

**FORCES
CHILDREN
SCOTLAND**



**FACILITATING THE
MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION
AND ENGAGEMENT OF
BABIES, CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE**



**FORCES CHILDREN SCOTLAND'S
PRINCIPLES**

This guidance outlines how we approach participation, all the considerations needed to deliver the best possible practice, and how children and young people will experience it.

The principles are designed to support various forms of engagement with children and young people, with particular relevance for project-specific group work.

The principles will remain the same for participation work which is not time-limited or requires regular commitment by participants, but consideration will need to be given to how they are applied in this context.

Thanks to Children in Scotland for sharing their learning, which we have adapted to reflect our context and existing practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Our vision is that opportunities for babies, children and young people from Regular, Reservist and Veteran families are maximised. They are listened to, their rights are upheld, and they are empowered to realise their potential and thrive.

We cannot achieve this without having them at the heart of all we do. These principles have been developed to inform the way we co-produce with children and young people and meaningfully include the experiences of babies.

HEAR. INVOLVE. SUPPORT. is the name of our 2025-2028 strategy and our commitment to children from forces families.



Two of our four strategic aims are linked to meaningful participation:

- **Creating spaces for listening, sharing power and upholding rights through learning, development and policy**
- **Participation, resources and wellbeing supports in Early Years, Primary, Secondary and community settings**

With over 13,000 babies, children and young people from armed forces families living in Scotland, we are committed to ensuring their views are widely represented, guiding our practice and informing our external work with wider policymakers and practitioners.

We know that doing participation really well isn't something you "finish" – it's an ongoing journey. Sometimes there will be barriers and challenges, and sometimes we'll get things wrong. When that happens, we promise to listen, learn, and do better next time. These principles guide everything we do.

OUR COMMITMENT TO BABIES, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

HOW WE MAKE SURE THEIR VOICE REALLY MATTERS

It's never just a tick-box: Their time is valuable. We'll only ask them to get involved when it really matters and their ideas can make a difference.

Privacy is protected: They do not need to share their personal stories in order to have an opinion.

Planned properly: We'll make sure there's enough time, money, and resources to do it well—not rushed, not half-done.

No out-of-pocket costs: We'll cover things like travel, snacks, and any other reasonable expenses, so they are never paying to take part.

Recognition for their time: They deserve thanks for what they give. This might be certificates, food, gift vouchers, or other opportunities (like training or events).

Clear from the start: We'll explain exactly what they can influence, how decisions will be made, and what their role will be.

Everyone is welcome: We'll work to make activities accessible and inclusive for all, especially those who might face barriers to getting involved.

Choices in how they take part: They can choose the format that works for them — online or in-person, group or one-to-one.

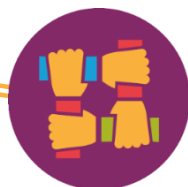
Consent: They will understand what they are agreeing to be involved in, and they can stop at any time. We'll check in regularly to make sure they still want to be involved.

Safe and well-managed: We'll follow proper planning steps to keep everyone safe, including risk checks, health and safety rules, and fairness checks.

Support outside of meetings: If they need some additional support outside of meetings, we will provide that to them or connect them with someone else who can.

We'll keep them in the loop: They will find out how their ideas were used and the difference they made—we won't leave them wondering.

See the results: We'll show them what happened next, so they know their voice mattered.

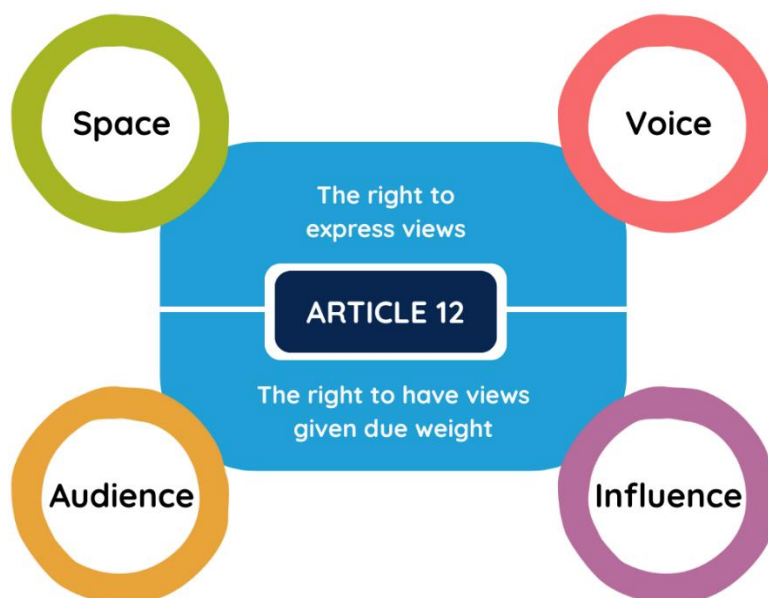


CHILDREN'S RIGHTS APPROACH

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that **children have the right to be heard, listened to, and taken seriously** in all decisions that affect them. As one of the UNCRC's General Principles, it must guide the interpretation and implementation of all other rights.

Participation refers to **the practices, policies, and approaches** that ensure children's voices are included in decision-making. One of our core values as an organisation is to listen to children and young people and share their views with our network and the wider community on a broad range of issues to deliver the best outcome possible.

