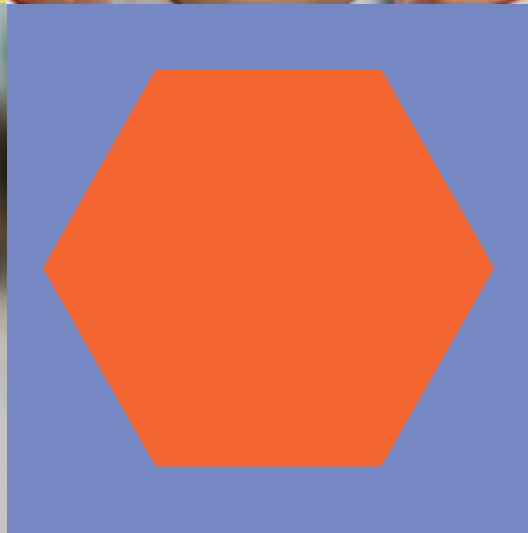
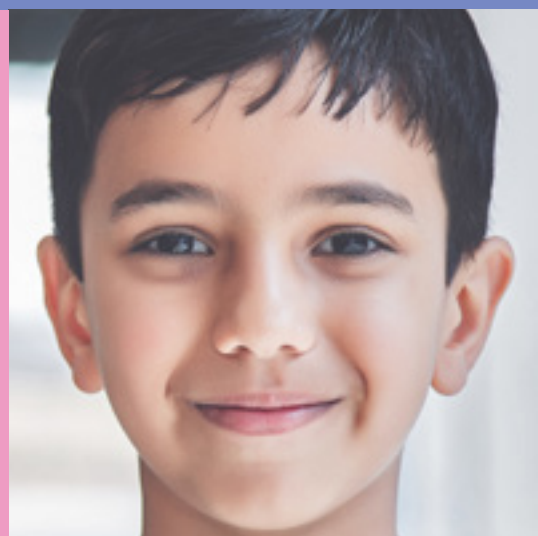
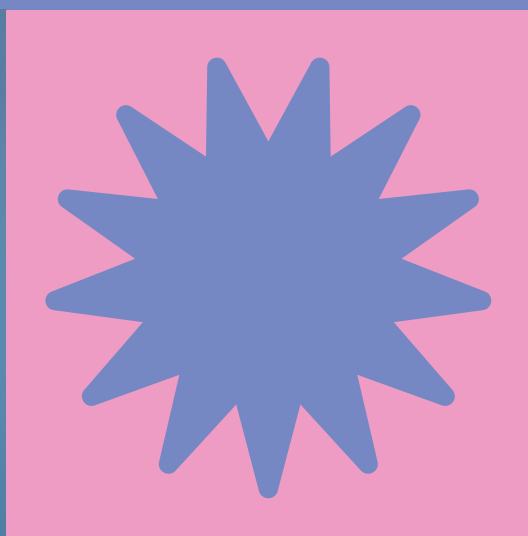


# VOICE OF CHILDREN FRAMEWORK

A guide for **policymakers** and **government officials**  
on including **children's perspectives**



## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the people who are the Traditional Custodians of the land, their continuing connection to land, waters and community and pay respect to the Elders, past and present. We extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the strength and commitment of First Nations practitioners that work alongside children and young people to support and guide leaders of the future.



Australian Government  
Department of Education

Early Childhood  
Policy Group

GRIFFITH  
UNIVERSITY



Queensland  
Government



Government  
of South Australia



GOVERNMENT OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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Government



NORTHERN  
TERRITORY  
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ACT  
Government

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The document must be attributed as Voice of Children Framework, April 2025.

## Preface

**The Voice of Children Framework has been commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education on behalf of the Early Childhood Policy Group, which consists of early childhood education and care officials across Australian, State and Territory Governments.**

It has been developed with the input of critical collaborators from Griffith University and a range of early childhood, outside school hours care and representative groups. Our critical collaborators brought specialist expertise in early childhood education and care, children with additional needs, Indigenous pedagogies, and trauma aware approaches to working with young children. Additionally, practitioners, academics, children's commissioners and policy makers from across the country and internationally generously shared their insights through face to face and online consultations. Finally, children shared their views on how and who they would feel comfortable talking to about things that mattered to them.

The accompanying Voice of Children Framework: Analysis Paper provides a review of the literature, and consultations informing the Voice of Children Framework, as well as helpful links to relevant guidelines developed in other jurisdictions.





# Table of Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Children have a right to be heard and taken seriously</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. The Australian Context</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3. What do we mean by children’s agency?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. What do we mean by children’s participation?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. When should the voices of children be incorporated?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6. Children’s Participation: Practice Principles</b>	<b>13</b>
a. Aim for impactful participation	13
b. Effective processes begin with adults	14
c. Facilitation processes require trusted and informed adults	14
d. Children require safe and accessible ways to share their views	15
e. Adopt a range of approaches to gather children’s perspectives	17
f. Be inclusive – plan for diversity	19
g. Close the loop. What happened? How do children’s perspectives have impact?	22
h. A successful process takes time and skill	23
i. Translating the voice of children into policy and programs	24
<b>7. Be Ethical</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>8. Entering contracts for children’s consultations</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Appendix A: Planning Effective Processes</b>	<b>27</b>
Planning Effective Processes	27
<b>Appendix B: Guidance for working with ECEC and OSHC</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Appendix C: Children’s Commissioners in Australia</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>31</b>



## Purpose

The Voice of Children Framework is a guide for government officials on hearing the ‘voices’ of young children in ways that can inform relevant policy and program decision making, including regulation and legislation impacting children.

