

A photograph of children playing with bubbles, framed by a large red circular graphic. The children are smiling and reaching for the bubbles. The background is a lush green garden.

CHILD IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOGETHER WITH CHILDREN



Save the Children

Practical guide
for carrying out
child impact assessment
together with children

Come and be inspired!

This guide was inspired by a passion to promote the rights of the child and especially children's right to participation. We, the authors, have worked for a long time in various services for families with children, in projects that develop the participation of children or in advocacy work that promotes the rights of the child. Over the years, we have learned a lot from children about what kind of encounters and ways of participation are meaningful to them and how capable they are of communicating their thoughts if they only have the opportunity and a safe place for it. We are also convinced that, by consulting and taking account of children's views, we can make better and more influential decisions on children's issues.

This guide was partly inspired by the observation that existing materials on child impact assessment do not provide sufficient guidance on the consultation of children as part of a comprehensive impact assessment. In cooperation with municipal actors, in particular, we have heard both excellent examples of successful and well-established practices and requests for more practical and concrete tools that are needed to consult children's views. Thanks for the creation of

this guide are therefore due to our partners and especially to the municipalities that provided comments at different stages of writing. Thanks to the Future Social and Health Care Centre Services of the Tampere Region (Pirkanmaan Tulevaisuuden sotekeskus) project and the municipalities involved, as well as the cities of Jyväskylä and Oulu. We also received valuable comments from the Vamlas Foundation for young people with disabilities and the Youth Council of Tampere Region. We greatly appreciate them! We would also like to express our special thanks to all the children and young people with whom we have learnt good ways of doing things.

We hope that the guide will inspire and encourage you to carry out child impact assessment together with children.

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Introduction

This guide is intended for adult professionals who consult children's views as part of the decision-making process. It focuses on the part of the child impact assessment process that involves consulting children. The aim of the guide is to pay particular attention to ensuring that:

- the consultation of children of all ages, in particular young children aged between 3 and 12, is carried out in a child-friendly manner; and
- children in particularly vulnerable positions and life situations are taken into account as part of child impact assessment.

Children¹ refers to all children and young people under 18 years. Of course, the needs and abilities of children at the opposite ends of the age scale are very different. Age is not the only determining factor, as each child develops at their own individual pace. In addition, a particular vulnerability does not determine the child's ability and skills to express their own views. It is more a question of the adult's willingness to hear all kinds of children. Interacting with them is

therefore not necessarily all that different from what it is generally good to take into account when consulting children. Special attention should be paid, however, to intentionally approaching all kinds of children, creating a safe framework for consultation, and preparing for children's multi-sensory narrative.

This is not a comprehensive guide for carrying out child impact assessment. There are already high-quality guides and studies available in Finland that focus on carrying out child impact assessment in a variety of ways. Among other things, a comprehensive presentation on child impact assessment¹ was prepared in the Programme for Change in Child and Family Services². Child impact assessment is also part of UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative, which provides guidance for carrying out the assessment³, and the church, for example, has a guide for impact assessment⁴.

1 <https://thl.fi/fi/tutkimus-ja-kehittaminen/tutkimukset-ja-hankkeet/lapsi-ja-perhepalveluiden-muutosohjelma-lape-/lapessa-julkaistua>

2 https://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/136377/PP_LAVA_prosessikuvaus_vihri_lape_ilme.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

3 <https://www.lapsiystavallinenkunta.fi/teemapaketit/aluksi-lapsen-etu-on-ensisijainen/miten-lapsivaikutusten-arviointi-toteutetaan>

4 <https://evl.fi/documents/1327140/39461555/LAVA-ohjeistus/9308d811-9e19-0cbe-b82e-560082043d97>

These guides bring together basic information about child impact assessment and how to do it. They state that the key stages of the child impact assessment are:

1. Identifying the need
2. Planning the process
3. Mapping, collection and consultation of information
4. Description of the effects
5. Taking a decision, communicating it and monitoring the effects of the decision.

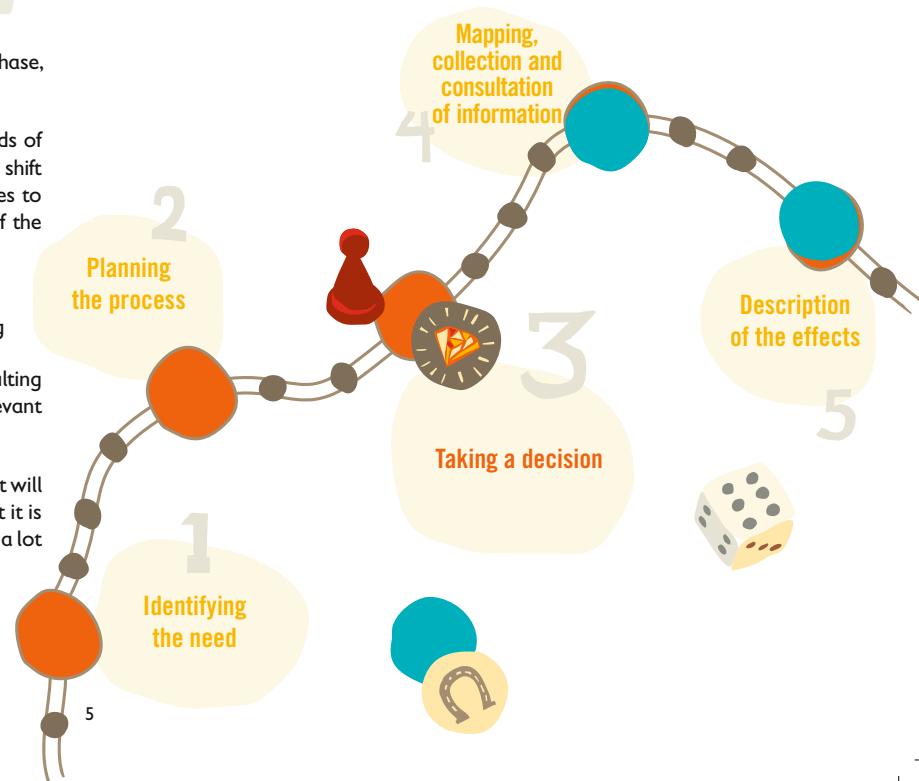
This guide focuses on the information gathering and consultation phase, and in particular on the consultation of children.

A recent study⁵ looked at the current state and development needs of child impact assessment. It argued that there should be a greater shift from consulting experts to involving children. This guide contributes to this need by increasing the capacity to consult children as part of the assessment.

Children do not always need to be consulted separately if there is already up-to-date information that can be used. When assessing the best interests of children, as many aspects as possible must be considered. Child impact assessment is not the same as consulting children; it is a broader approach to gathering and analysing relevant information.

Ensuring the best interests of children and child impact assessment will always take some time and effort on the part of the assessors, but it is worth the effort. Carefully conducted child consultations can bring a lot

of joy to all parties, create experiences of success and shared learning, and lead to ethically sound and effective decisions. Participation is children's right, but it is much more as children's experience: the opportunity to be themselves, to be seen, heard and loved as they are, to experience a sense of belonging and to influence things that are important to them. (Tulensalo, Kalliomeri & Laimio 2021.)



5 https://owalgroup.com/asiakascaset/lapsivaikutusten_arviointi/

Premise for dealing with children in child impact assessment

MAPPING OF INFORMATION AND TIMELY INCLUSION OF CHILDREN

During child impact assessment, information can be collected from both the adult and child perspectives. Adult perspective refers to the assessment of available information on children and the best interests of children from the perspective of an adult. Child perspective refers to the information produced by children themselves, as well as children's own perspective on the matter that the decision concerns. (Alila 2011.)

