A GUIDE TO INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN TEENAGE PREGNANCY WORK
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- Croydon Health Authority
- Croydon Social Services
- Croydon Voluntary Action
- Doncaster Health Authority
- Durham Young People’s Centre
- East Lancashire Health Authority
- East London Health Promotion and Community Involvement Team
- East Riding and Hull Health Authority
- GFS Platform, Young Women’s Project, Great Yarmouth
- Hammersmith and Fulham Social Services
- Hampshire County Youth Service – Aldershot Peer Training Project
- Health Promotion England (National)
- Healthy Hillingdon, Middlesex
- Involving Young Citizens Equally (IYCE), Huddersfield
- Keighley Young Women’s Unit
- Kingston and Richmond Health Authority
- Kingston upon Thames Social Services
- Lambeth Health Authority
- Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham Health Action Zone
- Leicester, Leicester and Rutland Health Promotion Agency
- Lewisham Reintegration Service for Teen Parents
- Make it Happen! Quality Protects (National)
- Manchester Brook Advisory Centre
- National Children’s Bureau (National)
- Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority
- North Lambeth Primary Care Group
North Nottingham Health Authority
North Staffordshire Health Action Zone
North Staffordshire Health Authority
Northumberland Health Authority
Nottingham Health Authority
Partners in Evaluation, London
Plymouth Health Authority
Reading Family Planning Services
Right Fit (National)
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council Education Department
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust
Shadow Project, Coventry
Sheffield Health Authority
Social Policy Research Unit, University of York
Southampton Community Health Services
Starcom Motive Ltd – Kidscope, London
Stockport NHS Trust
Swindon Health Promotion Agency
Teen Families Team, Wolverhampton
Tees Health Authority
The Clay Partnership Project, Cornwall
The National Healthy Schools Standard, Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment
The Office of the Children’s Rights Commissioner for London
The Who Cares Trust – Associate Parliamentary Group for Children and Young People in and Leaving Care (National)
Tile Hill College, Coventry
Tower Hamlets, East London Health Promotion
Triumph and Success Project, Sheffield
Trust for the Study of Adolescence, Brighton
West Surrey Health Promotion Service
Working with Men, London
Young People’s Forum on Sexual Health (National)
Young People in Democracy Project, South Bedfordshire
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A Guide to Involving Young People in Teenage Pregnancy Work

Introduction

The involvement of young people as active participants in decision-making has become an important trend in recent years. We have gradually moved from a paternalistic approach to health and welfare towards recognising that organisations have a responsibility to involve the users of their services. Whilst early attempts at participation focused largely on adults, the involvement of young people is now seen as equally important. The debate has moved on from whether to involve young people to how such involvement can be achieved and what approaches are most appropriate in which situations. A series of policy developments have placed firm expectations on planners and service providers to involve young people in the decisions that affect their lives.

The Teenage Pregnancy Strategy and Young Peoples’ involvement

The active participation of young people is essential for the success of the Government’s teenage pregnancy strategy. The report on teenage pregnancy by the Social Exclusion Unit in June 1999 set out two main goals:

- Reducing the rate of teenage conceptions (with the specific aim of halving the rate of conceptions among under 18s by 2010)
- Getting more teenage parents into education, training or employment, to reduce their risk of long term social exclusion.

The Government action plan has four main themes:

- **A national campaign** to improve understanding and change behaviour;
- **Joined-up action** to co-ordinate action at both national and local levels;
- **Better prevention** of the causes of teenage pregnancy;
- **Better support** for pregnant teenagers and teenage parents.

Involving young people is central to the implementation of this action plan in order to:

- develop credible approaches to awareness raising and service provision;
• ensure that support services for pregnant teenagers and teenage parents are accessible to those who need them most;

• communicate effectively with those groups most at risk

Credibility and accessibility can only be achieved if young people are actively involved in the work of teenage pregnancy co-ordinators.

This guidance aims to offer practical approaches to involving young people. It is set out in three sections:

1. Young peoples’ participation – what is it and why do it

2. The contexts of participation – where and when to do it

3. Learning from research and practice – how to do it

Accompanying this guidance are some current practice examples (how people are doing it already) and some information on useful resources and references – where to look if you want to know more

If have any queries please contact Jude Williams who is the policy lead for this area of work within the Teenage Pregnancy Unit.
1. Young People’s Participation – What is it and Why do it?

Key Messages

• Participation is an important principle
• There are mutual benefits of participation for young people, service providers and planners
• There are distinct issues to be considered when involving young people
• Participation is essential to the success of the Teenage Pregnancy strategy

1.1 Why is it important to involve young people?

There are legal, moral, political and pragmatic reasons for involvement:

• *The growth of the power of service users*
  The voice of the service user has become central to modernising public services and to recent developments such as ‘Best Value’.

• *Increased control of local regeneration schemes by local people*
  New Deal for Communities and other regeneration schemes have encouraged much greater participation and control by local residents. This is reflected in the recent Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy.

