Engaging Young People: A toolkit

Energise Me

Introduction

More and more people and organisations are recognising the importance of engaging with or consulting the people they serve. It happens every day. Our airports have buttons you can press to let them know if you've had a good experience. Schools, supermarkets, and TV channels have user surveys. The NHS Patient Experience Framework supports NHS Trusts to understand and improve patient experiences of their care.

But it can be a daunting task to try and understand your service users! This is especially true if you haven't done it before, or you don't know where to start.

We have written this toolkit to help you better listen to and understand the children and young people you work with **about physical activity**. To help you include them in the design and delivery of physical activity. And to work together to evaluate what is going well, what can be improved, and what impacts your activities might be having on them.

This toolkit can be used by anyone supporting young people to be physically active. You might be a youth worker, wanting to build more physical activity into your group sessions. You might be a teacher who wants to understand how your pupils feel about P.E. or what might help them to join after school clubs. You might be a coach or instructor who wants to reach more young people, or create even more inclusive sessions.

Whoever you are, there are over 30 activities you can try with your young people. Start with the How to use guide, and don't forget to have fun!
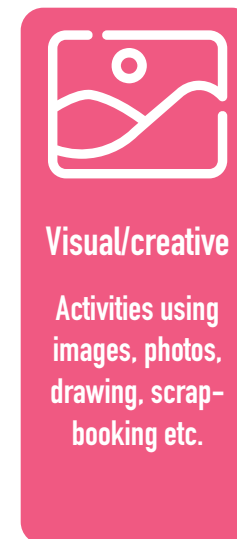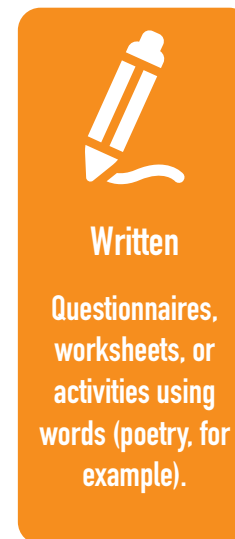
How to use

We recommend that you read through this toolkit before using the activity cards, especially if you are new to the idea of consultation, participation, co-design, and youth voice. We'll go over what these are, and the differences between them. We'll also look at why it's important, and how to keep young people safe and informed. Or you can dive straight into the activity cards. You don't need to read through them one by one. Use the cards like a recipe book, and take the activity you need. Feel free to adapt them, combine them, and experiment.

Each activity is laid out as follows:

- **Aim** – what the activity will help you to achieve.

- **Resources** – any items you will need to help you carry out the activity, from pens and pencils to worksheets or templates. All worksheets and templates are included, and you can adapt these as needed.

- **A step-by-step guide** to undertaking the activity. This is also where we'll indicate if this is a short activity, or a longer one. Some activities can be done in a few minutes, and some could last days or weeks!

- **Adaptations or additions** – some ideas to help you adapt the activity. This might be adaptations to make the activity accessible to a younger audience, or things to think about if you're delivering the activity online.

- **What next?** – some ideas to help you evaluate your activity, or ways to feedback your findings to your stakeholders. This is also where you'll find occasional reminders and suggestions on sense-checking your findings: "does this mean what we think it means?"

- **Potential risks** – you'll need to undertake your own risk assessment, but this section will highlight some of the potential risks to help you do that. It might be that certain topics could be upsetting or triggering to young people, or there might be physical risks.

- **Type of activity**. Each activity uses a simple icon to show if it is:

Spoken/auditory	Written	Visual/creative	Active
Asking questions, listening to young people, conversation starters.	Questionnaires, worksheets, or activities using words (poetry, for example).	Activities using images, photos, drawing, scrapbooking etc.	Movement, dance, using your body.

Some activities may be more than one type. We recommend using a variety of different types to appeal to different learning and communication styles.

Remember, this toolkit is designed to support you in helping young people be physically active. We'd love to hear how you get on! You can get in touch through our website, energiseme.org or by emailing emma.dovener@energiseme.org.

What is "engagement"?

You will have heard lots of different words to describe ways to engage with young people: consultation, participation, pupil/youth voice, co-design, co-production... Often people use these words interchangeably, but they can mean different things. One of the questions that will help you to differentiate between them is "who holds the power?"