The Framework is designed to support government officials to effectively reflect the voice of children when developing policies and programs that impact children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and outside school hours care (OSHC) contexts. Hence, it is particularly targeted to consultation processes for children from infancy to twelve years of age. However, other sectors engaged in providing effective, culturally safe, high quality care services to young children may also find the Framework useful.

Children’s meaningful engagement and participation in decisions relevant to their lives has wide ranging societal benefits. Facilitating children’s engagement and participation enables children to provide insights and perspectives that can be otherwise overlooked, thereby strengthening policy and service delivery in ways that are responsive to children’s needs, interests, concerns and aspirations. Importantly, seeking children’s perspectives is a democratic practice that models participatory processes to children, contributing to social cohesion and more egalitarian communities, while also supporting young people to ‘make healthier and more empowered transitions to adulthood’<sup>1</sup>



# 1. Children have a right to be heard and taken seriously

Australia is a signatory to the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(UNCRC\)](#). Article 3.1 focuses on children's best interests and states that

In all actions concerning children ... the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Determining children's best interests involves understanding the child's point of view and taking into account their perspectives.

Article 12 is explicitly focused on children's participation rights and requires that signatories to the Convention

... 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.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC),

the right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the Convention<sup>3</sup>

with all children having the right to be respected as participants in their families, communities and society.<sup>4</sup>

Article 12 is supported by:

- Article 13 which states that 'the child has freedom of expression, including to seek, receive and impart information and ideas'
- Article 14 which states that 'the child has freedom of thought, conscience and religion', and
- Article 17 which requires that 'the child has access to information from a diverse range of national and international sources'<sup>5</sup>

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) (to which Australia is a signatory) further underscores these commitments by stating that

children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right (Article 7.3).<sup>6</sup>

Australia is also a signatory to the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), which affirms, amongst other things, Indigenous children's rights to culturally appropriate education (Article 14), right to dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations (Article 15), and the rights and special needs of some Indigenous people, including children in the implementation of this declaration.<sup>7</sup>



## 2. The Australian Context

In Australia, children's participation rights in ECEC and OSHC are reflected in a range of relevant policy documents and reform agendas. Children's agency and participation rights are fundamental principles of:

- *the [National Quality Framework \(NQF\) for ECEC and OSHC](#)*<sup>8</sup>
- *the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)*<sup>9</sup>
- *the [Early Years Strategy 2024 – 2034](#)*<sup>10</sup>
- *the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy 2021](#)*<sup>11</sup>

**The NQF** encompasses the National Quality Standard (NQS), and the Approved Learning Frameworks: [The Early Years Learning Framework \(EYLF\)](#) and the [Framework for Outside School Hours Care: My Time, Our Place \(FOSHOC\)](#). These key ECEC documents promote children's agency, recognising children as competent and capable learners with a right to participate in all matters affecting their lives.

**Quality Area 1 of the NQS** requires that 'each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions that influence events and their world'

**Learning Outcome Two of the EYLF** links children's right to participation to children's sense of belonging and their recognition as active citizens who contribute to their world.<sup>12</sup>

**The FOSHOC** requires that children's views are visible in program planning and that approved providers and their educators facilitate and support children's voice and agency.<sup>13</sup>

**The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations** emphasise genuine engagement with, and valuing, of children. Principle 2 states that 'children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously'.<sup>14</sup>

Children's participation rights also align with strategies and frameworks within individual jurisdictions, for example the Australian Government's **Early Years Strategy 2024-2034** which advocates for embedding the voices of children in policy and programs, and elevating children's perspectives.<sup>15</sup>

**The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy 2021** calls for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities to be engaged as active partners in building a better service system (Goal 5).<sup>16</sup>



### 3. What do we mean by children’s agency?

The *Early Years Learning Framework*<sup>17</sup> and the *Framework for School Age Care*<sup>18</sup> describe children’s agency as children having the ability to make choices and decisions, influence events, and have an impact on their world. Importantly, agency is developed, enabled or restricted in the context of relationships. Therefore, the attitudes adults bring to consultations with children, and the processes adopted for listening to children and acting upon their insights are important.

### 4. What do we mean by children’s participation?

Importantly, children’s rights to protection and participation sit side by side and are not mutually exclusive.

The United Nations defines children’s participation as:

ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes.<sup>19</sup>

Many terms are used to describe children’s participation in decision making, including ‘voice’, ‘perspectives’, ‘views’, and ‘consultation’. Whatever terms are used, the Voice of Children Framework provides guidance to support the meaningful consideration and incorporation of children’s ideas and opinions into decisions that affect them.

### 5. When should the voices of children be incorporated?

The UNCRC states that children should be consulted on matters that affect them.

Australia’s *Early Years Strategy 2024-2034* (Strategy) provides a 10-year framework to guide how the Australian Government prioritises child-centred policy development and targets investments in early years supports and services. The Strategy notes the importance and value of embedding the voices of children in policy and programs, which elevates children’s perspectives.<sup>20</sup>

When our policies, programs and services reflect the voices and perspectives of children and families, we have the best chance of supporting children’s social, emotional, cognitive, physical and language development. . . The Australian Government will create opportunities to observe, listen and talk with children and families and take action to elevate these voices.