Our participation and influencing work is underpinned by the **Lundy model of participation**¹. This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC, which is intended to focus on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision.



The four elements are:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their views.
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their views.
- **AUDIENCE:** The views must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The views must be acted upon, as appropriate.

Children and young people should be supported to take part in decisions in all areas of their lives, including forces life, education, health, hobbies, and defence strategy.

¹[Lundy-Model-Handout_RRSA_May-2024.pdf](#)

FORCES CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CHARTER

We take a children's rights-based approach to everything we do. This means putting the rights of babies, children and young people at the centre. It recognises that they are not just passive recipients of services but **active rights-holders**, whose views, experiences and needs must guide decisions that affect them.

[The Forces Children's Rights Charter](#) informs all our participation, project and influencing work. By linking directly to the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)** and the **Armed Forces Covenant**, we commit to making sure no forces child is disadvantaged because of their parent's service.



When we take a children's rights-based approach to participation:

- We **start from children's experiences**, not from assumptions about what they need.
- We **co-produce** wherever possible, recognising children as partners.
- We **use their words, their priorities, and their insights** to shape law, policy and practice.
- We **close the loop** by going back to children and young people, so they know the impact their work has had.

SHARING POWER WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Forces Children Scotland is committed to sharing power with young people. This means that we will share decision-making authority with them - either giving young people responsibility to make decisions themselves or working together in partnership.

Sharing power is not only about who makes decisions, but also about building a culture of mutual respect between adults and young people. It involves recognising young people's strengths, valuing what they bring, and providing training or support when needed - just as we would for any adult involved in decision-making.



Working in genuine partnership with young people means adults may need to step back, let go of control, and rethink traditional professional boundaries. This is not always easy, and support for adults is just as important as support for young people when roles and responsibilities are shifting.

From the outset, **be clear about where decision-making power lies.**

It is important to ensure that measures to safeguard children and young people are balanced with measures to facilitate their empowerment and ownership, to ensure the latter is not undermined. The responsibility for safeguarding always rests with the adults.

Reflect on who has traditionally held power, how it has been used, and how this is changing through young people's involvement. Remember that power can be reinforced in both obvious and subtle ways- including in the dynamics between young people themselves.

Some young people may feel pressure to represent others or experience impostor syndrome when sharing power with adults. Make time to explore these feelings and provide structures of support.

Participation should be framed as an opportunity to contribute, learn and shape services – not a responsibility to speak ‘on behalf of’ all children and young people or to have ‘the answers’.

Processes and spaces must be designed with young people, not simply adapted for them. Youth-friendly, co-created structures are far more effective than expecting young people to adapt to existing adult-led systems. This work requires investment of time, skills and resources to do it well.

Above all, clarity, honesty and co-design are key. When adults share power with young people in intentional, supported ways, participation becomes meaningful and sustainable.



LOGIC MODEL

C&YP: Children and young people

What we bring:

- Skilled staff trained in participation practice
- Time and resources dedicated to co-design with C&YP
- Organisational commitment to children's rights & equity
- Safe, accessible spaces (physical and digital) for engagement
- Partnerships with schools, services, families, and communities
- Tools for inclusive communication

What we do:

- Co-create processes, spaces, and resources with C&YP
- Build adults' confidence and capacity to share power responsibly
- Provide training, preparation, and ongoing support for C&YP
- Ensure clarity about boundaries of decision-making power from the outset
- Facilitate dialogue where C&YP can safely challenge, question, and innovate
- Establish protective safeguarding measures that don't undermine agency
- Embed feedback loops so C&YP know how their input shapes outcomes
- Regularly reflect on, evaluate, and adapt participation practice

Direct results:

- Participation opportunities designed and delivered with C&YP
- Guidance for adults on power-sharing and safeguarding roles
- Clear communication of purpose, influence, and limitations of C&YP's involvement
- Child-friendly materials and tools that increase accessibility
- Records of C&YP's contributions and how they influenced decisions
- Visible examples of co-designed policies, services, or events

Outcomes for children and young people:

- Feel respected, safe, and listened to
- Gain confidence, skills, and agency
- See their ideas and experiences shaping real outcomes
- Experience participation as an opportunity, not a burden

Outcomes for adults/professionals:

- Increased capacity to share power and let go of control
- Greater awareness of safeguarding and ethical responsibilities
- Stronger trust and relationships with C&YP
- More responsive, equitable practice

Outcomes for FCS/systems:

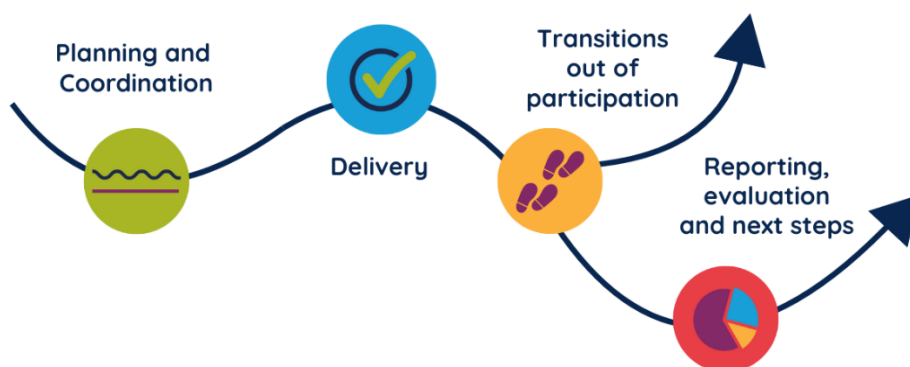
- Services and policies better aligned to C&YP's needs and rights
- More transparent decision-making processes
- Clearer accountability to children, families, and communities

