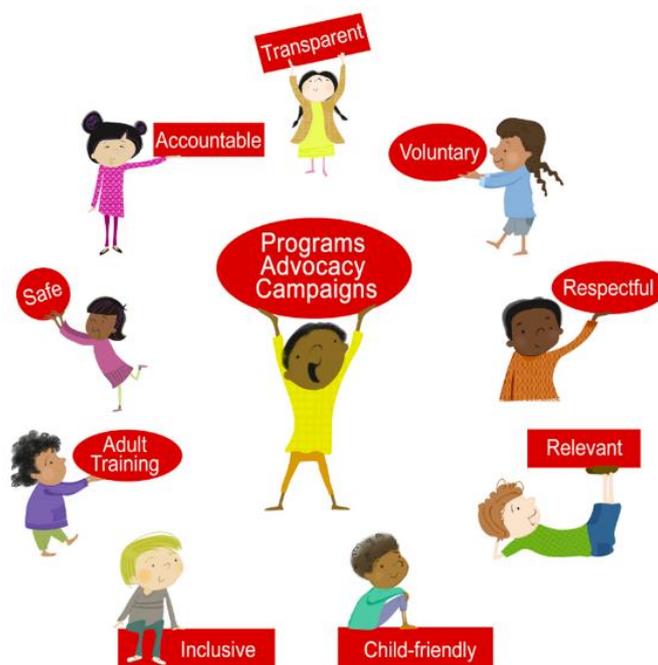


## Applying the 9 basic requirements for meaningful and ethical child participation during COVID-19



Children's participation is about having the opportunity to express views, having these views taken seriously and having the opportunity to influence decision making. It is the informed and willing involvement of children in any matter concerning them directly or indirectly. This includes children of different ages, genders and abilities and those children most marginalized in a society. Children's civil rights guide our ways of working and cut across the full spectrum of development and humanitarian contexts.

Save the Children believes children's participation is not an activity or a "one off" event, but rather a core principle that informs our organisational behaviour. Children's participation, then, is a crosscutting theme that permeates all aspects of the organisation and is central in our aim of strengthening the position of children and inspiring breakthroughs in the way the world treats children. It is a set of civil rights to be fulfilled, a principle to be applied, and a means to fulfil other rights. Crucially, to promote and support children's participation is to meet human rights obligations and to respect children and their rights.

**Even though many things are changing due to the coronavirus pandemic, Save the Children can still play a role in supporting children's participation. As always, we need to make sure that any child participation we support is safe, ethical and meaningful – and this means considering specific issues related to COVID-19.**

**This document is intended to provide guidance on safe, ethical and meaningful child participation during the coronavirus pandemic.**

## 1. Transparent and informative

This requirement means that children clearly understand their right to express their views and that they will be heard and valued. Children also know why they are involved in a given project/programme/activity, what their participation will help to achieve, and the types of decisions and plans that their participation will influence. Children have access to useful information and resources to help them understand the project, programme, organisation(s), key terminology and the processes/activities they will be involved with. Specifically, children understand what they are being asked to do, what will happen with the information they share and who will have access to the information. Children understand they can freely ask questions, seek clarification, raise concerns and/or express ideas and recommendations.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, we also have a responsibility to ensure that within any process involving children we embed accurate, child-friendly information sharing about COVID-19 and measures children can take to protect themselves. This will help counteract the rumours and misinformation that children will be hearing.

Sometimes during the coronavirus pandemic, it will be necessary to postpone or cancel participatory activities. When it is necessary to postpone gatherings/meetings with children, please ensure the change is communicated to children with sensitivity and explain how they will still be able to participate (either at a later date or through a different format).