Undertaking consultation with children with a view to making a difference will help ensure that listening to children is not limited to a ‘tick the box’ process, and is meaningful and purposeful.

In designing a consultation process, consider:

- Why are we asking?
- Are there insights from previous consultations we can learn from?
- How can we ensure this will make a difference?

Examples of successful consultations include the updates of the ECEC<sup>21</sup> and OSHC<sup>22</sup> Frameworks, the [Early Years Strategy Consultation Report](#)<sup>23</sup> and the recent [Productivity Commission Inquiry into ECEC](#).<sup>24</sup>



## 6. Children’s Participation: Practice Principles

- Aim for impactful participation
- Effective processes begin with adults
- Facilitation processes require trusted and informed adults
- Children require safe and accessible ways to share their views and insights
- Adopt a range of approaches to gather children’s perspectives
- Be inclusive – plan for diversity
- A successful process takes time
- Close the loop
- Inform policy

These practice principles are designed to support purposeful and impactful participatory processes. Although each principle is discussed individually, planning the whole cycle of consultation from the outset will help ensure meaningful consultation that embeds consideration of children’s views into relevant decision making.

A snapshot of guiding questions for planning effective consultations with children, and some specific guidance around considerations for working with ECEC and OSHC services for conducting consultations with children are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B.

### a. Aim for impactful participation

Effective participation processes are meaningful, respectful and carried out with integrity. Effective processes for consultation reflect and align with the purpose of the consultation, which itself should seek to have a tangible influence on outcomes.

The UNCRC requires that children should be consulted on matters that affect them. The Voice of Children Framework aims to ensure that the information and views shared by children through consultation processes are considered and able to influence decision making.

This accords with Level 3 of Shier’s<sup>25</sup> influential Pathway to Participation. At Shier’s Level 3, children’s views are sought, taken into account, and incorporated into adult decision making. From this base, it is possible to build processes in which children actively participate in the decision making itself.

To ensure that engagement and participation is meaningful, [The ACT Statement of Ethical Practice and Implementation Guide](#)<sup>26</sup> for consultation with children and young people suggests commencing with three key questions:

1. Why are we asking?
2. What difference will it make?
3. What methods will be used?

Additionally, further considerations include:

- asking key organisations (such as Children’s Commissioners) whether children have previously been consulted on the same or similar topic,
- reviewing existing data for relevance, and
- asking what are the gaps in the data that a new consultation process can or should address?

Where relevant, drawing upon existing data does justice to children's input, maximising the impact from children's previous consultations. For reference, links to the websites of Children's Commissioners across jurisdictions in Australia are provided at **Appendix C**.

## **b. Effective processes begin with adults**

Most often, whether and how children are listened and responded to is shaped by adults.

When adults hold (perhaps implicit) views of children as only 'developing, vulnerable and dependant' this can undermine processes to elicit children's participation.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, it is adults who are most likely to communicate children's views to others. In doing so, adults may filter children's views<sup>28</sup> especially when children's choices and perspectives challenge their views of what children 'should' be like.<sup>29</sup>

To minimise this power imbalance, adults seeking children's participation can:

- reflect upon and make explicit their taken for granted views of children and consider how these might influence how they approach children's participation
- understand that all children have the capacity to participate regardless of age, needs and capacities
- recognise children as active members of their own culture and society, with both the right and the capacity to influence their own lives
- recognise children as 'knowers and thinkers', citizens and competent learners, who have valuable insights of which adults might not be aware.<sup>30</sup>

## **c. Facilitation processes require trusted and informed adults**

Children's capacity to exercise their agency can be constrained or enhanced by the actions of the adults around them. It is important to recognise this relational aspect of agency, otherwise there is a risk of marginalising children who are unable to readily exercise it.<sup>31,32</sup>

A commitment to children's agency underpins children's authentic participation.

Children, especially very young children and children who are at risk of exclusion, are more likely to share their perspectives with trusted adults, and in physical spaces in which they feel safe. Therefore, those with overall responsibility for the consultation process are encouraged to work closely with, and possibly alongside, educators, families and key personnel in ECEC or OSHC and relevant community organisations.

For example, a consultation with children conducted for the Productivity Commission utilised educators within ECEC programs 'to neutralise any power dynamics between children and the research team'.<sup>33</sup> However, in some cases, children may be more open with an external person or team. Factors to take into account include the issue being investigated, the ages of the children involved, and the skill of those undertaking the consultation.

To develop inclusive processes, guidance can be drawn from the insights and expertise of children's families, and other adults who work closely with children – such as educators, allied health workers, cultural workers, or inclusion support specialists.

Consider who will be conducting the consultation process. Questions to ask include:

- do they have the necessary clearance to work with children? Adults must have a working with children clearance.
- do they have the necessary knowledge and skills to facilitate the consultation or will training be required?
- what is their image of the child? How does it change according to factors such as age, development, disability, or culture?
- how do they demonstrate cultural competence, including for First Nations children and children with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?
- how does the team reflect the various understandings that might be required to engage a diverse range of children's views?
- how will they cultivate a safe and open environment for children to share their views? Has the role of a trusted adult, which may include educators, been considered in this context?
- how are their suggested strategies appropriate to children's ages, developmental range, needs and capacities, including those with additional needs?

