

Childhood Bereavement Network

Guidelines for Best Practice in Participation

These guidelines are based on consultations with children and young people at the Jigsaw project and with Childhood Bereavement Network members. They are aimed at professionals, children, young people, parents and carers who work within and are supported by bereavement services.

Bereavement services offer children, young people, families and adults a range of opportunities which enable them to be part of a safe environment where they feel able to express themselves, feel respected, listened to, and valued. Enabling others to address their grief and gain support is about assessing their needs and encouraging them to participate in their care and bereavement process.

What is participation?

The use of different terminology can make the concept of participation a confusing one. Participation is often believed to be a process of asking people what they think about a topic, but this activity is better defined as consultation and represents only one of the possibilities of participation. There are different models of participation; each is valid and very different in terms of the methods used, outcomes for communities and commitment to ongoing involvement.

Consultation might involve asking children and young people to help with ideas for specific things such as designing posters, discussing a specific issue and using their feedback to go into a policy document or book.

Participation in its wider sense is similar to user involvement. It is about asking children and young people what they think and developing their

words into actions, for example asking them where they would like to go for a residential weekend and what kind of activities they would like to do, and then enabling them to see their ideas realised in their weekend away. Children and young people can be involved in a range of activities in which they help to make decisions and changes to the services they use or the communities they live in, for example becoming a 'buddy' to other peers or being part of an advisory group.



Participation is a journey, not a tick box exercise; it requires a change of culture. To create and develop a culture of children and young people's participation requires trust, respect and ongoing commitment to the process of change that it will involve. Participation is about developing a community ethos which values the views of others, celebrates differences, encourages discussion and works together in partnership to involve everybody.

Child centred services prioritise participation and work within a community model which involves the wider community, listens to the voices of all and acts on decisions made by children, young people and other community members about the things that affect their lives.

Why should we encourage children and young people to participate?

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children and young people have a right to be involved in making decisions that affect them.

Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

Children and young people can only participate in developing bereavement services if they a) are encouraged to do so and b) are involved in a service which actively listens, considers opinions and takes agreed actions. *'We help decide where to go we've been to the farm, cinema and even stock car racing.'*

A service which encourages participation is flexible, able to learn and evolve. There are different levels of engagement and some services will be more confident about participation than others. Be clear about where you are starting from and what you hope to achieve.

Participation works best when children and young people are given clear information on what they can inform and help to change.

Children and young people are a valuable resource to professionals; they are experts in their field and know what they want and need. Participation of children in developing the service they use leads to a better quality, more relevant provision, which is child centred. *'Giving other people information about grief helps you understand how you feel and also tells them about how other children might feel.'*

Children and young people want to be involved in making decisions that affect their lives. They want to help others and feel that they have made a difference. *'We help other children by being their buddy when they come here, sometimes it's helpful when you don't want to talk to an adult. It really helps you to know that you're making a difference.'*

Participation empowers children and young people and helps them to manage the process of grief. It enables them to develop their confidence, self-esteem, emotional health and well being of them as a whole person.

Participation can be an everyday part of the work that a service does with children. Empowering children to be involved in making decisions which affect them, and developing a safe environment where they can ask for help and trust and respect for each other is a central ethos.

Seeing other young people participate in different aspects of service planning inspires their peers and engages them in the development process. Seeing active participation in progress helps to validate the service's commitment to hearing children's voices and involving them in taking their work forward. *'I talked to my buddy about the other things he does here and it made me*

want to get more involved. He goes to conferences and tells adults all about us and what we need. I want to do that too.'

The process of participation engages children and young people in normalising their grief. They enjoy meeting other children who have experienced the same kind of things as them. With the support of peers they feel able to turn a negative experience into a positive experience. *'It really helps to get children together who have experienced the same thing. You're part of a group instead of being on your own and you make new friends who understand you.'*

Participation is an ongoing process. Activities need to be creative and empowering and should encourage children and young people to re-engage in decision making in the future. Re-visiting decisions, policies and procedures is an important part of valuing their work and showing that you are committed to listening to them.

Participation helps children and young people to make decisions in PARTNERSHIP with adults.

Developing a culture of participation

- Every service is different and will have a different culture of participation. In reviewing participation in your service it is important to be clear about why you are doing it, what you want to achieve and if it is achievable within your current ethos.
- Talk to staff about how you want to approach participation and realise that some people may feel uncomfortable about involving children and young people in making big decisions. Give your staff plenty of time to think about and discuss what the changes will mean for them. Remember that participation is not just a tick box exercise: it is a process of change and development.
- Ask children and young people how they feel about participation and how and what they would like to participate in e.g. youth forums or young people's participation councils. Help them to establish groups where children and young people act as advisors and ambassadors, helping to review and develop policies, procedures and activities. Remember that not all children and young people will want or feel able to participate, but keep the door to participation open to them: they may choose to join in at a later date.

