



The role of children's participation
in child-safeguarding

Child-friendly consultation tools to design safeguarding mechanisms

Terre des Hommes
International Federation

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1. Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC),¹ the most ratified human rights treaty in history, was a milestone in the struggle to protect children. Unlike previous efforts to recognise the special treatment of children, the UNCRC identified children not only as subjects of protection but also as subjects of rights.² The idea of rights and responsibilities brought up by the UNCRC gave children an agency in their development and well-being that did not previously exist. Agency, in relation to children, implies that they are not merely blank slates passively interacting with the world but are able to act with autonomy and intention.³ The UNCRC addressed this ‘agency’ as children’s right to be heard (Article 12). Defined by the convention, child participation is an underlying value that needs to guide the way each individual right is guaranteed and respected; a criterion to assess progress in the implementation process of children’s rights; and an additional dimension to universally recognised freedom of expression – implying the right of the child to be heard and to have his or her views or opinions taken into account.⁴

2. Why should children participate in the formation of child protection strategies?

Children have a fundamental right to participate. However, child participation also plays a key role in increasing the realisation of other rights. When children are empowered with information about their rights, and when they have confidence and are given a space to express their views and to participate in decisions affecting them, they are more able to assert and defend their right to education, protection, health and others.⁵ Several provisions in the UNCRC reflect children’s right to participate, including the right to freedom of association, information or to express their views and be heard – in accordance to their age and maturity.

The Convention also includes provisions that aim to protect children from all forms of violence, neglect, exploitation and cruelty, including the right to special protection in times of war and protection from violence in the criminal justice system. The UNCRC Optional Protocols⁶ are examples of alternatives to engage children in their protection. Children’s participation in the design and implementation of child protection mechanisms can make a difference in the way that civil society organisations and individuals protect children, as well as on how children protect themselves. These include:

- Opportunities for children to explore their understanding of safety, which tends to be influenced by their cultural and social backgrounds. A definition that often leads to differentiating between adults’ conception of ‘being safe’ and children’s perception of ‘feeling safe’;

1 See: www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

2 See: www.unicef.org/crc/index_protecting.html

3 Duncan, M. (2018). *Participation in Child Protection: Theorizing Children’s Perspectives*. Palgrave Macmillan; 1st ed. 2019 edition (August 7, 2018).

4 See: www.unicef.org/crc/files/Right-to-Participation.pdf

5 Barros, O. & O’Kane, C. (2018). terre des hommes. *Manual on Children’s Participation*.

6 See: <https://violenceagainstchildren.un.org/content/optional-protocols-crc>

- Increased children's confidence to speak up, to learn about their rights, and to look for ways to protect themselves and each other by accessing information and influencing decisions affecting their lives;
- Increased trust between the civil society organisations and children and their parents or guardians, which can also strengthen the support of community members for programmes and the creation of safe environments;
- Accurate design and implementation of organisational child-safeguarding policy and standards that respond to children's needs and are child-friendly – including the design of child-friendly feedback and complaint mechanisms;
- Strengthened capacity of staff to provide case management services and to ensure a safe environment in programme implementation;
- Increased programme quality by allowing adults to gain a better understanding of children's views. Training for adults and increased opportunities for children to share their opinions enhance the ownership, relevance, and sustainability of programmes and policies while promoting continuous monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.

3. Effective and ethical participation of children

Child participation should involve commitment to the ethical and meaningful engagement of children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child provided a detailed explanation of the importance of realising a child's right to be heard through the General Comment No. 12, that also includes the Nine Basic Requirements for an Effective and Ethical Participation of Children. These requirements aim to avoid tokenistic approaches and promote meaningful child participation by encouraging child participation processes to be: 1) transparent and informative; 2) voluntary; 3) respectful; 4) relevant; 5) child-friendly; 6) inclusive; 7) supported by training; 8) safe and sensitive to risk and 9) accountable.⁷

4. The toolkit

The following tools are designed to be used with children aged 5 years and older to a) explore their views about safety, and the risks they face or might face before, during and after participation in programmes; b) identify key stakeholders that could support their protection; c) reflect and identify the do's and don'ts of behavior by adults when in contact with children; d) explore their views about the profile of a child protection focal point; and e) determine key stages of reporting procedure and ideas of child-friendly feedback mechanisms.

It is strongly encouraged to review and ensure the application of the nine basic requirements for effective and ethical participation of children before using the following consultation tools with them.

⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), General comment No. 12 (2009): The right of the child to be heard, 20 July 2009, CRC/C/GC/12, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ae562c52.html>

4.1 The talking map⁸

Objective: To explore children's views on the risks they face or might face when attending and participating in organisational programmes or projects.

Time needed: 60-90 minutes

Materials: Sheets of A4 paper, crayons, markers, colours.