Impact:

- A culture where children's rights are embedded in everyday practice
- Sustainable structures for C&YP's participation that influence systems and policy
- Reduced disadvantage for forces children and young people in line with the Armed Forces Covenant
- Services that are fairer, more inclusive, and shaped by those who use them
- Stronger trust between children, young people, families, professionals, and institutions

KEY STAGES

Power sharing, inclusion, safeguarding, and child protection are overarching principles woven into every stage of our work and must be considered throughout.



PLANNING AND COORDINATION

- We will be clear on the rationale and scope of children's involvement. **10**
- We will be prepared as a team. **11**
- We will ensure children and young people are safe and protected. **12**
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- We will adjust the methodology as needed. **25**
- We will record accurately. **26**

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PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will be clear on the rationale and scope of children and young people's involvement.

We will include children and young people as early as possible in everything we do. We will think early about how much children and young people can be involved in designing and delivering the project by asking these questions:

- Do we have the time, resources, and support to make this a co-designed project?
- Is it clear what influence they will have and how their participation will be meaningful?
- Will there be opportunities for them to shape the direction of the work and take the lead in sessions?
- Have they already shown interest in this, or do we need to do some groundwork first?
- Are there other things happening in their lives during the project, like exams or holidays, that could affect their involvement?
- What are the power imbalances, and how will they be reduced to allow equity in participation and power sharing?
- What can we do to work around or reduce these barriers?
- Are we clear about how we will respond if there is a disconnect between the views and opinions of children, young people and adults?

Children and young people will know what they are agreeing to.

- **When they get involved in a project, it will feel like it is just starting, not that they are coming in at the middle or end.**
- **They will understand the difference their contributions will make.**
- **They will understand how they can be involved and where they can lead if they want to.**
- **They will know what power they have and how we will deal with differences in opinions and thoughts.**
- **If this is a new topic for them, they will be confident that they know everything they need to be fully involved.**
- **They will be confident that we know what else is going on for them and that their involvement won't clash with things like exams or holidays.**
- **They will be confident raising anything that is making it difficult for them to be involved and that we will work with them to overcome these barriers.**





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will be prepared as a team.

- There will be clear role clarity and relationship mapping. Before project implementation, we will clearly define:
 - Each staff member's specific role and purpose in the project
 - Why their involvement is appropriate and necessary
 - Which staff members already have established relationships with the young people
 - What steps are needed to build appropriate working relationships where none exist
- All team members will have a comprehensive understanding of the project goals, methodology, and the specific needs of participating young people.
- When working with new groups, we will build dedicated time into the project schedule for staff to establish connections with participants through introductory calls or extended time during initial sessions.
- We will assess whether additional training is needed to support staff in working effectively with new groups, particularly around specific issues, topics, or emerging themes that may arise. Training needs will be included in both project timelines and budgets.
- We will consider the comprehensive impact on staff undertaking this work, including:
 - Workload capacity and realistic time allocation
 - Lone working considerations and safety protocols
 - Emotional impact and psychological support needs
 - Ensure appropriate support measures and resources are identified during planning and adequately budgeted for.
- We will ensure safeguarding requirements are met. All staff must have appropriate clearance to work with children and young people. Staff working directly with young people as part of their regular duties must be current members of the Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme. Any additional adults assisting should work alongside PVG-cleared staff members.

Children and young people's experiences will be well planned and delivered.

- They will understand who all the adults in the project are and why they are involved.
- They will experience the staff as being appropriately trained.
- They will be confident that staff are aware of their specific needs and are able to meet them.
- They will know the staff or be given all the time they need to build supportive relationships.
- They will experience the staff as knowledgeable about the project and its outputs.
- They will experience the staff as having the time, skills and capacity to deliver the project with them.
- They will be confident that all adults they are in contact with are safe to work with children or suitably supervised by someone who is.





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will ensure children and young people are safe and protected.

- [All safeguarding and child protection policies](#) will be followed at all times by all adults.
- We will make it fair and safe by ensuring the safety rules match how big or small the project is—it won't be more complicated than it needs to be.
- We will provide clear information in consent forms and group formation to ensure children and young people understand what we will do to keep them protected.
- If we are working with other organisations, we will make sure:
 - It is clear who the lead organisation is for keeping everyone safe
 - There are clear guidelines for what happens if people disagree about safeguarding decisions
 - Each individual organisation has its own safety rules and trained staff
- We will be clear to everyone (staff, partners, and young people):
 - Who the designated person is that deals with keeping children safe, and
 - How to contact them if they're worried about something.
- We will ensure children and young people who need extra help during the project or when it finishes have a clear plan for who will provide this support. We will make sure everyone involved, including the young people, knows about it.
- We will always complete a risk assessment before starting any work with children and young people to spot and prevent problems before they happen.
- When delivering online, we will ensure strong safeguarding measures that protect participants from online risks like cyberbullying, inappropriate content, or breaches of confidentiality.