- Hold a consultation event with all staff, service users, children and young people to develop a participation policy and procedures that are right for your service. Ask the group to think about what participation means to them, how they would like the service to be developed, how they can be involved in the process and what training and support children and young people might need to participate fully.
- Be specific in setting out what is available for children and young people to affect. Don't make promises that can't be kept. Children need to feel they have made a difference and had their voices listened to and suggestions acted upon. Just as important is discussing why certain ideas can't be taken forward.
- Recruiting new staff is a process that affects everybody in the service, particularly service users. Train young people to participate in interview panels, making sure you have prepared them for the impact your questions and candidates' responses might have, or set up a children's panel to meet candidates as Jigsaw4u does. Young NCB (National Children's Bureau) members are part of interview and recruitment panels for all posts at the National Children's Bureau.
- Children and young people can also participate in advisory groups or management committees. Through these posts they can have a meaningful input into the development and delivery of the service. Advisory groups and committee members may be part of recruitment, training, policy and practice development, publicity and service delivery.
- Group work and 1:1 are both effective ways of engaging children and young people in participation. Discuss with them what is best for you both and where they would feel most comfortable. Ideas from 1:1 work can easily feed into group work and vice versa.
- Music, arts and drama provide an invaluable avenue of self-expression. These methods of expression are sometimes easier than asking direct questions that they may feel pressured into answering in a certain way. Posters, website design, newsletters, your shout walls, raps and poetry all offer great ways for children to get their views across.
- Develop a web page or message board on the service's website, involving children and young people in design, layout and content.
- Create film projects that enable children to talk about how they feel about specific parts of the service and what is important to them. The video can be used as part of a training programme for new staff, which could involve young people as trainers.
- Develop partnership panels with the wider community to create local support networks that:
 - a) offer children and young people the opportunity to learn about and influence other services,
 - b) raise awareness of bereavement issues locally,
 - c) develop local awareness of children and young people's involvement.
- Hold competitions to develop resources for the local community for example leaflets and posters about the service, business cards with contact details and service information on that can be picked up in local supermarkets or sent out to schools.

Participation in Practice

The Candle Project, South-East London

The Candle Project, based at St Christopher's Hospice, provides bereavement support for children and young people in south east London. It offers individual, family and group counselling for children, young people and their parents or carers when someone close to them has died. The project also provides a specialist training, advice and consultancy service to schools and other agencies working with children and young people facing bereavement.

Young people from Candle have been involved in creating a film with the Childhood Bereavement Network on the needs and experiences of bereaved young people. Candle is setting up a young people's forum to give feedback on the service. Project workers will be training a number of young people to work as facilitators and mentors with the forum, running consultation exercises and encouraging participation from other young people. The service hopes that this will result in more open and increased feedback than if project staff were leading the sessions.

Jigsaw4u, Surrey

Jigsaw provides telephone and email, guidance and support services to children; young people; parents & other caregivers; teachers & schools; and other professionals. The service provides a

range of 1-to-1 support for 2-18 years and also group activities for 4-18 years.

Children and young people from Jigsaw4u have been involved in creating a film with the Childhood Bereavement Network on the needs and experiences of bereaved children. They have also played an advisory role in developing these guidelines, which are now being used as a national resource. In summer 2003, a consultation was held with children involved in the project looking at participation, what it meant, what it achieved and what they liked about it. Their voices can be heard throughout these guidelines. The young people at Jigsaw4u are also part of the editorial team for their in-house magazine 'Our lives'. www.jigsaw4u.org.uk

Winston's Wish, Gloucestershire

Winston's Wish offers a range of services aimed at developing a community support model. The service offers a range of support for children, young people, their families, professionals and other community members from 1-to-1 support work, group activities, information, guidance and support via a Family Line, an email service and an interactive website.

Winston's Wish website offers bereaved children and young people opportunities to engage online through a range of creative and interactive web pages. The pages offer a wealth of engaging interactive and participatory activities and are simply headed: see, say, ask, play, talk, try and remember. Young people can log-on to the website and be supported by professionals and their peers through the message board. The 'skyscape of memories' page is interactive and encourages young people to place a star in the sky to remember their special person, share their memories and stories with others as well as viewing other young people's stories. www.winstonswish.org.uk

RD4U website, Manchester

RD4U is a completely interactive web based participation project. The website has been designed, developed and built by young people aged 16 - 25 years old. The development group works with a supervisor to answer private emails, manage and answer messages on the interactive message board in addition to writing pages for the site. The first group meeting was held in February

2003 and involved a group of young people in a consultation on how the website should be developed. Since that meeting the group has expanded to involve other young people and is a great example of involving, listening and acting on ideas.

www.rd4u.org.uk

Resources

Participation: Spice it up

Save the Children 2002, £18.95. This book offers well-established creative practical tools for engaging children and young people in consultation activities.

Building a Culture of Participation: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation

DfES Publications 2003, Free. This Handbook and Research Report written by NCB and PK Research Consultancy for DfES highlights the reasons why we must encourage children and young people to participate as well as offering practical techniques.

Young People and Citizenship

Vanessa Rogers, National Youth Agency, £14.95. A resource handbook aimed at professionals working with young people aged 11- 16 to promote participation, consultation and the values of active citizenship.

The Good Games Book, Teambuilding, Icebreakers, Evaluations and Endings, Act Out A series of books by Vanessa Rogers, National Youth Agency 2004, £6.50 each. This series of five books has been designed to encourage creative thinking when working with 11 - 16 year olds encouraging inclusion and participation.

Global Glue, Common Threads 2003

£14.00 (Available to order from Common Threads on 07000 785215). A CD ROM and activity pack aimed at those working with 10 - 18 year olds. Designed to encourage children and young people to think about themselves, the world they live in and the ways in which they can make a difference through participation.



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