

Suicide 
Prevention
Scotland.

Participation Practice

Local Suicide
Prevention Planning and
Implementation Toolkit

Local Suicide Prevention Planning and Implementation Toolkit

What will this document support you to do?

- ♥ Understand the context for involving young people
- ♥ Develop your participation approach
- ♥ Consider conditions for safe participation

When might this document be most helpful?

- ♥ At the start of local action plan development or when planning key activities
- ♥ After you have taken time to understand and assess your local need, and have decided on priority areas that need to be addressed
- ♥ When considering how you involve young people in your work
- ♥ Evaluating work where young people have been previously involved



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Introduction

This section of the local area toolkit has been designed, with the support of a local leads working group, those leading on national participation projects, and members of the Lived Experience Panel, to provide guidance for developing effective and meaningful participation approaches and practices involving young people (aged 16-25) in the design, delivery, and review of local action plans. It should be noted that participation with young people should sit alongside engagement with other stakeholders, such as workers and parents/carers, as well as the consideration of data and evidence.

In this section, **participation** is understood as:

- ♥ a young person's involvement in individual decisions about their own lives, as well as collective involvement in matters that affect them.
- ♥ a process rather than a one-off exercise, acknowledging that different areas may be at different stages of developing their participation approach and that there is no singular approach.
- ♥ being different from consultation, in which young people are asked for their views and ideas and these ideas are brought before people in a decision-making process. Participation instead enables direct shaping of decision-making processes by young people.

Given the sensitivities involved in engaging with young people on the topic of suicide prevention and the requirement for safeguarding and supportive processes, there may be a need for different levels of participation to be undertaken at different stages of developing action plans. There may also be times when consultation with young people around sensitive areas is relevant.

The Policy and Legislative Context

From a human rights perspective, involving young people in local plans aligns with the legal requirement under **Article 12 of the UNCRC**, which states that children have a right to express their views and have these taken into account when decisions are made which affect them. Currently, the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 embeds **Article 12 in primary legislation under Part 1 (Section 1(2) and Section 1 (5))**. The requirement of youth participation is also imposed by the Scottish Government's **UNCRC Implementation Programme, Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), Time Space Compassion** and the overarching **National Performance Framework**.



Insight from a Lived Experience Panel Member

Why should young people be engaged in the development of local action plans?

“Getting direct input from young people to help shape local action plans is vital. Policy and decision makers can learn so much from the lived experiences of young people. Hearing directly from ‘the horse’s mouth’ will help to ensure we gather views of what young people are currently thinking about current issues and their reflections on what they think is going on around suicide and mental health in society more widely.”

What could young people gain from being involved?

“The benefits to young people is that they are able to see clearly that they are being listened to and that their views are be taken seriously. It demonstrates to young people that decision makers have belief in them and promotes self belief and a strong sense amongst young people of being valued for their input. Participation of young people can also have a positive effect on young people’s mental health, by boosting self esteem and confidence and validating their personal experiences and sharing these for the good of others, for the greater good of society.”

How should young people be made to feel when engaging with local action plan development?

“Young people should made to feel valued, wanted, respected and taken seriously. They need to know and be reminded that they are worthy.”

What should young people be made aware of and what should young people expect of the staff working with them?

“Professionals should adopt an approach of patiently explaining issues/topics as you would do to a first year student or someone who doesn’t have any idea of the issues in this field. They must avoid using over complicated language. Producing friendly summaries of work tasks and asks of young people will help to reduce anxiety of young people involved. Using simple guides/ glossary of terms will be very useful for young people to know what exactly is going on and what is expected from their participation. For example, create a statement about what is a local action plan, then explain more about the professionals, their roles and who they can to turn to for further explanation during their period of involvement.

