



Ethics and SAFEGUARDING

in Participatory Approaches to Research
Exploring Child Sexual Exploitation and
Abuse and Related Harms with Child
and Youth Researchers

Acknowledgements

This guidance was developed by **Claire Cody** and **Helen Veitch** from [Children Unite](#), consultants for ECPAT International, in collaboration with **Sendrine Constant**, ECPAT International.

ECPAT International acknowledges the core funding support for its overall organisational objectives from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Oak Foundation.

The opinions expressed in this document belong solely to ECPAT International. Support from these donors does not constitute endorsement of the views expressed.

Suggested citation: ECPAT International. (2026). Ethics and safeguarding in participatory approaches to research exploring child sexual exploitation and abuse and related harms with child and youth researchers.

© ECPAT International, 2026.

For feedback or suggestions please contact: researchteam@ecpat.org

Reproduction is authorised with acknowledgment of source as ECPAT International.

Published by:

ECPAT International

328/1 Phaya Thai Road, Ratchathewi,
Bangkok 10400, THAILAND.

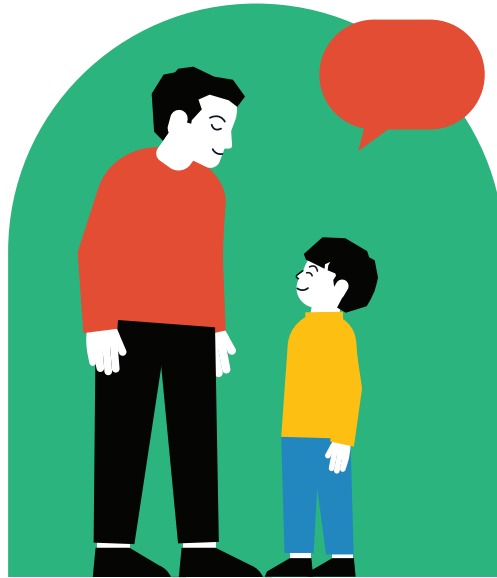
Phone: +66 2 215 3388 | Email: info@ecpat.org

Website: www.ecpat.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Ethics and safeguarding in participatory approaches to research exploring child sexual exploitation and abuse and related harms with child and youth researchers	3
Purpose	3
Section 1: The unique context for participatory research on CSEA	5
Understanding the Distinct Ethical Dynamics of Participatory Research	5
1 Rights-based and ethical considerations when researching with children and youth	6
2. Navigating ethical review processes and institutional approval challenges	7
3. Adapting ethical practice to incorporate participatory and trauma-informed approaches	8
4. Moving beyond approval - practicing ongoing and reflexive ethics	10
Section 2: Key considerations and learning	11
1. Preparing organisations and teams for taking an ethical approach to participatory research on CSEA	12
1.1 Scope existing evidence, context and local expertise	12
1.2 Ensure facilitators have appropriate skills, training and competences	13
1.3 Establish ongoing support and supervision for adult facilitators	14
1.4 Agree clear safeguarding and disclosure response procedures	14
1.5 Apply survivor-informed safeguarding approaches and tools	15
2. Continuously assessing risks and strengthening mitigation and support systems	15
2.1 Acknowledge the possibility of harm and re-traumatisation	15
2.2 Develop risk registers and collaborative mitigation strategies	16
2.3 Plan referral pathways and resource wellbeing support	16
2.4 Facilitate informal peer support and relationship building	17
2.5 Embed emotional support at key stages in research	17
3. Recognising and valuing children's contributions fairly and transparently	18
3.1 Navigating ethical concerns regarding compensation	18
3.2 Consider ethical and context appropriate compensation models	19
4. Communicating clearly, safely, and accessibly about the research	19
4.1 Choose appropriate formats and channels for information sharing	19
4.2 Use respectful, non-stigmatising, and inclusive language	20
4.3 Clarify core concepts such as consent, confidentiality and anonymity	20
4.4 Facilitate ongoing communication with local communities	21

5. Designing inclusive and safe recruitment and selection strategies	21
5.1. Consider whose voices are included and represented	21
5.2 Balance mixed and shared-experience groups to reduce harm and stigma	22
6. Embedding informed, voluntary, and ongoing consent practices	22
6.1 Apply legal and contextual consent and assent requirements	22
6.2 Support children to decline participation without pressure	24
6.3 Practice ongoing, negotiated consent across research phases	25
7. Preparing child and youth researchers for ethical and safe research roles	25
7.1 Develop foundational knowledge and research skills	25
7.2 Address boundaries, confidentiality and emotional challenges in peer research	26
7.3 Balance privacy, choice and safeguarding during data collection	26
8. Responding safely and ethically to disclosures and emotional distress	27
8.1 Recognise and act on disclosures of immediate and non-immediate harm	27
8.2 Help children understand confidentiality and disclosure thresholds	28
8.3 Prevent and respond sensitively to children’s distress	28
9. Managing endings, transitions, and pathways beyond the project	29
9.1 Support continued engagement and leadership pathways	29
9.2 Document ethical learning, safeguarding reflections and process insights	30
Useful resources	31
Useful websites or pages	31
Endnotes	32



ETHICS AND SAFEGUARDING IN PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO RESEARCH EXPLORING CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE AND RELATED HARMS WITH CHILD AND YOUTH RESEARCHERS

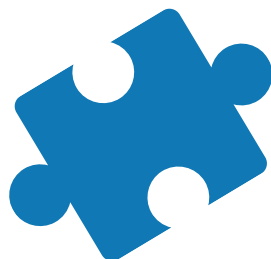
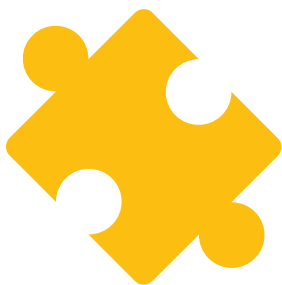
Purpose

This guidance explores considerations and learnings in taking an ethical approach to participatory approaches to research with child and youth researchers on the topic of child sexual exploitation and abuse (CSEA) and related harm. It attempts to fill a gap in existing ethical guidance by focussing specifically on the unique context for doing this type of research - research with children and youth, that involves participatory elements and focuses on sexual abuse and harm. This guidance has been designed to support ECPAT members and their partners through exploring key considerations and associated learning.

It draws on learning from the wider sector and reflections and lessons from ECPAT International's own experiences of implementing a range of projects that have included participatory elements to exploring CSEA and related issues with children and youth in diverse contexts.¹

In this document we are defining 'participatory approaches to research' as research which involves collaborating with children and youth in the design and implementation of the research. This may include children and youth acting as advisors, developing research questions, creating research tools, collecting data, analysing data, co-creating recommendations and engaging in dissemination.

In this document we define 'safeguarding' as the responsibility that organisations have to make sure their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to children - that they do not expose children to the risk of harm and abuse, and that any concerns the organisation has about children's safety within the communities in which they work, are reported to the appropriate authorities.² Child safeguarding policies and procedures are primarily focused on the harm potentially caused to children by association with organisations rather than the promotion and protection of children's rights in general. In this document we refer to 'safeguarding' or 'protection' of children and youth to harm and all forms of abuse. We recognise that there is significant overlap between concepts of research ethics and safeguarding or protection of children and youth.





SECTION 1: THE UNIQUE CONTEXT FOR PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH ON CSEA

This section begins to unpack the unique context for doing this type of research - research with children and youth, that is participatory and focuses on sexual abuse and harm. It does this through exploring what's different in participatory research; considering the specific context of research with children; thinking about the role of ethics committees and navigating procedural ethics when facilitating participatory research and considering how we respond to this unique research context.

Understanding the distinct ethical dynamics of participatory research

When undertaking any type of research, ethical guidelines are critical in protecting the rights and wellbeing of participants and the integrity of the research findings. While general ethical principles are useful to consider in approaching participatory research, they are rarely nuanced enough to assist researchers in approaching tensions and dilemmas that arise in research where the lines between researcher and participant become less clear.

This is particularly the case in the context of participatory research with children when they take on the role of researcher. This complicates the more familiar research relationship and boundaries that may exist between adults and children in traditional research processes. In addition, ethical application forms, processes and committees may not 'fit' with the collaborative processes used in participatory research - notably involving children in key decisions regarding the research process - which means the research process evolves over time.