## d. Children require safe and accessible ways to share their views

Children need spaces in which they feel confident, connected and safe to share their knowledge, and adults who encourage them to express themselves, are willing to listen, take them seriously and respond in authentic and meaningful ways.

### Participation must be voluntary

*Expressing views is a choice for the child, not an obligation... ensure that the child receives all necessary information and advice to make a decision in favour of her or his best interests.<sup>34</sup>*

First and foremost, children's engagement and participation in consultations must be voluntary. Typically, the consent of the service and children's parents/guardians will be sought before any consultation processes commence with children. However, adult consent is not enough in itself.

Children must understand what is being asked of them and have the opportunity to agree (assent) or refuse (dissent). Be attuned to children's ways of communicating their assent or dissent and recognise that this might change over time.

That means ensuring children have the opportunity to opt out or withdraw their assent.

Formal approaches to gaining children's agreement can include:

- providing pictures or videos that explain what is being asked of them, and/or
- seeking children's assent by asking them to verbally agree, circle an emoji, draw a picture, or write their name.

Be aware of children signalling their continued assent or desire to withdraw.<sup>35</sup> A desire to opt out/withdraw might be indicated in many ways, such as:

- physically, for example, by walking away, or a shake of the head,
- verbally, for example, by saying 'no', or 'I've had enough',
- by ignoring questions, or
- by showing signs of discomfort or distress.

## Safety first

First and foremost, the adults designing and conducting processes for gathering children's perspectives have a duty of care towards children. Children must be kept safe and free from foreseeable harm. The [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)<sup>36</sup> can be used to embed child safe practice in organisational processes that involve children.

However, safety encompasses more than absence of harm. A child-safe environment for engagement with children includes physical safety, relational safety (pertaining to the relationships between adults and children) and cultural safety. Organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, can draw upon the [Keeping Our Kids Safe](#)<sup>37</sup> resources, which support the culturally appropriate implementation of the National Principles.

## Physical safety

Ensure those conducting the consultation:

- are familiar with the [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#)
- understand, and comply with, the relevant strategies and policies of the organisation in or with which they are conducting the consultation.

In addition, think about the physical space for consultations:

- where will children feel safe and comfortable to share their views?
- are the surroundings quiet enough to hear soft voices?

Huser's<sup>38</sup> 'ethical spaces framework' poses a number of key questions to think about in relation to children's assent to participate. In it, she asks whether the environment allows children to:

- wander off easily, leave and return by themselves (so they have more control about how and when they participate)
- decide with whom to share their perspectives
- talk about topics they prefer to withhold from some people, including peers, and educators?

## Relational safety

Ensure those conducting the consultation:

- provide time and activities to build trust - open and honest conversations support the establishment of common ground between adults and children
- are prepared for the possibility that children may disclose information that requires action. Thus, it is recommended that the people conducting the consultation:
  - » are aware of the child protection policies of the organisation with which you are working, as well as your own obligations in relation to mandatory reporting.
  - » are honest and clear with children about what you will do with any information that they may disclose about someone harming them. For example, tell them about your responsibility regarding their safety and well-being. Advise them that for them to be safe they will need to talk to another person about their experience and that you will support him or her through that experience. Let the child or young person know he or she can ask about what will happen next (For more information, please see [AIFS 2015](#)).<sup>39</sup>

## Cultural safety

*Cultural safety in organisations requires an environment that is free from discrimination or denial of culture. It is also about valuing and celebrating cultural difference and affirming the right of children and young people to enjoy and practice their culture.<sup>40</sup>*

Creating a culturally safe environment for children to express their views will involve working with relevant community-controlled and representative organisations, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (such as [SNAICC](#)). Such organisations can be partners and allies in co-developing effective participatory processes.

### Creating a safe space - Barn Yarns in Outside School Hours Care

'Talking circles' were introduced to an OSHC program to trial as a space for children to express their views and problem solve. This was successful and the children themselves renamed the circles 'Barn Yarns' as they said the room was like a barn. Children spoke about Barn Yarns as a place and space where they could talk about things that mattered to them.

By naming their circle the children created their own "space" to listen to each other with their educator. The children 'call' a circle when they need to discuss everyday issues happening at the setting to think and talk about a way forward.

A talking stick, used to show respect within the circle, was created as collaboration between the children, educators and the local Aboriginal community.

This process enabled the educator to come to understand the children's perspectives in relation to the everyday program in the OSHC setting.

## e. Adopt a range of approaches to gather children's perspectives

*Children's 'voices' may feature multiple modalities that children adopt to express their views, including – but not limited to – laughing, crying, smiling, gaze, grasping, touching, pointing and uses of materials.<sup>41</sup>*

Approaches to gathering children's perspectives are most effective when they are respectful, inclusive and bring an awareness of children's strengths and capacities.

Diversity is the norm in childhood and a range of methods are likely to be needed for any group of children. Using a variety of methods to facilitate children's participation can help ensure that diversity in relation to factors such as age, development, culture, language, ability and gender is reflected in the data.

Participatory processes with children cannot solely rely on 'voice' and speech driven language. There is no 'one-size fits all'. Methods and activities to gather children's insights need to be tailored to context.

Contextual factors may include (but are not limited to) children's:

- age and development
- skills, interests and capacities
- culture
- identities
- familiarity with being consulted

- traits such as shyness or assertiveness
- the characteristics of the setting
- the question being asked.