• *Pressure from young people’s user groups*
  Early attempts to involve user groups frequently failed to hear the voices of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups. This was particularly true for children and young people. They were often ignored entirely or it was assumed that adults could represent their best interests. More recently these assumptions have been powerfully challenged both by young people’s groups and a growing number of children’s rights advocates.

• *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*
  Article 12 sets out the rights of children and young people to participate and there are a number of other articles in the Convention (for example, concerning the rights to freedom of conscience and religion) which assert the rights of children to hold views independently of adults.

• *The 1989 Children Act and subsequent Inquiry Reports*
  Implemented in 1991, the Children Act for England & Wales made it a legal requirement for the views of young people to be taken into account in any decision affecting them. The importance of listening to young people has been underlined by successive inquiries into the abuse of children, particularly those in the looked after system. A recurring theme of these inquiries has been the failure of adults to
actively listen to young people. This concern has led to an interest in more effective ways of empowering young people as a protective strategy. This is central to the Quality Protects initiative which aims to transform both the management and delivery of social services for children and requires mechanisms that allow children’s and young people’s views to be listened to and taken account of.

- **The growth of ‘citizenship’ as a policy issue**
  Government commitment to a ‘stakeholder democracy’ and the resurgence of interest in the concept of citizenship has contributed to a search for new ways of involving young people as members of their communities and as citizens, such as the development of Youth Councils and Youth Parliaments.

### 1.2 The benefits of participation

Those involving young people in decision-making have found a number of benefits for young people, staff and organisations.

**Participation:**

- Enables resources to be targeted more effectively – it can avoid wasting time and money on services young people don’t want to use.

- Improves the quality of services as young peoples’ needs and wants are more likely to be met.

- Gives young people greater ownership and commitment to a service.

- Helps young people to support and positively influence each other.

- Provides opportunities for young people to gain experience, skills and confidence.

- Encourages young people to take responsibility and control of their own lives.

- Enhances skills and job satisfaction for planners and service providers.

- Can entail a major shift of attitude on the part of some organisations

### 1.3 Are there any drawbacks?

**Participation:**

- Takes time

- Requires an investment of resources (e.g. in developing new skills for adults and young people)

- Involves negotiation so can slow processes down
On occasions, poorly planned participation can pose risks to young people. For example:

- Imposing responsibilities for which young people have not been prepared
- Exposing them to over-intensive peer pressure
- Involving them in tasks for which they do not have the confidence or skills
- Involving them in public presentations or media activities where they have not fully understood the possible implications
- Involving them in project activities to the exclusion of other interests in their lives

Most of these drawbacks can be overcome with proper planning and preparation but it is not helpful to pretend that participation never carries risks.

1.4 What is participation?

There are two interpretations of the term ‘participation’. It can mean simply ‘taking part in’, or being present; or it can mean a form of empowerment - having a real say in decisions.

It is primarily this second definition of participation with which we are concerned, though the first is by no means easy to achieve particularly when working with excluded groups.

A number of writers have developed typologies of participation (e.g. Arnstein, 1969; Brager & Specht, 1973). These models have more recently been adapted to the participation of children and young people by Thoburn, Lewis & Shemmings (1995); Hart (1992,1997) and Shier (2000) and neatly summarised in the Quality Protects Research Briefing included with this guidance.

These models generally make hierarchical distinctions between approaches according to the degree of power sharing. However, successful participation is not simply a matter of organisations being willing to share their power with young people and allow them to have a voice. It also involves young people themselves making a choice to get involved. Participation is a two-way process.

1.5 What is different about the participation of young people rather than of adults?

Most of the principles of participation apply both to adults and young people but there are some extra points to consider about the involvement of young people:

- **The impact of adult attitudes.** There can be all sorts of assumptions made about young people's capabilities and what they should and should not get involved in.
• **Relative power.** Socially and legally young people do not have the same level of autonomy as adults.

• **Changing interests and capacities.** Young people change more rapidly than adults – what is appropriate for young person aged 12 may not be for a 15 year old.

• **Time is experienced differently.** A year may be a regarded as a realistic time scale for action within an organisation – it is likely to feel like a lifetime to many young people.

### 1.6 Examples of non-participation

Hart (1992, 1997) highlights four common examples of non-participation:

- **Manipulation**, where adults involve young people or their work to illustrate an adult point of view.

- **Deception** where adults, with good intentions, deny their own involvement in a project because they want others to think that it was done entirely by young people.

- **Decoration** where young people are used to promote a cause but have little notion of what the cause is about and no involvement in organising the event.

- **Tokenism** often occurs when adults are keen to give young people a voice without thinking through the implications. Examples include the involvement of young people at an event without adapting the proceedings to enable meaningful participation; or the selection of young people to sit on panels or committees with little opportunity for them to consult with the peers whom they are supposed to represent. Here, young people are performing a symbolic function. Their presence serves to reassure adults that their views are being taken into account without any meaningful attempt to actually do so.

