## Youth Advisory Group or Commission Youth Council

A Youth Advisory Group (YAG) or Youth Council is a group of young people selected to enhance the participation of young people in the work of the Commission for Children and Young People.

The group plays a critical role in development of work, providing advice from their perspectives as young people with varied life experiences and creating avenues to link with broader groups of children and young people. The Youth Council is able to share their own experiences of being a young person, as well as reflect those of their peers where appropriate. The advantages and limitations of these models are set out in the table below.

<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A positive way to get young people involved directly with the work of the Commission in a way that it is not ad-hoc or project-specific</li> <li>• Provides avenues for young people to develop and drive different elements of the work rather than only being consulted with</li> <li>• Allows a youth perspective on the broad elements of the Commission’s work</li> <li>• Ensures there are young people providing oversight to written materials that are targeted to young people</li> <li>• Allows young people to gather a wider understanding of the work for a bigger picture response.</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will never be truly representative of a Victorian population of young people, so this must be made clear</li> <li>• Setting up spaces that feel safe and comfortable for young people who have experienced significant disadvantage, marginalisation and/or vulnerabilities to become involved in is likely to be done over a longer period of time and takes trust building and support over time</li> </ul> <p>Historically, YAGs have been tarnished by some organisations using them in a very tokenistic manner. To prevent this from happening with the Youth Council, the Commission must continue to be willing to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be prepared to learn as you do the work. Youth engagement in this way is not static</li> <li>• Ensure the young people feel comfortable and invested. Time must be put into getting this established at the beginning, getting the group together and setting expectations together, ensuring they are comfortable and clear about the role</li> <li>• Ensure the group is inclusive. For example, the Commission should consider recruiting young people from diverse backgrounds and young people who are interested but may not be comfortable in group settings</li> <li>• Ensure that Aboriginal young people are safe within the group, have support from Aboriginal staff if desired and work closely with the KAE team in an ongoing capacity</li> <li>• Be a role model for the group and model expected behaviours and values</li> <li>• Have regular check-ins with YAG/Council members.</li> </ul>

## Engagement tools

<b>Examples of use at the Commission</b>	The Commission established its first YAG in May 2020 as part of the plan to connect with young people across the state to hear about the impacts of COVID-19. The group has continued work since that period with the objectives to influence Commission work across each of its functions, connect the Commission with broader cohorts of young people, provide the Commission with new avenues to connect and hear from children and young people, and to provide direct influence from young people in all aspects of work. In January 2021, the group changed name to Youth Council to better reflect the work that it undertakes.
<b>When to use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When seeking consistent input and influence from young people across the work of the Commission</li><li>• When there is sufficient resources to provide support and walk alongside the group.</li></ul>
<b>Online resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word file]</li><li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li></ul>



## One-on-one discussions and interviews

Meeting with an individual child or young person face-to-face in an appropriate setting provides avenues for informal discussions or structured interviews. Choice and control should always be given to children and young people regarding when, where and how they engage. This is part of the participation principles outlined in the Framework.

<b>Advantages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often more suitable for children and young people when discussing sensitive or personal information and experiences</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for children and young people to speak their own words without the influence of others</li> <li>• Good to use as part of any investigative work for regulation purposes.</li> <li>• Often easier to develop rapport in short time.</li> </ul>
<b>Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be intimidating for young people who are not comfortable with strangers and no rapport has been developed prior</li> <li>• Young people don't get to hear other peers discussing ideas</li> <li>• Only get information from one person meaning it often won't be representative</li> <li>• Identify and mitigate risks associated with potential disclosures through a risk assessment and plan</li> <li>• Consider having stress management aids available for the child or young person (stress balls, fidget spinners, colouring pencils etc.)</li> <li>• Have more than one Commission staff member present in the room where possible, or where not available, another trusted adult to be a support person</li> <li>• Use people who are trusted by the child or young person to assist in setting up the discussion or interview (such as a family member, friend, worker, colleague)</li> <li>• Create a safe space for the child or young person by asking them if they need anything in the room to feel safe</li> <li>• Arrange welfare checks for young people following consultation to assess possible impact of interview (depending on nature of consultation)</li> <li>• When a child/young person identifies as Aboriginal, an Aboriginal staff member should lead the process. If this is not possible, it should be explained to the child/young person.</li> </ul>