Children and young people will be well supported.

- They will be safe at all times; their involvement should make things better for them.
- They will understand what we are doing to keep them safe. They can tell us when this is not the case, and we will work with them to make it better.
- They will know who to talk to if they are not feeling safe or have questions about their wellbeing.
- They will be confident that we have identified what could go wrong and put things in place to reduce the risk of that happening.
- If they need extra support to be safe, they will get it. This shouldn't stop them from being involved, but if it might, we will talk about it with them and decide together.
- If they need support between meetings or after the project is finished, they will get the support they need.
- They will be confident that we have the policies and procedures in place to keep them safe and that we regularly check that they are still best practice.





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will ensure that the full diversity of children and young people's experiences is represented.

- We will ensure that all activities we undertake are accessible and inclusive for all young people, especially those who might face barriers to getting involved.
- When recruiting for a new project, we will actively seek a mixed demographic while seeking to ensure tri-service representation and a mix of children from Serving, Reservist and Veteran families. We will take into consideration age, gender and sexual identity, ethnicity, geographical location, additional support needs and any other characteristic which requires additional thought and planning.
- Where possible, we will design recruitment materials with a small group of young people to ensure relevance and accessibility. Dissemination of the recruitment materials will also be planned alongside young people to ensure reach, diversity and inclusion.
- When working in schools or with MoD youth groups, we will allow enough time to coordinate with staff and volunteers there to ensure agreed outcomes and ways of working before the project starts. This will increase our ability to recruit a wide and diverse group.

Children and young people will feel that the group is representative of their community and diverse experiences.

- They can participate in everything they want to, with all barriers identified and removed or mitigated.
- They will see representation by children and young people from the tri-services, and a mixture of those from Serving, Reservist and Veteran families.
- They will be involved in designing the recruitment materials, or otherwise they will experience them as engaging and relevant because they have been designed by children like them.
- They might hear about the project through school or working with other services in their community and be confident to take part because they experience the adults as one team.





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will ensure informed consent.

- We will ensure that children and young people clearly understand why they're taking part, what it involves, and how their information will be used.
- Before they get involved, we will ensure they receive an easy-to-understand information sheet and consent form to help them decide if they want to join. Where possible, these will be co-produced with children and young people.
- We will provide opportunities to discuss their involvement and answer any of their questions before they sign up.
- It will be clear that children and young people can withdraw their consent at any time without needing to give a reason.
- Consent forms will only ask for what's necessary and match the type of activity, recognising that giving consent for a one-off school session is different from joining a longer online project.
- When needed for additional safeguarding, we will ensure consent forms include specific details about safeguarding processes during and after involvement. This might include identifying a supportive adult and providing appropriate contact details.
- We will ensure we ask about any extra support needed for the child or young person to participate so we can plan for it.
- Our consent forms will be rights-respecting. Where parental consent is needed for children under the age of 12, the form will make it clear that parental consent is about confirming the child understands what's involved, rather than giving permission to be involved.
- We will make sure all information is kept safe and only used for the project. We will comply with GDPR. If we want to use the information for anything else, we'll ask for new consent.
- Our consent process will actively consider any other forces-specific restrictions around privacy and security.
- We will regularly review our consent procedures to ensure they are best practice.
- Consent to participate in online projects will include information about privacy protections tailored for the online environment.

Children and young people have all the information they need to take part.

- They understand what they will be taking part in, how much of their time it will take and how their information will be used.
- They can ask questions and get answers before they make a commitment.
- They will know that they can stop being involved at any time, and they do not need to explain why.
- They will only have to give as much information as needed for the project they are getting involved in.
- They will be clear about how we will keep them safe while they are working with us.
- They will be asked about any support they need to join in, and this will be provided in the way that is most helpful to them.
- They will understand that their parent is agreeing that they understand what they are signing up to, not that they are giving permissions on their behalf. They will know that their rights are respected.
- They will know that being involved will not mean talking about anything that would make things difficult for their serving parent, like specifics about deployments or postings.
- If they are working with us online, they will know what extra things we will do to keep them safe.





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will adapt to ensure that all children and young people can take part.

- We will actively work to ensure as wide a representation of lived experience as possible, through proactive recruitment of those with protected characteristics.
- We will actively remove barriers and create opportunities to ensure they are accessible for all.
- We will consider key activities in the year, such as exams and school holidays, to avoid any clash or overload of commitments.
- We will give special consideration and planning to what is needed to include very young children and those with communication difficulties. We will use tools such as the forces-specific symbols in Talking Mats to help this.
- We will develop and maintain strong links and partnerships with others working with forces children, for example, the Army Welfare Service Community Learning and Development Team, to ensure as many forces children and young people as possible have the opportunity to be involved.
- Wherever possible, we will deliver the work through practitioners who already know the children well and understand how to support them effectively to increase accessibility. We will start these conversations early and build in their involvement from the beginning.
- We will adapt our methods, materials, environment, and ways of working to meet each child's needs.
- We will give ourselves plenty of time to work with children, as this is often key to making participation truly inclusive.
- We will consider the timing of the opportunity—is it likely to clash with school, after school activities, family commitments—and plan accordingly.
- We will give simple, clear instructions about how to join in, what will happen, and why their participation matters. We will use pictures, videos, or interactive guides to explain things when helpful.

