

Youth Engagement Guide



This guide was created and informed by young people working with eNurture supported by the Association for Young People's Health, and with comments from pupils and teachers from primary and secondary schools working to promote eNurture objectives.

This is a 'live' document that continues to be informed by on-going work with young people, researchers, practitioners, and other mental health professionals working with eNurture.

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What is the purpose of this guide?

This is a reference document to guide youth engagement specific to eNurture objectives and can be used as a resource for wider youth engagement activities linked to research and practice applications.

What is Youth Engagement?

Youth engagement is when young people are involved in the planning and decision-making that affect them. It puts young people's thoughts and ideas at the centre of projects and services that support and respond to their needs.

The Nurture Network (eNurture) aims to understand and promote young people's mental health in a digital world. This means that youth engagement is a really important part of eNurture's aims. Children and young people are experts on how the digital world impacts on their own lives. Engaging with children and adolescents provides the opportunity to understand youth perspectives of their own experiences to help inform research activities.

It is therefore important that children, young people (and/or relevant communities, such as teachers) help with the development of eNurture proposals and ongoing work. Youth engagement is primarily aimed at young people in primary and secondary education (age 4 to 18 years approximately). eNurture is committed to engaging young people in a meaningful way throughout its work - young people review eNurture research proposals and can also be consulted and participate in project proposals. This ensures projects are relevant to children and young people, and that youth engagement is sufficiently considered.

This document aims to help support eNurture's youth engagement activities. It should be used alongside (and not instead of) other essential guidelines and policies that need to be referred to when planning youth engagement, such as ethical procedures, Safeguarding and Child Protection, GDPR, as well as Equality and Diversity policies.

How was the Youth Engagement Policy created?

This guide was created by young people working with eNurture during a co-production workshop supported by eNurture Youth Lead Sarah Doherty and the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH), and with additional input from primary and secondary schools working to promote eNurture objectives.

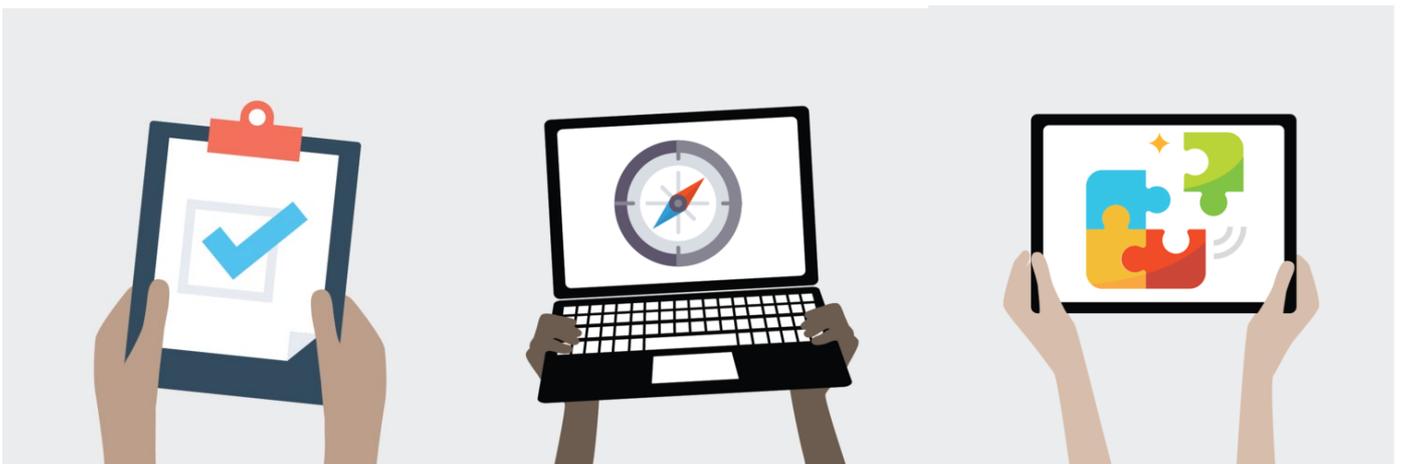
This means that children and young people worked with adults to help develop these guidelines.