## Engagement tools

<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systemic inquiries</li> <li>• Individual inquiries</li> <li>• Monitoring (Youth Justice and out-of-home care)</li> <li>• Independent Visitors Program (IVP)</li> <li>• Policy submissions</li> <li>• Child Safe Standards (CSS) compliance investigations</li> <li>• Complaints to the Commission about the service system</li> <li>• Reportable Conduct Scheme investigations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When discussing lived experience or contexts where the content is sensitive, and the child or young person might feel more comfortable not being with peers or other people present</li> <li>• For input into policy and project work that require an in depth understanding of the child or young person’s perspective or experience</li> <li>• Undertaking compliance investigations and seeking input from young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attachments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Online resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide</a> [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Fact sheet: Talking about trauma</a> (Blue Knot) [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li> </ul>

## Group consultations/workshops

Meeting with a group of children and young people to share ideas, experiences and information on particular issues. Groups can be of varying sizes which will guide how they are facilitated. The size, age and collective lived and/or living experiences of the group will help guide how the engagement is facilitated during the planning stage.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows large numbers of children and young people to participate and have input into issues</li> <li>• Less resource-intensive in terms of staff time than meeting individually with children and young people</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for children and young people to meet and interact with each other and develop new networks</li> <li>• Allows children and young people from diverse backgrounds to mix who ordinarily might not have the opportunity to come together</li> <li>• Builds skills of children and young people to speak in group settings and set agendas.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some children and young people might not be comfortable participating in group settings, limiting their input</li> <li>• May be less appropriate to discuss sensitive issues around their lived experience</li> <li>• Requires skilled facilitation</li> <li>• Identify and mitigate risks in relation to child abuse by completing a risk assessment and management plan</li> <li>• Facilitate group agreements to ensure children and young people feel safe, there is no judgement and all people are respected. Make sure this is meaningful and model how it is done – set the tone for the activity</li> <li>• Consider breaking large groups into smaller focus groups for at least some of the session to cater for those who may be more introverted or struggle to speak up in large groups</li> <li>• Youth friendly/less formal space is generally more appropriate</li> <li>• Creative and fun facilitation, particularly to start with. Where possible include young people to play a role in facilitation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic planning workshops</li> <li>• Child Safe Standards workshops</li> <li>• Systemic inquiries and taskforce</li> <li>• Cultural safety of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds resources</li> <li>• Engagement about the impacts of COVID</li> <li>• Independent Visitor Program visit discussions.</li> </ul>

## Engagement tools

<b>When to use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When seeking input into planning or ideas such as setting strategic plans/ goals</li><li>• Workshopping ideas such as teaching organisations how to make safe spaces for children and young people to be empowered</li><li>• Asking about their ideas and thoughts on the recommendations the Commission might make in an inquiry.</li></ul>
<b>Attachments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement</a></li></ul>
<b>Online resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide</a> [PDF]</li><li>• <a href="#">Fact sheet: Talking about trauma</a> (Blue Knot) [PDF]</li><li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li><li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li></ul>

## Forums and conferences

A forum or conference allows for larger numbers of children and young people to be involved and share ideas. This can involve presentations and various activities facilitated/co-facilitated by children and young people. This differs from a workshop, allowing for larger numbers of young people to attend and be involved.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows large numbers of young people to participate and have input into the issues</li> <li>• Less resource-intensive in terms of staff time than meeting individually with young people</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for young people to meet and interact with each other/develop new networks</li> <li>• Allows young people from diverse backgrounds to mix that ordinarily might not have the opportunity</li> <li>• Builds skills of young people to speak in group settings and set agendas for larger groups</li> <li>• Lead-in times for conferences allows for a lot of involvement with and influence by children and young people to design and lead the engagement.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some young people might not be comfortable participating in group settings, which might limit their input</li> <li>• May not be appropriate for speaking about individual issues or traumatic life experiences in most scenarios</li> <li>• Resource-intensive in the lead up and during the forum</li> <li>• Identify and mitigate risks in relation to child abuse by completing a risk assessment and management plan</li> <li>• Have a clear structure for the forum to ensure it can run as planned</li> <li>• Youth friendly/less formal space is more appropriate generally</li> <li>• Creative and fun facilitation, particularly to start with. Effective facilitation of these forums is critical.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth participation forum</li> <li>• Launch of inquiry report</li> <li>• Advocacy forum on a particular issue the Commission has worked on (out-of-home care, youth justice reform).</li> </ul>