It is also important to bring together information from different sources. In order to make child impact assessment multifaceted, it is essential to clarify the following issues at the planning stage:

- What information already exists on the matter to be decided?
- For example, have children already been consulted and has information been collected from them about the municipality's plans, programmes and strategies?
- What kind of surveys or studies have already been carried out to gather the views of children (for example, school health surveys, Child Friendly Cities Initiative mapping, surveys in schools or hobbies)?

- Have the children themselves raised the issue, for example, through student councils, youth councils or other tools for involving children in the municipality (such as electronic initiative channels)?
- Is it still necessary to know the thoughts, experiences and views of children on this particular issue?
- Have studies been carried out to provide suitable information for the decision?
- Has public debate, for example in social media or local news, highlighted any shortcomings that should be addressed more closely?
- How is the wide-ranging knowledge of professionals and their views taken into account? Professionals working with children and young people tend to have a good sense of how children and young people experience various services, for example.
- Is it also necessary to hear the views and experiences of parents?

At best, children's perspective is already involved in the plans guiding the activities and decision-making and their evaluation, so there is no such great need for separate children's consultations. If this approach is not

well established or if it is judged that children still need to be consulted in order to ensure that the best interests of children are served, it should be done. This is a statutory obligation for both the state and municipalities.

When compiling information, it is also good to stop and take a look at whether the information is sufficiently up-to-date and takes into account the perspectives of children from many backgrounds, different life situations and different ages. Many surveys may exclude, for example, young children or children in need of special support. It is also worth remembering that the experiences of children are always individual and there is no uniform group of children. Therefore, the determination of children's perspectives must be sufficiently diverse.

The consultation of children must be meaningful, not bogus. Here, 'meaningful' means gathering information and asking children about things that really matter to their lives and well-being. Children and young people should also have a genuine opportunity to influence the issues on which their views are consulted. The influence should not be limited in advance to things that are not genuinely important in children's lives.



*Different aspects of assessing the best interest of children.
The assessment of the best interest of children is always multifaceted.*

THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD GUIDE ALL ACTIVITIES WITH CHILDREN

When children's views are consulted as part of decision-making, it is important to ensure that this is done in a way that is respectful of children and appropriate for the purpose. The key principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child must be taken into account in the implementation methods. These principles guide all activities with children: hearing their views, making decisions and meeting with them. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child contains four general principles that should be real in the lives of all children:

1. No child is to be discriminated against.

This means that no one is excluded, bullied or called names. All children are equally important, valuable and equal. All children must be guaranteed good opportunities to be part of the community, to fulfil themselves, to be heard, to receive education, services and good care, and to lead a full life. This applies to all activities with children, including evaluation and decisions on which children need to be and can be consulted in the context of child impact assessment. For some children, special efforts are needed to ensure that they are taken into account and that their needs are heard. This is called positive discrimination.

2. The best interests of the child are realised.

This means that adults think about what is the best solution or decision for the child in all issues concerning children. The best interest of the child is not the same as the child's own opinion; adults must focus on the children's issue by listening and taking into account the children's thoughts and experiences. It is the adult's responsibility to ensure that they understand what it means to assess the best interests of the child. The adult must also ensure

that the best interests of the child are served and that the views of both adults and children on the matter at hand are taken into account. The purpose of child impact assessment is to ensure that the child's best interests are realised in the decisions.

3. The child is allowed to live, develop and grow.

Children must receive adequate food, care, education and adult protection. Children must be protected from all forms of violence, and adults must ensure that children have love, enough clothes and safe boundaries. In all countries of the world, children must be given these things so that they can feel good and have good conditions to grow. When children's opinions are asked for a decision, for example, they must feel safe and it must not cause them any harm or trouble. Play, leisure time and rest are also rights of the child, and they must be taken into account when dealing with children, for example, when listening to the views of children.

4. The child is allowed express their thoughts and opinions, and these must be taken into account.

The child is free to express their thoughts in all matters that are important to them. It is up to adults to listen to these and take them into consideration. Children know best what they think about things. They should be allowed to tell it to adults. However, children are not obliged to share their thoughts if they do not want to, and adults must never force them. It is important for adults, together with children, to think about how it would be easy for children to share their thoughts and experiences. Some children may need more help from an adult to express their opinion. All children's answers and views are equally valuable. In child impact assessment, it is important to tell the children how their views have been taken into account when making final decisions. Honesty is important, and adults must tell the children the truth about what the thoughts shared by the children affect.

KEY PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL LESSONS OF CONSULTING CHILDREN

Security

A sense of security consists of internal and external factors. For example, those present, the physical space, the topic covered, the life situation of the child and the course of the day all influence the child's sense of security. In order to understand the child's experiences and needs, it is important to create a safe atmosphere. They can only share their thoughts when they feel safe. The child must never be harmed, worried or threatened due to having participated in discussions and expressed their views.

Safe space

Create a safe space. Consider whether it is better for children to be in a familiar or unfamiliar place. A safe space does not contain dangerous objects, involves positive or neutral emotions and, for example, has a soundscape and lighting that have been considered from the perspective of children. You can always ask children if the place feels good or if there is something that disturbs their concentration, scares them or causes anxiety.

Whose presence is good?

Think about the people present and the dynamics of the group. Consultation can be carried out by an adult who is previously known or unknown to the children. They can also be consulted by other children and young people, such as experience experts and student unions. Children are different in terms of how quickly they become familiar and how nervous they are in new



situations. If the topic is sensitive, the presence of a familiar and safe adult can be helpful. On the other hand, it can also be easier to share their experiences with a stranger, and the presence of a familiar adult may prevent them from sharing sensitive information. However, for a young child, the presence of a parent, for example, may be important. Sometimes parents can help translate the child's experience into a form others can understand, which was used in the following example:

The Central Ostrobothnia Joint Municipal Authority for Social and Health Services, Soite, carried out a child impact assessment on the separation of children's and young people's emergency services from joint emergency services with adults. In the case of young children, it was decided to do a survey of the parents, because the parents accompanied the children on emergency visits. At best, parents are able to tell about their young child's experiences because they know their child best. Information on school-age children was received from a previous children's service walk and related development ideas. Information on young people was obtained by using participatory methods (such as image exercises) and by reflecting on experiential knowledge and needs.⁶

Sensitive topics

It is good to be able to tell about a sensitive topic anonymously or without other listeners. Mutual trust should be built, as it may enable the child to share even painful experiences. The child can also be offered the opportunity to externalise things, such as by reflecting on situations through an imaginary character. The child should be allowed to end the task as soon as they wish.

It is good to ensure that there are enough adults present in case a child needs personal attention or wants to talk to an adult afterwards.

Children can consider different things sensitive, and they can have experiences that are unforeseeable. Therefore, when planning the consultation, it must always be ensured that the situation is safe for the child.

Topics that arouse emotions in adults

Adults can have strong opinions and views on what would be a good decision. Sometimes this can lead to children being pressured and prepared against their knowledge and will to participate in child impact assessments, or told not to participate in them. It is important to ensure that the consultation does not put too much pressure or responsibility on children as a result of adult activities or lead to a situation where they experience discrimination on the basis of their views.