When, where and who? The Youth Engagement Workshop was a one-day event in London, Summer 2019. The workshop was co-facilitated by the eNurture Youth Lead (Sarah Doherty) with two staff from AYPH (Jeremy Sachs, Emma Rigby), and was attended by three young people (Mitchell Axon, Elsa Arnold, Tamanna Miah, with additional feedback from Lucy-Paige Willingham). The eNurture academic Youth Engagement Leads (Dr Elvira Perez Vallejos, Dr Ruth Sellers) also attended (see Annex for summary of co-production exercises that helped to inform this document).

What happened next? To make sure that this guide is relevant to a wide range of young people, it has been read and reviewed by other adolescents: we received feedback from a Youth Council in one secondary school during the Autumn term 2019. This feedback was collated by a school teacher. During this period we also received feedback from a range of professionals working with young people. Across two secondary schools (Commonweal School in Swindon and Preston School in Taunton) and one primary school (Rhiwbeina Primary School in Cardiff), a designated teacher collated feedback from a range of staff within their school (e.g. teachers, school nurses, school counsellors, and support workers). Members of the eNurture Advisory Board with relevant expertise have also reviewed this guidance document. Therefore, a range of adolescents and relevant professionals have contributed to the development of the guidance.

This is a 'live' document that continues to be informed by on-going work with young people, researchers, practitioners, and other professionals working to help deliver the objectives of eNurture.



2. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

Summary of what young people want

Think about the age of young people when developing engagement activities

Make sure activities have clear aims & outcomes - they should have structure with clear aims & goals and expectations. Children & young people should be aware of the outcomes.

Take young people's views seriously – whether they are sharing information about themselves, or are sharing thoughts and ideas

Avoid using jargon

Acknowledge the time and effort children & young people are putting into projects

Keep young people up-to-date after engagement activities so they know what outcomes came of their ideas and work

This guide sets out the following key considerations when engaging with young people:

- **Creating a safe environment**
- **Making engagement accessible and meaningful**
- **Facilitating effective engagement**
- **Dealing with practical considerations**

A safe environment

Everyone (young people, professionals, facilitators) should enter youth engagement activities with an open mind. Young people want to feel able to ask questions without feeling 'silly', and know that they will be listened to when they express themselves. Young people also want to not only wait for their turn to speak, but also actively listen to everyone else, taking on board differences of opinions.

To help provide a safe environment, engagement should feel like a respectful and polite space, where participants are able to express themselves, come up with different ideas and disagree with each other safely. A safe environment is essential and should include:

- ✓ **Confidentiality:** Participants need to feel that if they share experiences or anecdotes in a workshop, these are confidential. However, themes and topics may come out of an engagement activity that young people want to share in other parts of their lives. If so, participants should only share from their own experience, without identifying anyone else in the group. With some young people, safeguarding issues may also apply.

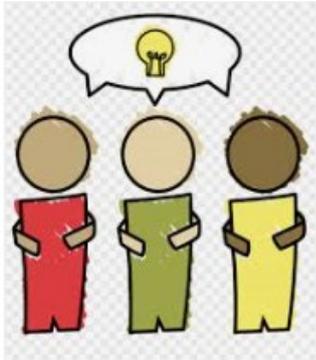


Consent: It is important young people understand the purpose of any activity, and consent to be involved. If a participant (young person, practitioner, parent, facilitator) wishes to create a photo or (audio or video) recording of the engagement work that includes the voices, faces or any identifiable features of others, they need to make sure they have consent from all those participating (or parental consent if more appropriate). They also need to say why they are creating the recording, whether it will be kept or not, how it will be shared (e.g. where they wish to post it) and whether/how young people can withdraw consent.