This is how we are defining these terms in this toolkit:

Engagement

Simply put, this is **how we interact with our stakeholders**. We're using this as something of an umbrella term – all the activities in this toolkit are ways of engaging with young people. There are different types of engagement, different ways of engaging, and what you choose depends on why you want to do it, and who you're engaging with.

Participation

This is how we involve or engage our stakeholders **in processes** (operational processes, or delivery), **policies, systems, or decisions**...so, everything! A stakeholder is anyone with an interest or concern in your organisation. If you're a school, it's your children, their families, your staff and governors, and even the local community. If you're a sports club it might be your players, coaches, volunteers, potential players, or people who come to watch your games.

The type of participation that you might undertake will depend on your aim, and your audience. There are some great models, but we really like Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (see next page). You don't need to get hung up on the theory if it's not for you. Just remember that rung 8 isn't necessarily 'better' than rung 1 – they serve different purposes.

Ladder of participation

Rung 1 - Manipulation

Adult-led activities, in which young people do as directed without understanding the purpose of the activities

Rung 2 - Decoration

Adult-led activities, in which young people understand purpose, but have no input in how they are planned

Rung 3 - Tokenism

Adult-led activities, in which young people may be consulted, with minimal opportunities for feedback

Rung 4 - Assigned, but informed

Adult-led activities, in which young people understand purpose, decision-making process, and have a role

Rung 5 - Consulted and informed

Adult-led activities, in which young people are consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions

Rung 6 - Adult initiated, shared decisions with young people

Adult-led activities, in which decision making is shared with young people

Rung 7 - Youth initiated and directed

Youth-led activities, with little input from adults

Rung 8 - Youth initiated, shared decisions with adults

Youth-led activities, in which decision making is shared between young people and adults working as equal partners

Consultation

There are several interpretations of 'consultation' but in this toolkit we are defining it as "feedback on an idea or proposal." This is what your local council might do if they have proposed a change to something – they consult the residents on their idea. It might take the form of a questionnaire, or an invitation to comment. The power often lies with the person or organisation doing the consulting, and the people being consulted don't always know or find out how their input is used.

It is a legitimate type of engagement, as long as you're transparent.

Co-design/co-production

This is a type of engagement where thoughts and opinions of service-users and professionals carry equal weight. You might co-design a leaflet or poster, or even a whole service. It's important to be aware of the power dynamic if something is to be truly co-designed.

There are lots of resources on co-design and co-production but Co-production Oxfordshire's Working Together Handbook is a brilliant place to start if you want to know more.

A note on youth voice

You might hear people talk about "giving someone a voice" but it's important to remember that everyone – young or old – has a voice. It is not within our power to give anyone a voice. What we can do is commit to listening to, amplifying, and acting on the voices of others.

This is especially true if we're talking about groups who traditionally hold less power or privilege than others, like children.

Why is engagement important?

Hopefully, if you're reading this toolkit, you already know that engaging with young people is important. But it can be tricky sometimes to explain why. This section will help you explain to young people, their families, or your colleagues, why engagement is important.

The simplest explanation is that if you are serving a particular group – in this case, young people – then that group are the experts. Engaging people with lived experience means that your offer will be more likely to meet their needs. We also want to know if we have been successful in our aims. And who better to tell us, than the young people we're supporting?

Not so long ago, some colleagues and I asked a question in a focus group that resulted in a lot of sniggers. It turns out that the phrasing we had used meant something quite different to those young people. Involving young people in the design of our questions could have helped us avoid some red faces!

Engaging with your service users will also result in your service being more inclusive. Another faux pas I made early on was holding a young people's consultation day during Ramadan... and bringing snacks. We were not a particularly diverse team, and we hadn't involved any young Muslims in the design of the event.

We can also use engagement activities as part of our outreach work, provided it is authentic and meaningful. For example, some of the activities will help young people better understand the different types of activity available to them, or the benefits of physical activity.