Information on what is happening

If possible, provide information about what is happening in advance or at the latest during the meeting. Age-appropriate communication, positivity, concise expression and the use of images are important regardless of the channel through which information is transmitted to children. It is also important to provide honest information on what children can and cannot influence. It is good to say out loud that children's views are not the only factor influencing the decision to be made.

6 Read more: https://www.soite.fi/media/Lasten_paivystyksen_LAVA_Soite.pdf/format-pdf

Tasks in which you must not fail

Plan the consultation so that each child can participate with their own skills and get the support they need. The consultation situation must not lead to experiences of failure or inferiority.

Common rules and tackling bad behaviour

It is the responsibility of the adult to ensure that the consultation situation is safe for every child in the group. The adult must intervene if the children behave unpleasantly towards each other. Better than intervening is to anticipate situations and create, together with the children and young people, a code of good conduct to which both children and adults commit themselves. For example, "All ideas are good!" is an important rule. In school classrooms and day-care groups, it is worth considering whether it is easy to express an opinion in the group without being ridiculed or bullied. For example, children often find that a comfortable atmosphere can be created by easy games for getting acquainted, the presence of an adult, tasty treats and common rules.

If there is any concern

If a child says something during the consultation which makes the adult concerned about the safety or well-being of the child, it is the duty of the adult to ensure that the child receives the help they need.

Voluntariness

Participation should always be voluntary for the child. The possibility of refusal is part of the experience of participation. Even if the child initially refuses to do the task, they often



eventually participate when the adult gives them the opportunity to choose the ways of participation and does not force it.

Tell the children about the opportunity to participate and influence things

Let the children know that they have a great opportunity to share their thoughts and views on a topic that adults are deciding on. Explain that the children's opinions will be taken into account in decision-making and that everyone's thoughts and experiences are valuable. However, tell them that everything is voluntary. Also be honest about the fact that adults will make the decisions and the children's participation does not mean that things will happen exactly as the children suggest.

Do not pressure or force

Never pressure or force a child to participate. Encouragement and motivation, on the other hand, are desirable. Some children express their thoughts in many words, while for some, choosing a single image may be a sufficient way to express their views. The way a child participates is affected by the approach to the activity, the child's personality and the importance of the topic to the child. In many cases, children are enthusiastic about participating when they are also given the opportunity to refuse.

Give the child options to make choices within the tasks

Give the child some room to manoeuvre regarding the activity. Even if you have planned the situation and the methods used in it, it is good to let the child choose how to do it. Consider and listen to whether the child finds it more comfortable to write, talk, draw, sing, play, rap or indicate the answers in images. Could the same task be done through gamification or using digital platforms? The same way does not work for everyone.



Equality

If possible, find out about the children's individual needs in advance so that you can take them into account. Make an effort to ensure that each child has the opportunity to participate and act in the situation with their own skills and in their own way. Meet the children without prejudice and do not assume that you know their views, for example, based on their life situation, appearance or characteristics. Often, attitude is key: believing that children of all kinds have something to say and thinking of ways to listen to them goes a long way.

Accessible space

Whether it is a physical space or a digital service, ensure its accessibility. Is the room accessible by wheelchair, and can the task be completed with the abilities of everyone present? Have children with sensory hypersensitivity been considered in terms of lighting, objects and instructions? Is it possible for the child to move around the space if they find it impossible to sit still? Is it possible for everyone who wants to participate to access and operate the digital service?

Support needed by the child

If you know that there is a child in the group who needs a certain kind of individual support, make sure that it is available. It can often be good for the child to have a familiar and safe adult to support

them. Sometimes the child's need for support is not known in advance, so there should be enough adults to give the children a genuinely equal opportunity to participate.

Illustrated material

Illustrated material should be used with children, as it helps many children to keep up. The child can use the images to return to what is happening and also to take initiatives. For example, the agenda of the meeting and often also the assignment should be illustrated. The Papunet image tool is easy to find on the Internet and allows you to quickly create an illustrated meeting agenda and assignments.

Multi-sensory narrative techniques

With a multi-sensory narrative, you can create opportunities for different children to participate. Not everyone likes to draw, some might be anxious of talking in a group, and others need to be able to move around while talking. Some are able to express themselves well, for example, through digital platforms by drawing on a tablet rather than on paper. With young or disabled children, activities and use of play often work better than sit-down assignments. Here, too, it is good to be open-minded and to find a suitable way together with the children and adults they are familiar with.

Open-minded attitude

Always treat children as children, even if they have a special characteristic or trait. Do not decide for the child in advance what they are capable or incapable of. Also invite children and young people who are not the first to get excited or seek to share their thoughts. In groups, keep track of whether you have noticed and paid at least a little attention to everyone present. Children say that if an adult does not even look at them at all, they feel that their contribution is not wanted.

Meaningful activities

It is important for children's participation that the activity is fun and important from a child's perspective. The same applies to adults: adults need to understand why the child's views are being listened to, and find a natural way to express themselves and communicate the subject so that it is linked to the child's experience.

There are many ways to make things meaningful – here are a few tips.

Consider age

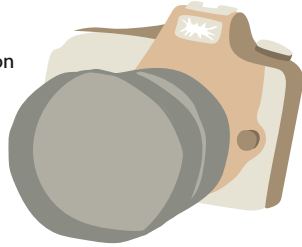
Children of the same age can like very different things, but often age gives a rough frame for the natural way of doing things. Young children often love to play, and young people may be eager to use tablets, phones, and game apps. However, sometimes things are the opposite of what you imagined.

Test with a child or young person you know

If you have children and young people in your social circle or family, test your idea with them. You may get good new ideas or find that something does not work.

Ask for support from people who work with children

Adults who work with children on a daily basis have a huge well of good ideas about operating methods children might like. Do not hesitate to ask adults who work with children for advice. Most people are happy when their expertise is appreciated.



Find out in advance what the children like

If possible, you should find out in advance what kind of things the children or young people in question like. Do they have any common interests that could be used for the task? Do the children like crafts, arts, physical activity, photography, games or talking? You can ask an adult familiar with the children or send a preliminary survey to the children. Of course, the group usually includes children whose interests vary.

Snacks, good equipment and thanks

Children and young people, without exception, remember good snacks, tools and thanks from adults. The thanks can be verbal or a nice moment spent together. You can thank young children by letting them choose a sticker from a treasure chest, and you can plan fun activities together with the group of children, such as a game session that takes place right after the tasks. Various prizes and draws may also be good incentives.

Be ready to change the plan and take a leap of faith.

Sometimes children and young people suggest other ways of doing things. Think about how you will react to them. Can you give up yours, or would it be a good idea to first fill out a questionnaire and then do something that the children or young people are excited about? Negotiations lead to good results.

Preparing to consult children

DESIRE TO GENUINELY REACH AND UNDERSTAND CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES

Consulting children is more than just a meeting and asking the child. Consultation is about reaching out to each child's own experience and increasing the adult's understanding.

Consultation is more than just answering given questions. You can also consult children who do not speak or write, for example. It is a question of understanding the child's experiences, which requires that children are invited to describe issues related to their everyday life and well-being with the skills and ways that are natural for them. The valuable and unique information provided by children is combined with and converses with the knowledge of adults and experts.

In child impact assessment, children may be consulted narrowly or extensively. It is clear that extensive consultation takes time. This is important to take into account when resourcing the planning phase. It is important to ensure that those who consult children have the knowledge and time to treat the children with respect and tact. Manageable, small-scale and high-quality implementation is preferable to extensive and careless consultation – it is better for the child, adult and decision-making.