Working with children and youth, in a participatory research project, on the topic of CSEA intertwines three specific elements that each have their own set of unique ethical conundrums and considerations.

1 Rights-based and ethical considerations when researching with children and youth

When researching with children and youth, additional considerations are required. The International Charter for Ethical Research Involving Children ([ERIC](#)) was developed in recognition that research involving children often led to more complex ethical questions. The International Charter refers to seven key principles to guide research with children:

- Ethics in research involving children is everyone's responsibility
- Respecting the dignity of children is core to ethical research
- Research involving children must be just and equitable
- Ethical research benefits children
- Children should never be harmed by their participation in research
- Research must always obtain children's informed and ongoing consent
- Ethical research requires ongoing reflection.

In addition to the charter, researchers often turn to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as a touchstone to working with children under the age of 18. Whilst the UNCRC does not specifically mention research, the key principles and articles provide a useful framework for considering the rights of children in research. As others' have outlined, children have a 'right to be properly researched'.³ Through interpreting different articles within the convention, it has been suggested that researchers should pay close attention to:

- The right to be heard
- The right to freedom of expression



- The right to be protected from harm and exploitation
- The right to the highest standards of care by professionals working with children and youth.

This cluster of rights, including that children should be able to share and express their views in ways they choose, has led to many researchers choosing to apply participatory approaches as they allow for flexible and creative methodologies (which should be supported by trained and skilled researchers and facilitators).

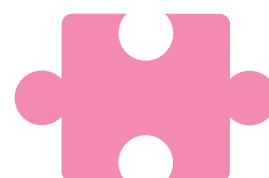
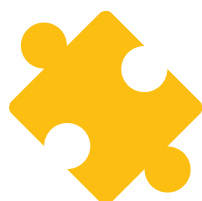
2. Navigating ethical review processes and institutional approval challenges

It is standard practice for researchers working at academic institutions to apply for ethical approval through their institution's ethical review mechanism (known as an Institutional Review Board or IRB). It may also be necessary to apply for further approvals when working with specific organisations and agencies and to seek in-country approval when working overseas. This is often referred to as 'procedural ethics'.⁴

When research sits outside of institutional structures, for example, when NGOs are undertaking research that will inform their practice, it may be challenging to gain ethical approval for the research, despite it being recognised as a vital part of the process. In addition, when organisations are unable to access ethical review processes, it affects their work in practical ways. Research that does not receive ethical approval is usually not accepted by academic journals and therefore does not become part of the recognised evidence base. At the same time, many donors and funding agencies increasingly prioritise "evidence-informed" programmes. This means that projects or interventions based on research without ethical approval are less likely to receive funding.⁵

Even if researchers have access to ethical committees, it is well recognised that participatory research often does not align with institutional review processes.⁶ These frameworks and processes often replicate adult-centric perspectives and are designed for traditional approaches to research where there are clear, determined roles between researchers and participants, agreed research questions and methods and a clear plan for dissemination. In participatory research, these aspects become blurred and are often unknown at the outset. The topics, research questions and methods may be worked out through the course of engagement with children and youth and therefore it becomes challenging to seek 'approval' before research activities begin.

In addition, ethical committees assess projects based on institutional standards. Reviewers on these committees may not have the relevant expertise or understanding to assess 'ethics in practice' in different cultural contexts, being unable to predict the range of ethical dilemmas that may arise.⁷ This may mean that participatory research projects on these types of topics are not approved. If they are, the review process may be limited, and reviewers may be unable to provide practical, helpful advice and guidance to the research team.



Responding to these gaps in procedural ethics, notably for NGOs undertaking participatory and action-oriented research with marginalised children, an independent ethics committee is being piloted that places children’s participation and agency at its core. The Research Ethics Group⁸ aims to:

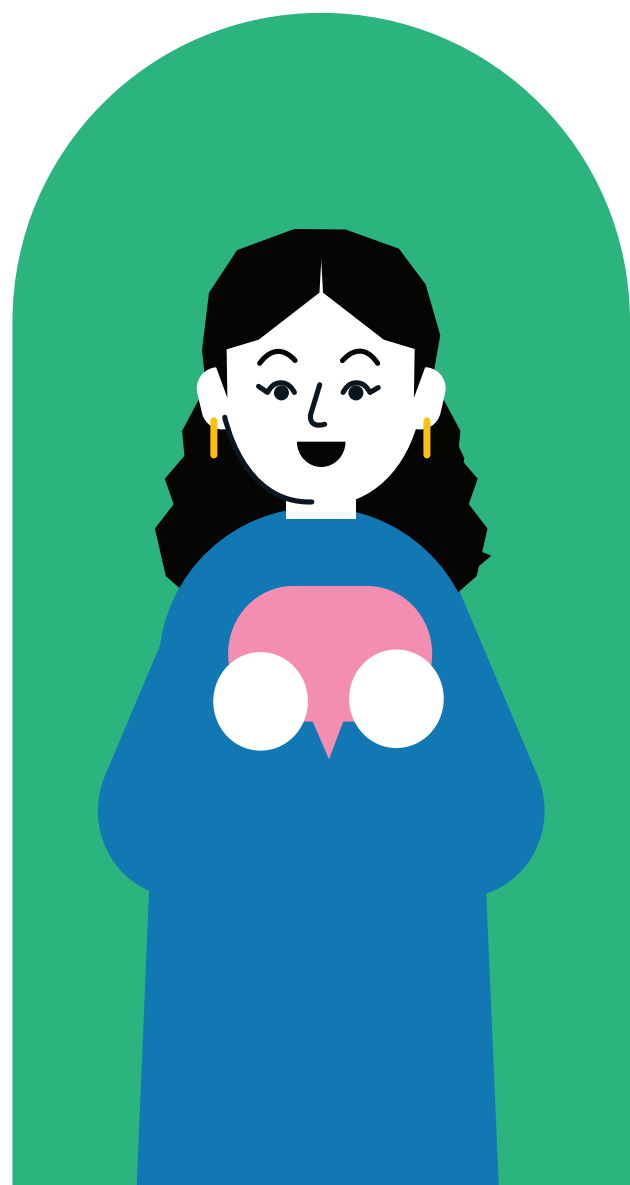
- Promote child-centred, participatory, and contextually grounded research practices.
- Provide an impartial and constructive review of research proposals in the field of child protection and care reform.
- Support researchers throughout the entire research journey, recognising that ethical challenges may arise before, during, and after fieldwork.
- Strengthen the ethical credibility and safety of research conducted outside traditional academic or institutional settings.

In addition, guidance is being developed for IRBs by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) on ethics considerations for research with marginalised children.⁹ The guidance uses evidence from a LSHTM study exploring ethics for participatory and action research with children in ‘risk situations’ (focused on CSEA).

3. Adapting ethical practice to incorporate participatory and trauma-informed approaches

Participatory approaches to research have evolved over time, shaped by various social and emancipatory movements, scholars and activists. These voices have challenged traditional approaches to knowledge creation and drawn attention to power dynamics that silence and undermine marginalised groups and certain types of evidence. The key difference between participatory methodologies and other research methodologies lies in the location of power in the various stages of the research process.¹⁰

From as early as the 1990s, it was argued that participatory research was a helpful mechanism to enable children who had experienced ‘the worst forms of exploitation’ (including child sexual exploitation) to share what was important to them, on their own terms, without an adult filter.¹¹ Despite this acknowledgment, in the context of participatory research on CSEA, there are limited examples of such research taking place.¹² Due to the relative dearth in projects that have applied participatory methodologies with children and youth on this topic, there is limited documented ethical guidance available.



In taking a participatory approach to research, it can be helpful to consider the different dimensions of 'child participation'. In considering article 12, the right to be heard, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment 12, further expanded the international community's understanding of article 12 by elaborating on, and providing a set of nine requirements to help promote child participation that is both ethical and meaningful.¹³ Within the general comment it states that *'all processes in which a child or children are heard and participate must be: transparent and informative; voluntary; respectful; relevant; child-friendly; inclusive; supported by training; safe and sensitive to risk; and accountable'*.