The professionals need to be trauma aware and responsive and young people should know and be familiar with any professionals who are there to support their emotional needs specifically. If you explain the purpose and key asks early on, you will save a lot of problems and reduce risks of young people withdrawing, due to not feeling good enough or even stupid or feeling like imposters. Professionals should also be aware of any educational and learning needs of those involved, e.g. if a young person is dyslexic then what extra support might they need to effectively take part in ways that suit their own learning needs. Promote various ways of engaging - accommodate their needs and go at their pace.



Perhaps a questionnaire asking what can we do to help your involvement and what needs do you have would be useful. This will help lift the pressure on young people who have any additional support needs and help them to feel less anxious prior to any face to face engagement. This type of approach needs to happen from the start.

Professionals also need to be realistic in their expectations of young people. It may help to start by setting the bar a bit lower level and this will help increase the sense of achievement when those goals have been reached - young people will be pleasantly surprised when it has been reached.

Praise is vital, young people need to know they've done well, reassure them and reinforce that they are good enough. The benefits of being involved can also have a hugely positive impact on their adult lives.

Staff Values - Be kind, show compassion and don't be scared to use humour. Humour can help break the ice and help young people relate to the action plans in local areas. Staff should not be too scared to communicate a bit about themselves when relevant. This can help young people feel their own experiences are normal and more relaxed. And if staff don't have relevant lived experience then involve other people with relevant lived experience to talk with and support young people.

Safeguarding and Child Protection training for professionals leading this work is very important."

Developing your Participation Approach

Understanding how your current local action plan meets young people's rights

You may find it useful to start by taking stock of your current action plan and reviewing how it aligns with GIRFEC and the UNCRC. To do this you can use the [Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment \(CRWIA\) Guidance](#) and the [list](#) of example assessments. Depending on your local structure, it may be helpful for those strategically leading on prevention/ early intervention or support for children and young people's mental health and wellbeing to complete this exercise collectively. These discussions may also help identify who does what and where suicide prevention for children and young people sits within the local structure.



Adopting a Whole Organisation Approach

Guidance notes suggest that, for effective and long-term change to be seen through participation practice, areas need to adopt a 'whole systems' approach to participation.



Public Health Scotland notes that whole system working can be defined as applying systems thinking and tools that enable:

"An ongoing, flexible approach by a broad-range of stakeholders to identify and understand current and emerging public health issues where, by working together, we can deliver sustainable change and better lives for the people of Scotland."²

Within this whole systems approach there are four components:

1 Culture

the ethos of an organisation, shared by all staff and service users, which demonstrates a commitment to participation.

2 Structure

the infrastructure for participation - planning, development, and resourcing etc.

3 Practice

the ways of working, methods for involvement, skills and knowledge which enable children and young people to feel engaged.

4 Review

the monitoring and evaluation systems that enable an organisation to evidence change affected by children and young people's participation.

This 'whole systems' approach calls on strategic and delivery structures and stakeholders which indirectly and directly support young people's mental health to have a role. Given this, you may find it useful to look at these four components alongside or as a collective with others working on young people's mental health and wellbeing.



1

Culture

A

As a local area, where are you with your participation practices? [The National Youth Agency \(2024\)](#) highlights 'tough questions' suggested for those in strategic positions to reflect on:

1. What are we aiming to achieve?
2. Where have we got to so far?
3. What will children and young people get out of it?
4. Are we able to resource it properly?
5. Why have we not done it before?
6. Are we prepared to involve children and young people from the start?
7. Are we prepared to be actively inclusive?
8. Are we being honest with the children and young people?
9. What are our expectations?
10. Are we prepared to give up some power?
11. Are we prepared to take some criticism?
12. Do we recognise this as a long-term commitment?
13. Are we prepared to build in changes long term and not just have a one-off event?

In addition:

Is there still a culture shift required in relation to confidence and acceptance of participation with young people in general, or with youth participation concerning suicide prevention?

B

Thinking about your answers to the above, what are the priority areas that need to be considered for creating the desired culture? Who needs to be involved and when does it need to be done by?