## Engagement tools

<b>When to use</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When seeking larger scale input and collaboration on one topic. For example, the Commission held a Youth Participation Forum in 2018 seeking input from across the sector about how the Commission can best play its role in the sector (this brought about an enhanced Youth Participation Practice Network, which was run by YACVic)</li><li>• Workshopping ideas such as teaching organisations how to make safe spaces for empowering young people</li><li>• Holding a youth conference (for example leadership conference for people in out-of-home care).</li></ul>
<b>Attachments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement</a></li></ul>
<b>Online resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li><li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li></ul>

## Yarning Circles

A cultural gathering for young Aboriginal people, held at an appropriate time and place, to share stories and share their strengths.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brings young Aboriginal people together in a cultural setting, allowing them to connect with one another and their culture</li> <li>• A safe space for Aboriginal young people to explore their culture, emotions and experiences</li> <li>• Has the ability to bring non-Aboriginal people into a cultural setting, providing greater insight and understanding of the culture.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires an Aboriginal staff member to lead and develop. Non-Aboriginal staff are able to assist and be involved but it must be led by Aboriginal staff and therefore depends on availability</li> <li>• Identify and mitigate risks in relation to child abuse by completing a risk assessment and management plan</li> <li>• Must have an Aboriginal person to facilitate. This can be a young person if they are comfortable, otherwise an adult can facilitate</li> <li>• Seek the advice of an Aboriginal team member as to whether this would be the most appropriate method for your project/objectives</li> <li>• Should be held in a cultural or community space.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Youth Our Way Inquiry</li> <li>• Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care forum.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When working with groups of Aboriginal children and young people and the resources are available to support this method (i.e. an Aboriginal adult or young person who is able and willing to facilitate)</li> <li>• When there is an appropriate space and time to have a yarning circle</li> <li>• When seeking to connect young Aboriginal people to each other and their culture.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attachments</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Online resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide</a> [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Fact sheet: Talking about trauma</a> (Blue Knot) [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li> </ul>



## Online forums

An online forum allows for larger numbers of children and young people to be involved and share ideas, with people able to attend from various locations at once. This can involve presentations and various activities facilitated/co-facilitated by children and young people. Using platforms such as Zoom allows you to hold a large forum and within that, break into smaller groups.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows young people to participate without having to travel, opening options up for people from different regions and areas of Victoria</li> <li>• Provides opportunities for some young people with disabilities to participate</li> <li>• Links a range of young people together that wouldn't otherwise get the opportunity, including from a range of diverse backgrounds</li> <li>• Efficient and not resource-intensive</li> <li>• Builds skills of young people to speak in group settings</li> <li>• Can break into smaller groups and be facilitated in a smaller setting before coming back into larger forum.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be intimidating for young people who are not comfortable with strangers in an online environment</li> <li>• Young people may not get to hear other peers discussing ideas</li> <li>• May prevent some young people with disabilities from participating</li> <li>• Participants may not speak up or feel comfortable in an online setting</li> <li>• In some instances it's not the most appropriate for speaking about individual issues or traumatic life experiences</li> <li>• Requires a number of staff to ensure it is done safely and appropriate safety measures are in place</li> <li>• Doesn't allow for children and young people who don't have access to internet and resources to engage</li> <li>• Identify and mitigate risks in relation to child abuse by completing a risk assessment and management plan</li> <li>• Have a clear structure for the forum</li> <li>• Youth friendly/less formal language at the beginning to ensure all participants understand the setup</li> <li>• Ensure that participants are reminded about privacy settings</li> <li>• Ideally have young people involved in the facilitation</li> <li>• Creative and fun facilitation important</li> <li>• Have staff who are practiced in this environment and ready to support, including in the facilitation of breakout rooms if used</li> <li>• Consider how children and young people's contributions will be recognised.</li> </ul>

## Engagement tools

Examples of use at the Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Online youth forums discussing the changes being experienced in 2020</li><li>• Online youth forums discussing the changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by children and young people.</li></ul>
When to use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When seeking to connect with a broad range of young people and when wanting to ensure that geographic location is not a barrier to participation</li><li>• Seeking to understand young people's experiences of certain programs or situations (for example seeking to understand their experiences of the impact of COVID restrictions).</li></ul>
Attachments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement</a></li></ul>
Online resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide</a> [PDF]</li><li>• <a href="#">Fact sheet: Talking about trauma</a> (Blue Knot) [PDF]</li><li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li><li>• <a href="#">Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</a></li></ul>

