

# ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



In this tool, you will find:

- » A summary of ways to support meaningful and effective participation of children and young people
- » Principles for engaging children and young people
- » Links to additional resources

Related tool:

- » Rights of Children and Families

## KEY GUIDANCE

### Background

As individuals and members of families, children and young people are CaFIS clients and have a right to be involved in decision-making that affects their lives (see CaFIS tool *Rights of Children and Families*).

Children and young people have unique perspectives on what is going on in their families, what they and their families need, and how services and supports are offered.

In taking a participatory approach, children and young people's ideas, opinions and feelings should be heard, acknowledged and respected. CaFIS providers are not obliged to act on every idea expressed, rather it may be your role to ensure the views and wishes of children and young people are represented and considered when decisions are being made.

### Principles for engaging children and young people

The following principles should be considered when engaging with children and young people:

- » All children and young people have the right to participate in decision-making, regardless of age, gender, ability and background. It is the responsibility of organisations to come up with ways to meaningfully involve them, based on their unique needs and wishes.

- » To be able to meaningfully participate, children and young people need enough information to understand what they are being asked to do, and support to form and express their views. As English is a last language for many Aboriginal children, CaFIS providers may need to consider how to provide information in culturally safe ways, using first languages.
- » Children's participation should be voluntary. The right to participate includes the right not to participate and to withdraw at any time.
- » All processes in which children and young people are heard should be transparent and informative, respectful, relevant to children's lives, in child-friendly environments, inclusive, supported by training, safe and sensitive to risk, and accountable.

It is important to consider having a say can sometimes cause children and young people discomfort or distress and can have direct or indirect consequences for a child or group of children. CaFIS providers will need to identify these risks and take action to ensure children can participate safely.

Participation should be seen as a process rather than a one-off event. It requires an ongoing commitment of time and resources.

### Different types of participation

Children and young people can be engaged with and participate in CaFIS services in a variety of ways, and for different purposes. For example they can:

- » provide unique insights into what is going on in their own inner worlds
- » help inform an understanding of what their families need
- » help shape the ways services and supports are provided
- » give feedback on whether services are responsive to their and their families' situations
- » play a part in designing, implementing and evaluating services.

Table 1 provides an overview of the contributions children and young people can make, some tools that might assist their engagement, and some of the benefits of engaging with them.

**Table 1: Types of participation aims, examples and benefits**

Type of participation	Aims of participation	Examples of tools or approaches that could be used	Benefits
Child as an individual and independent client	To understand individual children's needs, wishes, concerns and preferences	Child friendly welcome and information packs Child friendly assessments Child friendly case plans Child friendly feedback forms Child advocates or specialists	CaFIS supports are more responsive to the needs of individual children Children and young people feel as though their needs, views and wishes are taken seriously Families are more likely to engage because parents are more motivated to meet their children's concerns
Child as member of a family	To ensure that children's needs are considered when decisions are made that affect them and their families	Family Group Conferencing Family mediation Shared activities to identify and prioritise individual family members' needs	Family members better understand what is going on for individual children and appreciate why supports are needed Children and young people are given opportunities to share their thoughts and feel as though they are contributing to their family's growth Children and young people have greater confidence in CaFIS because they feel seen and heard.
Child as a member of a community	To ensure that children's needs are central to work completed within a community	Direct and indirect involvement in yarning circles and community consultations	Communities appreciate the thoughts, needs and wishes of children and young people Children and young people feel connected to their communities and see that they hold a central place
Child as a consumer of a program	To ensure that programs are meeting children's needs and that unintended consequences are avoided	Feedback forums Complaints processes Children's involvement in evaluations	CaFIS programs are able to demonstrate that they are having real impacts for children and young people CaFIS are able to identify and respond to children's concerns in a timely manner
Child as a consumer of a service	To provide opportunities for children and young people to help shape what is done and how it is done	Child and Youth Advisory Groups Children on staff recruitment panels Child and youth-inclusive co-design	Children and young people feel valued for their contributions and help shape services to ensure that they respond to their needs

Source: Based on Moore (2019) Children and Young People's Participation in Child, Youth and Family Support Services, Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia

## APPLICATION TO CaFIS PROVIDERS

### Meaningful and effective participation of children and young people

Children and young people are not always used to sharing their ideas, and adults and organisations do not always feel confident in talking to children and young people about their needs, wishes and expectations.

For participation to be meaningful and effective, both CaFIS providers and children and young people may need assistance. Some strategies to equip CaFIS providers with the skills and knowledge to engage with children and young people effectively include:

- » Child and Youth Engagement Policies that can set out the approach CaFIS providers can take in engaging children and young people and clarify expectations about how, when, and for what purpose CaFIS workers should engage with children and young people.
- » Practice frameworks that can embed children and young people's participation in all work with families.
- » Staff training can help equip staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to safely engage children and young people in decision-making.
- » Participation toolkits and libraries could be made available to those working with children and young people to ensure engagement and participation is meaningful and safe.
- » Evaluation plans should consider children and young people as groups to be consulted in determining whether CaFIS is achieving outcomes for children and families.

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Where to go for more information on this topic

There is a wealth of practice guidance available for organisations and practitioners working with children and young people. Some resources include:

Tusla (Irish Child and Family Child Protection) Child and Youth Participation Toolkit

Social Workers Toolkit for Direct Work with Children and Adults by Social Workers  
(<http://www.socialworkerstoolbox.com/category/activities/>)

Keeping children Safe Coalition Children's Participation in Child Protection  
[https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/8559/pdf/kcstool4\\_-\\_english.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/8559/pdf/kcstool4_-_english.pdf)

Moore, T. & Layton, M (2009) Kids Central Toolkit, Institute of Child Protection Studies  
<https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/institute-of-child-protection-studies/kids-central-toolkit>

NSW Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (2019) Engaging children and young people in your organization