### 1.7 So what is genuine participation?

Drawing from the models developed by Hart and others, it is possible to identify five degrees of genuine participation:

- **Information**: Adults retain full control over the planning and implementation of a project. Young people are involved purely as recipients of services but the value of providing good information should not be diminished as it enables young people to make informed choices about whether or not a project is appropriate for them.

  Providing information is the minimum level of participation and is a prerequisite of good practice. The main issue is to ensure that it is the right information reaching the right young people.

- **Consultation**: Adults retain control over the planning and implementation of a project but do so whilst taking into account the views of young people. Consultations can occur before something is set up to inform its development,
during the life of a project to ensure it is meeting young peoples' needs or when a project has ended as part of a closing evaluation.

Consultations have become a popular means of involving young people and there are different ways of carrying them out. The main issue is to ensure that the approach taken is fit for purpose by asking the right questions of the right young people. A consultation badly done (or over consulting the same young people about the same issues) can be as bad as not consulting at all.

**Representation:** Adults set up a project but involve some young people in planning and/or running it. This may or may not be accompanied by a consultation with a wider group of young people.

Representation often involves the inclusion of some young people on a steering group or management committee. The main issues to consider are how young people are selected (for example, are they chosen by adults or by their peers) and whether they are truly expected to represent the views of a wider group of young people or simply put forward their own viewpoints. In reality it is often unfeasible to expect young people to represent the views of others.

**Partnership:** Where projects are developed in partnership, adults and young people work together to plan and run the project. Partnership denotes a degree of real power sharing so young people should be involved in all the key decisions of the project, including the financial ones.

There are a growing number of examples of partnership initiatives, many of which started as adult-led but gradually moved towards an increased sharing of power and responsibility between adults and young people. The main issues are which young people are involved and how power and responsibility are shared.

**Self-management:** Projects which are self-managed by young people may be initiated by adults or young people but ultimately they are planned and managed by young people themselves. They may choose to engage the help of adults or to employ adults to run aspects of the project for them.

There are fewer examples of fully self-managed projects and those that exist are often fairly small. This is hardly surprising given the practical and financial obstacles involved for young people who wish to run a project independently of adults. However, there are increasing numbers of projects where the balance of control has shifted away from adults towards young people or where aspects are fully self-managed.

One danger of models of participation, particularly those presented as ladders or hierarchies, is that they can imply that all projects should aspire to the highest level. This interpretation is a mistake. Participation needs to be appropriate to its context and should take account of the issues involved, the objectives sought and the young people who make up the target group. Different kinds of participation might be more appropriate for different parts of a project or at different stages in its development.

The following three pages illustrate how different approaches to participation might be used in planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives.
# Levels of Participation

## Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultation</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The idea comes from adults who plan and design the project. Adults ask young people what they think and make changes to their plan accordingly.</td>
<td>The idea comes from adults who involve some young people in planning and designing the project. This may or may not be accompanied by a consultation with a wider group of young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Things to look for:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Things to look for:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How many young people were consulted?</td>
<td>- How many young people are represented?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who were they?</td>
<td>- Who are they and who do they represent?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How was the consultation carried out?</td>
<td>- How were they selected?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What questions were asked?</td>
<td>- What was the nature of their involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What evidence is presented to show that the views of young people have influenced the plan?</td>
<td>- At what stage of the planning did representation occur?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What does the plan say about future involvement of young people?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership</th>
<th>Self-managing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The idea might come from adults or young people. Adults and young people have to work together to plan and design a project. This may or may not involve a consultation with a wider group of young people.</td>
<td>The idea comes from young people themselves who plan and design the project. They may choose to invite the contribution of adults to help them with some aspects of the plan. This may or may not involve consultation with a wider group of young people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Things to look for:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Things to look for:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What is the balance of numbers between adults and young people?</td>
<td>- How many young people are involved in the project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What roles have young people and adults played in developing the plan?</td>
<td>- Who are they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Who has been involved and who has been excluded?</td>
<td>- Are there groups who are excluded?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What does the plan say about future involvement of young people?</td>
<td>- If adults are involved, what role do they play?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- At what stage of the planning were adults involved?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Levels of Participation:

## Implementation

### Consultation

Adults maintain the responsibility for implementing the project plan and managing the project's activities. Young people are consulted about all or some aspects of these activities.

**Things to look for:**

- How many are consulted and who are they?
- How is the consultation carried out?
- What sort of things are young people consulted about?
- What evidence is there that young people's views are being taken into account?

### Representation

Adults share some of the responsibility for running the project with some young people usually via the representation of young people on a steering/management group.

**Things to look for:**

- How many young people are represented?
- Who are they and who do they represent?
- How are decision making processes organised to ensure that young people have influence?
- Are young people represented in all aspects of decision-making or just selected areas?

### Partnership

Young people and adults share the running of the Project.