## Who should you be engaging, and how do you reach them?

Who you should be engaging will depend on your organisational and project aims. You might be undertaking some engagement with your existing service users to evaluate your project or service. You might be wanting to reach new audiences, or understand if and why certain young people are not physically active. Working with your existing pupils or service users is obviously more straightforward – you already have a relationship with them, they already have some trust in you, they may even have a solid understanding of your aims.

Engaging with new young people is much trickier. The best way to do this is to collaborate with other organisations or community groups.

A note on "hard to reach" young people

You've probably heard the phrase "hard to reach" but often it isn't the young people or individuals who are hard to reach. Rather it is the services or organisations who aren't reaching them! This image by Juliet Young sums it up:
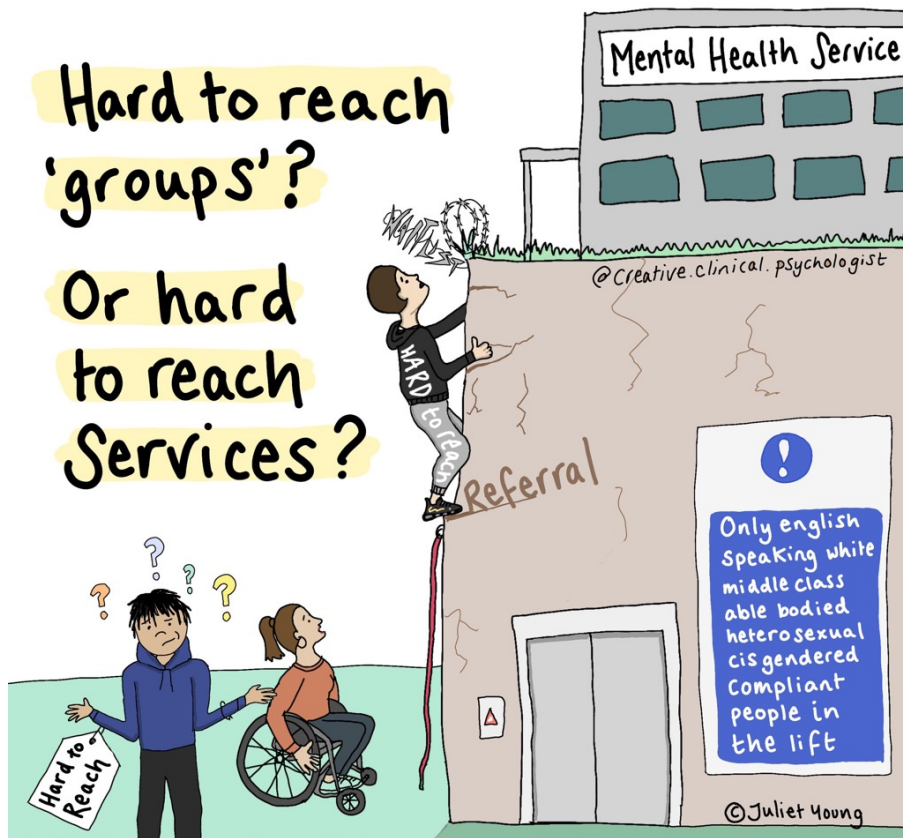
Protecting young people

Safeguarding and safety

This toolkit is not a comprehensive guide to safeguarding. If you are working with young people, your organisation should have a safeguarding policy, and a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). You may have procedures or guidelines about engaging with and consulting young people, and these should take precedence.

When you are deciding on your engagement activity, you should think about any potential risks, and how you will keep the young people safe. Here are some things to think about, and some questions to ask yourself:

Policy and procedures:

- Do you have clear safeguarding and child protection procedures?

- Do you have a digital safeguarding policy if meeting online, or using online tools?

- Do you need to conduct a risk assessment for your physical space and/or your chosen activities?

- Are your policies available to the public, and in child-friendly language?

Staff confidence and capability:

- Have your staff been trained (e.g. in safeguarding, or first aid) and is that training up to date?

- Do you need any specific digital training, or support to manage online concerns?

- Are you confident delivering your chosen engagement activities?

Technology and equipment

- Have you got the right technology and equipment in place?

- Are your staff confident in using that equipment, especially if digital?