It is not always necessary to develop new, detached forms of consultation – it is worth looking at methods that have been used in the past. In the following example, children were consulted in a child impact assessment through an annual satisfaction survey. Sometimes, adding a few related questions to a previous survey can be a great way to gain children's views on a topic.

In Jyväskylä, it was noted that disadvantaged families cannot necessarily afford after-school activities for young schoolchildren. This was the backdrop for the child impact assessment, which examined the views of children, parents and service providers. The children were given an annual satisfaction survey, for which some of the questions were made more specific and some were added in line with the year's theme. Keyword signs and smiley cards were used to support the survey. The survey showed that the after-school activities are important for most children, offering a place where they can spend time with friends, play and do recreational activities under adult guidance.

In the parents' survey, it was revealed that some disadvantaged families did not participate in the after-school activities because they could not afford them. The service providers had noticed that, in many cases, the children who were unable to attend the after-school activities due to their family's financial situation would have particularly benefited from the after-school activities. Through the child impact



assessment, it was concluded that equality is not realised at the present time and that it would be important to eliminate service fees for disadvantaged families.⁷

Although consulting children takes a lot of effort, it offers the opportunity to make better and ethically sustainable decisions and to prepare for potential negative impacts. The scarcer the resources are, the more important it is to take appropriate and ethically sustainable decisions. (Custodio 2016.)

WHERE CAN I REACH THE CHILDREN WHO ARE AFFECTED?

When you want to assess the impact on children with children, you must first reach the target group. The first step is to stop and think about which children are affected by the decision under discussion and where they can best be reached. In some situations, it is important to obtain targeted experience-based information from certain children. It is essential to always take into account the children whose lives may be especially affected by the decision. For example, adult turnover in services is particularly hard for children who do not have permanent safe adults in their life or who have experiences of insecurity related to their background. On the other hand, the establishment of large school units should be assessed from the point of view, in particular, of children who have difficulties with changes and large groups, or whose distance to school, for example in rural municipalities, would become considerably longer.

Children should be heard in the places where they spend time in everyday life:

- schools, day-care centres and afternoon activities, including special-needs classes and hospital schools, pupil welfare activities, children in institutional care
- recreational activities and leisure hangouts favoured by children and young people
- family services: maternity and child health clinics, family counselling centres, child welfare services
- regional meeting places: parks, wellness centres and shopping centres
- social media
- cultural activities: libraries, children's cultural centres, museums, cultural offerings
- activities and services provided by organisations: peer groups, meeting places
- events for children and young people
- activities offered by residents' associations to their members
- activities by housing companies.

Representative participatory structures, where children participate in advocacy work, may also have been created for children:

- youth councils
- children's parliaments
- student councils
- digital consultation channels.

⁷ Read more: <https://julkinen.jkl.fi:8082/ktwebbin/ktproxy2.dll?doctype=3&docid=989472&version=1>

In addition, there are various groups in which children encounter other children who have experienced similar things:

- children's peer groups
- experience expert groups.

Through representative groups and peer groups, we can also find children who have ideas for how to reach the views of as many and as diverse a group of children as possible. Children are the best experts on where to reach children, even in digital environments. Children can also be included as equals in the implementation of the consultation itself.

It is good to take into account parents as a way to reach children, especially in case of young children or children in need of special support. According to disability organisations, it is often difficult to reach children, and in addition to schools, day-care centres and hobbies, it is important to reach children through parents in, for example, social media peer groups and local active disability or family care organisations. It is also good to consult the parents to complement the views of the children because they often have an overall view of the child's service network. The network may be so extensive that children cannot perceive the whole, even though they can describe their own everyday life, needs and dreams.

The following section provides the best advice on how to invite children to express their thoughts when carrying out a child impact assessment. First, we focus on the ethical and practical aspects of consultation, followed by examples of ways in which children of different ages can be consulted in decision-making.



PLANNING THE OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY OF CONSULTATION

After you have decided to explore the views of children and young people in support of a decision and have found a channel through which to reach the children, it is time to consider how to prepare for the consultation. The first thing you should do is clarify the purpose of the consultation for yourself. After that, it is good to consider how to talk about the subject so that the children and young people can relate it to their own everyday life and understand what you want their views on.

For example, questions like “How should this service be developed?” or “Should the schools be merged or not?” are often too broad and abstract, and even adults would find them difficult to answer exhaustively. Such questions also overlook the fact that information can be obtained in ways other than through speaking and thinking, such as by observing children and by openly approaching their experiences and needs. So, try to think about how you could view the topic or theme through the eyes of a child. What kind of words and themes are involved from the perspective of the child's sphere of life?

In Jyväskylä, a child impact assessment was carried out on the restoration of the subjective right to day-care services. The assessors wanted to interview children, and it was decided that the interview would be conducted by an adult familiar to the child. The child's questionnaire consisted of smileys and colour scales (red, yellow and green), as well as illustrations of the child's day-care routines. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions. The topics covered included friendships, the length of the day-care day, rest periods, being able to play in peace, adults of the day-care centre, fulfilment of one's wishes and inclusion in games. This survey illustrates that children cannot be asked directly about a topic defined by adults (in this case, the subjective right to day-care services). Instead, the aim is to explore the children's thoughts in their everyday environment. In addition to gathering children's experiences of the subjective right to day-care services to support decision-making, the organisers of early childhood education received a lot of qualitative information about children's everyday lives in day care.⁸

When dealing with the theme and describing the goal, you may need to use concepts that are foreign to children. The glossary at the end of this guide contains examples of how they can be described to children. The descriptions are written especially with younger children in mind.

Once you know the purpose of the consultation, the themes and who information should be obtained from, it is time to choose the ways and methods of the consultation. Different methods require different preparations and amounts of time. For example, creating a good survey may require time and testing with children and young people in advance, but data aggregation is often easier than using creative methods. In preparation, it is also good to evaluate the use of time in different phases, so that the implementation is of high quality.



SELECT APPROPRIATE METHODS AND TOOLS

There are a lot of good tools for consulting children and young people. Different methods also provide different kinds of information. For example, surveys rarely provide answers to 'Why' questions. By drawing, the child can choose the angle from which to approach the topic, and a group discussion generates new insights in its participants..

⁸ Read more about child impact assessments in Jyväskylä: <https://www.jyvaskyla.fi/osallistu/osallisuus-paatoksenteossa/vaikutusten-ennakkoarviointi>

Do not hesitate to use methods that you yourself have found to be good and ones that the children are familiar with. The methods should always take into account the children's individual interests and needs. Tools that children are already familiar with often give you quicker access to the subject.

It is typical for children to use multi-sensory narration, which you should also take into account in the ways of doing things. Could you offer the children several ways to share their thoughts? You can also ask the children for help. Hold a vote, for instance: Would the children prefer to describe their thoughts by making up fairy tales or by drawing? How about photography or a survey?

In the following example, different age groups were taken into account with different consultation methods and questions.

The data collection of Huittinen's school network survey was diverse. Children in day care drew and told what a good day in day care is like. Different methods were used to determine what children with disabilities felt is important to them at school. Under the lead of the student union, groups of primary and secondary school pupils discussed, for example, what kind of school makes them feel good and what it would feel like to change schools. Adults gave opinions on three proposals and the quality of early childhood education and basic education in a survey. The youth council issued its own statement on the options.⁹

SELECT THE DOCUMENTATION METHOD

Different tools require different documentation. For example, when conducting an electronic survey, the information is saved automatically, but when recording conversations, documentation must be planned and the child and guardian must be asked for permission to record. The use of creative methods with children is a tried and tested practice, but requires careful documentation and prior planning.