**Things to look for:**

- Who does what i.e. are responsibilities for issues such as recruitment, financial management etc. shared between adults and young people?
- What are the respective roles of adults and young people?
- Which young people are involved?

### Self-managing

Young people manage and run their own project. They may choose to engage the help of adults. They may employ adults to run aspects of the project for them.

**Things to look for:**

- How many young people are involved and who are they?
- Are there groups who are excluded?
- If adults are involved, what role do they play?
Levels of Participation:

**Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultation</th>
<th>Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults plan and carry out the evaluation. They may consult with young people about the evaluation plan; more commonly they seek the views of young people which form part of the evaluation.</td>
<td>Adults share some of the responsibility for evaluation with some young people. The evaluation itself may involve consultation with a wider group of young people.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Things to look for:*

- Have young people been consulted about the questions to be asked in the evaluation?
- Have they been consulted on how it should be carried out?
- Have they been consulted on the report produced from the evaluation?
- How were the views of young people sought?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partnership</th>
<th>Self-managing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adults and young people plan and carry out the evaluation together. This may or may not include the involvement of young people as researchers.</td>
<td>Young people plan and manage the evaluation of their project. This may or may not involve commissioning adults to carry out the research.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Things to look for:*

- What role have adults and young people played in planning and carrying out the evaluation?
- Has consultation with a wider group of young people occurred?
- Has consultation with a wider group of young people occurred?
- If adults are involved in the evaluation, what role do they play? |
2. The Contexts of Participation– Where and When to do it

Key Messages

- The context in which participation is sought, should inform the approaches used
- Participation can be for the individual young person or collectively: in service development and provision; in research; in communities; in policy and media activities
- Each of these contexts give rise to issues which need to be taken into account

2.1 The different contexts of participation

It is important to distinguish between involving young people in decisions about their lives as individuals and their participation in issues affecting young people collectively. The different contexts of participation can be summarised as follows:

- **Participation in individual decision-making**: the involvement of individual young people in reaching decisions about aspects of their own lives. Young people can be involved in decisions about their sexual health or the future of a pregnancy.

- **Participation in service development and provision**: the involvement of young people individually or collectively as consumers of services. Young people can plan, shape, deliver or evaluate sexual health initiatives or support services for young parents.

- **Participation in research**: the involvement of young people in research as consultants, commissioners or researchers. Young people can formulate the questions to form the basis of a consultation exercise, design questionnaires or conduct interviews.

- **Participation in communities**: the involvement of young people as members of a community which might be either a neighbourhood community or community of interest. Young people can be involved in community based sexual health initiatives.

- **Participation in influencing policy or public awareness**: the involvement of young people in shaping and delivering messages to the public or policy makers via their participation in campaigning groups, involvement with the media etc. Young people can be involved in youth parliaments, with lobbying groups or writing or presenting sexual health messages through the media.

These contexts are not mutually exclusive. However, when exploring the resources and skills required on the part of organisations, workers and young people
themselves, it is worth considering the context and purpose of participation. The challenges are different for young people making decisions about their individual lives to those encountered by young people participating at the community or civic levels and different strategies are required to overcome them.

2.2 Participation in individual decision-making

The main focus of this guidance is on the participation of young people collectively. However, involving young people as individuals in making decisions and choices about their own lives is clearly an important feature of the work of Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators. There are some general issues to consider when supporting young people in this way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues to consider when involving young people in individual decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Does the young person have the information s/he needs to make an informed decision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has the young person had an opportunity to make sure s/he understands the issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What support is available for the young person to talk through options in a non-judgmental environment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is the setting for the support appropriate i.e is it accessible, comfortable, private and appropriate to the young person's culture?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If a young person is to be involved making decisions with adults present, what opportunities are there for him/her to prepare beforehand and talk things through afterwards?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How will differences of view be handled e.g. between the young person and a parent or other adult?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the young person have access to an advocate or supporter to help them represent their point of view?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Does the young person have any special needs which need to be taken into account e.g. communication needs?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3 Participation in service development and provision

Young people can be involved in identifying their own needs and in planning services. This can be done through consultation processes with young people from the target group of the service and/or through the more active involvement of young people working alongside planners.
Many agencies providing services to young people now involve young people in an advisory or management capacity. A common example is the involvement of young people on management or advisory committees. These may be exclusively of young people or mixed groups of adults and young people.

Other ways in which young people can be involved in managing projects are in selecting staff, writing project policies and giving presentations on the work of the project.

