

How to...

...listen to the voice of children and young people in the church



Children and young people are the audience for much of what happens in our churches, but how often do we actually listen to what they have to say?

This 'How to' guide will help you consider the impact of children and young people in your church, why it is important to listen to them, and how this can be done productively and efficiently. You will also find 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?

Listening to children and young people 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

LISTEN.
LISTEN...



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.'

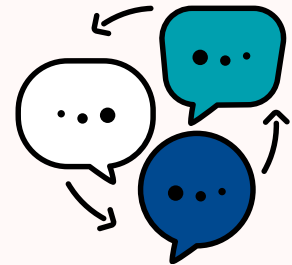
Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Unicef 1989) says 'Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously.'

What's the best way to listen to children and young people in church?

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 permission 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 on paper or online
- Play decision making games
- Use art and other creative art media to gather responses
- Have a 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)	Active Involvement (Tony Cook 2010)
Participation Children/young people decide, supported by adults in a form of partnership	Initiating and ownership With adult support children/young people take responsibility for activities and are involved in planning, delivery and evaluation
Elements of participation Children/young people are invited to express their views but adults make the decisions	Occasional help Children/young people help run activities that are mainly organised and directed by adults
Non-participation All decisions are taken by the adults, children and young people are told what to do and why	Turning Up Children/young people turn up and engage with the organised activities

What questions 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 and 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 about your 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>.