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- Child-friendly information is provided in appropriate and accessible languages/formats
- Child-friendly information is provided in a timely manner
- Children's roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
- Opportunities and limitations are clearly defined
- Children clearly understand the relevant policies and procedures to ensure their meaningful participation
- Children understand how they/their community/their projects/their peers might benefit from the activity
- Children's views will influence, shape and inform decisions/plans in a timely manner
- Staff are honest and open with children
- Staff do not steer or manipulate children
- Children are free to ask questions and know how to get more information, if they wish

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Child-friendly information (including about COVID-19 and measures children can take to protect themselves) is provided in appropriate and accessible languages/formats
- Children are free to ask questions and know how to get more information, if they wish. In particular, children are informed of where they can access more information about COVID-19.
- Efforts are taken to track and address rumours and misinformation related to COVID and understand/remedy the impact they might have a specifics groups of children (e.g. girls, ethnic groups, others)

## 2. Voluntary

Children have received sufficient information to understand the choices available to them, what they mean and how to engage – or not, as the case may be – with the process. Children clearly understand the implications of their choices and are free to make decisions to participate or not to participate accordingly. Staff have the competencies necessary to encourage children – particularly those who are marginalised – to participate and likewise, to ensure that children are never forced to participate. Children are aware that they can opt out of the participatory process at any time and know how to go about it. A culture that respects children’s choice must be fostered throughout the participatory process.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, children will be turning to more online/remote forms of participation, learning and engagement. Prior to ‘signing on’ children will need to understand the risks, limitations and opportunities linked to these platforms – so they can make informed decisions about participating and define the parameters of their participation. Where possible, children should help define the rules within remote/online platforms (i.e. guidelines related to privacy, sharing information/pictures, etc.).

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- Children have provided informed consent
- Children understand the principles of child participation
- Children know they can withdraw at any time
- Children know how to withdraw from a process
- Children are provided with sufficient and appropriate information and time to make informed choices
- Children are involved in ways that suit their age, capacity and interests
- Children understand what their choices mean
- Children have adequate amount of knowledge about the purpose and nature of the project/programme/activity and their role in it to help them make choices on a continuous basis
- Staff have a clear policy on participation including consent and confidentiality
- Staff have addressed adult/child power imbalances to ensure a truly voluntary process
- Staff are aware that permission given under pressure is not consent
- Staff have clearly explained to children the organisation’s responsibilities to children

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Children, staff and adult caretakers have information about challenges/risks related to online communication
- Children understand that information shared online may ‘live forever’ (i.e. they may not be able to withdraw information/pictures, once they have been shared online)
- Children will need to fully understand privacy settings and who is ‘listening in’ so they can make informed decisions about sharing and participating online/remotely
- Consent forms (developed for face-to-face processes) may need to be revised for online/remote consent
- Children fully understand how moving from ‘in person’ processes to online/remote processes will impact on privacy, information sharing, access and more
- Children are given the opportunity to decline online/remote options and other solutions or forms of engagement are explored (i.e. to address their concerns)

### 3. Respectful

Children’s views are treated with respect by adults and by other children. Staff have created an organisational culture that enables children to initiate ideas themselves and express their views without feeling they must first seek permission from an adult. Children’s views will be heard and valued. Children are able to express their views without fear of discrimination; respect ensures a culture that does not undermine children or their views and is considerate to their backgrounds, experiences, concerns, vulnerabilities and existing commitments. Likewise, respect ensures that children will not be humiliated nor exposed to harm. Respect creates a welcoming environment and fosters a caring and considerate attitude towards children.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, ensure respect for all the different situations children may find themselves, and the implications of the large-scale changes and stress they are experiencing. Take into account the changes/stress that may exist in relation to their parents/caretakers, school, work, economy, health, recreation, and other areas. Children may be asked to undertake more activities ‘independently’ and without the support from adults (e.g. caregiving for siblings, self-directed learning/study) – this can put added pressure on their lives and also expose them to new risks. Children may also be spending more time online or away from direct adult supervision. Children need information and understanding so that they respect each other and maintain respectful online/remote communication (e.g. in WhatsApp groups, etc.)

#### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- Children are able to freely express their views
- Children confidently share their opinions, ideas and insights
- Effective facilitation ensures children are not humiliated, frightened to speak out or discriminated against
- Effective facilitation ensures that the ways of working are culturally/gender sensitive
- Children’s other commitments/rights (e.g., school/work/play) are taken into account
- Staff are polite and considerate
- Staff have effective listening skills
- Staff do not dominate dialogue
- Key adults (e.g., parents, teachers) are supportive
- Key adults have a solid understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of the children they are working with
- Documents and products developed by the children are appropriately stored
- Children are never used or manipulated by adults to advance the latter’s agenda

#### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Adaptations are made to meet these criteria within all new online/remote communication formats and changing conditions
- Staff/partners take into account new demands on children’s time
- Staff take steps to ensure polite and respectful online dialog
- Staff take the time to reach out and respond to every child (so no one feels left out)
- Children respect other children’s privacy and personal limits
- Children have information on how to communicate in inclusive and respectful ways, and what kind of communication and sharing that can be harmful and humiliating (and illegal)
- Emotions and body language are more difficult to convey through online/remote forms of communication. Extra care needs to be taken to ensure written communication is not misinterpreted or comes off too harsh.
- Sarcasm should be avoided
- Emojis can be used to clarify meaning and emotion
- Privacy protocols are updated to consider new communication methods

## 4. Relevant

Children are able to contribute their expertise and draw upon their insights, knowledge and capabilities to express their views on issues of relevance to their lives and issues important to them. Relevant information is provided and accessible to children. Children understand why the issue is of relevance to them and why their views and expertise is being sought. Children fully appreciate how their contribution to the discussion/research/consultation/meeting will inform plans to deal with the particular issues. Children’s expectations are managed effectively and they understand both the relevance *and* the limitations of their participation. Children are given the opportunity to identify issues that they themselves believe to be relevant and important.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, every effort is made to ensure children can share their experiences and the impact COVID is having on their lives, communities and families –mechanisms for two-way communication are defined at an early stage. Children are provided with good, child-friendly information about the pandemic and have opportunities to define the role they want to play in raising awareness, advocacy, campaigning, safe risk communication activities, MEAL and more. Children are provided with the necessary tools and information to plan and navigate their opportunities safely.

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- Issues are of real relevance to the children involved
- Children clearly understand why they are participating in a given discussion/research/consultation/meeting
- Children understand how their input will add value to the process
- Children are encouraged to identify/highlight the issues that they themselves regard as relevant
- Methods enable children to understand the issues of concern and support them to share their insights, expertise and recommendations according to their age, circumstances and maturity
- Effective facilitation enables all children to engage with the process and activities
- Cultural factors are carefully considered during the planning process
- Language considerations are taken into account and actions to resolve communication barriers are adopted
- Children are clear on what they can and cannot influence; their expectations are effectively managed
- Children have *not* been pressured into participating

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Any change to programs is communicated to children with sensitivity
- Adaptations to programs and communication methods take into account the different needs, access and interests of different children
- Children have access to good, child friendly information so they can effectively define how they want to participate and the issues that matter most to them
- Limitations are clearly communicated with children (and defined with children)
- Alternatives for information sharing/remote participation are explored together with children and are revisited/adapted as needed
- Explore with children new needs/issues that may be arising (that may not have been part of past programs) and adapt as needed
- Support creative problem solving with children
- Support activities that help children have some fun and be active

## 5. Child friendly

Children feel welcomed. Staff are approachable and responsive to the children. Working methods do not discriminate children but take into account their evolving capacities, age, diversity and capabilities. Children are free to ask questions and raise concerns. The methods used promote children’s confidence in speaking out, sharing and expressing their views. Sufficient time, information and materials are provided and communicated effectively to the children to help facilitate their meaningful participation. Children feel that their contributions will be valued and used for the intended purpose(s).

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, access to child-friendly information will be one of the main ways we can support children’s participation. Only with access to child-friendly information can children start to fully understand the pandemic and then make informed choices about the role they want to assume in their families and communities. Information must be accessible and take into account different groups of children. Further, we need to be actively tracking and addressing rumours and misinformation about the virus and doing everything we can to ensure children can navigate fact from fiction.