C

Based on your answers to question B, what are the next steps?

Possible next steps:

- Find or establish an agreed understanding of participation
- Find or develop a participation charter or principles which support staff and young people to understand the commitment to responding to youth voices. If useful this could then be shown, agreed upon, and signed by all staff working on the local action plan as well as any young people engaged in this work. There could also be a commitment to review.
- Examples: [Children and Young Peoples Mental Health Joint Delivery Board \(cosla.gov.uk\)](https://www.cosla.gov.uk/children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-joint-delivery-board/), [Seven Golden Rules for Participation](#)
- Find or develop processes and build into governance structures to ensure managers actively support and sustain the development of participation
- Identify or edit organisational policies and documents to endorse participation practices
- Within your published local action plan make reference to a commitment to participation



It is essential to have in place structures to enable young people to become active participants. Such structures include having staff, resources, as well as decision-making and planning processes.

The following questions may be useful for establishing effective structures that support participation:

- What structures are needed to support staff as well as the young people engaged? This is needed to ensure that suitable safeguarding takes place. For example- young people having timely access to community Tier 1 and 2 services and workers having access to mental health first aiders, support and supervision, peer reflective practice or employee assistance programmes.
- Is there a need for support for staff or to increase organisational awareness and confidence in relation to engaging with young people on the topic of suicide prevention?
- Do you have in-house expertise that can help you develop a participation strategy? If not, are there other local areas that can share their learning to support this?
- Is there youth participation work happening within the mental health landscape in your area that may be beneficial to align with?
- Do you currently have staff internally who can lead on practical participation work, such as colleagues within community learning and development or youth work? If you require funding to support this work, is there any local or national funding to support this?
- If you don't currently have staff who lead on participation work, do you have the capacity, funds, or the ability to apply for funds to recruit? This participation job [template](#) or [tender](#) for the national Youth Advisory Group may be helpful documents to refer to if you are taking this work forward.
- Are there community-based organisations that engage young people that may be able to support your practices? If so, it may be beneficial to work in partnership with such organisations; an example of this taking place nationally is the [Rights Right Now work](#) and their partnership working [agreement](#).
- What funding and processes are needed to enable participation? For example, expenses or remuneration, creative resources, and digital resource for example dongles for those with no Wi-Fi. It may be beneficial to consult with local and national discretionary bursaries and funds that may be available to the young people engaged in your work.

Drawing on your answers to the questions in the Culture and Structure sections of this guidance, it may be helpful to draft a Participation Strategy which sets out your agreed approach to participation, for the young people involved, your workforce, and your wider organisation.

Strategy examples: [CYCJ](#), [Education Scotland](#), [Just Youth](#).



3 Practice

Once you have established what structures and roles you will have for supporting your participation approach it is useful to consider what young people have already voiced locally and nationally concerning suicide prevention.

- Are there local reports already available that directly or indirectly raise points for young people? Are there local evidence banks, such as the Improvement Service, which may be useful to connect with?
- Is there academic research that has drawn together young people's views that may be useful for your work? Some examples are available [here](#).
- Are there any national data banks or reports which may be useful?
- Some examples: [OurMindsOurFuture](#), Who Cares Scotland [resources](#), Intercultural Youth Scotland [reports](#), Children in Scotland's [evidence bank](#), SYP [database](#), Young Scot [Observatory](#) and the [Chief Scientists Office \(CSO\)](#).
- It may be helpful to connect with your local public health department if you need support to understand and make sense of the data available.

If the above is considered and more insight is required, a useful resource for setting the practical approach for engagement is the [Lundy model](#), set out in the diagram below, which calls for the provision of space for children to express their views, support to express their voice, an audience to hear these opinions and for the voices of these children to be given due influence and weight.

Space

How

Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

Voice

How

Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?