There are also things young people might need support with. Here are some questions to help you:

The emotional

- Are the young people in a suitable mental state for the activity?

- Is the topic (e.g. physical activity) likely to be upsetting or triggering for them?

- What preparations have you made to protect the emotional wellbeing of your participants?

The physical

- Is the session accessible to the young people?

- Can they get there?

The social

- Does your session cater to a variety of learning and communication styles?

- Do the young people need any support with their communication or social skills?

- Do you/the facilitator already know the young people? Or do you need to factor in time to build some trust?

Technology and equipment

- Do the young people have the right access? i.e. have they got WiFi/mobile data if joining online?

- Do the young people need any support to use the technology or equipment?

Remember, this isn't a comprehensive guide to keeping young people safe. In our 'Further reading' section on page 16 we have included some places where you can find out more.

Consent and anonymity

Whenever you are working with young people, informed consent is vital. They must know what they are contributing to, why they are being engaged or consulted, and what you will do with their answers and personal data. Give them this information in advance, and make sure it is simple and accessible to them.

If you are collecting personal data from young people, you should have a GDPR or data protection policy.

If you are taking and using their photos, you probably know that you should have consent from them, and from a parent or guardian. This is also true of their words and stories. Young people should be in control of their voice, so make sure you factor this into your consent forms and processes.

Inclusion and accessibility

When you are planning your activities, think about how you will ensure your session is inclusive and accessible.

Involving young people in the planning process can be a great way to foresee and avoid potential barriers.

You can read more about what young people mean by 'accessibility' in our blog: https://www.energiseme.org/blog/what-does-the-me-activity-report-mean-for-activity-providers-working-with-young-people/

These could be physical barriers. Ask yourself:

- Can the young people get to the venue I am considering?

- Is it in a safe place?

- Do the right transport options exist?

- Is the venue physically accessible?

- Do the activities I'm planning require certain physical abilities? Can they be adapted so that everyone can join in?

The barriers could be related to a protected characteristic. As a reminder, these are:

- Age

- Disability

- Gender reassignment

- Marriage and civil partnership

- Pregnancy and maternity

- Race

- Religion and belief

- Sex

- Sexual orientation

We can't list all the things you should consider, or the things that might go wrong, but some questions you might ask yourself include:

- Have I given young people the opportunity to let us know about any needs they might have? And am I ready to meet those needs?

- Should I offer refreshments, and do I know about any dietary or religious requirements?

- Does the venue have accessible toilets? Do I need to ensure if it has gender neutral toilets?

Designing your engagement

How you design your engagement activity (or activities) will depend on what you want to achieve, and on the people involved. It may also depend on the time and budget you have available.

Here are some questions to help you think about your engagement activity:

- What is your organisational or project purpose? And why is it important that you engage young people?

- Who should lead/be involved? This could be about expertise, or it could be about who has the right relationship with the young people.

- When and where will you hold your engagement activities? You could choose somewhere that is familiar and safe for the young people, or you might choose somewhere fun and exciting. You'll need to think about things like school calendars and religious holidays. And when you choose a venue, you need to think about the accessibility, as well as if it is appealing and suitable. For example, you could choose a building that is grand and beautiful, but might the young people see it as intimidating?

As you build your session plan, your purpose needs to remain at the centre. Be as specific as you can. Choose activities that fit the profile of your participants, that combine a variety of learning and communication styles. And keep in mind how you will use the findings, even if you don't like what you find out!

It is also important that you "close the loop". Young people who have given their time, energy, and opinions to help us deserve to know what happens as a result of their thoughts. Build in ways to ensure that they know what changes you've made, or what comes next.

Learning and communication styles

We all learn and communicate differently. Some people like data and statistics, while others prefer stories. Some people like to ring you up and chat, while others prefer an email. Helping young people to understand this, and helping them figure out their own preferences, means that you will be able to communicate with them more effectively.