## Phone discussions/SMS

Phone calls and text messages allow for discussions to occur, particularly for young people who may not want to meet face-to-face or where there are geographical constraints.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many young people have their own mobile phone and are comfortable using it</li> <li>• There is no geographical disadvantage when using a phone so easier to reach rural/isolated audience</li> <li>• Time and resources required is minimal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some young people may not have access to a phone</li> <li>• Not all young people feel comfortable talking or texting over the phone, particularly if they haven't met the individual on the other end of the line</li> <li>• Ensure staff are familiar with guidance on communicating with children and young people by phone and email</li> <li>• Must always have consent to contact via phone</li> <li>• Be clear in your communication, particularly if sending a text message</li> <li>• When calling, introduce yourself and the Commission at the beginning</li> <li>• Text messaging should only be used to disseminate information and opportunities or to advise of an upcoming meeting/workshop</li> <li>• Commission staff must only use Commission phones to contact children and young people; never their personal phone.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up discussions post face-to-face discussions for policy submissions</li> <li>• Organising consultations</li> <li>• Organising events</li> <li>• Offering upcoming engagement opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When you already have rapport with the young person, you can offer the opportunity to discuss issues over the phone</li> <li>• When a young person has left their phone contact details to reach out to them</li> <li>• When advising a young person of opportunities that are arising within the Commission or externally.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Online resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide</a> [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Fact sheet: Talking about trauma</a> (Blue Knot) [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li> </ul>

## Email

The use of email to communicate with young people can be an effective method to share information. This is dependent on the young person providing consent for you to contact them this way and giving you the details to do so.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many young people have easy direct access to email</li> <li>• Young people can write transparently about their own thoughts and not have to necessarily sit with you to talk about the topic if they are not comfortable</li> <li>• It is a good way to disseminate information to a lot of people at once</li> <li>• No geographical barriers, so easier to reach rural/isolated audience.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires the young person to provide the details, consent and desire to contact via that method</li> <li>• Requires the young person to have ready access to email</li> <li>• Harder to clarify/have further discussion on topic</li> <li>• Many young people don't actively use or check emails as it is not their primary form of communication</li> <li>• It is important that you know and have rapport with the young person if using this method to ensure you have the appropriate consent to communicate via email</li> <li>• Offer email as an option in situations that it will work, where they may wish to write their thoughts or opinions down and provide advice on a certain topic or issue</li> <li>• Ensure your writing does not include jargon, and is clear</li> <li>• Make sure that staff only ever use their Commission email to contact children and young people and never their personal accounts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing input into an inquiry and detail their experience of a certain service</li> <li>• Sharing broader opportunities with young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When young people have provided their details and advised this is a preferred communication type</li> <li>• To disseminate information or flyers to groups of young people</li> <li>• To share information or other resources available on the internet.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Online resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide</a> [PDF]</li> <li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li> </ul>

## Surveys

Surveys are a method to collect information by asking questions. Questions can either be ‘closed’ with yes/no or multiple-choice answers, or ‘open-ended’ with space for free text. They can be shared via online platforms, provided to young people by hand or sent by SMS.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can include a wide target population (e.g. across large geographic area, whole of Victoria)</li> <li>• Responses can be anonymous</li> <li>• Can collect good data</li> <li>• Minimal input with ability to get a lot of young people to answer.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people need access to technology if using an online survey</li> <li>• Questions and ideas can’t be asked or shared by young people if only closed questions are asked</li> <li>• Children and young people often experience ‘survey fatigue’ and may choose not to participate, particularly if surveys are lengthy or if their value is not clearly explained</li> <li>• Surveys are often anonymous which means it is difficult to organise specific supports for an individual who discloses safety issues</li> <li>• Ensure young people participate in the development of the survey and its communication to young people</li> <li>• Be realistic when setting a target for how many young people will complete the survey</li> <li>• Ensure dissemination is targeted and communicated clearly.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey for inquiries</li> <li>• Surveys for monitoring of residential units</li> <li>• Exit surveys when leaving youth justice custody</li> <li>• Surveys about the effects of COVID-19.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When wanting to gather large numbers of young people to input on particular issues (such as an inquiry)</li> <li>• When requiring a significant amount of data.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Online resources</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Risk assessment and management template</a> (CSS guide) [Word]</li> </ul>

## Artistic expression

Engaging children and young people through artistic activities can allow them to express themselves creatively while contributing their thoughts and ideas in a manner that feels natural and enjoyable. Artistic contributions can take many forms, such as drawing, painting, poetry, music, dance and audio recordings. These methods can be especially effective in engaging children and young people who might not feel comfortable expressing themselves through discussion.