Cohen and Emanuel (1998) list nine ways in which young people may be involved in delivering health-related services to other young people:

- Peer education in schools, youth projects and the community based on running workshops, education sessions or drama productions

- Informal peer education, especially around drug and sexual health issues, with young people providing advice, information and sometimes clean syringes and condoms for other young people on the streets, in clubs etc. through outreach work

- Counselling schemes where trained young people counsel other young people

- Mentoring schemes in schools where older students support younger students

- Befriending schemes such as those which involve young people who are in care or who have just left care being supported by young people who themselves have experience of being in care

- Young people working in a voluntary or paid capacity on projects taking on a range of roles varying from relatively simple administrative tasks to more demanding face to face work with other young people

- Young people acting as consultors of other young people such as administering questionnaires for surveys and running focus groups

- Young people training professionals, such as GPs and nurses, around issues to do with young people

- Young people organising and running conferences for other young people
### Issues to consider when involving young people as service providers

- Is everyone clear what is expected of young people?
- Have the boundaries of young peoples' responsibilities been made clear?
- Have young people been equipped with the information and training they need to carry out their role?
- Do the young people have the required skills and confidence?
- Do the young people have access to sufficient support?
- Have the ‘what if’ questions been asked? I.e. Do young people know who to go to if they are concerned about something or something is going wrong?
- What is in it for the young people – what motivating factors are there?
- Do the young people have the required time and commitment to see the job through?
- How much control do the young people have to influence and shape their role?
- What preparations are being made to train other young people so that the service does not rely too heavily on the same group?
- Have confidentiality issues been fully explored e.g where young people may have access to sensitive information about peers

### 2.4 Young people as evaluators of services

It is not uncommon for services to be set up on the basis of needs identified in consultation with young people but with the detailed objectives defined entirely by professional adults. If young people are to be involved in evaluating services they should also be involved in defining the outcomes that the service is aiming to achieve. Outcome measures defined by young people are still quite rare.

A more common means of involving young people in the evaluation of services is to consult them about their experiences as service users. Such consultation processes can be very useful if they are genuinely used to inform service development and not just used as window dressing for the service’s annual report.
2.5 Young people as researchers

Many issues of participation are common to both practice and research.

Participatory approaches to research involve a change in the traditional power relationships between researcher and respondent. Methodology is of central importance, but the nature and level of participation needs to be context-specific and participation can occur at one or more stages of the research process as illustrated by the following model:

Young people’s participation in research- an illustrative model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of young people</th>
<th>Role of researcher/nature of research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young people as non-participants</td>
<td>Study may be about young people but does not include them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people as research objects</td>
<td>Study involves young people in an entirely passive capacity e.g. observational study of child behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people as passive respondents</td>
<td>Study involves young people as respondents, e.g. of structured interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people as active respondents</td>
<td>Study involves young people as respondents but with greater freedom to express views and influence the questions within the parameters of the study design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people as consultants</td>
<td>Study involves young people in shaping the design and implementation to be carried out by adult researcher. Examples include involvement of young people on research advisory groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people as commissioners</td>
<td>Study is formulated in conjunction with young people or research question is entirely determined by young people. Examples include participatory research projects where adults and young people work together to agree research priorities and appropriate methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people as researchers</td>
<td>Young people are involved in the design and implementation of the research study.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*From McNeish, D (1999)*
There are research methods which lend themselves to a participatory approach (for a useful overview of these, see Boyden & Ennew, 1997) but no method is inherently participatory—much depends on how decisions are reached and who has control over the research process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues to consider when involving young people in research and evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have young people been involved soon enough to have an influence on the research questions and design?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have they been given the information and training to understand and carry out their research tasks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What support is available to them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What motivating factors are there to maintain their involvement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do the young people have the time and commitment to complete the research?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are the young people involved in all aspects of the research or just some parts of it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Will young people be involved in the dissemination of the research and if so, how?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.6 Young people as members of communities

Young people may be members of a geographical community (or neighbourhood) or a community of interest, though ‘community involvement’ often refers to the first of these.

In the past community participation tended to focus on the role of adults. The interests of young people may have been addressed but these were often identified and mediated via parents. Recently, there has been more emphasis on the direct involvement of young people in communities. The approaches to community involvement may need to be different if young people are to be encouraged to participate. For example a 1998 study by Fitzpatrick et al concluded that:

• The level of support needed to sustain young people's involvement is greater than that needed for adults. This requires substantial resources and dedicated staff time

• The participation of young people should be scheduled early in the life of a project in order to allow young people enough time to develop the skills and confidence to become effective participants.
2.7 Young people as shapers of policy and public awareness

The participation of young people may involve action research or other activities aimed at raising awareness of policy makers and bringing about change. This may be at the local level where young people seek to influence local policy makers to change or develop local services or at national or international level. Examples include presentations at national conferences, meetings with Ministers and MP's and contributions to Committees of Inquiry. The growth of Youth Parliaments is a further example.

