

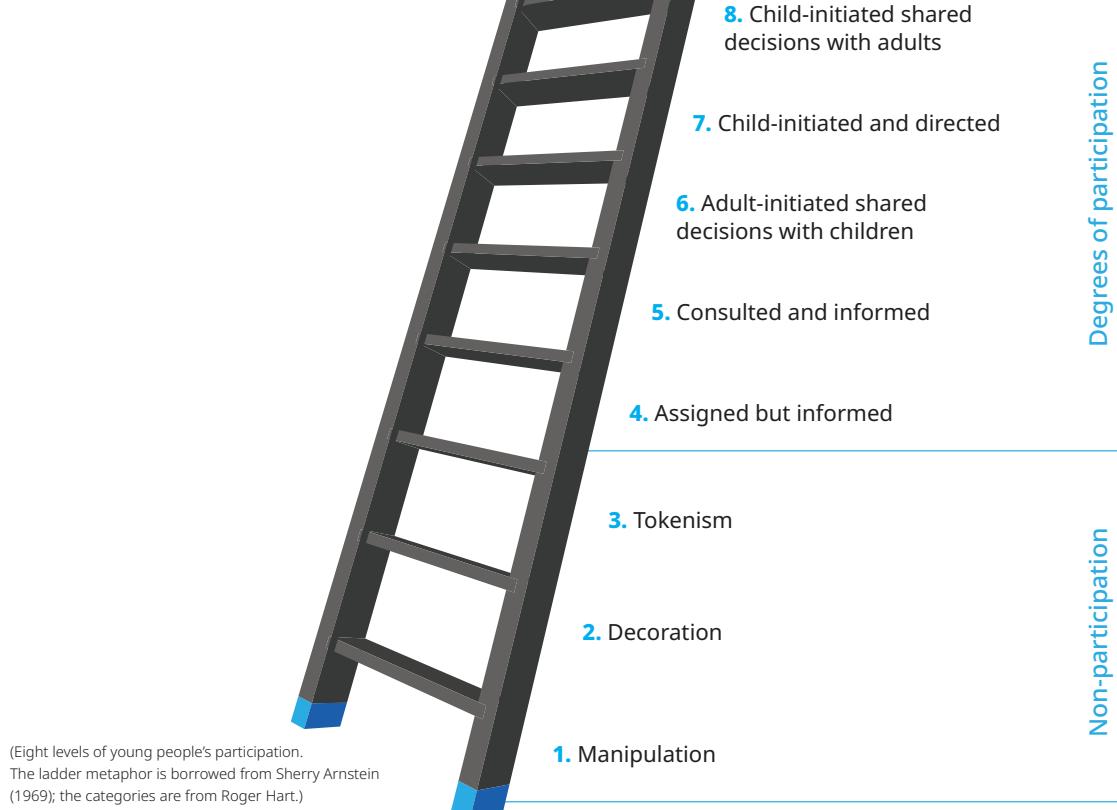


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Thematic Brief

# Meaningful Participation of People with Lived Experience of Care

## The Ladder of Participation



(Eight levels of young people's participation.  
The ladder metaphor is borrowed from Sherry Arnstein  
(1969); the categories are from Roger Hart.)

**A person with lived experience is anyone with personal experience of the child protection and care system. This term includes children in different forms of alternative care, children or young people who have left alternative care (sometimes called "care leavers")<sup>1</sup> and parents or caregivers (biological or alternative) involved in child protection services or with a child who has experienced alternative care.**

## Overview of Participation

Participation is an ongoing process, which includes information-sharing and dialog with and empowerment of children and adults to ensure their views shape the outcome of the process.<sup>2</sup> There are many different levels of participation: from giving a platform to share voices to activities that children themselves initiate. Participation that is only "tokenistic" is superficial

1 A care leaver refers to an individual of any age who has spent part of their childhood or adolescence in the formal care system and has since left care. Some care leavers "age out" of care and are therefore transitioned from the system at 18 years old, however, even children who spent only a short period in care are still considered care leavers. A care leaver is just one type of person with lived experience.

2 Adapted from: Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General Comment No. 12 as cited in Save the Children. (2021). The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation; and Changing the Way We Care and Lumos. (2022). Putting Child and Youth Participation at the Heart of Care Reform.

rather than meaningful. For example, an activity where participants do not have influence but are participating is seen as tokenistic. For participation to be *"meaningful,"* participants must:

- understand the purpose of their participation,
- understand the level of influence they can expect,
- be listened to,
- have their ideas acted upon, and
- receive adequate feedback and follow-up.

## Principles of participation

- > **Transparent and informative:** Participants are provided with information about their right to express their views freely, as well as details about how participation will take place, its scope, purpose, and potential impact.
- > **Voluntary:** Participants are not coerced into expressing views against their will. They are informed that they can withdraw from the process at any time without any negative consequences.
- > **Respectful:** Participants are treated with dignity and are not stereotyped based on their age, gender, care status, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, religion, or any other background.
- > **Relevant:** Participants are allowed to express their views on issues of real relevance to their lives.
- > **Participant-friendly:** Create safe, welcoming, non-intimidating, and collaborative environments. Participants are adequately prepared, confident, and able to contribute their views.
- > **Inclusive:** Activities avoid existing patterns of discrimination, are culturally sensitive, and provide opportunities for marginalized people with lived experience.
- > **Supported:** Participants have opportunities to receive training that will help them participate in a meaningful way (e.g. public speaking, group work, organizational skills).
- > **Safe and sensitive to risk:** Precautions are taken to minimize the risk of violence, exploitation, or any other negative consequence of participation. The psychosocial well-being of those engaged in participation is prioritized.
- > **Accountable:** Participants are provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced outcomes. They are given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes.

## Tips on Meaningful Participation



**Strengthen the capacity of those participating.** Skills for PWLE can be built around organizing, writing, working in teams, and public speaking, as well as self-care techniques. Skills for those working with PWLE can be built around strength-based communication, empathy, and understanding trauma. Peer-to-peer support can help strengthen the capacity to participate just as much as more directed training.



**Include meaningful participation in projects.** Do not withdraw until the end; start with the design and carry it through to implementation over time. Examples include advisory groups for children and adults to give input during implementation, participation in reflections or evaluations, and sharing lessons learned with other interested oblasts.



**Embed participation in case management.** This includes encouraging children and families engaged being supported through case management to share their views and opinions, verbally or in other ways.



**Promote self-advocacy.** A **self-advocate** is a person who draws on their lived experience to advocate for their own rights and the rights of their peers or someone who does not have lived experience but advocates alongside peers who do. Strengthening the skills and opportunities for children, youth, and adults with lived experience to engage in self-advocacy includes identifying people who want to be self-advocates, forming groups and/or partnering with established self-advocate groups, and supporting them in their wish to become champions.



**Monitor participation.** It is important to have multiple ways for participants to give feedback, including anonymously.

**Adjust participation activities based on the age and capacity of those participating.**



**Enable the participation of persons with disabilities.** To facilitate their engagement, considerations around venue, time, translation, or supportive devices should all be planned for and reflected in planning documents, including budgets.



**Create/strengthen participation groups in a manner that allows them to lead and make decisions.** Better Care might consider providing organizational strengthening and leadership development of these groups, to support them to become independent and self-sufficient. Activities that promote the group or network participation include providing platforms for groups and networks to influence the care reform agenda at the local and national levels, supporting their attendance at events, and identifying and supporting speaking engagements.



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Wherever he lives.

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A future.

A fair chance.

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For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

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And never give up.