Data can be gathered in many different ways, including:

- visual methods such as storytelling, photography, videography, drawing and painting
- digital methods such as specially designed games
- embodied methods such as drama, dance, playing and games, as well as
- more traditional approaches such as facilitated conversations and observations.

### Infants and Toddlers: Reframing Shier's Pathway

Through her research on infants and toddlers in ECEC, Sandra Cheeseman<sup>42</sup> has re-imagined Shier's Pathway to Participation from the infant and toddler perspective. This reimagined pathway moves the emphasis away from what the adult does to what the adult notices.

- I can communicate in many ways - you have to know how to listen
- I have views and opinions - I show them in many different ways
- My views are worth taking into account - if you wait and let me show you
- I can make decisions about my own capabilities - give me time and watch carefully what I choose
- I want to have a say - you may need to wait and watch carefully.

### Primary school aged children: Digital Games

[Rumble's Quest](#)<sup>43</sup> is a purposefully designed, validated, digital game that provides primary school aged children with an opportunity to report their own wellbeing across four domains: attachment to school; emotional and behavioural self-regulation; social confidence with respect to peer relationships; and supportive environments and relationships with caring adults. It has been designed as a reliable measure of wellbeing that gathers information directly from children to inform relevant policy and programs.

Children with disabilities have a right to be heard through representative organisations. Article 4.3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities states that:

*In the development and implementation of legislation and policies... States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.*<sup>44</sup>

Liaising and collaborating with representative organisations for other groups with which children identify (for example local First Nations organisations) can inform and strengthen participation strategies.

Gathering perspectives from the trusted adults (or older siblings) in children's lives (for example, family members, educators, support workers, representative organisations) to gain deeper insights into the data gathered from children can supplement (but not replace) data gathered from children.

When multiple data sources and perspectives are drawn together, this is known as mosaic methodology.

## Mosaic Methodology

**Spaces to play:** The Spaces to play study<sup>45</sup> was designed to obtain children’s input into the redesign of outdoor play spaces. Based in a three and four year-old preschool serving a mixed socio-economic area, the study involved children, parents and practitioners. Twenty-eight children were involved with a diverse range of capacities and needs, including speech and language difficulties. A range of methods were used to gather data. Some children took photos of the site and created books, others took the researcher on a tour of the site, using a camera and audio recording to document the tour. Working together in small groups, the children used their photos and drawings to make maps. The home corner in the preschool was converted into a ‘magic carpet’ by the introduction of a tent in which children could view a slide show of local parks and landmarks (taken from a child’s height) and discuss their favourite places. Throughout this process children were provided with opportunities to discuss and further review the data.

As well as interviews with children, a small number of parents and practitioners were interviewed about their perspectives on the children’s use of space. An outcome of the process was that in the redesign of the outdoor space, children successfully influenced what to keep, what to expand and what to change.

**Productivity Commission Consultation:** In developing the recent Australian Productivity Commission (PC) Inquiry, ‘A path to universal early childhood education and care’, the PC commissioned The Front Project (TFP) and Creche and Kindergarten Association (C&K)<sup>46</sup> to ask young children about what was important to them in the context of early childhood education. The consulting team adopted three approaches to data collection:

- community painting enabled children to depict people and relationships important to them
- the construction of a 3D landscape enabled children to depict the places they loved most
- a discussion and drawings with children about their happiest day provided additional information about what made them happy.

Simultaneously, the PC commissioned Griffith University to ask school age children about their experiences in OSHC. This team facilitated Talking Circles to engage with children about their activities before and after school and during vacation care and the differences between school and OSHC.

This data underscored the importance of children’s friendships, their relationships with educators, and their love for their families. It also highlighted the spaces, places and activities they valued. The processes used in gathering data reflected the capacity of the children to engage in processes and the timing and settings in which the processes were undertaken.

## f. Be inclusive – plan for diversity

Respect for diversity and working for equity is highlighted in the Australian EYLF and the My Time, Our Place as key principles. Respect for diversity and working for equity can be embedded in the processes developed for children’s consultation.

The rights encompassed by the UNCRC are universal, but children’s lived experiences are not, and some children may be less likely to have their perspectives heard or noticed.

## Whose perspectives might not be noticed?

A range of factors put children at risk of being silenced including age, cultural exclusion, differences in verbal fluency, disability, trauma and/or neurodivergence.

While such factors may place children at risk of exclusion, these are not deficits. A focus on all children's strengths and capacities and the value of their insights underpins the design of effective and inclusive processes.

There are common elements to be found in strategies that provide the space (both physical and time) for inclusion. Key pillars of inclusion are:

- creating a safe and supportive environment, in which all children are respected
- building trust through collaboration
- connecting with and learning from others with appropriate expertise, for example, the child's family, their educators, inclusion support staff, allied health professionals, and holders of cultural knowledge
- providing additional means of support where needed
- being prepared to modify and adapt processes where these are not successful and/or in response to feedback.