⁹ Read more: <https://www.mll.fi/lapsemme-lehti/huittisten-hullu-onnistuminen/>
<https://thl.fi/documents/605877/3817914/Lotta+Mikkonen.pdf/a64c57f4-2069-4eca-b68d-39d2e8f2adc5>

Audio and video recording may sometimes be appropriate, but in most cases it is enough for an adult, alone or together with the children and young people, to write down the themes and ideas raised in the discussion. This should be done with the children's permission and in front of them. A simple way to document things in front of everyone is to take a large piece of paper and write themes and thoughts that emerge in the discussion. The notes can be reviewed at the end and supplemented together with the children. In a remote meeting, you can summarise the discussion in the chat box for everyone to see.

Use open-ended questions in discussions and ask for clarifications if necessary:

"Tell me more!"

"What does it mean?"

"What is in this picture?"

"I have never heard that word before, what does it mean?"

"I have never tried it, can you tell me what is particularly fun about it?"

"Do you want to tell me why it feels bad or stupid?"

"Do you have a tip for what to do in such a situation so that the child would feel better?"

"What kind of advice would you give to grown-ups?"

Where possible, use the words that the child uses. This is to ensure that you are talking about the same thing. In addition to what the children tell you, observe what they do, what they look at and how they may feel.

GIVE CHILDREN THE OPPORTUNITY TO PREPARE

Also offer the children the opportunity to prepare. This does not mean that the children have to do anything in advance – it is often enough to know that the children will be consulted on the topic X at a certain time. If you work with children on a daily basis and carry out the consultation yourself, this is naturally easy to do this by telling the child: "On Wednesday, we will talk about X!"

If you are a stranger to the children, you can send a short video greeting, a letter, or a message explaining:

1. When you will come to meet the children and young people
2. Why you are coming
3. What you plan to do and what the purpose of the meeting is

Knowledge supports participation and often relieves tension.

We adults have been thinking...

It has been a long time since we were children!

We want to know what is important to children. This way, we can make good decisions.

We would like to hear your thoughts...

We will come...

You do not need to know or do anything in advance.

In the meeting, we will draw and talk and look at pictures...

We look forward to meeting you!

The consultation should start with an introduction of the subject together and giving instructions. For example, an illustrated slide show is a suitable introduction. If there are multiple consultation groups and supervisors, material prepared in advance helps keep the introductions similar.

The following child impact assessment related to the merging of schools in Alajärvi is a good example of how children can be introduced to the topic in a child-friendly way using topic division and pictures:

The organisers of the pupil survey in Alajärvi were particularly concerned with how to implement it and explain the background without worrying the children. In addition, it was important that all children received the same orientation before the survey. For scheduling and resource reasons, it was not possible for discussions and queries to be conducted in all teaching groups by the same person. In order to alleviate the situation, a PowerPoint guide was provided to the pupils to ensure that they were introduced to the survey on an equal footing. The PowerPoint presentation provided the children with information about what was being influenced and why. The idea was that teachers would go over the guide with each pupil separately before the pupils responded.¹⁰

REMEMBER
THESE!

Checklist to support preparation:

- ✓ Ensure that you know what the purpose of the consultation is.
- ✓ Consider how the topic can be approached and broken down into a form suitable for children.
- ✓ Select one or more methods and make a backup plan. Acquire the tools you need for the consultation.
- ✓ Consider the number of children and identify any special needs in advance.
- ✓ Consider the appropriate number of adults and identify responsibilities and whether the adults have sufficient skills to interact with children.
- ✓ Plan how to obtain the necessary permissions to consult and document children.
- ✓ Plan a suitable documentation method already at this stage. This is to ensure that it is done with high quality.
- ✓ Think about how to prepare the children

¹⁰ Read more: <http://uusiep.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/lapsivaikutusten-arviointi-etela-pohjanmaalla.pdf>

<https://thl.fi/documents/605877/1449685/LAVA+oppilaiden+perehdytys+alajarvi.pdf/3f1f8f6f-9c44-48e9-8cee-9e64f903b801>

Interactions with children

TELL THE CHILDREN WHAT WILL HAPPEN

At the beginning of the meeting, it is important to tell the child or group of children who you are (if you are a stranger to them), why you have come to consult the children and what is intended. Based on the preparation, you already have a plan on how to bring the children to the topic in child-friendly ways.

Pictures, drawing and plain language support children's ability to understand. When an adult draws what they intend to do, they also have to speak more slowly and think about the way of expression in a sufficiently concrete way. The skill of a master painter is not needed – stickmen and picture symbols work well. Children are often interested in following the topic better through pictures and drawing.

Consider what the decision could mean in the child's life and avoid professional and official jargon. You can use examples from the children's lives. However, avoid offering ready-made response options, so that the children feel that all sorts of thoughts are allowed. There are no wrong answers, and individual answers are not evaluated or disseminated. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion and experience.

Tell the children honestly that their opinions and thoughts will be listened to and taken into account as part of the decision, but



the decision will also be influenced by other factors.

The decision as to how to proceed will be ultimately made by adults. In order for adults to be able to make good decisions, each child's voice is valuable.

GET TO KNOW THE CHILDREN AND RESPECT DIVERSITY

You can play various 'get to know you' games and warm-up games with the children and young people before the actual task. They are particularly important when it comes to discussions with a group of children who do not already know each other. The initial games must always be such that everyone can participate in them without fear of failure. Children sometimes want to suggest a game themselves. The purpose of getting to know each other is to create a safe and pleasant atmosphere. You can also use play in online meetings, for example, by asking the children or young people to choose an emoticon or a GIF animation that describes their mood that day. The choice of a tool also affects what kind of getting to know each other is necessary.

An initial game can also be linked to the topic being discussed, or it can be used to test the tool you are going to use. For example, if you use smileys to aid in the task, you can do a playful smiley vote with the children by presenting funny claims: “I like sweets!”, “My favourite season is summer”, “Football is my thing”, “I like to wake up early in the morning.” At the same time, you get to know the children and the children see what they have in common. For example, if you are dealing with a school-related issue, you can start getting to know the children by everyone choosing one card that describes something nice at school. This way, you will already start to learn about the topic itself.

Getting to know each other can also be done by chatting lightly or by taking children’s initiatives. When you talk about topics of interest to the children, you get to know them a little bit and trust is created between you. You also learn more about the children’s way of communicating. The children start to feel that you are really interested in them and their thoughts.

Sometimes a child tells the most important things in five minutes, and sometimes even an hour is too little time. In a group of children, there are often children who work at very different speeds. It is worth considering activities that the children who are already ready could do. Are there any games or toys in the space that you can direct them to? Or can they read a book or do homework? It is also important for those who wish to focus to be able to complete the tasks in peace.

Young children’s ability to focus on tasks is often rather limited (though there are exceptions, especially if the consultation is based on play!). Young people, on the other hand, may get excited and want to talk about a topic that is important to them for a long time. We also recommend play interludes, snack times, breaks outdoors or a break workout if you are planning to do multiple tasks. And

why could important thoughts not come up while eating treats or taking a break outdoors? It is also advisable to request permission to record conversations in informal moments: “That was an important idea, can I write it down?”

PROVEN TOOLS FOR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Below are a variety of tools that you can use to reach children’s experiences and opinions. It is often advisable to use several tools at the same time. For example, drawing is a good addition to group discussions and allows for many kinds of participation.