Used with: Children aged 8 years and older. Ideally in small focus groups of children of similar age and gender.

Note for facilitators: For documentation purposes of this activity, children should not be asked to write down their names on their map. Ideally, the facilitator of this activity should be someone who is not directly related to the project and who is not in contact with the children consulted.

Practical steps

1. Each participant receives a sheet of paper in which he/she should draw a map that illustrates the path he/she takes every time he/she attends the project (including buildings, people, parks, and things that he/she sees often when walking to the meeting point).
2. Ask participants to think about the following questions and give them the opportunity to voluntarily share some of their responses in plenary discussion (or in small groups if documenters are available to take notes in each group):



- Is there any particular situation on your way to the project that makes you feel worried or confused? If so, what situation? And why?
- Is there any particular spot or place on your way to the project that makes you feel uncomfortable or afraid? (E.g. wall with graffiti, dark alley, lonely park, etc.) If so, what spot? And why?

⁸ Adapted from the "Keeping Children Safe Coalition Tool 4: "Children's participation in Child Protection", page 20.

- Is there any particular thing(s) on your way to the project that makes you think you could be physically hurt by it? (E.g. slippery steps, broken glasses on the floor, construction cranes, etc.) If so, what they are? And why?
 - Is there any particular person you meet or see on your way to the project that makes you feel unsafe and/or uncomfortable? If so, who is that? Or how does he/she look like? And why he/she makes you feel that way?
3. Then, participants are asked to think about the time they spend in the project itself and give them the opportunity to voluntarily share some of their answers about the following questions in plenary discussion (or in small groups if documenters are available to take notes in each group):
- Is there any particular activity in the project that makes you feel embarrassed and/or uncomfortable? If so, what activity? And why?
 - Is there any particular thing that you are asked to do when you attend the project that makes you feel unsafe? (E.g. grab heavy materials for the activities on your own, cleaning goods and sharp items, etc.) If so, what? And why?
 - Is there any particular question or request when you attend the project that makes you feel worried or confused? (E.g. stay alone with adults during or after the activities are finished, take pictures of yourself under adults or other children's request or supervision, etc.) If so, what kind of question or request? And why?
 - Is there any particular situation that happens or has happened in the project that makes you feel afraid? (E.g. fight between other children, specific attitudes or behaviours from adults or other children, etc.) If so, what situations? And why?
 - Is there any particular person in the project that makes you feel unsafe and/or uncomfortable? If so, who is that? Or how does he/she look like? And why he/she makes you feel that way?
4. Participants are asked to think about the following questions and to share their answers in plenary discussion (or in small groups if documenters are available to take notes in each group):
- What can we do as children in order to feel safe again?
 - What can adults do in order for us to feel safe again?
5. Based on their answers, encourage reflection on how children see the risks they have identified and the support system that could make them feel safer when attending and participating in the project.

4.2 Flowers of support⁹

Objective: To enable children to identify the groups of people (stakeholders) they think they can count on when in a situation in which they feel unsafe and afraid.

Time needed: 60 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper or coloured cardboard, markers, pens.

Used with: Groups of children. Children may work in mixed gender groups or they may continue to work in girls' and boys' groups. Can use with children aged 8 years and older.

Practical steps:

1. Participants are split in small groups of five and are given the explanation that they will have the opportunity to make a big flower to share their views and suggestions about what different groups of people can do to make them feel safe.
2. The first step is to identify the main groups of people (stakeholders) who can help to make them feel safe. Each group of people should have their own petal. Therefore, ask children to reflect on what groups of people they consider as a source of protection and to write down (or draw) their answers using separate petals for each group. (E.g. parents or caregivers, friends, teachers, and staff).
3. Participants are asked to think about what other groups of people should be added to the flower, and a new petal should be added for each new group of people identified as a secondary source of protection.
4. Then participants are asked to think and discuss about what each of these groups of people should do in order to make children feel safe. Their answers should be recorded in each petal accordingly.
5. Individually, participants are asked to think about what group of people they go to first when problems or unsafe situations arise, and to place one sticker or stone for whichever petal/group of people they selected.



⁹ Adapted from the "It's Time to Talk: Children's views on Children's work" toolkit. O'Kane, C., Barros, O., Meslaoui, N. (2016).

6. Individually, participants are asked to think about what group of people they go to last when problems or unsafe situations arise, and to place the other sticker or stone for whichever petal/group of people they selected.
7. The votes are counted to identify which groups of people children go to the most and least when problems or unsafe situations arise. A reflection could take place together with the participants to explore alternatives to share their messages with the stakeholders that were highlighted in the voting.

4.3 Red, amber and green traffic lights¹⁰

Objective: To enable children to reflect and identify the dos and don'ts of adults' behaviour when in contact with children.