- ✓ **Providing a safe space:** Some topics can be difficult to talk about. This does not mean that these topics should be silenced. However, group safety should always come first. Participants want to know what to do and where to go if they need time to look after themselves, or if they need support from the team. Make sure participants know what these steps are.
- ✓ **Making sure young people know who to talk to if they have concerns:** Participants need to know who they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns about a project or activity. If they do not feel like they can discuss it with the facilitator running the activity, there should be another person they can talk to, who can speak on their behalf (e.g. a teacher or member of staff). Another option would be to email a member of the research team or eNurture team. These practical steps can help towards providing a safe space.



- ✓ **Post-event support:** Participants should always have someone that they can contact after the event, if they have any concerns or wish to clarify things. These practical steps can help towards providing a safe space.



- ✓ **Group agreements:** Developing a group agreement with participants – how everyone agrees to act, behave, speak or what to do if things get difficult - is an essential part of keeping the engagement safe. During activities or events that last longer than a day, it is worth revisiting the group agreement to remind participants of what they have agreed and to continue to create a safe space.

- ✓ **Group expectations:** It is important from the start to be clear about what is expected from the young people as well as identifying what their expectations are.

Making engagement accessible

To get the most out of a youth engagement activity make it accessible to a wide range of young people so that more of them are able to participate. Below are suggestions from young people on how to make the engagement accessible and inclusive:

Flexible and varied ways of engagement: Engagement should be flexible. Different young people will engage in different ways. Some young people will want to talk in a large group, some will want to work individually or in small groups and not all young people process information in the same way. It is also important to remember that young people may have difficulties, and these will vary from one person to another. For example, some may become anxious engaging with new people in group activities. This means different ways of engaging may be needed (e.g. via skype, email etc.), and that activities may need to be flexible to the needs of participants. Think about how to make sure all young people feel comfortable.

What supports might young people need? Many young people wish to be involved in activities that concern them, but there are many factors that may stop them. Where possible always provide different support options, such as bringing friends or a loved one to the event. Flexible ways of engaging can help with this.

Avoid jargon, and explain specific terms: Young people can have lots of different skills and experiences, but this does not mean they will automatically understand industry terms or jargon. Be sure that language does not become a barrier.

Making it meaningful

Making engagement meaningful is not only important to organisations wishing to understand young people's needs better, it is also important to the young people taking part. To make sure that young people see engagement as meaningful (and not tokenistic), any engagement activity should be backed up by appropriate further action(s) to help take forward young people's ideas and to help to implement change. To make youth engagement meaningful:

- ✓ **Engage with a wide range of young people:** Not all young people will have the same views and needs. Ensuring that you are gathering perspectives from a range of young people with diverse backgrounds, identities, with different needs and from different geographical areas gives a much broader range of ideas and insight.



- ✓ **Give context:** Young people should be able to prepare for engagement activities. It can be helpful to let them know what is going to happen in advance. This could be with an agenda, or introduction before the engagement. It is also important to explain the context of the project, the desired outcomes, and what you want from the young people.
- ✓ **Co-develop engagement with young people:** Where possible young people want to be actively involved in developing and delivering the engagement. Ways this could be achieved include:
 - Providing co-facilitation roles
 - Training programmes, certificates or accreditation schemes to up skill young people
 - Paid consultation work for young people where appropriate



- ✓ **Take young people's contributions seriously:** Young people need to feel that they are listened to. They want to know how their views will be taken forward, and how their involvement can help affect real change. Explain how engagement activities will be used at the start of the engagement activity, and provide follow up after the engagement.

- ✓ **Provide follow up:** It is important that young people understand what their ideas, thoughts and work are contributing to. Young people should understand where their input fits in, and how it has informed research and other activities. It is therefore important that they know how you will keep them informed after the engagement activity.
- ✓ **Post-event support:** Make sure young people have someone they can contact after an event or engagement activity so that they are able to raise concerns or seek clarification.

What helps make engagement effective?

Working with young people requires specific skills. Below are some specific skills identified by young people that can help make youth engagement more effective, as well as enhance feelings of safety, and demonstrate commitment to young people.