<p><b>Advantages</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourages creativity and self-expression</li> <li>• Art can be more inclusive for children and young people with different abilities and learning styles</li> <li>• Artistic activities can be more engaging and enjoyable, making participation feel less like a task and more like a fun activity</li> <li>• Creating art can reduce anxiety and build confidence, especially for those who might find it challenging to speak up in group settings</li> <li>• Art often allows for deeper reflection and can start conversations that may not emerge through conversation alone.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Considerations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all artistic activities are accessible to young people with disabilities. This might include providing adaptive tools or alternative formats for participation.</li> <li>• Children and young people are encouraged to provide a short description of their artistic expression, with the support of Commission staff</li> <li>• Be mindful of cultural differences and ensure that the artistic activities are respectful and inclusive of all cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• Obtain consent for the sharing of any artistic work created by children and young people, especially if it will be displayed publicly.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Examples of use at the Commission</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artwork for systemic inquiries including In our own words and Let us learn</li> <li>• Audio recordings for inquiries.</li> </ul>
<p><b>When to use</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be effective when wanting to ensure that all children and young people, regardless of their verbal communication skills, can participate</li> <li>• Useful when the goal is to explore emotions and experiences that might be difficult to articulate verbally</li> <li>• Best suited for informal settings where the primary goal is to make participants feel comfortable and engaged.</li> </ul>

# Resources

## Online resources

- [CCYP Empowerment and Participation Guide](#) [PDF]
- [Fact sheet: Talking about trauma](#) (Blue Knot) [PDF]
- [Inclusive Organisations: A guide to good practice strategies for engaging young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in services and programs](#)
- [Risk assessment and management template](#) (CSS guide) [Word]
- [Support service information](#)
- [Together: Building an Inclusive Youth Sector](#)
- [Wayipunga youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people](#)

## Attachments

The following pages of this PDF contain additional guidance documents.

- Guidance: Creating a safe space for youth engagement
- Guidance: Engaging with pre-school children





# Creating a safe space for youth engagement

The vision of the Commission for Children and Young People (the Commission) is for the rights of all children and young people in Victoria to be recognised, respected and defended. The Commission cannot achieve this vision unless it is guided by the expertise and lived experiences of the children and young people for whom it advocates.

To maximise the participation of children and young people to inform what the Commission says and does, the Commission must offer young people SAFE SPACES in which to share their experiences and expertise. This document provides guidance to the Commission about the fundamental principles of how to co-create a SAFE SPACE for children and young people.

## What is a SAFE SPACE?

A SAFE SPACE is an environment which ensures the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of people during any consultation process or group setting. Having a SAFE SPACE means everyone knows what to expect from one another and what they aim to achieve from a consultation or interaction with the Commission.

## Before the consultation

The nature of Commission's activities and inquiries tend to be of a sensitive nature. So when creating a SAFE SPACE, it is very important to consider how you can alter the physical consultation space to help children and young people manage heightened emotions, triggers and differences in opinions. Ahead of the consultation, work with children and young people to design a space that will make them feel relaxed and comfortable.

## Access and support

Determine ahead of time if any attendees have accessibility needs or if there are barriers that might prevent them from participating fully. Arrange relevant supports, such as interpreters, support people, and breakout spaces.

## Choosing the facilitator

In some situations, consideration may need to be given to the gender of the facilitator, for example, when talking with victim/survivors of abuse, or considering the religious or cultural background of the participants.

Depending on the group, it may be appropriate to use co-facilitators who represent different gender, racial or cultural backgrounds

## **Food and drinks**

Providing food and drinks for the group is a great way to lighten up the mood and may be a welcome distraction if someone is struggling with the content of discussion. Young people tend to enjoy fruit juice, lollies, chocolates, and chips, dips and pizza (who doesn't?) and it also communicates that the Commission is grateful for their participation. The Commission will not be able to remunerate all participants in every circumstance so ensuring that the Commission can provide something which indicates that they are valued (as simple as snacks) can help avoid young people feeling that the exchange is one sided. The principle of good youth engagement is an **EXCHANGE**. This means when they give something (their input and expertise), the Commission gives something.