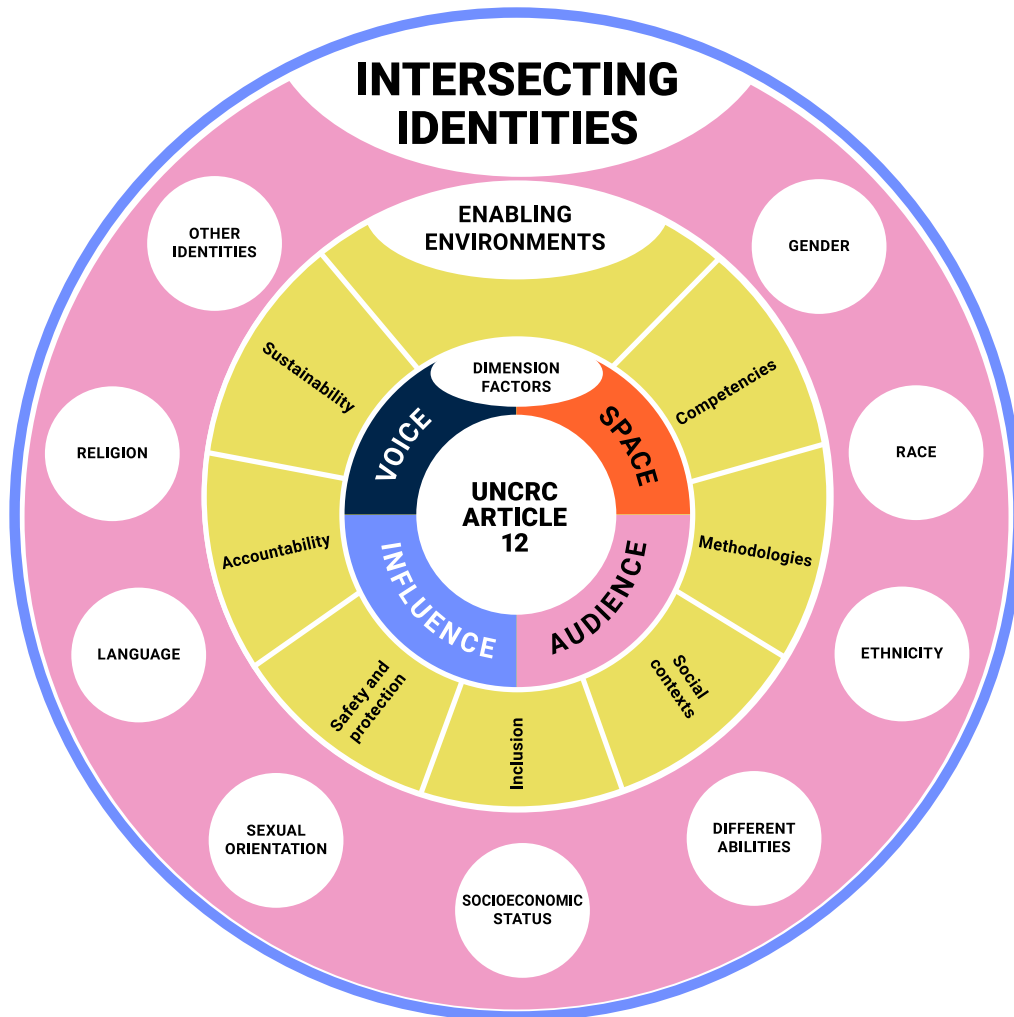
Government departments, as well ECEC and OSHC providers, will have policies and guidelines relating to inclusion. Many will have Reconciliation Action Plans, that can further inform site specific, responsive and respectful approaches to children's participation (see, for example, the [ACECOA Innovate Reconciliation Plan](#))<sup>47</sup>. Becoming familiar with these policies and plans can support the development of participation strategies responsive to local needs and conditions.

Ensuring that a diverse range of voices are heard requires discussion and planning with relevant others - families, educators, support staff, allied health professionals, holders of cultural knowledge and/or representative groups.

- How will cultural workers be included to support the engagement of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds or where children or their families speak a first language other than English?
- How will particular expertise be utilised to support communication needs (for example, AUSLAN, translators)?
- What type of environments and methods will be inviting/comfortable?

It is important to be sensitive to the possibility of children's intersecting identities. Complex forms of exclusion and marginalisation can result when these are not recognised, as children may be dealing with multiple and overlapping structural inequalities.<sup>48,49</sup> Enabling environments are required to counteract structural exclusion. In Cuevas Parras' research, children identified the following as creating an environment which enabled their participation:

- safe and inclusive spaces
- adult support
- time and resources
- long-term rather than short-term initiatives, and
- open communication with the organisations that supported them.



'Multi-dimensional lens to Article 12' model, (Cuevas-Parra, 2023, p.364)

The following case studies illustrate how researchers took into account the particular needs of the children they were consulting.

### Research with children on the autism spectrum

Before embarking on research with children on the autism spectrum, Simpson and colleagues took into account previously identified barriers to successful engagement. To support children's informed participation, Simpson et al.<sup>50</sup> provided children with a video outlining what would happen in each session, as audio-visual material is recommended both for children and individuals on the autism spectrum. Additionally, a 13 year-old child on the autism spectrum was employed as a consultant to review the content and presentation of these materials and the methods for obtaining feedback.

## Understanding 'listening' at preschool

In a project designed to understand 3 to 5 year-old children's experiences of 'listening' at preschool, Dealtry et al.,<sup>51</sup> used a combination of photos of various listening based activities in the classroom, emojis, and drawings. To ensure ongoing assent to participate, the children were asked to write their name or draw a picture if they wanted to participate, and throughout the project they were also asked to circle an emoji (happy or sad face) to indicate how they felt about being asked questions and shown pictures.