- ✓ **Age-related activities:** Children and young people of different ages will have different needs, and this may mean that different age-appropriate engagement activities are needed. Depending on the age group, think about whether it is helpful or necessary to include or involve other adults (e.g. parents, teachers, other practitioners). Young people said that where activities are not targeting the right age group, people can feel patronised or confused and this can lead to disengagement.
 - **Young people as co-facilitators:** For older children or adolescents, having a young person co-facilitate an activity can help enrich the process and ensure that young people's voices are at the heart of engagement. When young people are going to be co-facilitators, it is important that they are supported before, during and after the event by a named contact, provided with training and, if appropriate, paid for their contribution.
- ✓ **Be flexible:** Youth engagement activities should be flexible to take account of the different needs of a broad range of young people, and encourage wider participation to ensure all views are represented.
- ✓ **Cooperation:** Facilitators should be aware that the perceived higher status of professionals/practitioners can stop young people from feeling that they are being heard and respected. Cooperation and respect towards all group members is important. Facilitators should respect any group agreement and stick to the same code of conduct as young people to help with the sense of group cooperation to work towards a common goal.
- ✓ **Acknowledge everyone's contributions.** The facilitator should remain impartial and make sure that all the young people's thoughts and ideas are acknowledged and recorded.
- ✓ **Clarify expectations.** It is important that facilitators are clear about what is expected from young people. Make sure you also listen to them to understand what their expectations are.

Practical considerations

Below are some practical issues to think about when planning youth engagement activities:

- ✓ **Keep in touch:** Where there is ongoing engagement or follow-up, it is important to talk to young people about how they want to be communicated with. If they prefer social media to communicate, make sure it is safe and ethical. Remember some digital platforms like WhatsApp will be encrypted, whereas Facebook closed groups still do not offer encryption options. Slack, email, WhatsApp, Facebook and MSN are all worth exploring with young people. Be aware of issues around consent, especially for younger children.



Be aware also of issues relating to anonymity and confidentiality – in social media groups a young person’s identity will be known to all other group members. Facilitators should consider these risks carefully and make sure young people are aware of them. In a school or youth group context, communicating with relevant staff through email (e.g. class teacher, youth group lead, etc.) is effective and allows for monitoring of any concerns. Communication before an engagement event should consider how to best support them during events.

✓ **GDPR (General Data Protection) Regulation & Data Protection Act:** GDPR and the Data Protection Act refer to the processing of personal data. Ensure that your project or engagement activity complies with GDPR and Data protection. Make sure you explain to young people how data (collected from or about them) will be used.

✓ **Money** Young people should not be out of pocket. Be clear what expenses you plan to cover before the event. Include refreshments, lunch or breakfast. Be clear whether you are paying young people for their involvement, and if so be clear how much you are paying them. Vouchers are usually welcomed, and may be more appropriate in some circumstances. Cheques are not appropriate. The amount of payment will depend on the level of involvement.

Consistency. If there are ongoing pieces of work, it is helpful to have the same facilitator running the activities. This provides stability and allows the facilitator to get to know those involved.



✓ **Timing:** Obtain input on your research project/activity from young people (or relevant practitioners/other agencies) as early possible to help inform activity. The timing will depend on the nature of your project or activity. Think about where and when activities will take place. Young people have other commitments (school, college, university, jobs, etc.) which will affect when and where they can take part.



✓ **Be flexible:** Some young people may not be able to attend an activity, or may not want to contribute in a large group but they may still want to have a say. It can be useful to have other ways that young people can contribute. For example, using written feedback during or after an activity, or by providing an email address that a teacher can use to collate and forward feedback.

✓ **Safeguarding:** Young people need to know who they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns about a project or activity. If they do not feel like they can talk to a facilitator, there should be another person available who can speak on their behalf (e.g. a teacher). Young people may prefer not to talk in person so an email contact could also be provided. It is the duty of facilitators and anyone working with children to safeguard children and take all appropriate action in areas of child protection and safeguarding procedures to protect them. This youth engagement guide does not replace existing safeguarding policies.