## **Creative materials**

Whenever you bring a group of young people together, the Commission will need to acknowledge that young people have different attention capacities. This means that not all participants may have the capacity to sit and discuss things for an extended period of time with the primary focus being the consultation content. However, for some young people, they can participate for longer and more efficiently when they have some tools to keep their minds alert. It is recommended that for any sessions longer than half an hour that the Commission provide creative materials.

Creative materials can include:

- textas, pencils, paper, colouring pages
- stress balls
- plasticine
- Rubik's cubes
- fidget spinners

## **During the consultation**

### **Greeting participants**

For some children and young people, participating in a Commission consultation or inquiry process can be daunting– so making sure participants feel welcome is very important.

Welcoming young people to a space can be as simple as:

- a smile, handshake and introduction of who you are
- ensuring all other people present from the Commission extend the same warm welcome.
- Providing name labels where young people can write their name and preferred pronouns

### **LGBTI+ inclusive (pronouns and respectful language)**

At the beginning of any group introduction, it is standard practice to go around in a circle and for participants to introduce themselves. In addition to this, SAFE SPACES should include the recognition of LGBTI+ participants and strive to ensure that all participants are addressed by their correct pronouns.

In some groups there may be no experience or knowledge of differing pronouns and that is okay as well – what matters is a group acknowledgement that if mistakes are made that they are rectified in a respectful manner.

It is important that the facilitator is aware of the group members' individual pronouns at the beginning of the session and that they take it upon themselves to be aware of mistakes that are made so that they can gently interject and correct any slip ups. There may be some individuals who are happy and willing to say 'Hey, that's not my pronoun can you please remember that it's actually A or B'.

However, for many individuals, correcting mistakes made by strangers is a very anxiety provoking experience and it should be assumed that most people aren't comfortable correcting mistakes. It may be helpful in the group Agreement to acknowledge that mistakes may be made but to also emphasise that it is important for everyone to be mindful and to try their best to respect each other's pronouns. An effective way of reminding participants of each other's pronouns is to simply provide blank labels in which participants can write their own names and pronouns and to add the pronoun to the introduction along with names. For example:

- 'My name is Peta, my pronouns are They, Them, Theirs'
- Name tag: Peta – Them/ they/theirs

Before any session, facilitators should read and familiarise themselves with this document from Minus 18: [What are pronouns and why are they important?](#)

### **Acknowledgment of Country**

Acknowledgement of Country is imperative in any group consultation. An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following forms:

- General: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present.
- Specific: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Resource: [www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au)

### **Informing the group of the aim and purpose of the consultation**

Before any consultation begins, it is imperative that the participants are informed of the aim of the consultation and why they have been invited to participate. Giving young people information about the Commission and the intention of the consultation the day before it occurs, gives young people time to consider what they want to bring to the table on the day and to clarify anything they do not understand.

Informing participants of limitations on the consultation is incredibly important – this could be things like:

- whether or not they will have access to the work they participate in as it continues
- recognising that the consultation does not automatically mean that participants ideas and recommendations will be implemented
- outlining the importance of their input in constructing recommendations
- who will be involved, when and how
- previous contexts of other Commission activities or inquiries where appropriate

## **Making a group agreement**

No one really likes being told what to do but when we make our own rules, we tend to more readily abide by them. When working with children and young people, it is imperative to recognise that each person will have their own limitations, expectations and thoughts about their own safety.

Making a group agreement ensures that all participants have had an opportunity to say what they require from the space in order to participate to the best of their ability. The process for making a group agreement can vary from a semi-structured group discussion to a standard set of questions to which the group can respond. Ultimately, the purpose of co-creating a group agreement is to establish a set of rules for the group to abide by and to set out what will happen if those rules are breached.

It is important to note that it is not the facilitator's job to create the group agreement. However, it is the facilitator's job to ensure that all contributions to the group agreement are acknowledged and put into the agreement. A skilled facilitator can steer the group to consider things like confidentiality, conflict resolution solutions and creating 'Trigger Words' (words which indicate that the conversation or topic has become too challenging for some participants).