## g. Close the loop. What happened? How do children's perspectives have impact?

To ensure a comprehensive feedback process for children and other key informants, various and accessible approaches to feedback can be built into the consultation and participation initiatives.

When adults tell children what they do (or don't do) with their information and how their ideas have influenced policies, programs, services and practices, they build trust and engage with children in authentic and transparent ways.

This most often involves providing feedback post engagement. However, feedback can also be used as part of a cyclical, iterative approach to engaging with children to produce more depth and clarity.

Feedback mechanisms enable adults to:

- express their appreciation of children's time, expertise and contributions.
- invite children to share their thoughts on consultation and participation processes, so that these can be strengthened for the future.
- provide responses to children about the outcomes of the consultation process.

Service providers, families and other organisations that provided advice and support to the consultation process will also be keen to hear the outcomes of the consultation. Providing such feedback also helps develop or reinforce a shared commitment to taking children seriously.

## How should feedback be provided?

How feedback is provided will be determined by factors such as the size, spread and location of the consultation processes, and the needs of the children themselves.

- Provide child-friendly contact options to enable children, families and services to initiate contact for any questions/queries they may have.
- Feedback options can include in-person visits, letters to the children, illustrated booklets (hard copy and digital), and video.



## Approved Learning Frameworks (ALFs) Update Project

The views of Australian children aged 2-12 years were integral to the update of the Approved Learning Frameworks (ALFs) which are part of the NQF for ECEC and OSHC.

Children's perspectives gathered in Stage 3 were used to illustrate the outcomes expected by children in the final update of the ALFs. In Stage 3 an animation video was produced to tell children how their ideas had been used.

The children's drawings and comments were used as part of the animation in the video.<sup>52</sup>

## Showcasing children's feedback

Consider showcasing children's feedback and insights. When these are shared back to the broader community, this can amplify the impact of the insights gained. This can happen in a variety of ways including:

- Public Exhibitions: For example, art exhibits showcasing children's work and its connection to policy. Collaborate with children to provide interpretative narratives alongside artworks.
- Publicly available Policy Reports.
- Websites (see for example, [Envisioning Technologies of the Future with Australian and South Korean Children](#)).<sup>53</sup>

## h. A successful process takes time and skill

Successful consultation with children is more than a 'one-off process'. You may need time to modify or tailor your initial consultation approach if you find that your first attempts:

- are not successful
- do not move beyond the dynamics of an initial response
- fail to capture a diversity of 'voices'.

Revisiting questions with children at different times can help elicit deeper understandings and provides an opportunity to sense check your initial interpretations. It takes time to:

- build trust
- develop authentic and inquiring dialogue with children
- notice and observe what is going on for children to help with the interpretation of meaning.

Factoring in sufficient time also provides the space for hearing, interpreting, and co-constructing meaning through shared dialogue with children. This approach reduces the power differential between adults and children.<sup>54;55;56</sup>

Time supports the development of

- meaningful conversations with children enabling the adult to be attuned to what is happening in the 'present', and
- deep listening, opening the adult to hear children from their perspective rather than their own.<sup>57</sup>

This active process is an exchange of meanings that requires a deep 'suspension of judgement' on the part of the adult and the ability to listen to what children say from a contextual perspective.

## **i. Translating the voice of children into policy and programs**

Translating the voice of children into policy and programs is an important endeavour that can positively impact upon policy content or outcomes.

Successfully embedding children's perspectives requires recognising that including children's views in decision making creates an evidence base for better policy.<sup>58</sup>

It begins with:

- framing the consultation around questions or issues that children can influence
- considering from the outset how data will be analysed and incorporated.

and involves:

- providing a clear rationale as to why and why not certain insights are/are not used
- feeding back to children how their insights have been used, or why they haven't been used.

High levels of participation and empowerment occur when "skilled and supportive adults can move from doing work 'to' and 'for' children and young people to working 'with' them and ultimately supporting them to do the work by themselves".<sup>59</sup> Hence, children can also be engaged in developing policy and programs based upon the data gathered and a knowledge of the barriers to change.

Importantly, the practice of engaging children in decision making processes helps shift adults' framing of children away from vulnerability and dependence to *'one that recognises them as rights holders who have the necessary abilities, skills and expertise to participate fully'*.<sup>60</sup> In turn, this helps create the conditions under which it becomes common practice for children's perspectives to inform relevant policy.

To embed effective consultation with children, government departments could consider how children's perspectives can be incorporated in processes such as Regulatory Impact Statements.

Additionally, government policies on consultation could be reviewed to include a dedicated section for consulting with children.

In the Voice of Children Framework: Analysis Paper, many instances were found in Australia where children's perspectives had informed recommendations to government, however there were no documented instances where children's views had informed policy. To continue strengthening the evidence base on this, and building a cache of best practice examples, it is recommended that the policy impact of consultations with children is documented and tracked.

### **Kodomo Wakamono ★ Iken Plus**

(Program to Promote Reflection of Opinions and Views of Children and Young People).