The tools are divided into ones for young children (about 3–6 years), schoolchildren and young people. However, all methods can be applied with children of all ages. Many of these methods can also be used remotely. For example, all kinds of surveys can be carried out for children and young people on platforms they are already familiar with (such as Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook). The most sensible thing to do is to use existing accounts that have followers, so that the message reaches children and young people. It is also easy to request anonymous writings, photographs, stories and music electronically, as long as the permission issues are verified.

Young children

Drawing and pictures

Drawing is widely used in child impact assessments. Children can be asked to draw pictures of the city centre, the school yard or the park, for example. The essential information in drawing comes from listening to what the child says they have drawn and why. Children may share important thoughts while drawing, so it is worth talking to the children already then.



If drawing is not possible or the child does not want to draw, they can express their opinions using ready-made pictures. For example, the adult can take photos of playground equipment, and the child chooses the ones they like best. The child may also notice that there is nothing in the pictures that they want to say something about, and things can then be drawn or written about together.

Drawing should also be used for support when the adult takes notes from a group discussion and when the adult explains what they have learned from the children. Children can draw with pencils on paper in the traditional way, or on a tablet or blackboard.

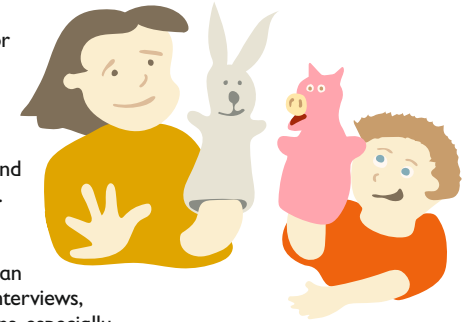
Storycrafting method

In the storycrafting method, a child or group of children tells a story that an adult writes down as they tell it. If the child does not express themselves with words or their Finnish is poor, the storycrafting can be supported, for example, with toys or pictures from Papunet. The most important thing is that the child can tell a story about the subject exactly as they want, and the adult does not control or change what the child tells. You can, however, give a ready-made theme for the story, such as “the best journey to school” or “a good visit to the library”. If the child gives permission to read the story aloud to the rest of the group, a good discussion often arises, which deepens the adult's understanding.

The child can take the story with them if they want. The child must be asked for permission if the story remains with the adult. The child must be informed of the purposes for which it will be used and to whom it will be read and shown. The child has the right to refuse to let the story be handed over or read to others. The storycrafting method can also be used in a group so that the children tell a story together about a topic they choose together.

Hand puppet interview

An interview is a natural way for adults to find out about other people's experiences and views, but it is often more difficult for children. For example, children may think that there are right and wrong answers to the questions. Therefore, informal discussions in everyday life may be a better way of gathering information than interview situations. Instead of interviews, we often talk about conversations, especially with younger children.



However, there are also children who are happy to take part in interviews, and small things can make them child-friendly. With young children, you can use a hand puppet that interviews them. Use open-ended and simple questions and preferably the kind of words the child uses.

For example, you can visit a day-care centre or library with a hand puppet that asks the children: “What's fun here, and what's bad?”, “What would you like to show me, and where should I not go?” Often, the child tells the puppet about their own experiences and presents a place and things that are important to them. An interview situation with a familiar adult may not be as nerve-racking as one with a stranger.

Map evaluation

Map evaluation can be used to find out the children's opinion on spaces and areas. The method can also be used during the planning phase of new facilities or areas for children. Finish the map or do it together with the children. Choose a way to mark the map, such as stickers, smiles, or plus and minus signs.

Walk with the child around the space and look at the map. Ask the child questions and give prompts: “Which spot brings joy?”, “Mark a spot you don’t like” or “Mark a place where you feel good.” Finally, go through the whole with the child or group. After this, you can pose clarifying questions: “Did I understand right?”, “Did you mean this?”, “Could you tell me more about this?”

‘Good-vision binoculars’ are also a great way to find out children’s thoughts on spaces and areas. The child makes binoculars with their fingers or toilet paper rolls and looks in different directions. “Which way is a nice place?”, “What looks scary?” You can also apply the same principle by asking children to touch different places in the space or area.

Playing

Children love to play independently. Observing children’s play often provides important information about what is relevant to them. Consultation for decision-making can use methods of play or a guided game, which differs from the free and independent play of children. Could the children build their dream city with Lego, create a new school building for small animals, or show as they play what the doll needs to help it feel safe in a children’s home or a meeting with a social worker?

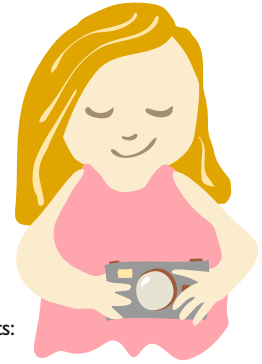
Observation

When you get to know things that are important to children in a service or place, it is good to observe what the children do there. Where do they have a good time? What are they not doing? What do they do alone, together or in the company of adults? Recording these things will give you valuable information. After the observation, we encourage you to go and talk to the children about the observations you have made. This will give you answers to ‘Why’ questions.

Schoolchildren

Photography

Photography works with children of all ages. Give the children a camera or phone and ask them to take pictures. You can go for a walk as a group and discuss the photos taken on the walk together. Children can be encouraged to take photos of things like places or objects that are comfortable and safe, or ones that feel scary and bad. Photography can work, for example, in the design of green spaces or streets: Is there a spot that needs lighting? Could the playground be further from the street?



In a panel organised at the Family House in Kuopio, children were given the opportunity to take a photo to show what was nice or boring about the Family House. A child under school age took a picture of our instructor for something nice and a picture of a dinner plate for something boring. The child said that Merja is nice, but it is boring having to empty one’s plate at meals.

Picture collage

A picture collage can be made on a variety of topics, such as “My visit to the child health clinic”, “Our afternoon activities” or “My hometown”. Children can be asked to glue newspaper clippings or printed images on cardboard with a specific theme. They can also draw and write on the photo collage. The adult can write next to the children’s pictures why they chose them. Alternatively, the adult can make a photo collage and ask the children to use smileys to mark nice things, stupid things and things that are okay.



Plays and going over them together

Jumping into an imaginary world may open up new perspectives. The adult can direct the theme of the play in a direction where information needs to be collected. Children can plan and execute a play, and its twists and suggested solutions can be discussed during the play or afterwards. Plays can be done in small groups so that more children can participate. The subject can be a change in bus routes or the prices of bus tickets, for example, and the plays can show how different decisions would affect children's lives. What if the bus stopped running in the morning or the ticket was more expensive? Various service encounters are also excellent topics for play-acting.

'I think' pictures

'I think' pictures are used to reflect on things, using a sun to represent nice things, a ghost to stand for unpleasant things and a tree for things that the child wishes for. The child or adult can draw or paint the pictures themselves, or they can be printed from the Save the Children Finland website: https://pelastakaalapset.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/main/2018/04/13161917/Hahmot_A2.pdf. Pictures can be used in many ways. For example, after a visit to the hospital emergency clinic, you can ask the child to tell you what was nice, what was unpleasant and what they would wish for. With a group of children, you can build large pictures on the wall, in which

everyone marks their opinions for everyone to see. The topic can be, for example, the local forest, recreational opportunities or library services. 'I think' images also work very well with young children.