Children and young people will have no barriers to taking part.

- They will be able to take part. If there are barriers to this, they will be supported to ensure it doesn't stop them taking part.
- They will have activities adapted to meet their needs.
- They will get as much time as they need, and it will happen at times that work for them.
- Other life events, like deployment, holidays or exams, don't get in the way of them participating.
- They will be able to tell us what they think through the use of creative activities and communication tools.
- They will hear about opportunities through people who are already supporting them in their community to make getting involved as easy as possible.
- If their involvement will be better because these adults are also involved in the project, they will be able to ask for that to happen.





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

We will plan and design activities with children and young people.

- We will co-design activities with children and young people.
- We will build on learning from past projects and avoid asking the same questions repeatedly, so children and young people know their input is valued.
- If a topic has been explored before, we will explain what is different this time, such as a new audience or showing evidence of change.
- Activities will be designed to match the needs, interests and strengths of each group.
- We will use creative and engaging methods suited to different learning styles, including tools like Talking Mats, where useful.
- Activities will be flexible and adaptable. We will prepare more than one way to explore a topic and adjust if something isn't working—even improvising if needed.
- We may collect baseline data at the start to help measure the impact of participation on those involved.
- In designing activities, we will be clear about:
 - Who we want to share findings with
 - How we will share them
 - What change or influence we hope to achieveThis will guide our choice of methods to make the most impact
- If our approach creates barriers, we will change the approach, not expect young people to adapt. Meaningful involvement always comes first.

Children and young people will work alongside us to design activities that work for them.

- They will be involved in designing the activities they will be taking part in.
- They will feel listened to and be confident that their views are and will be acted on.
- If it is a topic they have already shared their views on, they will understand why we are asking again.
- They will be confident that the activities are designed to allow them to be their best.
- They will know that the activities will work for them and meet their needs in how they like to learn or communicate.
- They will know that we will change the activity if it doesn't work for them and have other activities to do if the planned one isn't working.
- They will be confident that how the project is impacting them will be monitored.
- They will understand what is trying to be achieved and how the activities will achieve this.
- They will know that activities and methods will be changed as many times as needed to ensure they can stay involved and contribute their best.





PLANNING AND COORDINATION

Our additional considerations and risk management

- We will check if activities create any legal, ethical, or safeguarding issues. For example, when discussing deployment, we will think about security risks and the emotional support young people may need, especially online.
- We will stay aware of wider events, like major deployments, that could affect participation and adjust plans with advice from MOD colleagues.
- We will plan extra wellbeing support if the topic or outside events make it necessary. This may include asking young people to identify a trusted adult who can support them alongside FCS staff.
- We will have processes in place to monitor engagement and respond to any unexpected non-attendance, following safeguarding procedures if necessary.
- For in-person activities, we will book travel in advance where possible. If not, we will reimburse costs on the day so that money is never a barrier to taking part.
- For full-day in-person events, we will provide clear information about meals and ensure dietary needs are considered.
- For online activities, we will make sure all children have access to devices, reliable internet, and private space so no one is excluded.
- We will provide technical support when needed, including simple guides, troubleshooting help, and secure, child-friendly platforms.

Children and young people will be confident that we have thought of everything.

- **They will be confident that things like security and privacy concerns arising from forces life have been thought about, and they will be safe and well cared for.**
- **They will know that things like major deployments have been planned for.**
- **They will get extra support for their wellbeing if it is needed due to the nature of the topic or something else going on in their life.**
- **They will know that everything they need to join in will be taken care of, for example, train tickets, access to devices or food they like to eat.**
- **They will be confident that if they are out of pocket in any way, they will be paid back as soon as possible.**
- **If they need additional technical support, they will get what they need so they are confident joining in.**



DELIVERY

Our considerations for the delivery of all activities

- We will build safety and respect by creating a group agreement together, led by young people, and review it as needed.
- We will support the development of skills for children and young people to ensure that, in sharing their own or someone else's lived experience, they protect their privacy, do not breach confidentiality and warn people in advance if the content might be distressing.
- We will explain the purpose of every activity from the start, be honest about what's possible, and show how their input makes a difference.
- We will always be clear about the topic for discussion before starting, and we will give a trigger warning for those topics that might be sensitive.
- We will be clear that they do not need to share anything of their personal story in order to have their opinion heard.
- We will be clear that anyone can opt out of any activity at any time. This will be reinforced before beginning any activity about topics that might be sensitive or triggering.
- We will ensure there are always sufficient staff to respond to individual needs while the activity continues.
- We will encourage expression and leadership by letting young people shape sessions and contribute in ways that feel comfortable.
- We will agree together how their views are shared—anonymously, with a pseudonym, or with their real name.
- Participation is always their choice. They can stop at any time, and leaving will be made simple and respectful.
- For younger children, we will involve parents or carers when helpful, while respecting the child's independence.
- We will seek regular feedback and use it to improve and adapt future sessions.
- For participants who are involved in several projects or our core participation work, we will actively acknowledge and celebrate contributions and achievements at key milestones in their lives or at set times in the calendar. We will encourage continued engagement and foster positive relationships through this.
- A Designated Child Protection Officer will always be in place, and everyone will know who this is and how to contact them.