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- The methods/approaches are child friendly
- Meeting places and times for meeting are child friendly and accessible by children
- Relevant and child friendly information is provided to children and their parent/carer in advance
- Consent is received prior to the event, meeting or activity taking place
- Children develop or co-develop child friendly information and communication materials and methods
- Staff have the competencies to make children feel relaxed and build their self-esteem and confidence
- Staff are effective facilitators and familiar to a diverse range of methods
- Staff are adaptive and flexible in their approach
- Sufficient time is allotted for the proposed activities

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- All possible efforts are taken to make remote/online platforms accessible to all children, including the most marginalized
- Children receive easy to follow instructions for access/using remote/online platforms
- Children help define the remote/online platforms that will work best for them
- Children have access to child-friendly information about the virus (in different formats, languages, etc.)
- Staff/partners are supported to use new platforms effectively, ensuring children feel respected, supported and confident
- Children, staff and partners continuously evaluate how new platforms are working and make adaptations as required

## 6. Inclusive

Participation promotes inclusiveness and, recognizing that children do not all belong to one homogenous group, treats each child as an individual. No child is discriminated against during the participation process. The participation process takes into consideration existing patterns of discrimination, power imbalances and cultural sensitivities. The process ensures that the methods, approaches, languages and arrangements do not exclude the most marginalised children. Likewise, the process does not discriminate children based on their capabilities nor humiliate children on any grounds. The participation process makes sure each child knows they are valued, respected and important.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, challenges related to ensuring non-discrimination and inclusion may be exacerbated. Certain groups of children may feel the effects of the pandemic more than others. Some groups may be more vulnerable to misinformation and rumours. Some groups of children may be scapegoated and blamed for the pandemic. Solutions to promote online/remote participation and learning may not be equally accessible to all children and risk further marginalizing the most at risk children. Special efforts are needed to ensure our adaptations are fully inclusive and that we are always taking into account the rights and needs of these children.

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- Children are not discriminated against by reason of age, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status
- Girls and Boys of different ages, backgrounds and abilities are engaged
- A safe space is provided for different groups of children to explore issues relevant to them (e.g., girls working separately from boys, if needed)
- The process ensures that the most deprived children, children with disabilities and marginalized children have equal access and that their voices are heard and valued
- Participation is flexible enough to respond to the needs, expectations and situations of individual children
- Participation challenges and responds to existing patterns of discrimination
- Methods and facilitation techniques do not discriminate children, are accessible and promote equal access
- Direct efforts are made to meet in environments and times accessible to children, especially the most marginalised, taking into account specific requirements (e.g., disability friendly transportation and venues)

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Early on, map out the groups of children who may be most impacted/hardest to reach
- Include children in problem solving and exploring creative options for inclusive remote/online participation.
- Ask children to consider the needs of all children in their community/school and the different ways we can ensure their access to information and participatory processes
- Provide safe spaces for different groups of children to share their views (i.e. separate spaces for girls or other groups)
- Make all information and activities accessible so they can equally benefit children with disabilities
- Work with/partner with persons with disabilities and their representative groups to define a good participation strategy. A list of organizations can be found [here](#)
- Child friendly information should include audio, large print, easy to read, pictures and sign language
- Ensure all efforts to consult with children reach the most marginalized, including children with disabilities, minority groups, girls, etc.
- Track how rumours/misinformation might be harming or impacting specific groups of children - provide extra support to these groups as required

## 7. Supported by training

All adults working with children have been trained and equipped to work effectively with children. Specifically, adults working with children possess excellent communication skills, facilitation skills and analytical skills. Children have access to training in child rights, advocating, communicating with the media, holding decision makers to account, engaging in meetings, facilitation and designing and delivering training.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, all staff, partners and volunteers who will engage with children must be trained in a.) COVID-19 and key measures they can take to protect themselves (e.g. handwashing, no touch, keeping a distance of 2m between people) and b.) how to share accurate, child-friendly information on COVID-19 with children, and c.) how to navigate new platforms for online/remote communication, learning and outreach, including the risks and challenges related to these platforms.