There have been concerns in recent years about what is feared to be a growing apathy among young people concerning citizenship and political involvement. This has led to the development of several initiatives such as Youth Parliaments to enhance young people's interest in and understanding of political processes. Of course, political apathy is not confined to young people. Whitworth (1999) suggests that the levels of active citizenship can be illustrated by the model below:

![Citizenship Level Model]

2.8 Young people and the media

One way in which young people can gain influence is through the media. There are both good and bad examples of young people-focused media activities. There are several examples of young people producing material themselves for media purposes. Where you are approaching the media yourselves with a message or story, it is easier to be well prepared. It can be more difficult to anticipate problems when the media approaches you, perhaps for a reaction to an issue hitting the headlines. In either case, it is important that young people are well prepared, supported and provided with the information they need to assess the implications of their involvement. A radio or television experience can be quite exciting but it is important that young people are enabled to protect themselves and their families from exposure they may later regret.
Issues to consider when involving young people in the media

- What type of media is involved – print, radio or television?
- What is the message the young people want to put across?
- Have the young people rehearsed the message so they can be clear and not get drawn into other areas by an interviewer?
- Have the young people given full consent for information to be used in the media?
- Have they understood and been able to talk through all the implications of their involvement?
- Do the young people wish to be identified and if not, how will their identity be protected?
- What do the media concerned expect to get out of it and what are their priorities?
- Is there an opportunity to see what is to be used before it is broadcast or printed?
- Is there someone who can be with the young person during a media interview?
- Is there someone who can support them before and after?
- Will the media meet the young peoples' expenses?
- Is there an agreement about how the material will be used in the future?
3. Learning from Research and Practice – How to do it

There is a growing body of research and practice experience relevant to young people’s participation. Some of the most useful are included in the resources section. What follows is a summary of the key learning points from existing research and practice.

3.1 Acknowledging attitudes

Attitudes to young people’s participation hinge on beliefs about:

- the competence of young people to participate as autonomous people
- how young people develop competence with age and maturity
- rights versus protection, in particular about young peoples’ vulnerability and adult responsibilities to safeguard and protect them

Adult beliefs about young people can be inconsistent and contradictory, particularly on sensitive topics such as sexual health and teenage parenthood. Organisations wishing to engage the participation of young people need to understand their values and assumptions. Health and welfare organisations historically have been steeped in values emphasising the vulnerability of young people. Others may have a dominant view of young people as anti-social and in need of control. These values can pose hidden barriers to participation.

Of course, negative assumptions can work both ways. Young people may have fixed views about adults as out of touch, not really interested, not to be trusted and so forth. This is particularly likely for young people who have had poor experiences of adults in the past. If adults and young people are to work together some time may need to be set aside to explore these attitudes and generate a positive relationship.

Key Messages

- Organisations wishing to engage the participation of young people need to consider two sets of issues:
  - What they need to do differently to share some of their power with young people;
  - What they need to do to motivate young people to choose to participate.

- Engaging the participation of young people involves:
  - Acknowledging attitudes
  - Aiming to create more appropriate structures and processes
  - Working towards inclusion
  - Making use of what already exists
3.2 Creating more participatory structures and processes

Most organisations are adult-focused and function with hierarchical structures and processes not lending themselves to the active participation of young people. Even where organisations have made an overt commitment to greater participation, the required shift in processes, systems and values often fails to occur. The common consequence is workers who are highly committed to participation operating in the face of very persistent, and sometimes hidden, organisational barriers.

Current practice experience suggests that getting the processes right involves the following elements:

Creating participatory processes: where to start

1. **Clarifying objectives and boundaries:** Organisations and individuals need to be clear about why they are seeking participation, what they want it to achieve and what level of participation is appropriate. These aims need to be agreed with participants and revisited at regular intervals so that progress can be evaluated. There needs to be honesty about which decisions are open to change and which are not. If an issue is not negotiable it is important to say so from the start.

2. **Setting a realistic time-scale:** Participation is not a quick fix. It involves planning and preparation. In all likelihood a participatory approach will take longer than you think, especially at first.

3. **Meetings or what?** Adult decision making tends to occur in meetings. This may not be the best means of engaging with young people. If meetings are to be used issues to be considered include their timing and location, the way in they are conducted; the opportunity provided for participants to get to know each other and feel comfortable and confident. Ensuring that young people have an opportunity to influence the agenda is important as well as providing them with the support and information to get to grips with the issues to be discussed and consult with other young people. It is particularly important to have sufficient number of young people present at meetings – having a couple of young people amidst a sea of adults is not likely to constitute meaningful participation.

4. **Investing resources:** Participation needs to be underpinned by the resources to provide training, support and skill development for both staff and young people. Some of the practical barriers to participation have financial implications: the costs of transport, child care, providing resources and equipment for groups, ensuring that young people are compensated for their time and effort. Budgeting for these expenses is essential.

5. **Providing support to staff:** Participation requires commitment from all parts of the organisation, not just staff in direct contact with young people. Front-line staff need to know that they have the organisational backing to work in more participatory ways.

6. **Providing support to young people:** Young people also require support, information and skill development in order for them to become active participants. Issues to consider include ensuring that information is shared with young people, avoiding jargon, finding ways to communicate information that does not rely entirely on written formats.