Young people

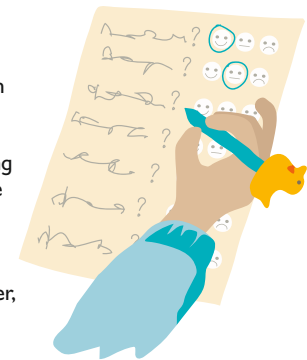
Group discussions

Some young people are interested in and capable of expressing their views verbally. In this case, the easiest way for both the organiser and the participating young people is a joint free-form discussion. Many young people are interested in social issues, and it is important to discuss decisions that concern them. What would young people like to say to decision-makers planning free upper secondary education? What could be the advantages and disadvantages?

The discussion in the group should be on a voluntary basis. It must be ensured that the group has a safe and confidential atmosphere, so that everyone dares to speak their minds. The host of the discussion has an important role to play, as they distribute turns to speak and allow for different ways of telling and also for different perspectives to be brought up. – The group discussion can also be conducted in various online services.

Surveys

Surveys are a good way to quickly obtain information about phenomena that exist in the lives of children and young people, and they do not take much time for young people to respond to. Many young people are happy to take surveys anonymously and, for example, via their phone. The response rate is often high, especially if the survey is answered in a guided manner, for example during school hours.



In surveys, it is essential to create good questions that meet the need and to test the functioning of the questions together with children and young people. Surveys can range from multiple-choice questions to open-ended questions. Surveys are convenient and the easiest method for extensive data collection, but a deeper understanding can be obtained by using other methods. To keep up the response motivation until the end, do not make the survey too long or boring.

The advantage of surveys is that they gather a large number of responses together and the data is easy to process. You can also, for example, find important themes for group interviews by first conducting a mobile survey of the topic.

Music

Young people can write lyrics or create compositions about matters relevant to them. For example, young people living in a children's home or youth home can express their thoughts by rapping or making up rhymes about how they feel they are heard or cared for: What things feel difficult in everyday life? What kind of support and help would they like? What works?

Comic strip

Young people can draw comic strips themselves from scratch or complete a strip started by an adult. This may work best with young people who know they are interested in expressing their thoughts by drawing. This could be the case, for example, with the views of newly immigrated people on the operation of a reception centre.



The picture does not always need words to accompany it, and yet it can still convey the young person's thoughts to adults. What does everyday life look like to the young person? What does the Finnish system look like from their perspective?

Writing

Young people can be asked to write about a topic that is currently the subject of a child impact assessment. In the case of youth psychiatry services, for example, they may be asked to write about their own experiences, on subjects like "My best memory of getting help" or "My worst memory of getting help".

For example, the area's cultural services for young people would also be suitable: Which places are relevant and what does not feel important to them? The adult can help by describing the services in the area in advance. Which of these are part of young people's daily lives and which are not? Is there a service that is particularly relevant to young people?

Jyväskylä sports and exercise services carried out a preliminary impact assessment on a planned outdoor sports park. It was noticed that young people were a large group of users in sports and exercise services, so the organisers also wanted to consult them about the matter. This was done through a master's thesis (Soanvaara, 2018) which collected essays written by young people aged 13–20. Among other things, the writings showed that the young people wanted the outdoor sports park to also have a space for unscheduled leisure and recreation. A thesis is a good opportunity to collect data and make an analysis.

THANK THE CHILDREN FOR THEIR INPUT!

Always thank the children at least verbally for their input. You can also say thank you with a small gift, a tasty treat or shared a moment of play. Also ask for feedback on how the work felt. What was fun? What was unpleasant? What stayed in their mind? Was something important left unsaid?

You can ask for feedback in many different ways depending on the situation and the age of the children.

For example, you can use:

- Smileys and mood cards
- Thumb feedback
- Anonymous survey on paper or in mobile format
- Moving along a continuum based on claims: "It was fun!", "It felt important", "I was bored", "I would like to do it again"
- Verbal feedback.



Give the children the opportunity to contact you or an adult afterwards if the topic leaves them wondering or if they want to add something.

COLLECTING CHILDREN'S INFORMATION AND RETURNING THE INFORMATION TO THE CHILDREN

After the children have been consulted, it is important to deal with the resulting data in peace, for example, in a working group. Children and young people may also be involved. For example, the data can be themed, assembled into mind maps, visualised or approached from the perspective of different questions.

Questions to reflect on:

- What did the children want to tell you about the subject?
- What is repeated in the material?
- What surprises you?
- Are there any differences in the children's responses that should be taken into account? For example, it is important to identify impacts on different groups of children. Pay special attention to vulnerable children and young people.
- How are the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child reflected in the children's responses?

In Nokia, a child impact assessment was carried out at the Harjuniityn koulu comprehensive school on the operations of the comprehensive school. The assessment was also the subject of a thesis (Lappalainen et al. 2018). Similarities were found in the views of different target groups, but also differences related to a strongly represented target group. Their identification was supported by a comparative table, in which responses were compiled by theme and target group. The responses discussed health (linked to safety and accidents), interpersonal relationships (the possibility of maintaining social relationships between children of different ages), the adequacy of space for play and

movement, and the smoothness of everyday life (for example, frequent waiting).

Once you have formed some kind of overall picture from the material, summarise it. It is best if you are able to summarise things immediately in a child-friendly manner. Examples of what the summary can be:

- video of 1–5 minutes
- visualisation of what was learned from the children and the effects of the information
- a letter read to children by a familiar adult.

After the children have been consulted, it is important to deal with the resulting data in peace, for example, in a working group.



The Family Focus (Perheet keskiöön) project of the Central Union for Child Welfare, together with Save the Children Finland and the municipality of Lempäälä, put together in video format young children's thoughts on an ideal family centre. How does it look, feel and sound like? What takes place there? What does not take place? The video was illustrated with drawings. It brought together things learned from children.¹¹

Together with Save the Children Finland, the municipality of Lempäälä also implemented a quality indicator to gather children's thoughts about a good meeting place. It was illustrated as a drawing and attached to the wall of the meeting place so that it could be examined with children. The quality indicator is also used when decisions are made on municipal services.¹²

Remember to describe briefly when and how the children's views were gathered. This will allow a third party to assess how the situation and questions affected the children's answers. Quoting out of context may lead to misunderstandings.

Children's works should also be presented at least partly as pictures so that you can justify interpretations. The words and narrative used by children, or at least samples thereof, should also be stored in the data, taking into account privacy protection.

Adults easily lose the essence of what children say by making too many generalisations. It is therefore a good idea to keep both the themes and examples of the children's phrasings that were used as the basis when creating the theme. Good documentation can be

used to show how the consultation was conducted and how the information was interpreted, making it more reliable. Also explain what was not taken into account and state if a certain important group of children was not consulted. When carrying out an impact assessment, it is important to know if any relevant information is missing.

Remember that children do not have the same barriers in their minds as we adults do. Sometimes adults may think that what the child has told them has nothing to do with the subject. However, in that case, it is worth stopping to ascertain whether your own perception is true or whether the matter may be important to the child.

Children have the right to be informed of the way in which their responses have been compiled, but also of the way in which they have been taken into account. It is worth asking children and young people in consultation situations for tips on how and in what form they wish to be informed. Never forget to return the information to the children and tell them where to find it.

11 Watch the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAfhMgwh-M8>

12 Quality indicator: <https://www.lempaala.fi/sosiaali-ja-terveys/perhe-ja-sosiaalipalvelut/perhekeskuspalvelut/perhetuvat/>

Conclusion

Children live out the decisions of adults in their everyday lives. There are a huge number of issues and decisions that affect children. The impact on different groups of children may vary. We may easily forget to put ourselves in the shoes of a child and look at decisions from their perspective.