In approaching research on CSEA, there is a need for sensitivity. In recent years researchers working in this area have intentionally aligned their research to trauma-informed principles.¹⁴ The four key assumptions of a Trauma Informed Approach (TIA) can help researchers to consider the impact of trauma on those they are seeking to engage in the research and understand how they may be able to resist re-traumatisation and potentially counter power differentials.¹⁵

Mounting evidence highlights how children and youth who have experienced CSEA have often also encountered harmful dynamics in their interactions with professionals in the aftermath of abuse.¹⁶ This means it is critical for researchers who are working with children and youth who may have experienced abuse to support them to move *'from fear to safety, from control to empowerment, and from abuse of power to accountability and transparency'*.¹⁷



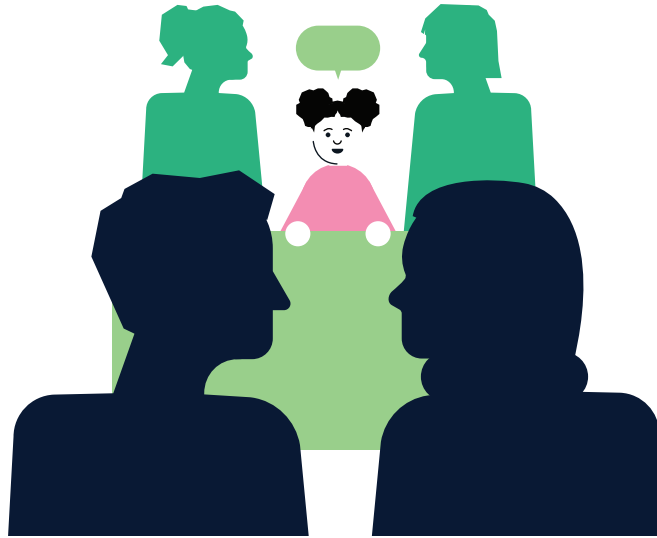
4. Moving beyond approval - practicing ongoing and reflexive ethics

In approaching procedural ethics for such types of research, it has been advised that researchers:

- Seek advice from others who may be viewed as 'experts' in these areas, including survivors, and demonstrate how this input has informed their ethical approach
- Acknowledge the range of ethical dilemmas and risks that may occur and demonstrate how these will be planned for and approached
- Bring together a research team, including colleagues from support services, and illustrate the teams' relevant expertise and skills to work on the project
- Avoid including 'standard' phrases around aspects that are harder to guarantee in participatory projects (e.g. children will remain anonymous)
- Be transparent about the aspects of design that may change and if possible, provide examples of the types of activities that may potentially occur
- Approach ethics in a staged, phased way - applying for an initial first phase of working with youth researchers where you will explore and identify the area and then submit a further application once the methods for data collection and dissemination are agreed.¹⁸

Whilst seeking formal ethical approval is important, this does not mean that the ethics part 'is done' at the point of approval. Ethics is an ongoing element that needs to be attended to throughout research engagement. Ethical dilemmas will unfold as activities begin and this will require researchers to behave ethically in practice and react to ethical challenges 'in the moment'.¹⁹ Often this will require researchers to think on their feet and decide how to approach ethical quandaries as they arise. In some circumstances this may lead to wider discussion and decision-making in collaboration with youth researchers, and in other circumstances there will be clear lines drawn around legal requirements that may force researchers to respond in certain ways.²⁰ In developing an ethically reflexive approach, it can be helpful to be intentional around this and consider how ethical decision-making will be managed and documented. This may include:

- Collaborative planning with the whole research team to think about the possible ethical scenarios that may arise and how these could be prevented or managed
- Training for researchers to discuss scenarios and possible ways to respond
- Project specific documentation: risk assessments, safeguarding policy etc.
- Developing a decision-making framework including principles, who should be involved in decision-making and where legal boundaries mean a certain path has to be followed
- Documenting the process for determining and agreeing responses to different ethical scenarios that arise
- Ensuring there is support in place for researchers so they can discuss issues that arise and seek support and advice²¹



SECTION 2: KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND LEARNING

This section highlights ten key considerations for ECPAT members and partners to reflect on to support ethical approaches to participatory action research addressing CSEA. These focus on the initial stages of the research process with additional reflections and learning associated with the 'action' phase in research can be read in a separate learning brief.²² These two stages have often been overlooked - particularly regarding ethics for research with children.²³


Key ethical considerations are grouped as follows:

1. Preparing organisations and teams for taking an ethical approach to participatory research on CSEA
2. Continuously assessing risks and strengthening mitigation and support systems
3. Recognising and valuing children's contributions fairly and transparently
4. Communicating clearly, safely, and accessibly about the research
5. Designing inclusive and safe recruitment and selection strategies
6. Embedding informed, voluntary, and ongoing consent practices
7. Preparing child and youth researchers for ethical and safe research roles
8. Responding safely and ethically to disclosures and emotional distress
9. Managing endings, transitions, and pathways beyond the project

1. Preparing organisations and teams for taking an ethical approach to participatory research on CSEA

1.1 Scope existing evidence, context and local expertise

The first step requires researchers to think carefully about whether the research needs to take place. This involves carrying out preliminary activities to assess the need for the research, and who may be best placed to work on the project.

- What has been done before on this topic?
 - Is there existing evidence we could draw on?
 - Who is working on the issue of CSEA?
 - Has research with children and youth been conducted locally and, if so, how was it approached, and what were the challenges encountered and the lessons learned?
 - Who locally has experience of facilitating participatory work with children and youth on CSEA or related issues?
 - How is child and youth participation perceived by the local society?
 - What is the local and national political and social context with regards to CSEA?
 - What language / terms are used to discuss the issue?
 - What are the gaps in local knowledge and research?
 - What knowledge would support better responses for children and youth?
 - Are there upcoming opportunities that the project idea could add value to? (e.g. a national event or upcoming policy consultation?)
 - Does the national legislation impact on the project or children and youth in any way? (e.g. legislation around mandatory reporting, sexual consent, same-sex relations or dominant views on gender identity and expression may pose a risk to some children and youth if they identify as survivors within a project).²⁴
- 

1.2 Ensure facilitators have appropriate skills, training and competences

Often in abuse-focussed research the focus is on whether children and youth 'are ready' to engage in the research, yet 'readiness' is multidimensional and we need to also consider whether we - the adult researchers, facilitators, managers and others in the organisation are 'ready'.²⁵

This may involve having previous, relevant research experience in the topics of focus and methods that will be used. Even with this experience, it is helpful to provide project-specific training to help adult researchers or facilitators feel prepared and confident.

In participatory research that focuses on CSEA, such training may involve adult researchers or facilitators developing their knowledge around:

- Trauma-informed research²⁶ and understanding the impact of trauma, signs of trauma, how to respond to distress and disclosures in the moment, the use of language etc
- Child-centred and child rights-based approaches to research - ways to share information in child-friendly ways etc
- Survivor-informed and centred approaches
- Awareness of the local or national policies and processes (such as mandatory reporting) along with local support services that are available.

Training may also focus on the application of specific tools such as risk and needs assessment, practicing questions and responses and talking through a range of different scenarios that may play out²⁷ (See section 7.1 for elements of training that can be adapted for children and youth acting as researchers). There may also be a focus exploring the soft skills required for participatory work with children and youth, such as active listening, flexibility, adaptability and conflict resolution.



1.3 Establish ongoing support and supervision for adult facilitators

Post-training, adult researchers / facilitators will still require ongoing support. This may come from peer support within the research team, supervisory sessions, and having the ability to debrief and seek support from external professionals.²⁸ When working with child and youth researchers, ongoing support also needs to be in place (see 2.3).

In talking about a trauma-informed approach, it must be recognised that organisations and institutes also need to work in trauma-informed ways. Organisations, and senior management must be prepared to hold the risks involved; dedicate the necessary resources; and properly prepare and support the research team. In participatory research, the adult researchers and wider team also need to feel comfortable and ready to shift and share power with child and youth researchers and be comfortable with sharing decisions with children and youth, being flexible, and working in ways that may not be the 'norm'.