Time needed: 60 minutes

Materials: Three large circles: one red, one amber/yellow/, and one green. Pens, markers, and post-its.

Use with: Groups of children. Children may work in mixed gender groups or they may continue to work in girls' and boys' groups. Can use with children aged 8 years and older.

Practical steps:

1. Participants are given with an explanation of the regular understanding of traffic lights and that together with them the facilitator is going to build the meaning of each of the traffic light colours.

Note for facilitators: If children are not familiar with what a traffic light is, we encourage you to use happy/sad faces to carry out this activity (see images below).



2. The overall group is split in three smaller groups.

¹⁰ Adapted from A Toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation: How to measure the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation. Save the Children. Lansdown, G. & O'Kane, C. (2014).

3. This activity works like a carousel with three different stations for each of the traffic light colours (red, amber/yellow, and green), where red represents adults' attitudes/behaviours that make them feel very unsafe; amber/yellow represents adults' attitudes/behaviours towards children that they do not like;¹¹ and green represents adults' attitudes/behaviours that make them feel very safe.

Note for facilitators: If happy/sad faces were used instead of a traffic light, please adapt the questions accordingly.

4. Before each group goes through each of the stations, the facilitator is going to ask participants to think about every time they attend the project and the adults they interact with while being there.

5. Participants are asked to answer the questions placed in each station according to the colour (see step 3) and to write down (or draw in case they cannot write) their answers on the big cardboard placed in each station. Children could also use post-its to answer the questions in each station.

6. The facilitator places all the three colours together and discuss with the participants what other elements were not included. If there are elements of the code of conduct that participants did not include, the facilitators may role play a situation that simulate the conduct and ask children to guess the situation and decide where to place it (whether in red, amber, or green).



4.4 Body mapping¹²

Objective: To explore children's views on the ideal profile of a Child Protection Focal Point.

Time needed: 45-60 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper, pens, crayons, markers.

Used with: Groups of children, ideally in small focus groups with similar age and gender. Can use with children aged 5 years and older.

Note for facilitators: This activity should be facilitated in separate groups of girls and boys aged 5-7 years, 8-12 years or 13-17 years bringing together five to ten children. Due to sensitivity of issues and discussions related to sexual reproductive body parts, this exercise does not include explicit questions related to such body parts. However, if children directly discuss issues of sexual harassment, sexual abuse or sexual experience their responses will be recorded in a sensitive way and with careful consideration of the best interest of the child.

¹¹ These could be adults' attitudes/behaviours that children dislike but that they could tend to ignore either because they do not feel uncomfortable enough to share with others, or because children do not think it was on purpose even if they did not like it.

¹² Adapted from the "It's Time to Talk: Children's views on Children's work" toolkit. O'Kane, C., Barros, O., Meslaoui, N. (2016).

Practical steps:

1. Participants are split in small groups of maximum five according to their ages and gender.
2. Each group receives flipchart paper. A volunteer will be asked to lie on the sheets so that the shape of his/her body may be drawn around. If a girl volunteers it is important that other girls draw her body shape. If a boy volunteers another boy will be asked to draw his body shape. Note: if children hesitate to volunteer, then either a body shape can be drawn freehand or the facilitator could volunteer for their body shape to be drawn around.
3. In each group the children are encouraged to sit around the 'body map'. A vertical line will be drawn down the middle of the body map, so that one side represents a happy child = things that make them feel safe; and the other side represents a sad child = things that make them feel unsafe.
4. Participants are briefly introduced to what a child protection focal point is, linked to the reflection of the previous exercise (talking map) on the role of adults in making them feel safe. An additional explanation is given so that participants know that they will be asked to think about certain characteristics that they think this person should or should not have, and to record their answers using the body parts. Depending on their age and writing skills, either the activity can be facilitated with one facilitator noting down children's responses, or children can write their responses on small pieces of paper and put them on the body map.
5. Participants are asked the following questions in order to explore their views on the ideal profile of a child protection focal point:

- **The head**

What knowledge do you think this person could have that would make you feel happy/comfortable/safe or sad/uncomfortable/unsafe?