Decisions cannot be made effectively if children and their experiences of everyday life are ignored. Children have the statutory right to participate. There are a variety of child-friendly practices available, and many professionals have the skills to reach the experiences and needs of children of different ages and different kinds.

Child impact assessment is connected to other impact assessments¹³, and children's perspectives should not be seen as competing with other perspectives. Often, what is good for children can be good for everyone.

So, you should boldly go and explore the world of children and share their wonder. In this way, you can contribute to the inclusion of children in the social decision-making that affects them as partners, not just as objects of decision-making. You may even experience your own work as more meaningful.



Because children have opinions too.

They are not just adult things.

They are part of children's lives!

Children's experiences of participation and empowerment come from having the opportunity from a young age to participate and influence things genuinely in matters that are important to them. This experience, at its best, carries them far and teaches them the value of their opinions and the importance of listening to others.

13 Foreexample, <https://thl.fi/fi/web/hyvinvoinnin-ja-terveyden-edistamisen-johdaminen/hyvinvointijohtaminen/paatosten-vaikutusten-ennakkoarviointi#IVA>

Child-friendly glossary

This glossary contains difficult words that may need to be used in child impact assessment. The list is not exhaustive, but you can try to explain difficult words related to your topic in similar ways. You can test beforehand with a child you know whether they understand what you are going to talk about.

Child impact assessment

Child impact assessment is a rather difficult expression. It is also difficult for us adults to understand. It means that children have the right to influence decisions made in Finland. The decisions can be connected to many different things in children's lives, such as schools, day-care centres, playgrounds, forests and parks. The building of large motorways or shopping centres matters to children. Decisions about nature and environmental protection are also connected to children. In addition, Finnish laws, for example, affect children's lives.

Finland is as much a place for children as it is for adults. Actually, there are no things that have nothing to do with children. That is why it is always the task of adults to consider how a future decision will impact children's lives and what would be the best decision for them. All children are entitled to their own opinion, and not all



children think similarly about things. It is important for us adults to stop and listen to what you, in particular, think about this. Child impact assessment puts together information from children and information from adults, and adults use it to decide how to proceed. Children have the right to hear what kind of decision was made and how their thoughts were taken into account.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

A special agreement, or convention, has been made for children about the various rights that children have. It is used in almost every country in the world.

It is the duty of adults to ensure that all children have these rights. Although the convention talks about children, it also means babies and young people, that is to say everyone from new-borns to 17-year-olds. The convention has 54 articles, or points. According to the convention, children have the right to, for example, play, care, school, food, a home, medicine and safety. All children also have the right to express their views, and adults must take them into account. The convention also says that all children are equal and that all children should be treated equally well.





Municipality

Municipality means a limited area, and municipal residents are the people who live there. Sometimes a city can also be a municipality (for example, Helsinki, Tampere and Oulu). Municipalities elect people to make decisions about that

municipality. It is the responsibility of the municipality to make sure the people living there have schools, day-care centres, care for the elderly, libraries, and so on. Municipalities also make decisions connected to children.

Decision-making in Finland

Decision-making is about choosing between different options. Municipalities and cities in Finland constantly make decisions about, for example, the construction and demolition of buildings, people's work, schools, day-care centres, sports facilities and forests. Parliament makes decisions that affect the whole of Finland and all Finns. Municipalities and cities, on the other hand, make decisions that affect the lives of the local residents. It is important to listen to the ideas of the people affected by the decision. If, for example, a decision is being made about starting to charge fees for using outdoor ice rinks, then it would be important for decision-makers to know first what the people who use outdoor ice rinks think about this.



Budget

This means thinking about how much money would be needed for something. A budget should always be made when building new buildings or repairing old ones. If we have to build a new school, we

have to calculate in advance how many million euros will be needed. The budget also takes into account how many people are needed to work, for example, in day-care centres, schools or other services, and how much money needs to be reserved so that all those people can work. Things usually cost a lot, and we are talking about hundreds of thousands, millions or tens of millions of euros. Each year, we monitor carefully what the budget has reserved money for and what not. Finally, we look at whether the original budget was correct or whether things cost more or less than planned.



Law drafting

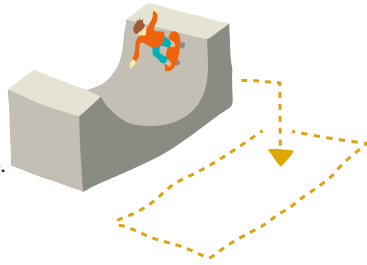
Laws are the rules that every Finn must follow or obey. For example, there is the law that every Finnish child must be allowed to go to school, and it is the responsibility of adults to ensure that all children get to go to school. Law drafting means that Finland makes new laws or makes changes to old laws. Laws should not be changed just like that – we always need to ask many people what the new law should be like. If the changed law is about children (for example, children must be allowed to go to the child health clinic or and get free school books in school), then children should always be asked what they think. If we were preparing a law saying that every child should have one free hobby, we should ask children what you think about it and how the new law would affect you.



Space use planning

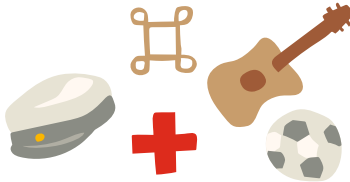
This means thinking about how to use a space, such as a library, school yard or shopping centre.

We think about who is in the space and what they do there. Sometimes, for example, it may be that not many people visit the local library, and we wonder if the library could be closed. However, often some people do visit the library, and it is very important to ask them what they think about closing the library. Or, if the school wants to remove walls and create a large common space in which more pupils study, it would be important to ask the pupils and teachers who will be spending time in the space what they think about the change and how they would feel if we did it.



Service network

A service network means all services provided by a municipality or city for the people who live there. The various services include

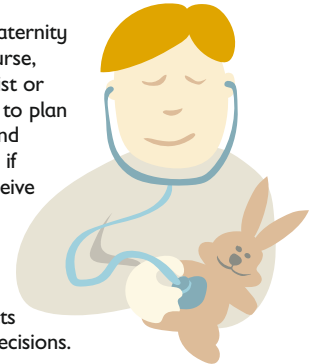


- early childhood education and training (day-care centres, schools)
- health services (maternity and child health clinic, health centre, hospital)
- sports and cultural services (indoor swimming pool, sports fields, libraries and museums)
- assistance services (child welfare, family counselling centres, speech therapy)

If we say we want to reform something about the service network, this may mean, for example, that we look at all services related to physical activity in the municipality.

Service situations and service encounters

Service encounter usually means meeting a professional. It can be, for example, a maternity and child health clinic employee, school nurse, social worker, psychologist, speech therapist or school social worker. It is up to the adults to plan the meeting so that it is as comfortable and pleasant as possible for you children, even if there is talk of difficult issues or if you receive a vaccination. However, adults need feedback, that is, your opinion of what it was like for you children to be at the meeting and what was nice and what was maybe unpleasant. That way, we adults can learn to do better and make better decisions.



THE WORK GROUP OF THIS GUIDE

The authors of this guide work in various positions at Save the Children to ensure that children's experiences of participation and well-being in everyday life and in decision-making can be strengthened. We hope that children can influence and participate in things that are important to them in ways that feel natural for them. It is important for us that the rights of the child are respected for every child.

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For more information on working with children (in Finnish):
www.pelastakalapset.fi/lapsilta-opittua



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