7. **Building in involvement as soon as possible:** Participation can often be a bit of an afterthought or it can be tempting to get something started by adults with a view to bringing young people on board later. This can make it very difficult for young people to shape decisions as it is usually harder to make changes once something has started. Early involvement can feel risky to adults who may not want to raise expectations or subject young people to the uncertainties of plans in their infancy.
3.3 Motivating young people to be involved

One of the challenges facing organisations seeking to involve young people is to motivate their involvement. Young people have competing pressures on their time and being involved in a teenage pregnancy initiative may not be top of their priority list.

Practice experience and research which has sought the views of young people suggest there are a number of factors which are important in motivating young people's involvement:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Encouraging motivation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>The issue needs to be relevant and important:</strong> fairly obviously, young people are more likely to get involved in an issue they see as important. Unfortunately, adults and young people do not always share the same priorities. The issue of teenage pregnancy may not excite the interest of all those young people we would like it to.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. <strong>The activities need to be interesting and fun:</strong> a fairly common comment from young people who have been active participants is that meetings set up by adults are often boring. Whilst staff are paid to be bored in meetings and tend to get used to a degree of occupational tedium, we do need to find the fun factor if young people are to stay on board.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Young people need to get some personal benefit:</strong> young people who have got involved in participatory activities frequently cite personal satisfaction as a key motivator. Satisfaction can come from knowing you are making a difference, having your voice heard, learning new skills, meeting new people and getting valuable experience which will help in future life and career choices. Adults can make a big difference by considering what their young participants might want from the experience and taking steps to facilitate it.</td>
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<td>4. <strong>Incentives and rewards are important:</strong> some participatory projects pay young people to be involved or provide other incentives such as tokens, cinema tickets etc. Payment can be important in helping to reach some young people and should always be considered when adults are being paid for similar services. However, payments are not the only incentive – a trip or a meal out for the group as a thank you can be valued just as much. Giving young people a certificate or award to recognise their contribution can also be valued</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Young people need to feel valued and respected:</strong> this is probably the most important motivating factor of all. Young people are very rapidly put off if they pick up the impression that they are only there to make up the numbers or if their views are not really being listened to. This can frequently occur when adults (usually unintentionally) take over an event or meeting and the young people are gradually ignored. This often leads to young people withdrawing or becoming disruptive but can usually be avoided if adults afford young people the same level of respect as they would other adults. Conversely, research has consistently shown how much young people appreciate genuine respect from adults.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. <strong>There needs to be results:</strong> people of all ages want to see results for their efforts but young people in particular can become de-motivated if they do not see something changing as a consequence of their involvement. This presents a challenge to projects working towards longer-term outcomes, so it is important to build in some tangible results at the earlier stages.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. <strong>There needs to be feedback:</strong> if short term results aren’t possible, young people still need to be given feedback about what will happen next and how their work will be used. This might mean being prepared to re-contact young people some time after their involvement to let them know what has happened.</td>
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To pay or not to pay?

A common dilemma for those attempting to motivate and sustain involvement is whether to pay young people. There are no clear answers to this but it might be helpful to consider the following points:

- **Would you pay adults in similar circumstances?** If someone has a particular skill or expertise you would normally expect to pay for, payment might be appropriate whether the recipient is an adult or a young person.

- **Will young people be out of pocket if they are not paid?** People should not be worse off for getting involved. Expenses such as bus fares, child care, necessary refreshments etc should always be considered. Similarly, if a young person is giving up paid employment to participate, compensation should always be considered.

- **Is payment the best incentive in this situation?** Young people themselves hold different views about whether they should be paid. Some might prefer to give their time voluntarily or to have a different incentive or thank you, such as a meal or an outing.

- **Could payment act as a disincentive?** Some young people could be deterred from participating if they think that payment means they have to go through a selection process or accepting a payment might tie them to something they're uncertain about.

- **Are there risks to young people through payment?** The impact of payment on young peoples' benefits etc needs to be considered. This has implications for how much can be paid.

- **Can payment be made in cash and immediately?** The incentive power of payment rapidly diminishes if young people have to wait and then receive a cheque. Vouchers or tokens might actually be more attractive in these circumstances. Each organisation has its own particular policy and practice regarding payments. It is important to check this out early when making plans.

- **Could payment be misinterpreted?** Care needs to be taken when paying young people to give research or media interviews where it could be construed that young people are being paid to voice particular views.

3.4 Achieving inclusive participation

Just as generalisations about ‘young people’ need to be avoided, similar care needs to be applied before generalising about groups of young people who share particular characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability. Nevertheless, some consideration needs to be given to how some young people's experience of participation is affected by these factors and experiences of past exclusion.
Issues to consider are:

- **Age appropriate participation**
The interests and capacities of young people change and develop as they get older. Participatory approaches therefore need to be age-appropriate. Imposing adult models of participation is unlikely to be successful; likewise treating young people of all ages alike can patronise some and confuse others.