Children and young people will have clear ground rules, developed with and for them.

- They will feel safe and respected at all times. They will know how to treat others and how they will be treated. They will be involved in working this agreement out and reviewing it.
- They will know that they do not need to share anything of their personal story to say what they think needs to happen.
- They will understand how to protect their own and others' confidentiality when sharing lived experience.
- They will know the purpose of every activity and the difference their involvement can have.
- They will know that they can opt out of an activity at any time, and they will be offered the support of an adult when this happens.
- They will have the opportunity to shape the activities and how they contribute.
- They will be involved in deciding whether their contributions are anonymous or have their name attached. They can also choose a different name.
- They will be encouraged to give regular feedback on how future sessions can be adapted or improved.
- They will always know who is responsible for ensuring everyone is safe and how to get in contact with them.



DELIVERY

Our additional considerations for in-person delivery

- We will choose venues that are accessible, safe, comfortable and welcoming, while reflecting the cultural needs of the group.
- Where possible, we will gather information in advance about individual support needs, so the space is as inclusive as possible from the start and before it is designed together.
- We will design the space with participants where possible.
- We will create a relaxed atmosphere with simple touches like music, lighting, and comfortable seating. Where possible, we will provide a quiet space for breaks.
- We will be aware that what feels welcoming for some can be overwhelming for others. We will avoid too much noise or choice and use inclusive options like gentle icebreakers and fidget toys.
- We will provide food and snacks, taking into account dietary needs and preferences.
- We will ensure staff are easy to recognise—for example, with branded clothing, ID badges, or other identifiers, especially in busy settings.
- We will keep a copy of the risk assessment and key contact details on hand.
- We will ensure cash is available to reimburse participants for any costs not covered in advance.

Children and young people will be comfortable and confident getting involved in-person.

- They will experience the participation spaces as safe, welcoming and individually tailored to meet their needs.
- They will have a say in how the space is set up.
- They will experience welcoming activities as inclusive and respectful of everyone's needs.
- Where possible, they will have a space to withdraw to, should they need it.
- There will be food and drink that they like and want to eat.
- They will know who the staff are as they are clearly identified.
- They will be confident that staff know the plan to keep everyone safe.
- They will not be out of pocket for participating.



DELIVERY

Our additional considerations for online delivery

- We will set clear ground rules for behaviour by considering what needs to be added to the group agreement that is specific to creating a positive and inclusive online space.
- We will use icebreakers and warm-up activities to build rapport and encourage openness.
- We will facilitate engagement and interaction by using a variety of interactive methods, for example, polls, breakout rooms, chats and collaborative whiteboards, to keep children and young people actively involved. We will support multiple ways to participate to suit different preferences and abilities, including speaking, typing and drawing.
- We will be mindful of attention spans and energy levels when online by keeping sessions shorter and including frequent breaks.
- We will be flexible and responsive to signs of fatigue or disengagement.
- We will follow up with the young person and their supportive adult where needed, if they drop off a call unexpectedly or their presentation during the call raises concerns.
- We will follow our safeguarding policies if we have not been able to reach the young person or their supportive adult after a reasonable amount of time.

Children and young people will be comfortable and confident getting involved online.

- They will help make the rules for creating a safe online space.
- There will be activities that help people to get to know each other and get used to being together online.
- They will experience lots of different ways to be involved, and these will be varied to make sure everyone can participate.
- The sessions will be short and include lots of breaks, because participating online can be hard to keep up.
- They will be confident that activities will change or stop if everyone is looking tired or slowing down.
- They will be contacted by one of the staff should they drop off the call unexpectedly and not rejoin. We will ensure they are safe and check if they need additional support to stay involved.
- If they can't be reached, their identified supportive adult will be contacted to check in with them to make sure they are okay.
- They will be aware of what the safeguarding policies are and when they will be followed.



DELIVERY

We will support communication.

- We will ask children and young people how they prefer to communicate and adapt based on their feedback.
- We will equip children and young people with the communication skills needed to present their lived experience and views in a way that protects their privacy.
- We will keep language clear, accurate, and easy to understand, avoiding complicated words, acronyms, and jargon.
- We will make discussion topics, information, and key questions straightforward.
- We will routinely use different coloured paper for printed materials, to assist those with dyslexia without drawing attention to them.
- We will never assume children and young people already understand. We will create space for them to ask questions or clarify points. At the same time, we will avoid oversimplifying in a way that might feel patronising.
- We will use a mix of methods to help everyone engage, including spoken, written, visual, creative, and digital.
- We will consider the use of communication tools, such as Talking Mats, to be as inclusive as possible.

Children and young people will be able to communicate in the way that works best for them.

- **They will be asked how they like to communicate and experience adaptations to meet this need.**
- **They will experience plain language without jargon or big words.**
- **They will easily be able to take part in all discussions.**
- **There will be communication tools available for all at all times, so no one feels singled out.**
- **They can ask as many questions as they need to, so they can understand.**
- **They will experience multiple ways to have their say, and they can choose the ones that work best for them.**



DELIVERY

We will build relationships and confidence.

