

How to host a focus group with children and young people

A focus group can be about almost anything!
The intention is to bring together a small group of
people to share their insights, perceptions, and
perspectives about particular experiences on something.

Remember, reaching a consensus is not the goal
and building trust is everything. Keep it REAL*.
Keep it brief. Keep it together.

Time

Allow 1 hour

People

6-8

Materials

- Name tags
- Post-its
- Marker pens
- Butchers paper
- Activities tools
- Recording equipment

Steps

Before you start

1. Be clear about the purpose

- What do you need to know?
- What is it in service to – why do you need to know it?
- What is the value in bringing people together?

This step frames everything – who you invite, the blurb on the invitation,
the choice of venue, format, activities and the outcomes.

TOOLS: Youth Engagement Canvas, Youth Engagement Map

2. Choose the venue, date and time

- What space will work best for the purpose and the people?
- When are people most likely to be available?

Remember to book the space!

3. Invite the people

- Who do you want/need to hear and learn from?

Consider the profile, behaviour, and demographic of the people you need to
contribute – for diverse and helpful insights to be shared and heard.

4. Plan the format

Choose the activities that best serve the purpose and the people.

Here is a basic agenda.

- Acknowledgement of Country
- The 3-minute start (intro, overview, non-rules) – remember this is about them.
 - 1 minute to introduce yourself + housekeeping

**Read [The Field Guide](#) to keep it
real when engaging children and
young people.*

- 1 minute overview of the session – explain:
 - the purpose
 - that there will be a few activities
 - ideas will be recorded and shared
 - consent/how to opt out
- 1 minute to explain the non-rules eg:
 - fidgeting and doodling is ok – it can help us think
 - neat writing or correct spelling is not important
 - there is no right or wrong answer – agreeing is not the goal
- Activities
- Close

5. Develop and select the activities

Always consider these four elements:

1. Icebreaker

Use any form of game or activity that encourages participation, builds connections, makes people comfortable and encourages out-of-the-box thinking.

2. Frame – start with the problem

A creative way to frame the bigger issue e.g create a persona/avatar

3. Explore

This is about provoking insight, generating and sharing ideas so use open ended 'why, what, how, who' questions

4. Distil

This is about distilling, clarifying or eliciting more detail on responses and proposing early potential solutions.

*Always have a place for random thoughts to be shared – like a speech bubble wall.

For ideas on Icebreaker activities for kids follow this link:

<https://www.scienceofpeople.com/icebreakers-for-kids/>

6. Be a good host

The atmosphere and room set up needs to be suitable to the purpose and people. Consider activities that get people moving around the space. Use the walls and available furniture as your stage props if possible. Sitting or standing at a table is often helpful as it becomes the stage for a task.

Also consider:

- What refreshments will you provide (consider allergies, culture and abilities)?
- How will people welcome, greet and introduce each other?
- Do you want name tags?
- How might you make the space welcoming?

Allow plenty of time to set up.

Hosting the focus group

7. Moderate the session

Moderators are master conductors, timekeepers and listeners, balancing the management of the energy in the room while encouraging natural expression. Remember to stay on track. Remain neutral. Smile (an appropriate amount!) Think about getting help to scribe and facilitate – it is almost impossible to host and scribe well, especially if you're just starting out. If hosting alone, consider having another means, beyond note taking, to record the content.

What makes a good scribe?

Someone who listens well, captures the essence and checks in to ensure that what they have recorded means the same as what was shared. Quotes are great – especially handwritten.

8. Bring things to a close

Ensure each participant has had a chance to contribute.
Ask for any final thoughts or questions before finishing.
Use a closure question/ activity to allow participants to reflect on their focus group experience.
Thank each person for their participation.
Consider providing a modest reward (eg. vouchers).
Inform people how the information will be used – how they can find it.
Tell of any possible next steps and further involvement.

Collate and share the findings

9. Gather and distil the insights

The findings are likely to naturally form clusters or themes – which is a great place to start.
Distilling the insights without losing the meaning takes practice – consider your potential biases and be honest about what you heard.
Get creative with reports – consider using video, podcasts, zines/ illustration to present the findings.
Less is sometimes more when it comes to written reports – attach the raw data/ quotes/ images where possible to support the summary.

10. Follow up (if possible)

Consider ways to share the final distilled information with participants.