It is important for the facilitator to model the activity and go first to set an example if the group goes quiet. If you think the activity is stupid the tone will come across to the young people so making sure you practice and do something you feel comfortable with.

The space should be one in which participants feel comfortable learning, sharing, and growing. Everyone in the space acknowledges that there may be some discomfort due to discussing topics that may be uncomfortable in nature. In establishing this space, participants honor each other's experiences and opinions with respect to achieve a place of understanding. The most important part of a brave space is inclusion of all.

Sample questions a facilitator can ask when supporting the group to make an agreement:

- *Do we think that it's okay to discuss the content of today's session with people who weren't involved?*
- *What do you expect from each other during this session?*
- *What is not okay during this session?*
- *What can we do as a group if people begin to argue?*
- *How can we make sure everyone feels respected and safe?*

## **Stepping out**

Allowing young people to step out of the space when they feel they aren't able to manage is critical and it gives them an opportunity to regulate their own emotions when the facilitator is managing the rest of the group. It is advised during the process of making the group agreement that this is discussed – so that the group knows *in advance* what their options are and that it is ok to step out and that this won't be judged negatively. It is not the job of the facilitator to dictate what the young person does out of the space – if the young person wants to have a cigarette outside or sit in another room for a while then those things should also be discussed when making a group agreement.

## **Scribing and clarifying**

Finding effective ways to log the discussion is very important. Having two facilitators is an effective way of ensuring that conversation keeps on track while the other facilitator records the discussion. It is also important for facilitators not to guess or assume what ambiguous comments may mean. Instead, clarify that you have understood what someone wanted to say and what they meant by it. If unsure it is very easy to clarify by asking:

- *Can I please just make sure you meant \_\_\_?*
- *What I heard you say is \_\_\_, is that right?*

During the consultation, be conscious of different ways of communication, whether through behaviour, assistive technology, or interpreters.

## **Conflict resolution**

In some group consultations, emotions run high and there is a risk of conflict among participants. Managing these conflicts can be tricky so discussing this as a group at the beginning of the session during the making of the group agreement is very important. Allowing participants to determine how they would like conflict to be managed is key to the effectiveness of actually doing it. As previously mentioned, if the group already knows what to expect, then it is far more likely that they will adhere to any consequence of conflicting views in a respectful and predictable way.

A skilled facilitator will acknowledge at the beginning of the session that participants are all entitled to their own emotions, feelings and opinions, however being disrespectful of other people's emotions, feelings and opinions is not okay. Trying to identify and address power differentials within the consultation can help avoid conflict. Being assertive and diligent when conversations become heated and redirecting participants to solution-based discussion is key.

In groups where there is a real likelihood of conflict, it is recommended that there be at least three facilitators present. If a situation of high conflict arises, it is important that the participants who are having conflict have support outside of the group while the session continues with the other facilitator.

It is also important to recognise that conflict usually arises from deep passion and personal experience. If participants have to cut the session short and step outside, it is very important that they still have an opportunity to contribute when things have calmed down, for example by phone, after the session when others have left or in a follow up appointment.

## **After the consultation**

In order for the Commission to maintain positive and sustainable relationships with the participants, it is important to ask them what they would like to happen after the consultation, within the limitations outlined in the initial briefing. This could include sending participants a copy of a completed report, offering to have their name within the 'contributor' section of a report or offering participation in other aspects of the inquiry or other Commission activity.

## **Debriefing**

Following the consultation, check in with the young people and support people that participated in the discussion and provide information for support services if required. Ensure that children and young people are provided with information about how to provide feedback or make complaints about the consultation.

Debrief with co-facilitators to reflect on practice, and act on any concerns, including making relevant notifications if required.

## **More information**

For more information about creating a safe group space:

- [https://amplifier.org/pdf/education/Amplifier-Creating\\_A\\_Brave\\_Space.pdf](https://amplifier.org/pdf/education/Amplifier-Creating_A_Brave_Space.pdf)
- [CCYP Empowerment and participation guide](#)



# Engaging with pre-school children

This template was developed in order to take notes for consultations with young people for purposes of an inquiry. It is intended to serve as a guide, and to be edited to suit the specific consultations that you are doing in various contexts.

The Commission is committed to hearing what children and young people have to say and partnering with them in its work. As part of this, ensuring a range of avenues for children from aged three to have input is critical.

This resource is to provide practical guidance to staff on engaging with younger children (3-6 years).

