



nsw commission for
children & young people

Including children and young people

Participation is an important way of helping to build a sense of connection between people and the communities in which we live. It helps people gain access to the things they need to ensure a sense of well-being and a good quality of life. Participation means being involved in the processes where decisions are made that may have an impact on our lives.

The participation of children and young people

Children and young people already participate in society in varying ways. They live in families, go to school, play sport, belong to organisations, are employed, pay taxes and are consumers.

When children and young people develop strong, caring relationships with their communities, they are more likely to grow up safe and healthy, participate in education, culture and employment and not become involved in violence and crime.

Involving children and young people in decisions helps them understand how decisions are made and develops their judgement. What they learn from participation will be carried through to their adult lives where they continue to benefit the community.

Children and young people have ideas and opinions on what directly affects them. While their attitudes may differ from the people who have always made decisions on their behalf they want to feel that their family and communities value their contributions.

“Children have the right to express their views freely in all matters that affect them and their views must be given due weight.”

*The United Nations Convention
on the Rights of the Child
(Article 12)*

What happens if people don't participate?

When people are excluded from family life, schools, neighbourhoods, work, and so on, they can become isolated and cut off from the rest of the community.

This can make their lives more difficult and make them more vulnerable to social and other problems.

Strong communities encourage and value the participation of all its members, including children and young people.

“Engaging with young people and getting our views is one very important way of helping to rebuild that sense of connection between us and the community in which we live. It is an opportunity to feel respected and be confident that our views were being taken seriously.”

Young person,
World Forum Conference

“I think it's really important that we do have a forum to have a say. It can be hard to make a difference, but we're all trying!”

Young person,
World Forum Conference

“Young people come in different shapes and sizes.”

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information

Organisations and children and young people

There are many organisations whose work involves and impacts on children and young people, like schools, churches, hospitals, welfare agencies, local councils, financial institutions, recreational and sporting bodies.

Working alongside children and young people will help the organisation become more relevant to the children and young people who are affected by its policies and services.

Involving children and young people helps them understand how organisations function and the important skills and experience children and young people acquire will continue into their adult lives.

What can organisations do?

Rather than trying to fit kids into an adult work environment the challenge for organisations will be to change their culture and systems so that all contributions are valued.

This can mean changing the physical layout of your office space, or arranging meetings to fit in with school timetables. It can also mean providing background information to participants so they understand how decisions are made.

This amount of change will require planning, restructuring and budgeting for staff time, resources and all the other considerations in changing into a child friendly, inclusive and flexible organisation. It means changing the way you do business.

What can families do?

Every family works in different ways and its members come from different backgrounds but the following tips may help you to encourage the participation of the children and young people in your family:

- keep your child informed about what is happening in the household
- take the time to talk with them
- give them choices about things that will affect them eg. what they would like to eat or where to go for holidays
- help them understand what the consequences may be for their choices or actions
- listen to their point of view

The Commission for Children and Young People was set up to promote the participation of children and young people in community life at all levels, especially when it involves making decisions that affect their lives.

Some ways the Commission brings children and young people together include:

- offering traineeships for young people
- creating a Young Peoples Reference Group to give children and young people a voice in decisions being made
- involving young people in selection panels to employ staff
- seeking young people's guidance about what they wanted on the Commission's website
- providing an ongoing discussion forum on the website for young people to put forward their views on issues that effect them

Participation: A Case Study

A Sydney school has established regular meetings about the running of the school.

Students and teachers chair the meeting and parents can propose motions. Children and teachers share the decision making.

The school prides itself on having a fresh approach to democracy.

The school's guiding principles are founded on self-determination, creativity, co-operation and student participation in the affairs of the school.

For more information:

The NSW Premier's Department Register of Boards and Committees lists hundreds of organisations dealing with almost every issue the government manages including:

- training and education
- the environment
- transport
- recreation and sport
- health
- the arts
- community services
- housing
- police and justice

Young people who want to be involved with one of these organisations can have their name considered by contacting (02) 9228 4199 or visiting the Commission's website: www.kids.nsw.gov.au