[White Paper on Children's Policy 2024](#)

Every year, the Japanese government must submit and publicise a report on the implementation status of its child-related measures. Section 1, Chapter 4 of the White Paper outlines the obligation of Ministries and Agencies to report on:

- Social participation of children and young people and reflection of their opinions and views
- Promotion of participation of children and young people in the process of deciding national policies
- Promotion of initiatives by local governments
- Enhancement of opportunities for participating in society and expressing opinions and views
- Devices for reflecting diverse opinions and views in measures
- Fostering of human resources who support social participation of children and young people and reflection of their opinions and views
- Development of an environment to facilitate activities of organizations that are mainly led by young people
- Investigations and studies concerning social participation of children and young people and reflection of their opinions and views.

## **7. Be Ethical**

An ethical approach to consulting with children requires going 'beyond the simplicity of how to do things, but asking why and how.'<sup>61</sup>

Ethical codes of practice and related guides can be useful for thinking through the ethical implications of various participation methods and processes, even in cases when formal ethical clearance is not required. The following Codes are a useful reference point:

- [Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics](#),<sup>62</sup>
- [The ACT Children and Young People Commissioner Statement of Ethical Practice and Implementation Guide](#) is a guide for ethical practice in consultations and engagement with children and young people. It is accompanied by a child-friendly version,<sup>63,64</sup>
- The International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children,<sup>65</sup>
- [The AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research](#),<sup>66</sup> and
- [AIFS Ethics in Evaluation Practice Guide](#).<sup>67</sup>

Effective processes will be clear on the use, storage, retention, transfer and destruction of any images or videos of children taken as part of the process and ensure appropriate restrictions on any future personal contact with the children.

## Will ethics clearance be required?

When participation is sought for the purposes of research (rather than consultation), ethical clearance will be required. Where responsibility for ethical review lies will be dependent upon the organisation conducting the research. For example, universities have embedded ethical review processes, as do many early childhood providers and schools.

Many ECEC and OSHC providers have their own ethical clearance processes that need to be complied with before consultation takes place.

For further information on ethical conduct in research, please refer to the [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research](#).<sup>68</sup>

## 8. Entering contracts for children's consultations

The principles of this Framework can be incorporated into the requirements for contracts or undertaking projects which include consultation with children. It is important that those entering and managing the contracts, and those undertaking the consulting, are appropriately resourced and trained to respond appropriately to the qualities of the cohorts of children who are the target source of knowledge.

Evidence of the following is required:

- Completion of online training module – [Child Safe Organisations](#)
- Policies and procedures for responding to children's disclosure of abuse and maltreatment
- [Working with children checks](#) for the relevant jurisdictions:
  - » NSW [Office of the Children's Guardian](#)
  - » ACT [Access Canberra- Working with Vulnerable People](#)
  - » VIC [Justice and Community Safety](#)
  - » QLD [Queensland Government Department of Justice and Attorney General - Blue Care Services](#)
  - » TAS [Department of Justice](#)
  - » SA [Department of Human Services](#)
  - » NT [Northern Territory Government](#)
  - » WA [Department of Communities](#)
- Timelines for consultations that demonstrate sufficient time to engage effectively
- Information about how data will be stored, and (if applicable) destroyed
- Information about the curation of the artefacts collected from the children
- How fidelity in analysis will be assured and methods of reporting findings
- Strategies to report back to children
- Strategies, if required, to showcase data to a broader audience where appropriate.

# Appendix A: Planning Effective Processes

## Planning Effective Processes

**Clarity of purpose:** What are you seeking to understand?

**Scoping:** Have children already shared their insights, if so, what can be learnt from these previous consultations?  
Who is it important to consult with?

**Impact:** How will children’s perspectives inform policy development?





## Appendix B: Guidance for working with ECEC and OSHC

- In selecting sites to approach for participation, conduct a situational analysis. What sites or combination of sites might be able to provide the diversity needed for the questions being investigated?
- Plan the consultation process with the ECEC and OSHC settings to ensure it is not disruptive, is aligned with their values, and at best can be merged into everyday operations.
- Organisations may have their own ethics screening and approval processes that will have to be adhered to.
- Collaboratively consider the timing, and location of the consultation processes, but be prepared to adapt.
- Sites are busy. Sites may vary in how readily they can accommodate or support children's consultations.
- Multiple visits may be necessary, especially with younger children or children unused to consultation processes, and this will need to be carefully negotiated with each site.
- Remember, educators have expertise about children and will have valuable insights that can support the development or implementation of the consultation processes. They can also advise on external allies and experts who may be able to provide additional insights into a child or community of children to foster their inclusion.

## Appendix C: Children’s Commissioners in Australia

Ahead of planning or undertaking consultations with children, you may wish to engage with relevant Children’s Commissioners to inform your approach. The following list provides links to Children’s Commissioners (as at April 2025), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioners, across jurisdictions in Australia.

### National

- [National Children’s Commissioner](#)
- [National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People](#)

### Australian Capital Territory

- [Children and Young People Commissioner](#)
- [ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children & Young People Commissioner](#)

### New South Wales

- [Advocate for Children and Young People](#)

### Northern Territory

- [Children’s Commissioner](#)

### Queensland

- [Queensland Family and Child Commission](#)

### South Australia

- [Commissioner for Children and Young People](#)
- [Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People](#)

### Tasmania

- [Commissioner for Children and Young People](#)

### Victoria

- [Commissioner for Children and Young People and Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People](#)

### Western Australia

- [Commissioner for Children and Young People](#)

You may also wish to consult additional key stakeholders and/or peak organisations with relevant expertise to inform your project.

For additional resources and guidance, please refer to Appendix 2 of the Voice of Children Framework: Analysis Paper.



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