Annex:

Outline of activities at the youth engagement co-production event that informed youth engagement guidance

The Youth engagement workshop consisted of the eNurture Youth Lead (Sarah Doherty) co-facilitating one day with two staff from Association for Young People's Health (AYPH). It was attended by three additional adolescents (two female, one male). The eNurture academic Youth Engagement Leads (Dr Elvira Perez Vallejos, Dr Ruth Sellers) also attended and contributed.

Activities included: 1. Co-developing a set of principles or a code of conduct for the workshop to ensure everyone felt they could contribute; 2 a discussion of where adults engaged and experiences of when engagement goes wrong [e.g., one activity was asking adolescences to outline places where adults engaged with them, barriers to engagement (either from adult or young person), and examples of good and bad engagement.] 3. Discussion of what positive engagement may look like based on these earlier discussions and activities.

1. Principles for the workshop

The group agreed the principles that go towards creating a safe environment:

- **Confidentiality:** Themes and topics may come out of the engagement that participants might want to share in other parts of their lives. This is completely supported, however participants should only share from their own experience, without identifying anyone else in the group.
- **Consent:** Should a participant or facilitator wish to create a photo / audio or video recording of the engagement work that includes the voices, faces or any identifiable features of other participants, they need to seek those participants consent, explaining why they are creating the recording and where they wish to post it.
- **Engagement must be meaningful and seek to be as inclusive as possible:** Participants' input needs to be listened to, evaluated and used to affect real change, rather than being tokenistic or a 'tick box exercise'. Engagement must continue to strive to be inclusive and diverse, working with a broad range of young people from various backgrounds, ethnicities and cultures.
- **Safe spaces provided:** The engagement work must understand that while every effort is taken to keep workshops safe, professional and emotionally balanced, certain topics can be difficult for participants. This does not mean that topics should be censored unnecessarily, however, every effort should be made to keep the group safe, and procedures should be in place should a participant need time to look after themselves or need support from the team.

Young people co-developed a commitment to the group during participation workshop:

- We communicate honestly and challenge ourselves to speak up when we agree / disagree or wish to express ourselves
- We keep ourselves safe, recognise when something may be difficult and ask when we need support
- During engagement workshops we are fully present, meaning we use devices / phones respectfully
- We keep open minds to others' opinions and attempt to understand different points of view

2. How to get youth engagement right

Young people experience youth engagement in many parts of their lives. From educational institutions to healthcare and work placements. Through these different institutions and organisations, young people encounter youth engagement first hand, carried out by a range of different professionals.

We held a group discussion with young people, asking “where do young people experience youth engagement and what makes you feel unengaged when in these environments?” By thinking about times when engagement hasn’t it is possible to identify what could be changed so that participation with young people is effective.

The young people shared where they experienced youth engagement in one large group, then split off into smaller groups to discuss what goes wrong, why youth engagement sometimes does not work and what advice they would give to facilitators to engage young people properly.

Here is a summary of points raised by young people as examples of their experiences of when engagement has gone wrong:

- The uneven status of professionals can inhibit young people from feeling that they are being heard and respected.
- Communication from professionals can sometimes feel patronising or full of inaccessible jargon. In some cases professionals can feel too informal or overly friendly.
- Teachers can single out young people in classes for a various reasons, either for answers to questions or to point out something about that student to a class. This feels embarrassing and prevents engagement.
- Young people have felt that professionals in educational settings sometimes do not take them seriously. Examples of this ranged from medical and mental health complaints as well as struggles with their education.
- Professionals can fail to properly plan workshops or youth engagement. This can feel like the engagement lacks objectives, meaning or purpose.
- Professionals fail to acknowledge the time and effort young people put into workshops and engagement, undermining the importance of their opinions, time and effort.
- Engagement used as a tokenistic exercise rather than in a meaningful way undervalues young people’s input and agency.
- A lack of action taken after the youth engagement, including not incorporating young people’s opinions into projects or feeding back to the young people next stages
- Work experience placements sometimes underestimate young people’s skills
- Placements often do not provide support or properly invest in young people’s development meaning they can feel under stimulated or conversely overwhelmed by the work
- Work place culture can be seen as non-inclusive to young people.
- Career services can be too prescriptive or general, lacking understanding of careers young people are interested in today, meaning services are not appropriately responding to young people’s ambitions or vision
- Career services can be de-motivating or create a negative mind set for young people if told that they should not pursue their career choice or matched with a career they are uninspired by.