1.4 Agree clear safeguarding and disclosure response procedures

If organisations are working in partnership, it is important to agree how key protection or safeguarding processes, such as responses to disclosures of abuse, will be managed. When disclosures arise in a research setting, they are often 'unintended' (children don't intentionally wish to disclose) this could potentially increase risk of harm if appropriate responses are not in place or referrals are made into systems that are not safe for children.²⁹



1.5 Apply survivor-informed safeguarding approaches and tools

In supporting participatory work which specifically targets survivors (though recognising we may not know people's status and therefore always must plan for and prepare for disclosures) it may be helpful to seek out specific guidance on safeguarding. Survivor-informed safeguarding complements existing safeguarding practices but is specifically designed for work with survivors of CSEA and survivor-led or grassroots organisations. The concept of 'survivor-informed safeguarding' was created in 2022 by Children Unite³⁰ from a review of safeguarding policy and practice commissioned by Oak Foundation's Prevent Child Sexual Abuse programme. This new approach to safeguarding was piloted by Ignite Philanthropy with survivor-led organisations, it complements existing approaches to safeguarding, but focuses on three elements:

- Trauma-informed practice: centring survivor wellbeing and connecting individuals to support services.
- Risk-informed decision-making: co-developing assessments and mitigation strategies with survivors and their networks.
- Continuous informed consent: ensuring survivors fully understand risks and can disengage when needed to protect their wellbeing.

See the learning report for funders and a resource pack for grassroots or survivor-led organisations for safeguarding tools from this pilot.³¹

2. Continuously assessing risks and strengthening mitigation and support systems

2.1 Acknowledge the possibility of harm and re-traumatisation

A key ethical principle in research surrounds balancing potential benefits and harms for participants. In considering research with children and youth who have experienced harm and abuse, the default is often to limit opportunities for their engagement in research. This is often due to fears that talking about their experiences, or the topic more generally, will be distressing and potentially trigger or re-traumatise children. Even if research is not designed to engage with children and youth who are known to have experienced CSEA, it's important to remember that we may not always know who has been impacted by sexual violence more generally and, through initiating discussions, children may recognise that they themselves have experienced certain forms of sexual violence.³² Additionally, when research and action phases focuses on CSEA, thinking about how any association with this topic may be potentially harmful for children and youth, both as participants and researchers is necessary. It's critical to have open discussions about this, particularly with child and youth researchers to help them think about how they may feel differently about association with these topics when they are at different phases of their lives.

2.2 Develop risk registers and collaborative mitigation strategies

As a project team, it is important to develop a process for identifying potential risks and potential mitigation strategies at the outset of the project. Developing a Risk Register³³ for the project is one way to identify and monitor specific risks and mitigations associated with project activities. As risks will be perceived differently, it can be helpful to include survivors, particularly those who may have had experience of engaging in research processes, in thinking about risks.³⁴ As adults' interpretations of what they consider to be 'risky' may differ from youth's experiences,³⁵ and as children and youth are recruited into the project, risks assessments should be revisited to capture their concerns and perceived risks and identify how these could be managed - see [Creating a Safe Environment](#) for participatory risk assessment tools. As new risks occur, these should be added to an organisational 'live' Risk Register and discussed as a team.

When involving children and youth in research, particularly those who may have lived experience, individual risk and needs assessment to understand whether the timing and project is right for children can help support decision-making. Often if engaging children with lived experience, these assessments will be undertaken in partnership with organisations working directly with children.³⁶

2.3 Plan referral pathways and resource wellbeing support

In working on collaborative research projects, it is critical to spend time building relationships and a shared understanding of the project with partner organisations and agree on what safe and ethical 'participatory approaches' mean.

When engaging children and youth in participatory projects it is essential to include a budget line for supporting children and youth and to develop agreed referral pathways with external organisations. It is unrealistic to think that all support needed can be covered in a research budget. Children's engagement in research activities often uncovers issues that impact on their safety and wellbeing (such as disclosures of abuse). It is therefore important that adult researchers/facilitators feel confident in making initial referrals to external organisations and are clear around the boundaries of support that can be offered as implementing organisations cannot usually secure long-term support for children who may require it.



2.4 Facilitate informal peer support and relationship building

Those working in this field also note the importance of cultivating a culture of informal, peer support in participatory projects. Children should not feel worried or concerned about their participation in this work and should be encouraged to discuss their feelings.³⁷ Children and youth who have taken part in research projects share how engagement can strengthen and increase their support network as they meet new people, peers and staff, who they became close to.³⁸ In addition, activities that may be part of the project, such as mapping out support, can also allow children and youth to recognise the different people in their lives, or practices they can develop to support self-care and wellbeing.

In participatory projects that engage children and youth over a long period of time, it is appropriate to think about and build in opportunities to support children and youth more generally in their lives - how will they benefit from involvement in the project? For example, building in opportunities for development and training that may support them in future work and education.³⁹

2.5 Embed emotional support at key stages in research

In undertaking research, or related activities that focus on CSEA and related harms, there is a significant likelihood that disclosures of abuse will be reported. During the *Children Know Better* project, several disclosures occurred in both countries (Bangladesh and Nepal) during data collection and further disclosures were identified at the point of data analysis. Safeguarding protocols and processes were in place for the implementing partners to respond in line with national child protection procedures. Child leaders, youth facilitators and project staff all undertook training on safeguarding and ethics, however, understandably in some instances child leaders were upset and emotional in recounting or discussing incidences of reported abuse. This was particularly notable during the analysis workshop where it was reported that there was suddenly a 'heaviness in the room' and one of the child leaders became upset with the session needing to be paused.⁴⁰ The emotional toll that child and youth researchers may face in undertaking research in this field aligns with other learning from participatory action research projects involving young researchers.⁴¹

This illustrates that although training is essential, so that children and youth understand what constitutes a disclosure and how to respond safely, training alone is not enough. Children and youth engaged in data collection should be accompanied by experienced adults who can 'step in' if disclosures arise and respond according to their safeguarding/protection procedures. In the *Children Know Better* project, the child researchers who ran focus group discussions insisted that no adults should be in the room as they felt they would be able to speak more openly with the child participants, this meant that adult facilitators were not in the room but outside and available. This kind of situation presents a dilemma for implementing organisations that will need to be resolved by balancing procedural requirements with the rights and wishes of children.



The learning from *Children Know Better* also highlighted something that adult researchers working in the field of CSEA have long recognised, that sometimes disclosures are not picked up in the moment but only after leaving the field, or when reading transcripts or during analysis. This means that prior to children and youth engaging in the analysis phase, it is appropriate to anticipate that they could be triggered (have an intense emotional response) by the research process. Being faced with multiple accounts of sexual harassment and injustice during analysis can feel very different from hearing one or two experiences in focus groups. It may be helpful when designing analysis sessions, to provide enough time and space within the analysis process to enable children and youth to explore their feelings and feel supported. This should include closing activities that help children and youth leave the analysis feeling positive and not holding on to difficult emotions.⁴²

3. Recognising and valuing children's contributions fairly and transparently

3.1 Navigating ethical concerns regarding compensation

Compensation in research continues to be challenging to navigate.⁴³ Some adult practitioners whose working practice regularly engages children in a variety of activities (awareness raising activities, trainings, evaluation sessions etc.) are hesitant to offer compensation to children who are participants in research or who take on the role of researchers. They can fear, for example, that children and youth will not see the difference in taking part in a research activity or a prevention activity, therefore if 'research activities' are compensated, this may impact on future engagement of children in other activities.⁴⁴ There are also concerns around financial payments influencing future research, or impacting on dynamics between children, families and wider communities.⁴⁵ Ethics committees or donors may not permit payments to children and youth engaged as researchers or research participants.