- We will take the time to build relationships, as these are the foundations of the safe spaces needed for good participation.
- We will be mindful of our interactions, at all times being professional, friendly and respectful of their boundaries.
- We will take the time to learn children and young people's names and what is important to them.
- We will invest time at the beginning to develop the children and young people's decision-making skills, so they are confident in sharing their views even when they are different from others in the group.
- We will create an environment where curiosity is encouraged, questions are welcomed, "mistakes" are okay, and understanding is regularly checked.
- We will value each perspective equally, showing that their voice has genuine importance and impact.

Children and young people will be supported through relationships.

- They will have as much time as they need to build trusting relationships.
- They will experience the staff as welcoming, professional and respectful of their space.
- They will feel seen and that everyone is making an effort to get to know them.
- They will feel supported to make decisions and know what things they need to consider when making them.
- They will be confident to be curious, try things that may not work and ask as many questions as they need.
- They will experience regular check-ins to ensure they are understanding and fully able to give their best.
- They will be confident to share their views, even when they are different from others.



DELIVERY

We will adjust the methodology as needed.

- We will monitor how engaged participants are and change our approach if needed.
- If an activity isn't working, we will try different ways to spark interest and encourage participation.
- We will listen to feedback and involve children and young people in agreeing adjustments where possible.
- We will keep asking for their ideas and feedback throughout.
- If things don't go as planned, we will be ready to improvise and ask colleagues for support.
- We will adapt the programme to get the best outcomes—this could mean extending an activity if energy is high, stopping early if it isn't working, or taking a fun break before returning.
- After each session, we will review what worked, what didn't, and what to change for next time.
- We will remember that every group is different—what worked before may not work again.

Children and young people will know that activities will be adapted to suit them.

- They will be confident that activities will engage them or be changed if they don't.
- They will be confident in saying what is working, what isn't and what would make it better—and know that it will be acted on.
- They will have many opportunities to give feedback in ways that work for them.
- They will experience the activities as planned for them, not something that has been done over and over without thought or adjustment.



DELIVERY

We will record accurately.

- We will record their voices, opinions and experiences truthfully and accurately at all times.
- We will not alter or paraphrase their words.
- If working with other adults to support participation work, such as interpreters or advocates, we will ensure they understand the need for the views presented to genuinely reflect those of the child or young person.
- We will be transparent about the recording process. We will explain clearly that while consultation results may be summarised in reports, every effort will be made to preserve the original meaning and context of their contributions.
- If quotes are used, we will check with the owner if they are happy with both the quote and the context in which it is being used.
- We will only use their words for the purpose they have agreed. If we are re-using a quote or opinion for another purpose, we will go back to the owner and seek new consent for this use.
- We will involve them at every step when creating written content in their name or preparing content they will deliver for an event or recording.
- We will continuously check that their views are accurately represented and only sign off on the content when they are completely happy with it.
- We will make sure they are comfortable with the photos or videos used.
- We will share the final output with participants before publication. We will give them as much time and as many drafts as they need to review and approve the final output. It should not go out without their sign-off.

Children and young people will be confident that what they say will be treated with respect.

- They will be confident that what they say will be recorded just the way they said it.
- They will know that the meaning and context of what they say will be respected and not changed in any way.
- They will know how their words will be used in the output.
- If their words are used as a direct quote, they will understand the context in which it is being used and be asked for their permission to use it.
- They will be confident that we will only use their words in the way they have agreed.
- They know that we will come back and ask for new permission if their words will be used for something else.
- They will be fully involved in creating all content.
- Content will only be published or delivered once they have signed off on it.
- No photos or videos of them will be used without their permission, and they will know how they are being used.
- They will see the final content before publication and have the opportunity to make changes.





TRANSITIONS OUT OF PARTICIPATION

At some point, all children and young people will transition out of participation—this is normal. Some young people may just drift away as they develop new interests, or the project might come to an end, and they don't want to continue with a new one. It is important that as much attention is paid to good endings as to good beginnings.

If the need for ongoing support for any of the participants has been identified during the project, we will make sure this is in place either through internal services or by making the appropriate connections with outside agencies. Our responsibility to the participants does not end just because the project has.

We will plan for transitions.

- We will plan for endings right from the start of the project.
- We will keep a record of individual contributions and worker observations about skills learned or demonstrated.
- We will acknowledge their contributions in a formal way. This might include a reference, certificate of involvement, nomination or evidence for an award, or support with their personal statement. We will make this personal to each participant.
- Some young people might transition out of one project while still working with us on another. We will mark each transition in its own right.
- Some participants will move away because of forces life, and we will work with them to identify similar opportunities in their new community where possible.
- We will consider where their words and images have been used and ensure that consent for continued use has been discussed and understood, including using them in new ways. In this instance, we will apply a reasonable and proportionate assessment of appropriateness of use.

Children and young people will feel supported when they leave.

- They will know that they can choose to stop working with us at any time.
- Their involvement and contributions will be celebrated when they finish working with us.
- They will have evidence of their contributions to help with things like job searching or further education applications.
- They will be celebrated and rewarded at key milestones, such as moving school or significant holidays.
- They will understand how and where their contributions might continue to be used and will have consented to this.





TRANSITIONS OUT OF PARTICIPATION

We will respond to unplanned transitions.

