

Suggested Guidance for Interviewing Children

The stakeholder interviews are an exciting opportunity to gather information relating to innovative approaches to education for marginalized girls. The following guidelines should be followed when interviewing children and adolescents under age 18 in order to ensure that the interviews are a positive experience for all involved. They would be relevant in any information collection activity involving children or adolescents under age 18. **Please read these guidelines in advance of conducting any interviews or data collections with children and youth, and bring them with you to the field for reference.**

1. Children's participation¹

Children must have the opportunity to express their views about activities that affect their welfare, and these views should be respected.

In order to adhere to the basic ethical principle of respect for persons, children and adolescents must be treated with honesty and integrity. Their opinions provide a valuable perspective that should be respected and responded to in an age-appropriate way. Investigators have a responsibility to identify appropriate opportunities and roles for young people to express their views about the information-gathering activity in ways that are appropriate to their age.

Children and adolescents can provide crucial information about their needs and how to respond to them. For example, they can review questionnaires and advise investigators if the proposed techniques for gathering information are appropriate or likely to be reliable or if any questions might cause distress and should be changed. They can also help to collect information from other children and assist with the interpretation and communication of the results.

Children's participation helps improve methods for gathering information, thus enhancing the accuracy and usefulness of the findings. Involving children in age-appropriate decision-making may also have other benefits, including providing opportunities to improve their self-esteem and support of each other. Promoting the participation of children and adolescents recognizes their potential to enrich decision-making processes, to share their perspectives, and to participate as active citizens.

In addition, it is unethical to prevent children and adolescents from participating in decision-making about things that affect their lives. The principle of children's participation affirms that children and adolescents have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. It requires that their views be heard and given due weight according to their age and maturity, in accordance with human rights conventions. Participatory approaches must also be designed to ensure that information gathering supports inclusion of minority voices, such as those with

¹ The guidance and text in this section is taken from: Horizons Population Council, IMPACT, and Family Health International. *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information for Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and Resources*. Section 2.

disabilities, is nondiscriminatory, and is age-appropriate.

Investigators must pay careful attention to balancing the two distinct roles that children and adolescents may play in the information-gathering activity:

A. Children and adolescents as participants in the information-gathering activity.

Participatory approaches that promote the inclusion of input from children and adolescents in the design, development and/or collection of information-gathering activities are an important way to recognize young people's views and should be used to the maximum extent possible.

B. Children and adolescents as respondents in the information-gathering activity.

Information gathering on sensitive topics can be upsetting and should be regarded as intrusive. To protect children from harm, the use of information-gathering methods should be kept to the strict minimum required to gain appropriate information on sensitive issues, in accordance with the basic ethical principle of beneficence.

Giving children and adolescents the maximum opportunity to express their views must be balanced with protecting their best interests and safeguarding them from potential harm by minimizing intrusion. Children and adolescents must have the opportunity to express their opinions without compromising their safety and wellbeing.

2. Considerations for especially vulnerable children²

Children who are in especially vulnerable situations require additional safeguards to protect their welfare.

Maintaining ethical standards is particularly important for children and adolescents without a parent or guardian, or those who are not protected by an effective legal system because of displacement, refugee status, or social marginalization. Approval from a child's parent or guardian is required whenever possible, but many vulnerable children and adolescents may not have a legally responsible adult to look after their interests.

Orphaned, separated, and unaccompanied children and adolescents require special considerations to avoid being exploited. For example, in the United States, children and adolescents who have been separated from their parents and close family members, including those in the care of agencies, may be included in a study only if it is:

- Specifically related to their status as separated children; or
- Conducted in schools, camps, hospitals, institutions, or similar settings in which all

² The guidance and text in this section is taken from: Horizons Population Council, IMPACT, and Family Health International. *Ethical Approaches to Gathering Information for Children and Adolescents in International Settings: Guidelines and Resources*. Section 5.

children are included as participants.

Children and adolescents living in circumstances of armed conflict, severe poverty, famine, or other destabilizing events face increased risks with no guarantee of safety. Adults working with children and adolescents in these particularly insecure settings, where infrastructures are weak or populations are mobile, face many challenges when collecting accurate information. For example, it is often harder to provide follow-up services to meet children's needs and the information revealed may be particularly sensitive.

Program managers struggling to meet the basic needs of war-affected populations may be unable to perform even routine monitoring and evaluation of their services. In such circumstances, investigation teams must be extremely sensitive to the nature of their activities and question whether it is appropriate to contact children. When it is possible to enter such communities, investigators face the difficult task of anticipating consequences that threaten the safety of children, their families, and their communities. This requirement extends throughout the activity, including attention to collecting data anonymously or keeping records of disclosed personal information confidential long after the activity is complete.

3. Ethical Standards for Research with Children³

The following principles would entail a minimum set of standards for research with children.

Principle 1. NON-HARMFUL PROCEDURES: The investigator should use no research procedure that may harm the child either physically or psychologically. The investigator is also obligated at all times to use the least stressful research procedure whenever possible. Psychological harm in particular instances may be difficult to define; nevertheless, its definition and means for reducing or eliminating it remain the responsibility of the investigator. When the investigator is in doubt about the possible harmful effects of the research procedures, consultation should be sought from others. When harm seems inevitable, the investigator is obligated to find other means of obtaining the information or to abandon the research. Instances may, nevertheless, rise in which exposing the child to stressful conditions may be necessary if diagnostic or therapeutic benefits to the child are associated with the research. In such instances careful deliberation with relevant research governing body should be sought.

Principle 2. PARENTAL CONSENT: The informed consent of parents, legal guardians or those who act *in loco parentis* (e.g., teachers, superintendents of institutions) similarly should be obtained, preferably in writing. Informed consent requires that parents or other responsible adults be informed of all the features of the research that may affect their willingness to allow the child to participate. This information should include the profession and institution affiliation of the investigator. Not only should the right of the responsible adults to refuse consent be respected, but also they should be informed that they may refuse to participate without incurring any penalty to them or to the child.

³The guidance and text in this section is taken from:

Society for Research in Child Development. (2012). *Ethical Standards in Research*. Retrieved November 5, 2014 from <http://www.srcd.org/about-us/ethical-standards-research>.

Principle 3. INFORMED CONSENT: Before seeking consent or assent from the child, the investigator should inform the child of all features of the research that may affect his or her willingness to participate and should answer the child's questions in terms appropriate to the child's comprehension. The investigator should respect the child's freedom to choose to participate in the research or not by giving the child the opportunity to give or not give assent to participation as well as to choose to discontinue participation at any time. Assent means that the child shows some form of agreement to participate without necessarily comprehending the full significance of the research necessary to give informed consent. Investigators working with infants should take special effort to explain the research procedures to the parents and be especially sensitive to any indicators of discomfort in the infant. In spite of the paramount importance of obtaining consent, instances can arise in which consent or any kind of contact with the participant would make the research impossible to carry out. Non-intrusive field research is a common example. Conceivably, such research can be carried out ethically if it is conducted in public places, participants' anonymity is totally protected, and there are no foreseeable negative consequences to the participant. However, judgments on whether such research is ethical in particular circumstances should be made in consultation with a relevant research governing body.

Principle 4. ADDITIONAL CONSENT: The informed consent of any persons, such as schoolteachers for example, whose interaction with the child is the subject of the study should also be obtained. As with the child and parents or guardians informed consent requires that the persons interacting with the child during the study be informed of all features of the research which may affect their willingness to participate. All questions posed by such persons should be answered and the persons should be free to choose to participate or not, and to discontinue participation at any time.

Principle 6. DECEPTION: Although full disclosure of information during the procedure of obtaining consent is the ethical ideal, a particular study may necessitate withholding certain information or deception. Whenever withholding information or deception is judged to be essential to the conduct of the study, the investigator should satisfy research colleagues that such judgment is correct. If withholding information or deception is practiced, and there is reason to believe that the research participants will be negatively affected by it, adequate measures should be taken after the study to ensure the participant's understanding of the reasons for the deception. Investigators whose research is dependent upon deception should make an effort to employ deception methods that have no known negative effects on the child or the child's family.

Principle 7. ANONYMITY: To gain access to institutional records, the investigator should obtain permission from responsible authorities in charge of records. Anonymity of the information should be preserved and no information used other than that for which permission was obtained. It is the investigator's responsibility to ensure that responsible authorities do, in fact, have the confidence of the participant and that they bear some degree of responsibility in giving such permission.

Principle 8. MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES: From the beginning of each research investigation, there should be clear agreement between the investigator and the parents, guardians or those who act in loco parentis, and the child, when appropriate, that defines the responsibilities of each. The investigator has the obligation to honor all promises and commitments of the agreement.

Principle 9. JEOPARDY: When, in the course of research, information comes to the investigator's attention that may jeopardize the child's well-being, the investigator has a responsibility to discuss the information with the parents or guardians and with those expert in the field in order that they may arrange the necessary assistance for the child. Researchers need to be aware that they may obtain findings suggesting that a child's health and well-being might be in jeopardy, that these findings may include false positives, and they should be knowledgeable about current human subjects procedures and regulations for informing families of incidental findings.

Principle 10. UNFORESEEN CONSEQUENCES: When research procedures result in undesirable consequences for the participant that were previously unforeseen, the investigator should immediately employ appropriate measures to correct these consequences, and should redesign the procedures if they are to be included in subsequent studies.

Principle 11. CONFIDENTIALITY: The investigator should keep in confidence all information obtained about research participants. The participants' identity should be concealed in written and verbal reports of the results, as well as in informal discussion with students and colleagues. When a possibility exists that others may gain access to such information, this possibility, together with the plans for protecting confidentiality, should be explained to the participants as part of the procedure of obtaining informed consent.

Principle 12. INFORMING PARTICIPANTS: Immediately after the data are collected, the investigator should clarify for the research participant any misconceptions that may have arisen. The investigator also recognizes a duty to report general findings to participants in terms appropriate to their understanding. Where scientific or humane values justify withholding information, every effort should be made so that withholding the information has no damaging consequences for the participant.

Principle 13. REPORTING RESULTS: Because the investigator's words may carry unintended weight with parents and children, caution should be exercised in reporting results, making evaluative statements, or giving advice.

Principle 14. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS: Investigators should be mindful of the social, political and human implications of their research and should be especially careful in the presentation of findings from the research. This principle, however, in no way denies investigators the right to pursue any area of research or the right to observe proper standards of scientific reporting.

Principle 15. SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT: Misconduct is defined as the fabrication or falsification of data, plagiarism, misrepresentation, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, analyzing, or reporting research. It does not include unintentional errors or honest differences in interpretation of data. Vigorous leadership will be provided in the pursuit of scientific investigation that is based on the integrity of the investigator and the honesty of research. The presence of scientific misconduct will not be tolerated.

4. INTERVIEWING⁴

A. The questionnaire

1. The questionnaire content and language should be sensitive to the language, needs and feelings of the age group to be interviewed and their capabilities.
2. The questionnaire language should be kept as simple as possible and not be patronizing.
3. The research should avoid questions which might result in a child or young person making unreasonable demands on a parent or guardian.
4. The questionnaire must also avoid classification questions that are unnecessarily intrusive or are difficult for the child or young person to answer. Where consent is being sought, it may be preferable for some classification questions to be asked of the parent or responsible adult, rather than the child or young person.

B. The interview

1. It is not normally necessary for the responsible adult to be present during the interview. Where their presence would be undesirable for technical reasons - e.g. if it could introduce bias - this must be explained and consent sought to interview the child alone.
2. The child/young person must be reminded of their right to withhold answers to particular questions.
3. Any disclosure of a confidential nature which may be potentially harmful to the child or young person must be dealt with in a sensitive and responsible manner.
4. Care must be taken to avoid any physical contact with the child/young person.

C. Research venues

1. Research should only be conducted in safe and appropriate environments.
2. If the research is conducted in the clients' domain, the client must share equal responsibility with the researcher for providing a safe and appropriate venue.
3. If a child is recruited in the street and taken into a central (hall test) location, there must always be another adult present in the same room throughout the interview.
4. It is advisable for research carried out in the home of the child/young person, either in person or by telephone, that an adult remains on the premises - though not necessarily in the same room - throughout the interview.

⁴ The guidance and text in this section is taken from: MRS, Conducting Research with Children and Young People, March 2006.

5. Checklist for operationalization

The following tables operationalize the principles in these guidelines into a checklist format for ease of reference during research and information collection.

Principle	Observed	Comments
Principle 1. Non-Harmful Procedures		
Principle 2. Parental, Legal Guardian or <i>in loco parentis</i> Consent		
Principle 3. Informed Consent Child		
Principle 4. Additional Consent		
Principle 6. Necessary Use of Deception Methods Reviewed		
Principle 7. Anonymity of Information in Institutional Records		
Principle 8. Mutual Responsibilities between Investigator, Parents, Guardians, those acting <i>in loco parentis</i> , Children		
Principle 9: Disclosure of Research or Information Uncovered Jeopardizing to the Child (if applicable)		
Principle 10. Unforeseen Consequences Mediated		
Principle 11. Confidentiality of Information		
Principle 12. Duly Informing Participants of Information		
Principle 13. Reporting Results Judgment Exercised		
Principle 14. Use and Presentations of Findings Mindful of Potential Implications		
Principle 15. Scientific Misconduct Prevented		

Questionnaire

Principle	Observed	Comments
Content and language sensitive to language, needs and feelings of age group interviewed		
Language simple and not patronizing		
Avoid questions that might make unreasonable demands on parent/guardian		
Avoid classification questions unnecessarily intrusive or difficult for child/youth to answer		

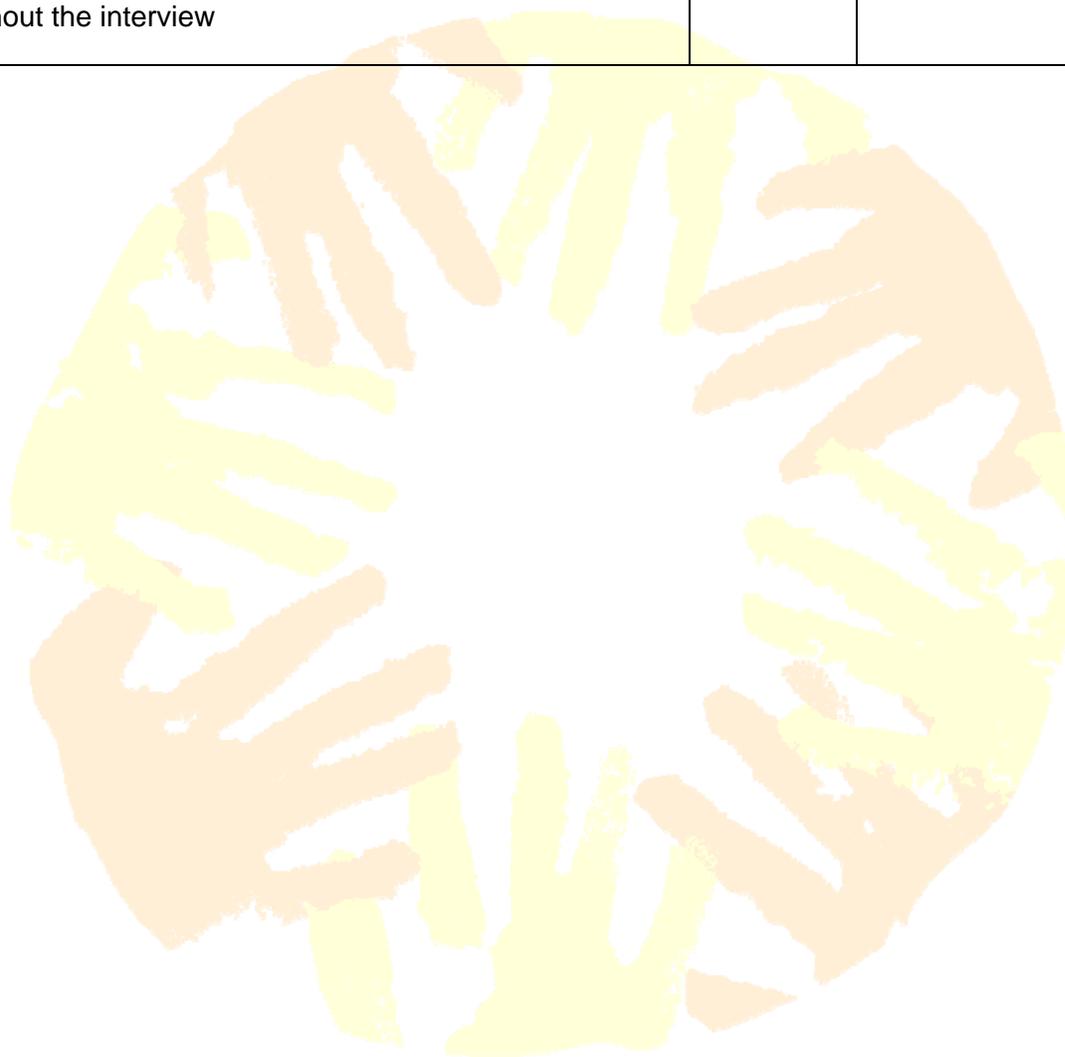
The interview

Principle	Observed	Comments
If responsible adult present undesirable for technical reasons, this is explained and consent sought		
Child/young person reminded of their right to withhold answers to particular questions		
Disclosure of confidential nature potentially harmful to the child or young person dealt with in a sensitive and responsible manner		
Care take to avoid any physical contact with child or young person		

Research venue(s)

Principle	Observed	Comments
Research conducted in safe and appropriate environment		®
If conducted in clients' domain, the client shares equal responsibility with the researcher for providing a safe and appropriate venue		
If child recruited in the street and taken into a central location, another adult present in the same room throughout the interview		

If carried out in the home of the child/young person (in person or telephone), an adult remains on the premises throughout the interview		
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