3.2 Consider ethical and context appropriate compensation models

It is expected that out of pocket expenses are covered for travel for example, but there are opposing perspectives around payment, and other ways of acknowledging individuals' time and expertise as either participants or researchers. There is also recognition that children and youth may benefit from other types of support that is not monetary in nature such as sanitary products, data allowance, emotional support, and support for accessing other services.⁴⁶ However, in participatory research, where children and youth may take on a more substantive role in the research, potentially advising, or undertaking activities that are usually undertaken by paid, adult staff, compensation becomes a trickier issue to navigate.⁴⁷ Recent thinking on this issue highlights the importance of : considering what might be considered fair and respectful within the specific context whilst not being overly influential;⁴⁸ carrying out risk assessments specifically on providing compensation⁴⁹ and; discussing potential options for reward and recognition with children and youth themselves.⁵⁰ Being transparent about compensation is key to stem perceived frustrations over inequities within research teams that include adult and children and youth researchers.⁵¹

4. Communicating clearly, safely, and accessibly about the research

4.1 Choose appropriate formats and channels for information sharing

In recruiting children and youth, it's important to think about how the project will be communicated in ways that enable children, youth and their families and communities to understand the research, the topic, their role within it, the risks and benefits and make an informed decision about their involvement.

To do this, it's helpful to consider who needs the information, and the best ways for conveying this information in ways that are transparent and informative. There is still a reliance on researchers using written information sheets and consent forms as part of the informed consent process.⁵² However, other approaches for sharing information such as animations, videos and visual tools are becoming more widespread; and role play (of a research interview) has been used effectively to explain the research process to children.⁵³

4.2 Use respectful, non-stigmatising, and inclusive language

In researching CSEA, the language that is used with children and youth is critical. Children and youth, particularly those with lived experience of CSEA, often struggle with terms related to this form of abuse and it may be helpful to 'sense check' project documentation with those who have relevant lived experience to ensure the research aims are conveyed in ways that are respectful and non-judgemental and that victim-blaming language, communication or behaviour is avoided.⁵⁴

ECPAT's implementing partners have engaged children and youth with a range of needs, including hearing impaired children, in research. Being aware of different support needs, and being creative in how information is conveyed, is central. It is vital to discuss with the children concerned (or their parents, carers or workers) how best to communicate with them recognising that some children may prefer working with visual aids including emotion wheels and communication cards.

4.3 Clarify core concepts such as consent, confidentiality and anonymity

In research projects often information about the project is given in written form, however key concepts such as 'consent', 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity' should be clearly explained and where possible examples given. This should include explaining in what circumstances, and what would happen if a researcher needed to break confidentiality.⁵⁵

It can also be helpful to explain how data will be anonymised and what and how this may appear in reports. In the MUKTI South Asia project, it was only during the final validation workshop where survivor participants were shown some example quotes that were presented with ID numbers that they really understood how, what they said, would be presented to others anonymously.

The concept of 'anonymity' may also become more difficult to manage and explain in participatory approaches to research. When children and youth are actively involved in the research process, advising, collecting data, co-developing recommendations and developing research outputs, quite rightly, they may wish to be identified and acknowledged for their contribution. This means when developing an ethical protocol, or writing an ethical application for a participatory project, it may not be possible to guarantee anonymity at the outset. Instead, this will need to be explained and approached as an evolving ethical issue to explore together with children and youth as the activities and project evolves.

In conveying information, different projects have used different methods for this such as holding open information sessions for children and parents or sharing information and then developing a quiz to check children's understanding of the research project and key concepts.⁵⁶

4.4 Facilitate ongoing communication with local communities

Children's participation on the topic of CSEA is sensitive. It is important to lay the groundwork and consider how parents, carers, community members and other stakeholders can strengthen their understanding of the topic from the start.

In the *Children Know Better* project, child leaders reported initial backlash from peers, relatives, community members and teachers for taking part in a project focussing on CSEA. Laying the groundwork, initiating community discussions around the topic and allowing parents, carers and other community members to share concerns or ask questions may ease potential tensions. As projects evolve and progress, sharing updates and continuing conversations may help build support.



5. Designing inclusive and safe recruitment and selection strategies

5.1. Consider whose voices are included and represented

Children are not a homogenous group. Are the children involved in the research those with lived experience of CSEA or are they children who live in the areas where the research is being conducted? It is every child's right to be involved in decisions that affect them, however, asking children and youth who do not have lived experience of the issue will lead to different responses and outcomes.

In considering the selection of children to take on the role of research participant or researcher, it is helpful to develop criteria to help to explain to children, families and others in the community the key activities and responsibilities for each role. In projects involving children with lived experience, it is helpful to be flexible with the upper age range.⁵⁷ However, recent projects have highlighted that it can be challenging to recruit older children and youth as researchers without compensation when their role requires a substantial time commitment which may interfere with work or study.⁵⁸

5.2 Balance mixed and shared-experience groups to reduce harm and stigma

The literature on group work emphasises the importance of establishing common ground.⁵⁹ If children and youth have different experiences related to CSEA, such as being impacted by online versus in-person exploitation, being viewed as 'at risk' as opposed to being identified as a survivor, or being impacted by different forms of sexual violence such as sexual assault, there may be a risk of children and youth being dismissive or insensitive towards each other and that hierarchies of victimhood develop within the group.⁶⁰

There is an argument however that mixed groups (which include children and youth that do not identify as having lived experience) can be helpful in mitigating stigma for any survivors involved. Learning from a participatory project involving a mixed group of children and youth where the focus of the project was on child sexual exploitation, identified that if a group is being put together with the explicit aim of children and youth sharing their experiences, then considering how 'shared' the groups' experiences are is necessary to stem potential tensions and frustrations within the group.⁶¹




6. Embedding informed, voluntary, and ongoing consent practices

6.1 Apply legal and contextual consent and assent requirements

Informed consent processes require researchers to gain formal permission for an individual to participate in the project. Legal requirements differ from country to country and in some contexts parental consent is required for anyone under the age of 18, in other contexts, children under the age of 18 may be able to give consent. If parental consent is required, it is important to gain consent from an adult who has legal responsibility for the child, recognising this may not always be a parent (and in some circumstances access to parents is not possible).⁶² Wherever parental consent is needed, it is also critical to gain 'assent'⁶³ from the children involved to ensure they are happy to participate.

Even if the law in a country says a child or young person *can* give their own consent to take part in research, there may still be strong cultural, family, or community norms that expect parents, guardians, elders, or community leaders to be involved in decisions about children. Consequently, it's helpful to understand the local context and expectations around decision-making with children.⁶⁴ It may be worth considering who is normally expected to be informed or consulted when decisions about children's participation in an activity are made. In addition, there may be cases where children wish to take part in a project, but parents do not give their consent and researchers will have to consider how this will be managed.⁶⁵

Informed consent means that those involved in providing consent understand:

- What research is
 - The purpose of the research
 - The overarching topic and potential range of methods (recognising that in participatory projects these often evolve and determined over time)
 - Who the researchers are and who they are working for
 - Why the child is being invited to participate
 - The child's role, what it involves and what they will be asked to do
 - Where and when activities will take place
 - The risks and benefits
 - How information shared will be used
 - How information will be anonymised, stored and kept safe
 - Any compensation that is available
 - How to consent if they want to take part
- 

- How to withdraw consent
- How to complain
- What support is in place and who to contact
- Limits on confidentiality (e.g. when confidentiality will need to be broken due to safeguarding and mandatory reporting)
- When the project will finish and how they can learn about the findings/ outcomes.⁶⁶

It can also be helpful to approach informed consent as a negotiated process and to recognise that socio-cultural factors (e.g. power dynamics) may limit genuine and voluntary participation.

6.2 Support children to decline participation without pressure

Often in abuse-focussed research, staff from NGOs or service providers may be the ones to approach children and youth to invite them to be youth researchers or participants in research - in this respect they may be acting as 'gatekeepers'. Research shows that children's decisions to engage in research are closely tied to their relationship with trusted NGO staff gatekeepers. Although this may enable easier access to children and youth, and they may feel they will be protected, children in this position may also feel pressure to say yes in order to please their trusted adult.⁶⁷

For children who have accessed services from an organisation that invites them to participate, this may be more pronounced as children can feel like they 'owe' the organisation, or worker something. Children should be clearly told that saying 'no' will not jeopardise or lead to support being withdrawn or them not being invited to take part in future opportunities. This tension will need to be discussed in advance with partners so they fully understand this dynamic and can be supported to think about how they can emphasise this point and reassure children and youth that involvement is voluntary and not tied to support.