What thoughts could that person have that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **The eyes**

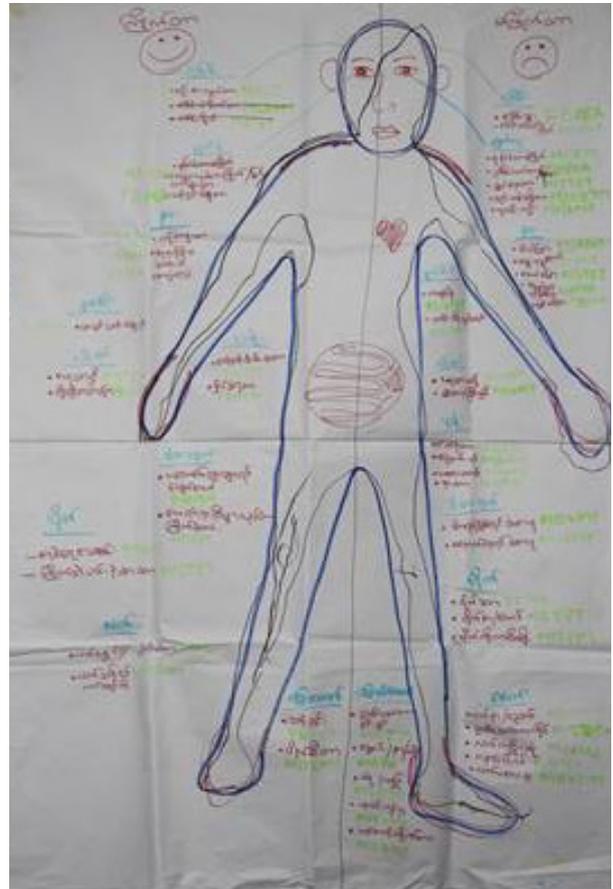
How that person could see you, that would make you feel happy or sad?

What things could that person show to you that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **The mouth**

How that person could talk to you that would make you feel happy or sad?

What things could that person ask you to say that would make you feel happy or sad?



- **The ears**

How that person could listen to you that would make you feel happy or sad?

What things could that person ask you to listen to that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **The shoulders**

What duties/responsibilities that person could have that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **The heart**

What reactions and attitudes that person could have that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **The hands and arms**

What that person could do or not do that would make you feel happy or sad?

What materials/things/objects that person could carry in his/her hands that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **The legs and feet**

Where that person could go that would make you feel happy or sad?

Where that person could ask you to go that would make you feel happy or sad?

- **Overall body**

How that person could be dressed that would make you feel happy or sad?

How does your body react when you feel happy/safe/comfortable or sad/scared/uncomfortable?

6. The body maps will be placed in a gallery display so that the key findings can be shared and discussed in plenary (including similarities and differences between the body maps).

4.5 Footsteps¹³

Objective: To enable children to determine the key stages of a reporting process and to explore child-friendly feedback mechanisms.

Time needed: 45-60 minutes

Materials: A set of four large footsteps in four different colours per group, post-its, pens, and a large goal sign of “successful communication.”

Used with: Groups of children. Children may work in mixed gender groups or they may continue to work in groups of girls and boys. Can be used with children aged 8 years and older.

¹³ Adapted from A Toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation: How to measure the scope, quality and outcomes of children's participation. Save the Children. Lansdown, G. & O'Kane, C. (2014).

Practical steps

1. Participants are introduced to the activity by determining first whether they consider it relevant or not to communicate to others when they feel unsafe and why. This reflection can be linked to the findings of the red, amber, and green traffic lights. The conclusion of this brief reflection should be posted somewhere far from participants.
2. Then, the facilitator is going to explain to the participants that in order for them to reach the goal of communicating to others when they feel unsafe, it is important to build a path so that they can identify what to communicate and how to communicate it.
3. Each group of participants receives four footsteps (in four different colours). They will be asked to use these four steps to reach the goal by reflecting on the following questions:
 - First footstep: Participants are asked to drop the first footstep on the floor and think about what they should communicate (What are the things/situations related to their safety that they think they should explain). All the group members should step on the footstep, while one of them writes down the answers on the post its before all together dropping the second footstep and move on.
 - Second footstep: Participants are asked to step all together on the footstep and think about whom they should communicate to (Who they should go to when they feel unsafe). All participants should step on the footstep while one of them writes down the answers on the post-its, before everyone together drops onto the third footstep and moves on.
 - Third footstep: Participants are asked to step all together on the third footstep and think about how they should communicate (What kind of mechanism they think could be used to communicate their concern (writing, suggestion box, one-on-one, feedback desk, drama or any other method the children come up with!). All participants should step on the footstep, while one of them writes down the answers on the post its, before all together dropping onto the fourth footstep and moving on.
 - Fourth footstep: Participants are asked to step all together onto the fourth footstep and the facilitator tells them about what happens after they communicate the situation (the person reads/listens to the child's concerns, discusses a plan with the child, communicates the principle of confidentiality to the child, and commits himself/herself to follow-up on the child's communication and solution).
4. Once all groups reach their fourth step, ask all the participants to take a last step to the centre of the room where the large sign of "successful communication" is placed.
5. Encourage reflection on the contributions of the groups for each of the first three footsteps, the challenges faced by the children while moving along the steps and answering the questions, and the importance of communicating their concerns when they experience a situation that makes them feel unsafe.

