

“ Listen – Act – Change

Council of Europe Handbook on children’s participation

For professionals working for and with children



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Building a Europe
for and with children



Annex 6

**COMMUNICATING WITH
CHILDREN: A CHECKLIST**





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Hearing a child's views on matters that are important to them and involving children in decision making means talking and listening; it involves getting to know the child and earning their trust. It is a process. To be understood by children, professionals have to be careful about language and how they present information. The three best ways of promoting understanding are to:

- ▶ Make things simple. Be careful about the words you use. Avoid jargon and long sentences.
- ▶ Use a variety of communication techniques.
- ▶ Regularly check with the child, or children on their (and your) understandings of what's going on.

Use this checklist to guide reflections on your practice when communicating with children in your setting:

Do you ensure that?

- ▶ The child understands who you are, what you are trying to say or what you are trying to ask.
- ▶ You demonstrate respect for the child. You are listening to them and taking them seriously.
- ▶ You are ensuring that decision-makers get to hear and understand the child's wishes and feelings.
- ▶ You do what you say you will do.
- ▶ You continue the dialogue with the child and tell them what happens next and how their wishes have been taken into account.

Connecting with children is enabled when:

- ▶ Children are involved throughout any process, and understand it.
- ▶ Children receive the information you have prepared, in a form they can understand and with time to discuss it.
- ▶ Children's questions are listened to and they are encouraged to express concerns.
- ▶ Children see clear evidence of their preferences and needs being taken into account in any final decisions.
- ▶ Children remain informed about what is happening and why things are happening in this way.

Since coming into force over 30 years ago, Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has affirmed children's right to express their views on all matters that affect them. The Council of Europe has sought to make this right real and concrete in the member states through its Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18, and has also embedded child participation in its own standard-setting, monitoring and capacity building work as well as at its international events. This Handbook represents a substantive contribution to the Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016 to 2021) promoting child participation under its second priority area.

The Handbook was produced by the Children's Rights Division of the Council of Europe in collaboration with international child participation experts and following the consultation of more than 50 children and young people on the challenges to be addressed.

It is meant to be a hands-on tool for people who work with children in a professional capacity, for example in schools, hospitals, alternative care settings, child protection services, and other social services. It is designed for social workers, teachers, judges, lawyers, immigration officers, psychologists, civil servants, youth workers and day care workers, offering them practical approaches to "do" children's participation and make it work for all children, including those in vulnerable situations, both at an individual and a collective level.

Professionals using this Handbook are invited to improve their capacities and skills to "listen" to children, to "act" upon the lessons learned and to "change" any decision making involving or concerning children. They are also invited to spread the good practice promoted through this tool and thus, in the end, to make a life-changing impact for children in those contexts where decisions are made without truly listening to them.

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.