Young people develop different competencies at different rates and are influenced by a range of social and cultural factors. This means that young people need to be offered a diversity of ways to participate and have the opportunity to get involved in ways recognising their developing interests and capacities. Whilst age-related characteristics are not universal, many of the projects which have succeeded in engaging and maintaining young people’s participation have designed their activities to be age-appropriate as well as being responsive to individual interests and capabilities. When planning events, organisers may need to consider that a one or two year age difference between participants can be very significant for young people. There can be major differences between a group of 12 year olds compared to 14 year olds compared to 16 year olds. Depending on the issue being addressed, it may be necessary to involve age groups separately and differently.

- **Gender differences**
Participatory approaches need to encourage the involvement of both young men and young women. In the area of sexual health and teenage pregnancy there is often a concern that young men are more difficult to engage. This can be for several reasons. The different socialisation of boys and girls can result in girls being more comfortable than boys in expressing themselves verbally on some topics. Peer and social pressure can discourage male involvement. In other circumstances, research has found that in mixed groups boys may dominate the discussion and take over the activities available. Involving young people in same gender groupings in some circumstances can be an aid to participation. Where participation is sought within a mixed gender setting, it may be helpful to ensure the availability of male and female facilitators and consider the range of activities to ensure that participation does not rely solely on discussion.

Young men can also be excluded from participating as young parents by the unintended consequences of social policies. It is not always in the practical interests of young mothers to openly share the responsibility for parenthood with young fathers. That does not necessarily mean that young fathers are uninvolved or that they are uninterested in participating in decisions affecting them.

- **Ethnicity, culture and religion**
The participation of black and minority ethnic young people needs to take account of their experiences of racism and that black young people are over-represented in socially excluded groups. The organisation of participatory activities needs to be sensitive to the cultural, religious and linguistic background of participants. On sensitive topics such as sexual health and teenage pregnancy there will be particular considerations for some groups. Mixed gender activities may be inappropriate, for example.
The guidance for Teenage Pregnancy Co-ordinators called ‘Developing Contraceptive and Advice Services to Reach Black and Minority Ethnic Young People’ highlights several barriers. These apply both to young people accessing services and to their more active involvement as participants:

- institutional and personal racism
- a lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate provision
- inappropriate and inaccessible locations for services
- concerns about confidentiality
- no relevant images or culturally inappropriate messages and a poor atmosphere within services
- inaccessible information
- poor staff attitudes and behaviour

These barriers and possible ways of overcoming them need to be taken into account when planning for the involvement of black and minority ethnic young people.

• **Socially excluded young people**

There are many young people who due to a combination of their circumstances and life experiences come to be identified as ‘vulnerable’ or ‘disadvantaged.’ Particular groups such as disabled young people, those ‘looked after’ by local authorities, care leavers, young people who have become involved in offending, young people affected by ill-health - either their own or the ill-health of a family member, are likely to experience more barriers to participation. Of course, these are often the very young people that organisations are trying to reach.

Barriers to participation are magnified for those who are particularly disadvantaged. Young people who have had difficult life experiences are less likely to have the confidence and self-esteem to participate. If their views have not been taken into account in the past they are less likely to be motivated to participate in the present. If their experiences have included mistreatment by adults then they are less likely to trust the current intentions of adults trying to engage their participation. Negative assumptions and stereotypes apply to young people generally may be even stronger for certain groups. In addition, some young people face additional practical barriers. Disabled young people may experience difficulties in gaining physical access and/or they may have problems in communicating their views. Engaging the participation of disabled young people involves enabling access to means of communication suiting their needs; providing access to people who understand the ways they communicate and/or independent facilitators.

3.5 Using what already exists

Making use of what is already going on in the locality makes obvious sense. There is no point in duplicating efforts, firstly because it is a waste of resources and secondly because it fails to value what has gone before. Some communities and groups of young people are over-consulted. As one person put it in a recent study of young people’s participation (McNeish et al 2000) ‘Some young people round here would puke if they saw another questionnaire’.
An important stating point for any organisation seeking to involve young people is to find out what is already going on in their area. There will almost certainly be an abundance of activity, much of it at a local level in schools, youth groups and in communities. At a more strategic level many areas have youth councils and youth parliaments. Other developments such as the Healthy Schools Initiative require people to consider young peoples involvement.

The following checklist of questions might be helpful:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What already exists in our area?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Have young people been consulted on this issue before?</td>
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<td>• If so, what use was made of the information last time?</td>
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<td>• Are there existing participatory forums in the area e.g a Youth Parliament, Youth Council, School Council, Citizens Panel which includes young people?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Is there another organisation planning to do a consultation on a similar or related issue?</td>
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<td>• If so, can we combine our efforts to avoid duplication?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are there some good examples of participatory projects we can learn from in our area?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Are there staff who have developed particular expertise in involving young people?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Are there young people who have become experienced participants who can advise us on how to involve other young people?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


McNeish, D (1999) From Rhetoric to Reality: Participatory Approaches to health promotion with young people, London: Health Education Authority


Shier H (2000) Pathways to participation; openings, opportunities and obligations in Children and Society, vol 14