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- All adults interacting with children possess the confidence, skills and support to facilitate meaningful children’s participation processes
- All adults interacting with children understand these nine basic requirements and understand why participation is important
- Learning and development plans are in place to support the continuous quality improvement in child participation
- A diverse range of formal and informal opportunities exist to facilitate learning, knowledge and technical skills development
- Staff have dedicated time and access to key documents and relevant resources
- Children have access to appropriate and relevant training
- Children co-facilitate training (when appropriate/possible)
- Children have access to relevant information, resources and personnel to advance their knowledge and expertise
- Adults know what manipulation of children looks like and are taking preventive measures to guard against it
- Relations between staff members are positive and they treat each other with respect and honesty

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- All adults accessing remote/online platforms ensure their interactions with children are respectful, friendly and inclusive
- All adults interacting with children have accurate information about COVID-19 and risk mitigation measures, and have been trained in how to share this information with children.
- Learning and evaluation plans are in place to support the continuous quality improvement in child participation platforms
- Staff have dedicated time and access to key documents, platforms and relevant resources
- Children have access to appropriate and relevant training, including how to be involved in safe COVID-19 risk communication.
- Staff are able to identify and mitigate risks related to new remote/online platforms – together with children

## 8. Safe and sensitive to risk

Children know that all considerations in relation to their safety and protection from harm have been taken into account. Staff have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work. Staff must take every precaution to minimise the risk to children of abuse and exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. It is necessary to ensure that potential risks have been identified in advance. Clear 'risk management' plans are in place to ensure the safe participation of children. Relevant organisational policies and procedures are understood by staff and implemented effectively. Participation expectations are managed and communicated effectively between staff and the communities, parents/carers and children. These expectations clearly define the benefits, limits and potential risks associated with participation.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, we have a responsibility to children and their communities to not put them at risk through acting in ways that may worsen transmission of COVID-19. This may sometimes mean we have to cancel or postpone participatory activities (see: [Existing initiatives](#)). We should try to find ways to listen to children about the risks they are facing as a result of COVID-19, and work with them to identify ways to mitigate those risks.

The ways that children have to tell us about problems may change during COVID-19. For example, we may have to stop some of our internal Feedback and Reporting channels (such as children's feedback discussions and feedback boxes) due to the risk of coronavirus transmission. We should explain to children what channels (for example, hotlines) remain open for children to tell us about problems with our programmes or staff behaviour. See *this guidance for more information on Feedback and Reporting Mechanisms (FRMs) during COVID-19 in the [MEAL resources](#)*. Children may also be facing increased risks in their homes and communities due to lockdowns or social distancing. Work with Child Protection and Gender focal points to explain to children and adults any mechanisms (such as external social protection hotlines, sexual and gender-based violence hotlines etc.) that exist in your country for reporting child abuse, domestic violence or other abuses. You may also want to share information about other places children and adults can seek support, such as local Protection services or health centres. Any new remote/online platforms to support children's learning, participation, reporting will need risk assessments. [You can use this risk assessment template](#). Children (and their caregivers) will also need information to safely navigate these platforms and understand their risks. Children may be interacting with each other online/without adult supervision more than usual. Special measures may be needed to help children ensure safe/respectful online social interactions and to help children understand how to respect each other's privacy (e.g. sharing personal information, pictures, etc.) and avoid bullying.