Children and youth have also shared how power dynamics, and peer pressure, can be an issue not only between a researcher and child but also when being asked to give consent in a group setting and that it's important that children are asked individually.⁶⁸



In discussing research rights with children and youth involved in abuse-focussed research, youth have shared that it can help them to know some phrases and ways to say 'no'. Suggested phrases from children and youth include *'Thanks for the invite but this doesn't feel like this is right for me'*.⁶⁹ In addition, in a study exploring the ethics for participatory research, NGO staff found that role-playing the consent process with potential child participants - where the child interviewee declines to take part in an interview - was an effective way to explain to potential child participants, that the NGO would respond in a positive way to a child saying 'no'.⁷⁰

6.3 Practice ongoing, negotiated consent across research phases

The traditional approach for asking children to sign a consent form can be problematic and off putting so thinking about ways to record and verify consent in different ways may be helpful.⁷¹

In participatory research, as this rarely involves a 'one off' interaction, researchers should constantly return to the concept of consent. Researchers suggest returning to the concept of consent at each phase of the research, or when new methods or activities are starting.⁷² In participatory research, the researchers will not know at the outset what the project may involve and therefore in the initial consent given, children, youth and parents will be unable to make informed decisions at the outset about the different aspects that may occur in terms of their participation in different activities and events. Continuous conversations where children (and their parents/carers) can understand the risks associated with different activities and know they can withdraw consent, opting in and out, as best supports them is helpful.



7. Preparing child and youth researchers for ethical and safe research roles

7.1 Develop foundational knowledge and research skills

Children and youth, particularly those with lived experience of CSEA, have unique knowledge and perspectives, however they are unlikely to have the experience and skills required to undertake research in ways that are safe and ethical. Children and youth will require training and access to support and mentorship to prepare them for research roles. When engaging with children and youth who have missed out on education, or have not engaged in previous child rights projects, it's helpful to build a foundational layer of knowledge before moving into research specific training.

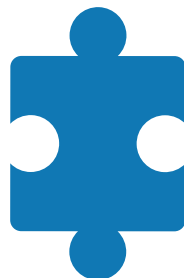
Where children and youth are taking a significant role in the research, it is important for them to be supported and equipped with relevant knowledge and skills so that they can carry out their tasks. Such training may cover a range of elements including, creating a safe space,⁷³ and understanding implementing partners relevant policies around safeguarding (laws, reporting mechanisms, child protection policies and codes of conduct).

Following this, further training may be required including theory of participatory action research, research ethics and gaining informed consent, assessing risks, forming research questions, options for research methods, sampling, interviewing, data management, analysis, report writing, dissemination or advocacy.

7.2 Address boundaries, confidentiality and emotional challenges in peer research

In preparing children and youth for participatory research, it's important to recognise that child and youth researchers straddle different identities, as peers and researchers, this means they have a potentially more complex role to navigate.⁷⁴ It can be helpful to discuss potential challenges with youth researchers such as:

- Boundaries: sharing personal details, creating some distance
- Confidentiality
- Emotional toll: hearing experiences or stories that resonate, are familiar and feeling that you are unable to help
- Assumptions that building trust and 'rapport' will be easy
- Endings and transitions



It can also be helpful to discuss how it may feel for children to be interviewed by peers. For example, acknowledging that it:

- May be more difficult for children to say 'no' to their peers
- Children may feel less comfortable with 'youth researchers' due to their connection with the issue / community
- Children may feel more comfortable and accidentally share 'more' than they would with other researchers⁷⁵

7.3 Balance privacy, choice and safeguarding during data collection

As with any research, the space where data collection takes place requires careful thought. When children and youth are discussing sensitive issues such as CSEA they have stated that 'privacy' and 'confidentiality' are priorities. In asking children and youth about the topic of CSEA privacy is critical. The need for privacy and confidentiality however should be balanced with organisational policies on safeguarding and protection which often dictate, for example, that adults should not be left alone with a child, or they should be visible to others.⁷⁶

Children may wish to have a parent, peer or supporter present while they take part in data collection activities (particularly if these are interviews which can feel quite intense for many children). Or for peer-to-peer data collection they may wish that there are no adults present. Parents may also wish to be present. While child participants should have choice and control over who is present, it is important to balance their wishes with safeguarding and ethics policies and procedures and, in particular, the consequences and response procedures that follow should a disclosure occur during data collection.



8. Responding safely and ethically to disclosures and emotional distress

8.1 Recognise and act on disclosures of immediate and non-immediate harm

In research on the topic of CSEA it is appropriate to assume there will be disclosures of sexual abuse from research participants - for example, in the *Children Know Better* project 50 disclosures of abuse were made during data collection by child participants in focus group discussions. Researchers should therefore be experienced at identifying whether a disclosure of abuse or harm requires immediate action. This usually concerns whether the disclosure identifies that someone is in immediate risk of harm - thresholds for what constitutes 'immediate' and 'harm' for the implementing partner will need to be clarified with researchers before data collection begins. If immediate risk of harm is identified from the disclosure, researchers will need to follow the organisational procedures for responding to a disclosure - this may require stopping data collection, explaining the need to break confidentiality and the involvement of a safeguarding lead or focal point for the organisation. Responding to this situation requires a 'victim-centred' and 'best interests of the child' approach and should be undertaken by someone with a good understanding of organisational safeguarding policy and procedures (such as the safeguarding lead or focal point).⁷⁷

If the harm identified does not put anyone in immediate risk of danger, for example, the disclosure is of abuse that happened years ago, safeguarding procedures will still need to be followed but discussion with the child who disclosed can happen at their own pace.



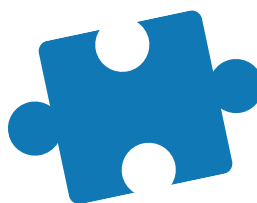
8.2 Help children understand confidentiality and disclosure thresholds

When child and youth researchers facilitate interviews and focus group discussions with their peers such interactions may feel less formal, and child research participants may easily forget that they are in a research space. In the *Children Know Better* project, several disclosures of sexual abuse were made during data collection. One assumption from the project team about why this may have been the case is because children were more comfortable talking with their peers when adults were not present. Although this level of comfort from child participants is positive, it raises questions about whether the children may have felt that the conversation was more casual and less 'formal' - and that in sharing this information they did not realise they were disclosing an abusive or harmful situation.

As research suggests that disclosures that are 'unplanned' can lead to negative outcomes for children, it is important that child participants in research clearly understand at the outset what constitutes 'a disclosure of abuse' so that they have a better understanding of what it means to disclose to their peers in the context of research - and what will happen if they do disclose.⁷⁸ This understanding needs to be balanced with a clear message that children should never feel silenced or unable to share their experiences in a research setting. This nuanced understanding of confidentiality and disclosures may be approached through opening activities with child research participants that highlight these core elements before discussion of the research topic begins. As researchers, such as children and youth, who are less experienced or confident may not always identify what is or is not a disclosure - in these circumstances it would be appropriate for an experienced adult to be present during data collection.

8.3 Prevent and respond sensitively to children's distress

Exploring the topic of CSEA can be an emotional and distressing experience, with a high likelihood that children and youth will experience distress. This is not a reason to abandon the exercise, but it does require a series of mitigations to be in place that use trauma-informed approaches to both prevent and respond to children and youth who become upset or distressed. During data collection when there is an increased likelihood that child participants will become distressed when speaking about CSEA - child and youth researchers should practice responding to a child in distress (role play can be particularly effective to practice responses). In an example of participatory research highlighted in *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People*⁷⁹ a youth researcher responded to another child (participant) who was crying during a focus group discussion by comforting her and asking her if she wanted to leave the room. Adult facilitators were initially alarmed at a youth researcher undertaking this role as ethics protocols recommended that adult facilitators respond to child participants in distress. However, they soon realised that the youth researcher had reacted naturally to a child in distress, not out of obligation. It is important to distinguish between a youth researcher empathetically responding to another child in distress and them having *the responsibility* to respond to a child in distress (which is often part of safeguarding procedures). The *responsibility to respond* to a child in distress should lie with facilitating adults.