Audience

How

Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

Influence

How

Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Other tools to support meaningful engagement also exist such as [Harts Ladder](#). There are many different practical ways of undertaking participation such as:

- Creating advisory groups
- Hosting focus groups
- Distributing surveys
- Creative work
- 1-1 surveys

The national approach will include several of the above, with all engagements with young people taking place within the established, supportive relationships they have with an adult or organisation, such as their throughcare and aftercare worker. This enables young people and those supporting them to identify what is suitable to be involved with and ensures wrap-around support is in place.

We have also been clear that the ask of young people is not disclosing their experiences but rather giving advice on what opportunities, issues, and constraints could be considered within the suicide prevention action plan to ensure it responds to the needs of children and young people. In addition, the Participation Network has been established to enable more young people, from within their organisations, to provide their views on pieces of work.

There are lots of guides on how to undertake the practice of participation with young people, including within local contexts such as [Participation within Education Setting](#). Two guides which have been co-produced by third sector organisations are Our Minds Our Future and [Children in Scotland's Principles and Guidance Participation in Educational Settings](#). Other examples can be found [here](#).



4

Review

To help gather evidence to show how participation has influenced your local plan, it may be useful to consider the following:

A

Aims, objectives, processes, and outcomes could be set and the young people engaged in the work should be part of this exercise. These may be suitable to be included within your participation strategy, as discussed in the above section on structure.

B

A decision should be made as to the process of reviewing participation practices (i.e. what the organisation is doing to involve children and young people) as well as the outcomes of participation (i.e. what has the impact been on your local action plan as a result of involving children and young people and what impact has there been for the young people involved individually)?

For this you may wish to consider:

- What systems do you currently use for reviewing your local plans? Can you add participation as a theme within this?
- Are other policy teams already doing similar work for their participation practices and would there be an opportunity to align the work or learn from them?
- Do you need to develop a new approach to reviewing this work? If so, the national Youth Advisory Group review approach and [Rights Right Now's](#) evaluation resources may be useful.



Safe Participation and Conditions Specific to the Theme of Suicide Prevention

Given the context of the work, it is important that the participation approach:

- considers the wellbeing of both the young people involved and the staff involved
- clarifies the available learning resources, guidance and emotional support for staff
- confirms how young people will access support.

For advice regarding:

Child Protection and Safeguarding and Ethical Guidance

Please see the Scottish Government's Decision-making: children and young people's participation [guidance](#).

Emotional Support

- Consideration should be given to how time, space and compassion is given to the process of participation as well as the support given to staff and young people involved.
- Understand what is available in your local area and consider if this is suitable to support the young people through the participation practice you have planned.
- Is there suitable wellbeing support available for staff? If not, is this something that can be provided?
- Do staff have sufficient awareness and confidence to support young people to access support? Do staff have awareness of the support available to them?
- Are young people in a place that engaging with the participation activity would be an opportunity for them and will not cause them to relive their trauma? Has two years passed since they sadly lost someone to suicide? Would setting up a referral process be useful to consider in your work, whereby a worker or other appropriate adult can help advise if joining your programme of work would be of benefit to the young person?
- Would having a wellbeing action plan be helpful? If so, this [Wellbeing action plan resource](#) may be useful.



- The Lived Experience Panel (LEP) learning has shown the importance of:
 - ensuring those participating are briefed and debriefed after engagements
 - participants being made aware of who they can contact should they need support
 - staff being clear and consistent with permission seeking throughout the work
- The national Youth Advisory Group (YAG) work has benefited from:
 - The non-disclosure approach as a way of safely discussing the topic
 - The requirement of members to have a supportive individual/ worker
 - Building in self-care, development (qualifications and skills), and focusing on relationship-based practice
 - A range of supports which the young people engaged are aware of when choosing to be involved in this work.
 - **Having clear communication on what the group's function will be**

Education Resources

- For this you may also have local training resources which have been evaluated positively that you may want to consider.
- The Mental Health Improvement & Suicide Prevention Knowledge and Skills Framework (**KSF**) and **learning resources** are designed to help people to recognise when someone may be experiencing poor mental health and to know how to respond - and ultimately help to prevent suicide.
- It may be useful for those responsible for training to consider which level of (KSF) is required of individual staff, teams, and managers within their role and the opportunities to embed these resources within the current training offered to staff.