There are lots of different tools and models that you can use. In a professional context, you might have heard of the 16 Personalities or Myers-Briggs. Or you might have done a Colours test.
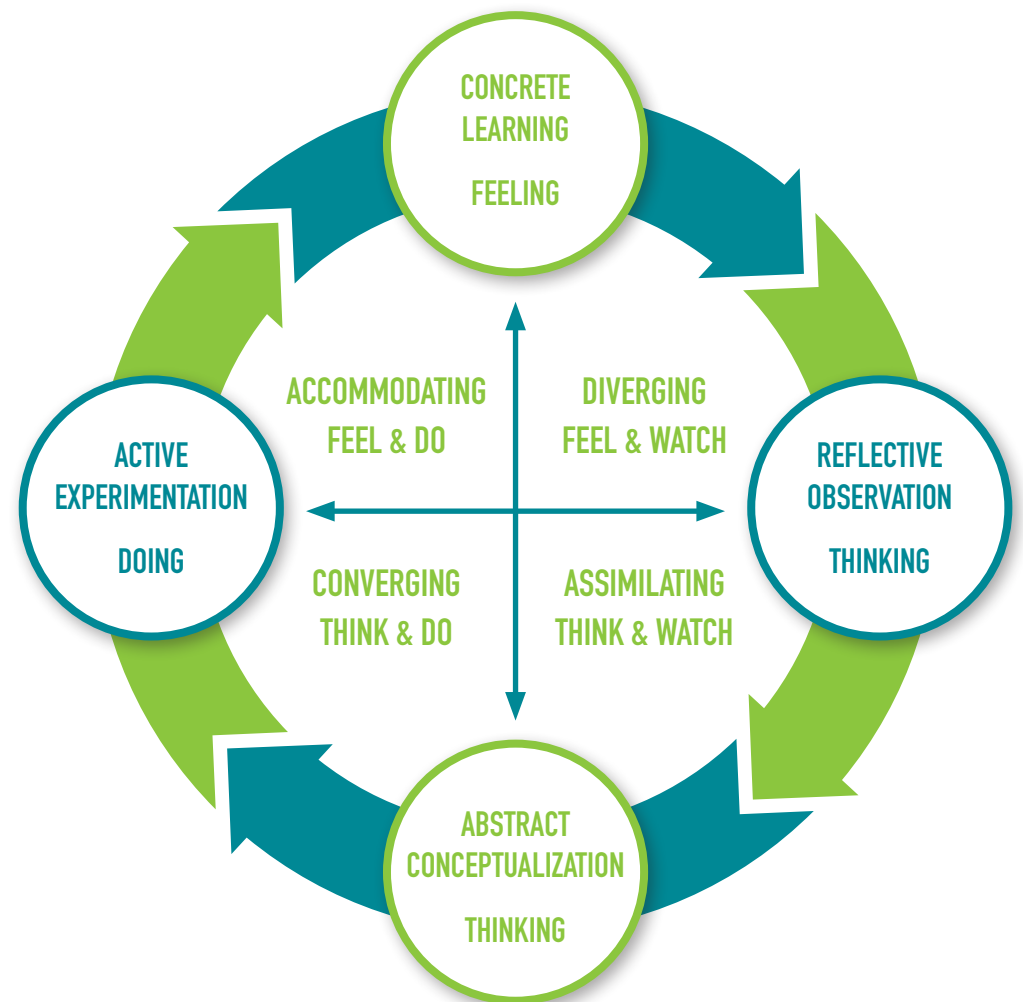
Some learning styles models you might want to look at for (or with) young people are:

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory

Whenever you are working with young people, informed consent is vital. They must know what they are contributing to, why they are being engaged or consulted, and what you will do with their answers and personal data. Give them this information in advance, and make sure it is simple and accessible to them.

David Kolb developed his theory on learning in the early 80s, and has updated it a number of times since. Kolb describes learning as a cycle, involving: concrete learning, where you have an experience; reflective observation, where you reflect on that experience; abstract conceptualization, where you start to form new ideas based on your reflections of your learning experience; and active experimentation, where you start to apply those ideas and used what you have learned.

Kolb also described four learning styles, often shown on a matrix:

CONCRETE LEARNING

FEELING

ACCOMMODATING FEEL & DO

DIVERGING FEEL & WATCH

ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION

DOING

REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION

THINKING

CONVERGING THINK & DO

ASSIMILATING THINK & WATCH

ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION

THINKING

Kolb suggested that our learning style is based on how we approach a task and on how we feel about it.