When engaging, regardless of the context and the activities that are undertaken, Commission staff must adhere to the Commission's Child and Youth Engagement Principles which are:

- we do no harm
- we listen and engage with purpose
- we are genuine and do not underestimate the knowledge and skills of children and young people
- we explain and clarify the purpose of engagement to children and young people
- we ensure informed consent from participants
- we consider accessibility, special needs, diversity and cultural safety
- we recognise and celebrate children and young peoples' contribution and participation
- we keep exploring new ways to engage – informed by children and young people.

## 1. Identify partners

Prior to engaging directly with younger children, it's important to identify adult figures in their lives with whom you'll be partnering with to develop rapport and engage with them. Examples might include parents, caregivers, early childhood educators or extended family.

Often the engagement will be done alongside these adults, so it is important they are liaised with as early as possible.

## 2. Develop an information resource for the children

This resource should be tailored to the activity (for example, what will you be focussing on, home, kinder, family, favourite things etc). In every situation, there will need to be core information that is communicated in a child friendly manner. This includes:

- pictures of the Commissioners
- pictures of the people coming to visit and some pictures/drawings explaining a bit about them (what their favourite food is, favourite hobby, pets etc)
- pictures and a statement about what the Commission's job is (i.e. making sure kids are safe and happy, making sure kids have a safe home)
- what happens after we meet with them.



### 3. Complete risk assessment

As are all organisations that are subject to the Child Safe Standards, the Commission is required to undertake a risk assessment prior to engaging in activities with children and young people. The risk assessment tool must be completed and approved by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) prior to any engagement. The risk assessment tool can be found [here](#).

### 4. Develop questions and consent form

We will always be just another stranger in these children's lives, so engaging in an age appropriate, and purposeful way will ensure that the occasion is a pleasant and fun experience for that child.

Develop questions that align with the work you are doing. For example, when seeking to understand children's experiences of kindergarten use questions like:

- what do you like most about going to kinder?
- what are your favourite things to do at kinder?
- what are you best at doing at kinder?
- are there things you don't like about kinder?
- who brings you to kinder?
- if you had a magic wand and could make kinder the best place, what would it look like?

The Commission's consent form should be adapted and provided to the child's caregiver for the particular activity, stating the purpose, the method, the outcome and the confidential nature of it.

### 5. Prepare options for activities to do that will get answers to the questions

It is important to be aware of the context and remain engaged with the adult partners that will be assisting with your engagement. Activities might be different if they are in a kindergarten setting with a lot of children, opposed to in a park or home environment with only one or two children present. It is important to plan a variety of engagement methods and be aware of realistic time expectations for each.

Some examples of age-appropriate activities are:

- drawing pictures
- colouring in pre-prepared pictures that align with how they feel and talking about that
- taking photos on a camera of objects that describe their answers
- talking, while playing games of their choice (building a castle with Lego for example)
- using a edited version of the resource ['When I wake up I smile'](#)
- using imaginative techniques such as dolls and puppets to communicate or story tell
- Use examples in the CCYP [Empowerment and participation guide](#) for 3-8 year old children, page 67.

A range of other activities including a word tree and the run around game can also be found in this [Involving children in decision making guide](#).

Giving the choice of how they might be involved is likely to enhance the child's engagement, rather than feeling put on the spot in any way.

## **6. Liaise with the trusted adults that you will be working with**

Having developed the resources, the engagement methods, and the questions, it is important to check all of this with the adults you'll be working with throughout this engagement. Checking all of this, explaining the rationale, and seeking their views within the particular context is important prior to engaging.

You may want to re-visit aspects of prior steps after this discussion.

## **7. Trial the engagement**

Where there is the opportunity, it is best practice to trial what you are planning to do. This can be undertaken with children within your own networks or children who have engaged in the past and have trusted adults connected with the Commission.

This step may not always be possible and it is okay to proceed without carrying out a trial, but always ensure clarity and all information is provided in step 6.

## **8. Do it**

With this age group it is important to:

- Actively listen
- Be transparent with the adults in the lead up, the doing, and the post engagement
- Be transparent with the children about who you are and what you are doing
- Be flexible during the engagement – if one activity isn't working try another – if a break is needed, take one
- Have a sense of humour and be enthusiastic.

## **9. Evaluate**

Seek feedback from the adults, staff and where possible children.



---

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

---