### How we uphold this requirement in normal practice

- The principles of 'do no harm' and 'best interests of the child' have been applied
- Conflict sensitivity and [risk assessments](#) have been undertaken
- Children feel safe when they participate
- Children involved in participatory processes are aware of their right to be safe from abuse and know where to go for help if needed
- Child safeguarding plans are in place to minimise risks, prevent abuse and remove barriers that some children face when obtaining help
- Referrals for psychosocial support (or other urgent support) to children have been established if required
- Children are involved in identifying risks and creating solutions
- Staff recognise their legal and ethical responsibilities in line with codes of conduct, child safeguarding policies and procedures

### Additional COVID-19 considerations

- Review Annex 2 - Guidance extracted from the Program Adaptations guidance V1.0
- Ensure [risk assessments](#) for participation cover COVID-specific risks.
- Set up ground rules with children on safe ways to interact online, including in group communications. Agree on how personal information, videos, photos will (or will not) be shared to protect everyone's safety and privacy
- Adapt all existing safeguarding plans/risk assessment to include risks related to isolation and online/remote communication. Explore new safety concerns with children and how existing reporting mechanisms may have changed.
- Ensure children are aware of their rights (within the new communication formats) and know how to seek help and support when needed
- Avoid 1:1 online communication between children and adults

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A procedure is set up to allow children involved in participatory activities to make complaints in confidence</li> <li>• Consent is obtained for the use of all information provided by children and information identified as confidential is safeguarded at all times</li> <li>• No photographs, videos or digital images of a child can be taken or published without the child, and parent/carer’s explicit consent for a specific use</li> <li>• Responsibilities relating to liability, safety, travel and medical insurance are clearly delegated and effectively planned for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide children and parents with information related to online safety. (for example: <a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li>• Work with children to define the safest, most accessible way for them to report any safeguarding and protection concerns while participation is being supported remotely (i.e. hotlines, email, etc). Include modalities that work for the most marginalized children</li> <li>• Support children to have safe and respectful online interactions with each other, to identify protection concerns and know how to seek help if needed</li> </ul>
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## 9. Accountable

Children receive feedback on how their contribution has advised, informed or influenced developments to date. Participation is not a “one off” event and accountability processes are integrated throughout our efforts to ensure children’s views and concerns: challenge actions, influence recommendations and ensure continuous quality improvement. Children have access to key stakeholders and have the opportunity to ask questions and to provide feedback on their participation. Lessons learned are systematically documented and applied to ensure quality improvement. Appropriate feedback is provided to the children in a timely and accessible manner. Children have adequate time, support and information to share any feedback with their peers, particularly when nominated by their peers and/or communities to represent their views.

**During the coronavirus pandemic**, accountability mechanisms need to be considered/developed at the early stages of planning and preparation. Prior to consulting with children, there should be a clear plan for how they will see the results of the consultations, including a child friendly report sharing the results. Any consultation with children should include opportunities for children to: access child friendly information about the virus; define concrete actions/recommendations that would support them/their family/their community; define the actions they would like to take; and better understand the support available to them, including feedback mechanisms. The ways that children have to tell us about problems may change during COVID-19. For example, we may have to stop some of our internal Feedback and Reporting channels (such as children’s feedback discussions and feedback boxes) due to the risk of coronavirus transmission (see #8 Safe and Sensitive to Risk).

How we uphold this requirement in normal practice	Additional COVID-19 considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes where children can participate</li> <li>• Define communication and follow up mechanisms with children</li> <li>• Ensure results are shared with children</li> <li>• Children are supported to participate in follow-up and evaluation processes</li> <li>• Develop good governance: transparent and clear processes</li> <li>• Develop programming influenced by children and learning processes</li> <li>• Develop processes that facilitate children’s participation in accountability mechanisms</li> <li>• Ensure all children have a range of opportunities and processes to deliver their feedback (not only those children who take part in consultations and events)</li> <li>• Ensure children receive appropriate, honest and transparent responses to their inquiries, concerns and questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure children see the results of any consultation/participatory process</li> <li>• Develop child friendly versions of any consultation report – explore with children how the findings can be used to support their own actions</li> <li>• Include evaluation, participation and feedback mechanisms into any new online/remote platforms developed across sectors/themes (e.g. for children’s learning, protection and more)</li> <li>• Ensure we are not only extracting information from children (to understand the impact of COVID) but that any interaction with children respects their right to access information and to take action</li> </ul>