In taking a trauma-informed approach, adequate wellbeing support needs to be built in for young researchers who may find it upsetting and distressing to hear information from their peers, particularly when topics are focussed on abuse and harm.⁸⁰ This could include, for example, wellbeing breaks during data analysis or data collection where child and youth researchers have free time to unwind or take part in 'fun' group activities. In the Children Know Better project child leaders were feeling so overwhelmed during an analysis workshop that it had to be stopped and support given to children to help manage their emotions.

9. Managing endings, transitions, and pathways beyond the project

9.1 Support continued engagement and leadership pathways

If children and youth have been involved in a long-term or intense participatory project, endings can be emotional and difficult to handle. It is important to think about how endings will be handled at the start.⁸¹

During the *Children Know Better* project, a risk was identified by project staff that engagement in the project had 'lit the fire' in children and youth - just as the project was ending. In acknowledging this, the project team sought to connect the child leaders with other platforms. Actions including pursuing a memorandum of understanding with local Child Rights Committees in Nepal so that child leaders could continue participating in the Child Rights Committee meetings at the ward level. A similar approach was taken in Bangladesh where the implementing partner worked with children's parliaments to identify opportunities for continued engagement. Efforts were also targeted at schools engaged in the project, identifying opportunities for child leaders to lead child rights clubs and engage in school councils.



9.2 Document ethical learning, safeguarding reflections and process insights

In participatory work, the process is just as important as the outcome. Participatory processes evoke rich learning over what works well and what doesn't for all of those involved. In traditional research projects, the focus tends to be on documenting the numbers of those involved, activities and outcomes and there is often a desire to showcase the successes. Yet real learning comes from the detailed documentation of mistakes, tensions and complexities that arise during the project. This learning, and the perspectives of the different groups involved (the children and youth, facilitators, partner organisations and the audiences or end users of project outputs) helps to provide a more holistic picture for future application. In addition, safeguarding or protection practice should be monitored and any learning from safeguarding cases be used to refine and update organisational policies and procedures. The Risk Register⁸² can be used as a live document where learning on safeguarding or protection issues is documented.

Evaluations of participatory research with children and youth on this topic are vital if we wish to share with others what impact, and 'added value', comes when we collaborate with children and youth in our research.



USEFUL RESOURCES

- [Core Component on Creating a Safe Environment](#) ECPAT International (2025)
- [Power of Participation: An introduction to participatory approaches for childhood sexual violence research](#) SVRI (2025)
- [Shifting the Narrative on Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Guiding Principles on Victim Blaming Language, Communication and Behaviours.](#) ECPAT International (2025)
- [Valuing Participation: A comic exploring how young people's time and contributions are recognised when they take part in projects addressing childhood sexual violence.](#) Cody, C. and Soares, C. University of Bedfordshire (2025)
- [Resource Pack on Survivor Informed Safeguarding](#), Ignite Philanthropy & Children Unite, (2025)
- [Survivor-Led Safeguarding - Lessons for Funders](#), Ignite Philanthropy & Children Unite, (2025)
- [Thinking about taking part in research? A guide for children and youth - by youth.](#) Learning Together Project, University of Bedfordshire, University of Central Lancashire and Different & Equal (2024)
- [Supporting the safe and ethical involvement of children and youth in research about violence and abuse.](#) Learning Together Project, University of Bedfordshire, University of Central Lancashire and Different & Equal (2024)
- [Seeing things from both sides: A comic to help young people and professionals understand each other's views about young survivors' participation in efforts to address child sexual abuse and exploitation.](#) Cody, C. and Soares, C., University of Bedfordshire. (2023)
- The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook, 2nd Edition. Alderson, P. and Morrow, V., Sage (2020)
- [Creating a safe space: Ideas for the development of participatory group work to address sexual violence with young people.](#) Warrington, C., University of Bedfordshire (2020)
- [Guidelines for ethical research on sexual exploitation involving children](#) ECPAT International (2019).
- [International Child Safeguarding Standards](#) Keeping Children Safe 2016

Useful websites or pages

- [ECPAT International - Resources on Child Safeguarding](#)
- [Ethical Research Involving Children \(ERIC\)](#)
- [Safeguarding Resource & Support Hub](#)
- [Our Voices Your Project Journey](#)
- [Children Unite](#)

ENDNOTES

- 1 This guidance includes specific learning on ethical challenges and responses documented in ECPAT International's Children Know Better project, implemented in Bangladesh and Nepal. The project worked with 50 child leaders aged 12-16, supported by 10 youth facilitators aged 20-25, to conduct peer research with more than 342 children and 51 adult decision makers on CSEA and related harms. Child leaders were also involved in participatory analysis, report writing, awareness-raising and advocacy activities aimed at influencing local and national stakeholders.
- 2 See Keeping Children Safe (2016) Keeping Children Safe. (2016). [International Child Safeguarding Standards](#).
- 3 Beazley, H., Bessell, S., Ennew, J., & Waterson, R. (2009) [The right to be properly researched: research with children in a messy, real world](#). *Children's Geographies*, 7(4), 365-378.
- 4 Ellis, K., Hickle, K., & Warrington, C. (2023) [Researching sensitive topics with children and young people: Ethical practice and Blurry Boundaries](#). *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22
- 5 Veitch, H. (2025) ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth. London. Children Unite.
- 6 Bovarnick, S., with Peace, D., Warrington, C., & Pearce, J. (2018) [Being Heard: Promoting children and youth's involvement in participatory research on sexual violence: Findings from an international scoping review](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire; Durham Community Research Team (2012) [Community-based Participatory Research: Ethical Challenge](#)
- 7 Ellis, K., Hickle, K., & Warrington, C. (2023) [Researching sensitive topics with children and young people: Ethical practice and Blurry Boundaries](#). *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22.
- 8 The REG is being co-ordinated by Terre des Hommes Netherlands, Family for Every Child and Children Unite.
- 9 Veitch, H. (2025) ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth. London. Children Unite.
- 10 Cornwall, A. and Jewkes, R. (1995) [What is participatory research?](#) *Social Science & Medicine*, Volume 41, Issue 12, December 1995, Pages 1667-1676
- 11 Boyden, J. and Ennew, J. (1997) [Children in Focus - a manual for participatory research with children](#). Save the Children Sweden.

- 12 With the exception of the Bhattacharya, I. (2010) [Vulnerability of children living in the red light areas of Kolkata, India. A youth-led study](#). SANLAAP; Small Steps Collective, 2022 The evidence speaks for itself: Findings from the 'Small steps can make a big difference' youth-led action research project into youth's perspectives on seeking justice and support in relation to child trafficking in Albania. Tirana: Different & Equal and Young Women's Empowerment Project (2009) [Girls do what they have to do to survive: Illuminating methods used by girls in the sex trade and street economy to fight back and heal. A participatory action research study of resilience and resistance](#).
- 13 UNCRC, 2009.
- 14 Beckett, H., Warrington, C. & Bracewell, K. (2025) [Enhancing Children's Involvement in, and Influence over, Domestic Abuse and Family Violence Knowledge Creation through Trauma informed Approaches to Research](#). Journal of Family Violence. Advance online publication.
- 15 See SAMHSA (2014) who recognise that those working in trauma-informed ways must: realise the widespread impact of trauma; recognise certain behaviours as normal reactions to abnormal experiences; respond sensitively in practice and policy and resist retraumatization. SAMHSA have identified six key principles of a trauma-informed approach: safety; trustworthy and transparency; peer support; mutuality and collaboration; empowerment voice and choice and attending to cultural, historic and gender issues.
- 16 Warrington, C. (2013) [Partners in care? Sexually exploited young people's inclusion and exclusion from decision making](#). In M. Melrose & J. Pearce (Eds.), Critical perspectives on child sexual exploitation and related trafficking (pp. 110-124). Palgrave Macmillan and Cody, C. (2017) [Connecting the dots: Supporting the Recovery and Reintegration of Children Affected by Sexual Exploitation](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.
- 17 See Sweeney, A. & Taggart, D. (2018). [\(Mis\)understanding trauma-informed approaches in mental health](#). J Ment Health, 27(5), 383-387. Sweeney and Taggart refer to relationships between professionals and survivors as "power over" relationships which can revictimize survivors and stymie recovery. These writers emphasise that professionals working with survivors should seek to act in the opposite way of abusers.
- 18 Adapted from Beckett in SVRI (2025) [Power of Participation: An introduction to participatory approaches for childhood sexual violence research](#).
- 19 Ellis, K., Hickle, K., & Warrington, C. (2023) [Researching sensitive topics with children and young people: Ethical practice and Blurry Boundaries](#). International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22.
- 20 Beckett in SVRI (2025) [Power of Participation: An introduction to participatory approaches for childhood sexual violence research](#).
- 21 Adapted from Beckett in SVRI (2025) [Power of Participation: An introduction to participatory approaches for childhood sexual violence research](#).
- 22 See Learning Brief on Advocacy
- 23 Alderson, P. and Morrow, V., (2020) The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook, 2nd Edition. London: Sage. (2020)
- 24 Adapted from Our Voices <https://ourvoices.beds.ac.uk/your-project-journey/>