There isn't a simple test you can do to find out where you fit in the Kolb matrix – and it's important to recognise that your approach to learning might change depending on who you're with, what you're learning, and lots of other factors.

Honey & Mumford

Similar to (and inspired by) Kolb, Honey and Mumford developed four distinct learning styles.

Activists: people who learn by doing. Likely to throw themselves into a task, and figure it out along the way.

Theorists: people who want to read up on something first. They like theories, models, data.

Pragmatists: people who want to try out ideas and theories. Often seen as decision makers or problem solvers.

Reflectors: people who watch and think first. Thoughtful and observant.

Honey & Mumford also developed a straightforward questionnaire – there's a version with 40 questions, and a version with 80 questions. Both versions are readily available online, but would work best with older young people.

VARK models

This is probably the most familiar of the learning styles models. VARK stands for:

Visual: people who learn by seeing and observing, especially things like charts or infographics.

Aural/auditory: people who learn by listening, perhaps to lectures, podcasts, or taking part in group discussions. They might even talk to themselves as they process information.

Read/write: people who learn best through reading and/or writing. They love a list!

Kinesthetic: people who learn best by experience and practice. They might like demonstrations or videos, or they might like to dive straight in and have a go.

An advantage of this model is its simplicity. As you're choosing your activities, it will help to keep in mind the need to balance these different styles. If you've got an activity that involves writing or drawing, follow it up with a discussion, or a physical activity to appeal to different styles of learning.

Of course, people don't fit just one of these categories – most of us will be a mixture.

Before you get started...

Once you've planned your activities, whether it's one hour, an afternoon, or a full day of engagement activities with young people, there is some information you'll need to share before the session. We talked about safeguarding and consent on pages 9 and 10, so don't forget to do any risk assessments you might need. And get the appropriate consents – from young people and from their parent or guardian.

When you share information about your session, remember that some young people might be nervous, and some will have access requirements. Make sure they know the aim of the session. Sharing the purpose, and what you hope to achieve will help the young people bring their best selves to your session. When we don't understand why we're doing something, it's easy to get distracted or dispirited.

Share the agenda too. Especially if you're planning a longer session. It's good to know when breaks are expected, and when the finish time is. Then, stick to it! We've all been to meetings or courses that have overrun, and it's difficult to keep focused when you're worried about missing your train, or you're getting hungry.

And if there are any special requirements – tell people well in advance. If you're providing refreshments, be clear about whether that is tea and biscuits, or a full lunch. If you're paying for travel expenses, be clear about whether you'll pay upfront, or if you'll reimburse afterwards. If you want people to bring a pen – tell them! If you want young people to come dressed ready for comfort or in their uniforms – tell them!

And remember... not everyone learns in the same way, so if you provide all of the above in a written format, be prepared to spend some time talking through it with young people or their families, too.

Most importantly... have fun!

Further reading

Learning and communication styles

https://www.16personalities.com/

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hartman_Personality_Profile

Kolb, D. A. (2007) 'The Kolb learning style inventory' Boston, MA: Hay Resources Direct

Honey, P., & Mumford, A. (1989) 'Learning styles questionnaire', Organization Design and Development, Incorporated

Participation models

Arnstein, S. (1971) 'A Ladder of Citizen's Participation', Journal of the American Institute of Planners, no 35, July

Hart, R. (1992) 'Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship', UNICEF Innocenti Essays No. 4, Florence: UNICEF

Treseder, P. (1997) 'Empowering children and young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision-making', London: Save the Children

Shier, H. (2001) 'Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations', Children & Society, Volume 15, 107-117

Lundy, L. (2007) ' "Voice" is not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', British Educational Research Journal 33 (6): 927–942

Co-design and co-production

https://www.scie.org.uk/co-production/what-how

https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/influence-and-participation-toolkit/how/methods/co-design/

https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/influence-and-participation-toolkit/how/methods/co-production/

https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/about-council/CoproHandbook_Full.pdf

Safeguarding

https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection

https://www.anncrafttrust.org/

https://www.nya.org.uk/skills/safeguarding-and-risk-management-hub/

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