- For every project or activity, we will agree on how long a period of non-engagement could take place before it is seen as an unplanned transition. This will vary depending on the type of project and the level of engagement expected.
- We will use worker observations and our database to monitor engagement to quickly respond where an unplanned transition may have occurred. As a team, we will agree on how we will follow up with the participant.
- If there are identified safeguarding concerns linked to non-engagement, we will follow our safeguarding procedures to ensure the participant is safe.
- After a participant does not engage for the agreed amount of time, we will acknowledge their contribution in a formal way. We will make this personal and provide an invitation to get involved again if they wish. This might include a reference, certificate of involvement, acknowledgement of achievement, nomination or evidence for an award.
- We will make explicit the contexts in which their contributions may be used in the future and invite them to get in touch if they no longer want this to happen. We will take no contact as consent but will be thoughtful about when and how we use their contributions.

Children and young people will feel supported when they leave.

- They will know that their contribution is valued and understand how it has made an impact for them and others.
- They will have evidence of the work they have done.
- They will feel supported in their decision to move on from working with us.
- They will feel like their ending with us has been positive, and it is acknowledged.
- They will understand how and where their contributions might continue to be used and will have been given an opportunity to withdraw consent. They will understand that no contact will be taken as consent.





TRANSITIONS OUT OF PARTICIPATION

We will support transitions into youth leadership or volunteering.

- Where a young person is keen to still be involved but has reached young adulthood, we will work with them to identify youth leadership or volunteering roles with FCS.
- We will work with them to identify the support and upskilling required to take up these roles and endeavour to deliver this within our capacity or link them to those who can.

Older young people will have leadership opportunities to stay involved.

- They will know that there are options for them to stay involved in new ways as they get older.
- They will feel supported to develop their leadership or volunteering role as young adults.





REPORTING, EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

Children and young people's participation does not end at delivery; it continues until the project has been completed, evaluated and reported on. By openly sharing findings, outputs and good practice, we will strengthen the case for change grounded in the most reliable evidence and the authentic voices of children and young people. This ensures participation work is meaningful, fully leveraged, and driving positive, lasting change in the lives of those we serve.

Our considerations for reporting and feedback

- We will always recognise and thank children and young people for their contributions, both publicly in reports and privately.
- We will involve the participants in deciding the format and method of reporting wherever possible.
- We will support them to be involved in every aspect, including analysis, recommendations and deciding how it will be disseminated.
- We will consider children and young people when deciding the format of the final output. This might include a detailed technical report alongside a simpler summary, or even creative formats like films, new policies, or procedures.
- We will present all feedback and reports in clear, accessible language, avoiding jargon and acronyms.
- We will ensure that every participant receives a copy of the report in their preferred format.
- We will ensure that all participants will know when reports will be published and the social media planned to support the launch.
- We will consider how best to share and promote the findings as widely as possible, to ensure maximum impact for their time and expertise.
- We will collaborate closely with the broader armed forces community and children's sector to exchange good practice in participation and engagement, and to disseminate key learnings from the project.
- We will continue to provide feedback to the participants, so they know what happened to the views they shared and whether their input led to any actions or changes.
- If a requested change wasn't possible, we will communicate this clearly, along with the reasons why.

Children and young people will know how their contribution has been reported and made a difference.

- They will be publicly credited for all their work and celebrated in private.
- They will be involved in deciding how their work will be reported.
- They can be involved in every aspect of reporting if they want to, and they will be supported to develop new skills to do so if needed.
- There will be a version of the report that will be accessible for them. They will help decide what this looks like and they will receive a copy.
- They will know what will be published, when it will be published and what social media is planned to share the findings.
- They will know what has happened with the findings and the difference it has made.





REPORTING, EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

Our consideration for evaluation

- We will ensure participants have meaningful opportunities to provide feedback on their involvement throughout the project.
- We will encourage them to share their thoughts on the overall engagement process, the decisions made as a result, and to ask questions or continue the conversation.
- We will be intentional about what feedback we seek and will choose child-friendly methods to collect it. This might include standard questions after sessions, dot voting, emoji scales, anonymous surveys, or dedicated evaluation sessions.
- We will always include ways to evaluate how the engagement has impacted individual participants, using baseline data collected at the start to track progress.
- Where we can, we will monitor the broader impact on the wider community and any influence on national policy and include this in the feedback loops.

Children and young people will have many opportunities to give and get feedback.

- Their feedback about what it has meant to be involved in the project will be asked for often and in different ways to make it easy for them to share.
- They will receive recognition for their involvement, which includes personalised feedback about the skills they have developed and shown.
- They will get feedback about what impact their involvement has had in the wider community or on policy and practice.





REPORTING, EVALUATION AND NEXT STEPS

Our considerations for next steps

- We commit to ensuring the findings from the report and evaluation actively shape the direction of future projects and strategic plans.
- We commit to sharing these insights across the staff team to foster collective learning and improvement.
- We will conduct a thorough debrief with all staff involved, providing an opportunity to reflect on successes, challenges, and areas for organisational growth.

Children and young people will know that their work has made a wider impact.

- They will know that their involvement isn't just about a specific project; it will impact future work by FCS.
- They will know that their involvement will help FCS staff to continue to learn and develop.

