

# THE PARTICIPATION CHARTER

## Participation is a right

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that any child or young person has a right to express their views and have them given due weight in decisions affecting them, in accordance with their age and maturity. Participation is not a privilege and it does not have to be earned; rather, it values children and young people as citizens in their own right. The UK has ratified the convention, and increasingly public services are required by law to take seriously the wishes and feelings of children.

## Children and young people are the best authorities on their own lives

Only children and young people themselves can communicate what they like and dislike, what works for them and what doesn't. Services that involve them meaningfully in individual decision making and in planning, delivery and evaluation will be better able to meet their needs and be better used by them.

## Participation depends on respect and honesty

Honesty, mutual trust and respect are essential for effective participation. Children and young people's contributions must be taken seriously, treating each child as an individual and avoiding assumptions or stereotypes. It requires honesty about how children's contributions are going to be used and exactly how much power and influence they can really have. Children and young people must feel free to say what they really think, without the possibility of negative consequences.

## Participation must be accessible and inclusive

Children who are very young, disabled, or who have special educational needs have the same right to participate as other children. Services and organisations should be proactive in engaging them, as well as those who are socially or economically disadvantaged, excluded or discriminated against on any basis. Participation also requires a safe, child-friendly environment to be effective.

## Participation is a dialogue to influence change

It involves listening and responding constructively to what children and young people say or want to do. Children and young people value the experience and knowledge that adults can contribute to help them participate. Prompt and honest feedback by adults is one way of letting children and young people know that their views are valued.

## Participation is built in

For participation to be meaningful, services and organisations have to build this into their values, structures and procedures. Different levels of participation will be appropriate according to the circumstances, goals, type of organisation and the children and young people involved. It can range from individual decision making to inclusion in democratic processes or involvement in organisations' planning, evaluation, decision-making or governance structures. Meaningful participation never stops; it is not a project or task with a beginning and an end, and it requires commitment, time, effort and resources.

## Participation is everyone's responsibility

Every person or organisation whose activity affects children and young people directly or indirectly has a responsibility to ensure their views are listened to and acted upon.

## Participation benefits everybody

Effective participation improves decisions affecting children and young people and helps them to develop confidence and skills, and to build valuable social bonds. It develops children and young people's sense of their own rights and responsibilities as citizens, helping to counter anti-social behaviour and promote a commitment to society and its institutions. Successful participation can also benefit communities, promoting social cohesion and a more positive view of children and young people. For services, it is one of the keys to ensuring they meet the needs of children and young people, are well used by them, and so are able to demonstrate improved outcomes.



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**Supported by** British Youth Council, Children's Rights Alliance for England, National Children's Bureau, National Council for Voluntary Youth Services, The National Youth Agency and Save the Children UK