- 25 Cody, C. and Soares, C. (2023) [Seeing things from both sides: A comic to help young people and professionals understand each other's views about young survivors' participation in efforts to address child sexual abuse and exploitation](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire.
- 26 ECPAT International. (2019). [Guidelines for ethical research on sexual exploitation involving children](#).
- 27 See Cody, C. (2023) Training on trauma-informed practice and data collection: working with young survivors of trafficking for the project MUKTI South Asia (unpublished).
- 28 In Project MUKTI South Asia, a trauma-informed consultant was employed to provide training to the research team and to provide follow on support via debriefing to support problem-solving and reflection.
- 29 See SVRI (2025). [Power of Participation: An introduction to participatory approaches for childhood sexual violence research](#)
- 30 Read more about this approach at <https://www.childrenunite.org.uk/work/survivor-informed-safeguarding-model>.
- 31 See <https://www.ignitephilanthropy.org/key-resources>
- 32 See SVRI (2025). [Power of Participation: An introduction to participatory approaches for childhood sexual violence research](#)
- 33 See Tool 1 Risk Register Template in ECPAT International (2025) [Core Component: Creating a Safe Environment](#) Bangkok: ECPAT International (2025).
- 34 Recommendation from Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth](#) Children Unite.
- 35 Beckett, H. and Warrington, C. (2024) [Do no harm? Rethinking risk and harm narratives in abuse-focused research with children](#). Child Protection and Practice.
- 36 See Tool 2: Individual Needs Assessment in ECPAT International (2025) [Core Component: Creating a Safe Environment](#) Bangkok: ECPAT International (2025).
- 37 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth](#) Children Unite
- 38 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth](#) Children Unite.
- 39 See Our Voices <https://ourvoices.beds.ac.uk/your-project-journey/> and Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth](#) Children Unite.
- 40 See Evaluation Report, Children Know Better, 2026
- 41 Cody, C. and Veitch, H., (2024) [A Review of Existing Approaches to Child and Youth Informed Participatory Advocacy on Child Sexual Exploitation](#), ECPAT International
- 42 See Tool 7: Protection Shield in ECPAT International (2025). [Core Component: Creating a Safe Environment](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.

- 43 Cody, C. and Soares, C. (2025). [Valuing Participation: A comic exploring how young people's time and contributions are recognised when they take part in projects addressing childhood sexual violence](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire.
- 44 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid and Cody, C. and Soares, C. (2025). [Valuing Participation: A comic exploring how young people's time and contributions are recognised when they take part in projects addressing childhood sexual violence](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire.
- 47 Cody, C. and Soares, C. (2025). [Valuing Participation: A comic exploring how young people's time and contributions are recognised when they take part in projects addressing childhood sexual violence](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire.
and D'souza, N. A., Tisdall, E. K. M., Battaglia, S. M., & Ruiz-Casares, M. (2025) Youth are crucial to research—how can they be paid fairly? *Nature*, 637(8047), 789-791.
- 48 ibid
- 49 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 50 Cody, C. and Soares, C. (2025). [Valuing Participation: A comic exploring how young people's time and contributions are recognised when they take part in projects addressing childhood sexual violence](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire.
- 51 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 52 Ellis, K., Hickle, K., & Warrington, C. (2023) [Researching sensitive topics with children and young people: Ethical practice and Blurry Boundaries](#). *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22.
- 53 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 54 See [Shifting the narrative on Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: guiding principles on preventing victim-blaming language, communication and behaviours](#), ECPAT International (2025)
- 55 Warrington, C. (2020) [Creating a safe space: Ideas for the development of participatory group work to address sexual violence with young people](#). Luton: University of Bedfordshire. Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 56 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 57 Learning from the Children Know Better and Our Voices projects.
- 58 See Learning Brief on Selecting and Preparing Children
- 59 Knight, C. (2017) 'Group work practice: phases of work and associated skills and tasks', in Grief, G. L. and Knight, C. (eds.) *Group work with populations at risk*. 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.17-31.

- 60 Hickle, K. and Roe-Sepowitz, D. (2017) 'Group work with survivors of sex trafficking', in Grief, G. L. and Knight, C. (eds.) Group work with populations at risk. 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.313-328; Hickle, K. and Roe-Sepowitz, D. (2014) '[Putting the pieces back together: a group intervention for sexually exploited adolescent girls](#)', Social Work with Groups, 37(2), pp.99-113
- 61 Cody, C. (2020) An ethnographic study of a group photography and digital storytelling project for young people accessing a child sexual exploitation service. Luton: University of Bedfordshire
- 62 See [Guidelines for ethical research on sexual exploitation involving children](#). ECPAT International (2019)
- 63 Assent is the agreement of an individual, such as a child, to participate in a study, even though they aren't legally able to give full informed legal consent.
- 64 Jamieson et al., (2021)
- 65 See [Guidelines for ethical research on sexual exploitation involving children](#). ECPAT International. (2019)
- 66 See [Thinking about taking part in research? A guide for children and youth - by youth](#). University of Bedfordshire, University of Central Lancashire and Different & Equal (2024)
- 67 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 See [Thinking about taking part in research? A guide for children and youth - by youth](#). University of Bedfordshire, University of Central Lancashire and Different & Equal (2024)
- 70 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 71 Jamieson, L. et al. (2021) Working together: Including children in research on violence against children - A Resource Pack for Research Practitioners. End Violence, Partnership Knowledge Network, End Violence Lab and Save the Children.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Cody, C. and Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth Children Unite](#).
- 74 ibid
- 75 In responding to this tension, it may be helpful for young researchers to share with their peers that if, on reflection, they feel they have shared too much or wish they hadn't shared a specific detail during the research, that they have the chance to have that removed from the notes/transcript (though of course emphasising that if the information relates to a safeguarding concern - this cannot be 'taken back'.)
- 76 ECPAT International (2019) [Guidelines for ethical research on sexual exploitation involving children](#) Bangkok: ECPAT International.

- 77 See Tips on Adapting a Reporting Flowchart to be Survivor-Centred in [Resource Pack on Survivor Informed Safeguarding](#), (2025) Ignite Philanthropy & Children Unite. See also: Tool 6 Responding to Disclosures of Harm and Abuse in ECPAT International (2025) [Core Component: Creating a Safe Environment](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.
- 78 Beckett, H., Warrington, C. & Bracewell, K. (2025) [Enhancing Children's Involvement in, and Influence over, Domestic Abuse and Family Violence Knowledge Creation through Trauma informed Approaches to Research](#). Journal of Family Violence. Advance online publication.
- 79 See example Box 4.10 Responding to distress when researchers are young people in Alderson, P. and Morrow, V., (2020) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*, 2nd Edition. Sage 69
- 80 Veitch, H. (2025) [ETHYCS: Strengthening Research Ethics With Marginalised Youth](#) Children Unite.
- 81 See the journey companion on transitions at Our Voices https://ourvoices.beds.ac.uk/media/hjmbashb/v2-journey-companion_transitions.pdf.
- 82 See Tool 1 Risk Register Template in ECPAT International (2025). [Core Component: Creating a Safe Environment](#). Bangkok: ECPAT International.



328/1 Phaya Thai Road,
Ratchathewi, Bangkok,
10400, Thailand

Telephone: +662 215 3388
Email: info@ecpat.org
Website: www.ecpat.org

For more information:

