



Child Participation Policy

Don Bosco National Forum for the Young at Risk

01. Introduction

Participation is one of the guiding principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 of the UNCRC sets out the right of children to express an opinion and to have their opinion taken into account when decisions are being made on any matter that affects them. Others, like article 5 and articles 13 to 17 make explicit other key aspects of the exercise of this right by children.

The right to participation is particularly important, in that it is an enabling right, empowering and supporting children to access other rights under the UNCRC, within the family, the school and the larger community. It affirms that children have the right to express their views in all matters that affect them and to have their views heard and given due weight according to their evolving capacities. It recognizes the potential of children to enrich decision-making processes, to share perspectives and to participate as citizens and facilitators of change.

Juvenile Justice Act 2015, Sec.3, Sub Sec.(iii) speaks of the Principle of Participation as one of the 'guiding principles' to be followed in the administration of the Act.

The Constitution of India, in Article 19(1) (a), grants to every citizen, the right to freedom of speech and expression. Freedom of speech and expression is regarded as the first condition of liberty and occupies a preferred position in the hierarchy of liberty as the mother of all liberties. The right to participation is founded on this right.

YaR Child Participation Policy is an integral component of Don Bosco YaR Child Policy and Essential Protocols. It provides basic norms and guidelines for meaningful practice of child participation in all Young at Risk related interventions of DB YaR Forum.

02. Definitions

A “child” is, as in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a human being below the age of eighteen years.

“Participation” refers to one’s opportunity to express one’s view, to influence decision-making and achieve change.

“Child Participation” is the informed and willing involvement of all children, including the most marginalized, according to their age and maturity, in any matter concerning them directly or indirectly.

03. Guiding Principles

In our practice and promotion of children’s participation, we adhere to the following guiding principles.

01. Children have the right to be heard - to express their views and to be listened to on matters that affect them.
02. All children, without discrimination, have equal rights to participation.
03. The right to participation is founded on the respect for the inherent worth and dignity of each child.
04. All children, according to their age and maturity, have the capacity for participation.
05. Child Participation promotes the best interests and personal development of the child.
06. Child Participation takes place only in an environment where children are safe and protected from manipulation, abuse, exploitation, and violence.
07. Child Participation is a way of life and work that permeates all our programs and colours every sphere of our child related activity.

04. Importance of Children’s Participation

We affirm that children’s participation contributes to their personal motivation, development, and empowerment. It helps develop their skills and confidence and builds their leadership potential. It strengthens children’s awareness of their rights and the rights of others. It promotes children’s capacity for civic engagement, tolerance, and respect for others. Children’s participation enables them to resolve their issues, and become agents of change.

Through children’s participation, adults learn to view issues from children’s perspective. It contributes to fresh outlook, greater credibility and better outcomes. Children’s participation paves the way for us to be more accountable to them and contributes to improved structures, policies and decision making.

05. Levels of Children’s Participation

Children’s participation can be consultative, collaborative or child-led.

Consultative participation occurs when adults initiate processes to obtain information from children because they think that this information is vital for policies, legislation and services. It is started, led and managed by adults.

Collaborative participation involves children in the development of services and policies that impact them. Such processes are adult or children initiated, involve partnership with children and empower children to influence or challenge processes or outcomes.

Child-led participation occurs when children themselves identify and resolve issues that concern them while adults act as facilitators rather than leaders; children control the process.

Though consultative and collaborative participation have their place and roles to play, we promote child-led participation, to the extent possible, in the best interest of children.

06. Child Participation Practice Standards

Our practice of child participation meets the following standards :



- 1 Transparent and Informative** : Children are informed about their right to express their views freely, the weight of their opinions and the scope of their participation - how it will take place, and its potential impact. This information is accessible and age-appropriate.



- 2 Voluntary** : Participation is with free consent. Children are not forced to participate.



- 3 Respectful** : Adults working with children respect children's views and opinions and give them opportunity to initiate ideas and activities. Adults also take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural context of the children.



- 4 Relevant** : Children are able to express their views on matters that affect them, which also means that children are enabled and supported to identify issues that are relevant to them.



- 5 Child-Friendly** : Children have safe, welcoming and encouraging environments to work in, with time and resources specific to and adequate for their different ages and maturity.



- 6 Inclusive** : Participation is without discrimination of any kind. All children have opportunity to participate, irrespective of age, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, health, or socio-economic background.



- 7 Supported by Trained Adults** : Adults - staff and management - working with children are equipped with adequate preparation and skills to promote children's participation, to listen to children in a participative manner.



- 8 Safe and Sensitive** : Adults keep children safe from violence, exploitation, or any other negative consequence of their participation.



- 9 Accountable** : Children are informed about how their views have been interpreted and used and about the outcomes of their participation.

07. Our Commitment to Children's Participation

We are committed to children's participation, to working with all children, adopting approaches that suit the understanding and capacity of each child as well as their social and cultural background.

We are committed to enabling children's voices to be heard, and for the design, implementation and monitoring of our programmes to be influenced by children's views.

We are committed to involving children in our work. Children participate in various aspects of our work, like programme design, staff recruitment, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation through participation in children's clubs/parliaments, committees, councils, and child-led networks. Children also participate in peer education, advocacy, campaigns, media work, and organising or facilitating events etc.

We are committed to creating a conducive environment within our organisation and in the wider society, where children's participation can prosper. Such an environment exists where children have access to the information they need to be able to voice their opinions, are able to gather with others to discuss issues, and have the freedom to think and express themselves, without fear of adverse consequences for themselves. (UNCRC Articles 12, 13, 14, 15, 17)

08. Monitoring and Review

Regular monitoring and documentation of the manner in which this policy is implemented in our programmes/interventions/centres, and its periodic review, will enable it to be not only an effective process through which children grow and develop and are enabled to have significant influence over matters that affect them, but also ensure that the policy evolves to respond adequately to the demands and challenges that emerge over time.

1. To promote and support the development of participation practice and bring about change, regular and periodic monitoring, review and evaluation will be undertaken in all contexts where we work with the Young at Risk.
2. Every three months, each of our programmes/interventions/centres will undertake a review and document the way this policy is being implemented and how the practice standards outlined here are being achieved.
3. This YaR Child Participation Policy is to be reviewed after a period of three years from its publication.

Annexures :

1. List of best practices in child participation for all interventions of DB YaR Forum
2. Check-list of indicators for each of the "Child Participation Practice Standards"
3. A tool-kit for promotion of child participation and for its periodic review

Don Bosco National Forum for the Young at Risk

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Don Bosco National Forum for the Young at Risk, also known as DB YaR Forum, is a network of Don Bosco institutions and organizations committed to the rights of at-risk, marginalized, vulnerable children and young adults. We work towards a world where every child and every young person lives and grows towards "fullness of life" in secure, enabling environments. We are present for the care and protection, best interests and maximum development of children and young adults in 175+ settings in 80+ towns and cities across 20 states and union territories of India.



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