

Working with Children and Young People: A Quick Guide for Frontline Staff



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The realization of the provisions of the Convention requires respect for the child's right to express his or her views and to participate in promoting the healthy development and well-being of children. This applies to individual health-care decisions, as well as to children's involvement in the development of health policy and services.

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**(2009 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
General Comment 12: 98. CRC/C/GC12)**

This Guide aims to raise awareness of the responsibilities of all frontline staff in relation to their work with children and young people. Outlined below are examples of how you can ensure your practice is in keeping with relevant policies, procedures, protocols and guidelines.

More details are available from www.hse.ie/go/workingwithchildren

- **UN Convention on the rights of the child 1989**
- **The National Children's Strategy 2000 - 2010**
- **Agenda for Children's Services 2008**
- **National Strategy for Service User Involvement in the Irish Health Service 2008-2013**
- **HSE Policy on Engaging Children in Service Planning, Design, Development, Delivery and Evaluation 2009**

Why Involve Children and Young People?

- It is children and young people's right and it is national and organisational policy.
- Children and young people who understand the service you are giving them are likely to have a more positive outcome than those who don't.
- It leads to better service for children, young people and their families and to more fulfilled staff.

When?

- Children and young people's participation is an ongoing process from first to final contact. Additionally you should involve them when:
 - planning times for their appointments
 - reviewing your service or planning a service development
 - checking the child/youth-friendliness of your building etc.

How?

- Question your own beliefs about children and young people.
- In all communication use clear and simple (not patronising but jargon free) language.
- Welcome their views and reassure them that being critical of a service will not mean that they will be refused a service.

- Let them know that they can ask their parent or another responsible adult to ask questions or make comments on their behalf.
- Be mindful of the needs, rights and responsibilities of parents/guardians who influence and are impacted by your interaction with the child or young person.

For information on consent, confidentiality and specific methodologies:

www.hse.ie/go/workingwithchildren

What can you do?

You Can Be Clear

- Introduce yourself and explain your role.
- Check that they know why they are meeting you and who has given consent for the contact. Clarify what is confidential and what information may be shared and with whom.
- Never promise to keep a secret which relates to a child's safety or welfare.
- Let them know what records you keep, who has access to their records and how they can see their records (ideally offer to show them their file/chart).

- Be clear about the limits of your relationship. It is important to build up trust but, do not offer anything that cannot be delivered or maintained. Remember, the child/young person may have mixed experiences of relationships developed with service providers and other adults.

You Can Be Consistent

- Whenever possible meet a child or young person in the same room and involve the same staff.
- Always remind the child/young person what happened the last time you met, check how they have been and let them know the purpose of this meeting/visit and of any tests or procedures.
- When they are leaving, ask them if they have any questions, concerns or suggestions. Use open ended questions for this. You could ask for their advice for how you might deal with other children/young people coming to your service.

You Can Listen, Discuss, Act, Feedback

- Every time a child/young person makes a suggestion, give it careful consideration.

- Explore the feasibility of suggestions together and consider whether there are alternative, creative and feasible ways of addressing the intention behind the suggestion.
- If relevant pass on to service managers and ensure that it is given due consideration. Put it on your team agenda.
- Always feed back to the child/young person what has happened to their suggestions.

You Can End Well

- When your work with a child/young person is coming to an end, let them know well in advance.
- Go through with them why you have worked together and the work you have done.
- If the child or young person is moving to another service, think about the best way to do this.
 - Could you introduce them to someone from the new service?
 - Let them know what they should do if they are worried about needing your service again.
 - Make it easy for them to make contact and ensure reception staff are appropriately prepared for such contacts.

- Take responsibility for ensuring that all transitions are planned for as part of the care provided by your service. It is important that there are appropriate protocols developed within and between services to enable the child and young person to move from one service to another in a supportive way.
- Ask them if there is any other help/information they need from you or any other health service. If so, refer to the appropriate service.

You Can Ensure Best Practice

- Always demonstrate evidence that changes have been brought about through children and young people's involvement.
- Alongside ongoing processes of involvement you may wish to set up structures such as, for example, consumer panels. Only put in place participation structures that can be supported and maintained. Children and young people should only be invited to participate in such structures if they are given a clear mandate and opportunity for direct impact/change.

- Avail of training where possible. Useful resources on best practice and specific guidelines can be found on:

www.hse.ie/go/workingwithchildren

Make children and young people aware of appropriate channels for feedback and complaints:

Your Service Your Say provides practical information for anyone (including children and young people) wishing to make a comment, compliment or complaint about health services received in Ireland and for those working to involve people in the design, development and delivery of health and social services.