Below are the key messages young people would like to pass on to professionals working within youth engagement

Young people urged professionals to be engaging, interesting and age appropriate. They stressed the importance of communicating session plans and avoiding complicated jargon. Explaining the context of the project, the desired outcomes and what you want from the young people is also important for good engagement.

Keep regular communications open so young people continue to understand the impact of their work and are aware of project developments.

Show that youth engagement is not tokenistic by valuing youth input and experience. Do this by:

- Engaging with a diverse range of young people
- Creating a space where all participants input is valuable, listened to and recorded
- Reimbursing young people for their time, explaining beforehand fees, expenses and refreshments

Understand that a safe and respectful space is required, not just to get the best from youth engagement but to also ensure the wellbeing of participants. Devote enough time and expertise to creating this and make sure the engagement sticks to group agreements or codes of conduct created and agreed on by the young people themselves.

Professionals or facilitators to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner, being aware that a too friendly or too formal attitude seldom make young people feel comfortable and do not promote the best youth engagement. All professionals or facilitators should also follow the group agreement.

What young people want from youth engagement in context of eNurture and the work they do

SUPPORTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN eNURTURE

- Engagement should be **flexible**, acknowledging that different young people will engage in different ways and that this needs to be reflected in the activities on offer to them.
- Where possible young people should be **involved** in developing and delivering the engagement. Ways this could be done include:
 - Providing co-facilitation roles
 - Training programmes to up skill young people
 - Certificate / qualifications or accreditation schemes
 - Providing paid consultation work for young people
- Be clear about the **aims** of the engagement
- **Communication** pre-engagement should prepare both the young people and staff, clarifying how young people want to be communicated with and how to best support them during events. Discuss what forms of communication suits the group best, bearing in mind some forms, like WhatsApp, will be encrypted, whereas Facebook closed groups still do not offer encryption options. Slack, email, WhatsApp, Facebook and MSN are all worth exploring with the young people.
- Send an **agenda** ahead of the event or meeting so young people have time to prepare their thoughts and assist in keeping the session to time

SUPPORTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT DURING EVENTS

- Consider **where and when** events are held. Young people have other commitments such as school, college, university as well as jobs and part time jobs. These will affect the locations and times of day they can engage
- Think about meaningful **incentives** for the young people such as vouchers and thank you cards – remembering little gestures go along way (flowers and birthday gifts also go a long way)!
- Support the engagement of young people from a variety of **diverse backgrounds** and be aware that this may require additional work

- During engagement or events that last longer than a day, it is worth **revisiting the group agreement** to remind participants of any agreements they have made and to create a safe space
- Young people should not be expected to be out of pocket for engagement. Be clear how much you are paying them or be clear what **expenses** you plan to cover before the event
- Think about what **support** young people may require, such as bringing friends or a loved one to the event

SUPPORTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT DURING DECISION MAKING IN BIDS AND FUNDING

- Where possible, make bids or funding application documentation as **clear and accessible** as possible. This may require guidance for young people on specific language or jargon. Also exploring different ways young people can access paper work, such as on a phone or digital platform
- Specific **examples of good bids** or funding applications give young people context to help them judge applications.
- It is important that young people **understand the overall objectives** the funding programme and any bids that they are assessing
- Involve the **advisory board** and ensure they reflect a broad range of experience and backgrounds.



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The Association for Young People's Health focuses on the health and wellbeing of 10-24 year olds. We bridge the worlds of policy, practice and evidence to promote better understanding of young people's health needs, and to advocate for youth friendly health services. www.ayph.org.uk info@youngpeopleshealth.org.uk