Practice Examples

The guidance was developed following on from consultation work in 2021, with local leads to understand work taking place about young people and the support required. During the consultation, it was clear that there is emerging practice that would be valuable to capture and share across Scotland. We hope that these case studies provide inspiration and insight for others to reflect on how young people's needs are being considered within local action plans.

Practice example

North Ayrshire

In North Ayrshire, their work on suicide prevention emerged when sadly there was a spate of suicides within their area and young people felt there was a need to do proactive work on this topic. Local structures and processes enabled this need to be heard and responded to through the youth participation strategy, in particular through having an Executive Youth Council that linked regularly with decision makers. Having staff support to enact this strategy and structure was also key. Once the work was raised and committed to it was important that both the young people and those working on actions to prevent suicides in the area worked in tandem. A key enabler of this work was having senior leadership buy in and a multi-agency approach. Through the video, you will hear how their 'nothing about us, without us' approach to developing suicide prevention work looked in practice in North Ayrshire.

[Watch the video here](#)



Practice example

West Dunbarton

In West Dunbarton work took place through their wider health and social care community planning structures, something that for many areas may be where suicide prevention sits about children and young people. Within the area, the establishment of a Youth Council provided a mechanism for young people to contribute to local action. Specific pieces of work were funded by researchers who explored [how different sectors worked together in supporting children and young people's mental health and emotional well-being](#). The team provided training and undertook engagement with [children, young people and their families to understand their needs](#). The video highlights the importance of having consistent relationships with young people as well as the other stakeholders within your area who influence change. As well as the importance of providing accessible and supportive spaces. It was also noted that those who hold the power to take action need to commit to taking the work forward, highlighting the need to use the previous and current knowledge young people have gifted us and always feeding back the changes that have been made.

[Watch the video here](#)



Practice example

Youth Advisory Group

Within the national work, there was practitioner expertise and academic data that fed into the previous Suicide Prevention Action Plan. Once in post, it was identified by the Children and Young People Delivery Lead that a structure was needed to enable young people to be part of developing and enacting the action plan. A proposal was put to the Scottish Government outlining the work, the commitment needed from all involved in the national action plan, and the funding required. This was approved and Children in Scotland and The University of Stirling secured the contract to hold the work, both a **Youth Advisory Group (YAG)** and a **Participation Network** for further engagement with those working alongside children and young people. The core approach to this work recognises the importance of relationships, with every member of the YAG having a designated adult supporting them to engage in this work. Their video highlights that young people have different experiences and needs and this must be recognised when developing engagement work alongside young people. It also notes the key practices the group members have found useful and the role of policy and practice in being partners in this work.

Resources and support

A range of national organisations which work with children and young people can offer support for participation practices including those listed throughout this document and below.

Alongside the resources throughout this document, further information and examples can be found in the **Involving People with Lived and Living Experience** section of the toolkit.

If you wish to link with the local area's suicide prevention lead please contact the Suicide Prevention Implementation Leads at Public Health Scotland on psh.suicideprevention@psh.scot.

If you wish to connect in with the national structures for youth engagement please contact cross@childreninscotland.org.uk.

Participation Network

The Participation Network is aimed at practitioners in Scotland working with young people with experience of suicidality, young people who have lost someone to suicide or young people who experience poor mental health. The Participation Network is facilitated by Children in Scotland, and aims to complement the work of the Youth Advisory Group, recognising that there will be many other children and young people who are not part of the advisory group but who have experiences and opinions that could and should inform our work.

There are also other practitioner support networks which might be of interest such as:

- **The Scottish Co-production Network**
- **Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Network**

