



Listen to the voice of children/young people in the church

When developing youth/children's ministry in your church, it is important that you listen to the ideas and suggestions of the children/young people. They will have a view about most things relating to church, faith, life and God, but adults often forget to include them or ask them.

If your church is committing to engaging with younger generations, it is important to listen to the voices of children/young people in decision making processes. This guide introduces a suggested participation spectrum, some of the whys, hows and whats, a sample consultation and an evaluation tool for monitoring the impact of listening with the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

Why should the church listen to children and young people?

It helps us to:

- Better understand them and their concerns
- Hear their views, opinions and ideas, even if they differ from the adults' ones
- Avoid implementing things they don't want or need
- Shape future direction through fresh perspectives
- Create a greater sense of ownership and belonging
- Hear their prophetic voice and what God might be saying through them
- Plan and prepare alongside them
- Encourage and impart valuable decision making skills
- Show they are valued and that their ideas can lead to change

1 Timothy 4: 12 "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity".

Article 12 of the UN Convention of the rights of the child (Unicef 1989) says, "Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously".

How do we listen to children and young people?

There are endless ways of listening to the voices of children and young people. However, it is vital to choose a method that is age appropriate and best suits them. You will need to plan well, obtain relevant permissions and follow all safeguarding procedures.

Method examples:

- Have an informal discussion or conduct a formal consultation
- Set up a time limited focus group relating to a particular issue or project
- Set up a youth or children's council similar to schools

- Have youth representation on the PCC
- Conduct a questionnaire or survey either physical or via online platforms
- Play decision making games
- Use art and other creative art medias
- Have circle time to share views and ideas

What should children and young people be included in?

- 1) Decision making 2) Planning 3) Shaping and changing 4) Evaluating impact

Participation / Decision making

Below is a spectrum to help understand that participation can include both decision making and active involvement. Both will help us listen to children and young people more effectively.



Both parts of this can lead to empowering children and young people

Decision making

Adapted from Roger Hart

Participation
Children/young people decide, supported by adults in a form of partnership

Elements of participation
Children/young people are invited to express their views but adults make the decisions

Non-participation
All decisions are taken by the adults, children and young people are told what to do and why

Active involvement

Tony Cook 2010

Initiating and ownership
With adult support children/young people take responsibility for activities and are involved in planning, delivery and evaluation

Occasional help
Children/young people help run activities that are mainly organised and directed by adults

Turning up
Children/young people turn up once or regularly and engage with the organised activities

What question might we ask children and young people?

You could ask questions about:

- God, prayer or their church
- The groups they belong to or setting up a new group
- Using their gifts in the life of the church
- Connecting more with the local community or school

Children/young people are prepared to share their views; you just need to remember to ask them.

10 Sample questions about Church

1. Why do you go to church?
2. What do you like most about your church?
3. Is there anything you don't like at church?
4. If you could change anything about your church, what would it be?
5. What do you think God thinks about your church?
6. How do people find out about your church? How could they find out more?
7. What stops other children from going to your church? What could be done to attract more?
8. How could your church link with the local schools? Do you have any suggestions?
9. Does your church have good groups for children/young people? If YES say why, if NO what would you suggest?
10. What three words would you use to describe your church?

There are also 300 sample questions that unpack a number of key topics and themes on the Church of England's Learn to Listen website: <https://www.learn-to-listen.org.uk/>

Example of a consultation with children/young people about church

This session is a great tool for finding out children and young people's views on the church. You could start the session with refreshments where you can do introductions and an explanation of the session. Encourage everyone to be honest with their answers and affirm the children/young people that all their opinions matter.

Activity 1: To get the children/young people moving and making decisions, invite them to stand in the middle of the room and ask them to choose their preference, by moving to the right wall or to the left wall.

- **Fizzy drink** (to the left) – OR - **Milkshake** (to the right)
- **Chips** (to the left) – OR - **Pasta** (to the right)
- **Netflix** (to the left) – OR – **Cinema** (to the right)
- **Kindle** (to the left) – OR – **Book** (to the right)
- **Chocolate** (to the left) – OR – **Haribo** (to the right)
- **iPad** (to the left) – OR – **Smart phone** (to the right)

Activity 2: Divide the children/young people into smaller groups and give each group an '**Ideas Tree**' (see sample below), some leaf shaped Post-its and pens. Invite them to answer each question by writing on the Post-its and sticking them on the relevant branches. Allow enough time to answer each question then invite each group to feedback their thoughts and ideas.

Activity 3: Ask the children/young people to choose a few things they would most like to feed back to the church PCC / want the PCC to act upon (don't make promises). End by asking the children/young people if any of them would be prepared to feedback to the PCC.

SAMPLE Consultation asking children and young people what they think about church.

If you could change anything about church what would it be?

What do you not like about church?

What do you like about church?

Ideas Tree



Monitoring Impact

Monitoring the impact is an integral part of the listening process. After consulting with children/young people, here is a **SAMPLE** 5 step tool to help monitor and evaluate impact. It is important that the PCC hear what the children/young people have shared and act on what is appropriate. Be realistic and honest about what can and can't be acted upon. Children/young people are ok with 'NO', if there is good reason, honesty and the chance to discuss a compromise with them.

If any discussion goes to the PCC for discussion, these 5 steps may help with record keeping.

1) Consultation information

Group of children/young people consulted with:

Date of Consultation:

Facilitated by:

Date children/young people ideas/views taken to PCC:

2) Main points the children/young people have requested to be taken forward to the PCC for consideration:

Comments:

3) Record of PCC discussion:

Comments:

4) Action to be implemented, as agreed by the PCC:

Comments:

Agree who will feed back to the children/young people if they are not present at the PCC meeting

5) Monitoring

Agree a date to review any changes as a result of implementing the agreed action?

Additional information, advice and resources can be found on the Church of England's Learn to Listen website: <https://www.learn-to-listen.org.uk/>

For any further advice or help, contact your Archdeaconry based Go Team Adviser:
<https://www.bathandwells.org.uk/ministry/children-young-people/>