TALKING SAFELY

IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM 1 1 0 children aged 8 - 1 9



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Changefactory Knowledge Centre

Changefactory Knowledge Centre Published 2021 Project leader Yngvil Granly Photo David Dundas Brandt, Morten Brun Photos are of participants in the survey

THANK YOU

A HUGE THANK YOU to those of you who took part in this survey. Thank you for the experiences you've shared and the advice you've given.

You know a lot about what it's like to receive help from the Child Protection System. You often know what's needed to get the Child Protection System to give you help that makes it better for you. You know a lot about what needs to be done so that children can talk safely.

The knowledge you have about all of this is important for Norway. Thank you for being brave and sharing this knowledge. It can make the Child Protection System safer for more children. More children can receive help that makes life better for them.

THANK YOU FROM OUR HEARTS

THANK YOU TO CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

Thank you to all of you who wanted to contribute. Thank you for showing trust. Thank you for making an effort so that the children could participate in this survey. Thank you for the commitment you showed for children to be able to express themselves freely and for the fact that this is important for Norway. We hope you enjoy this report, with knowledge directly from many children across Norway.

TO ALL ADULTS IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

You are vital. You can make vital decisions about the help that children and families will receive and about where children will live. What you do and decide can make a big difference for all the children you meet, both in their lives then and there, but also for a long time to come.

For children who need help from the child protection system, you can be absolutely crucial. Most children in the Child Protection System have something important that they want to tell. What can determine whether they're able to tell you is how safe it can be with you. For decisions to be correct, children first have to be allowed to talk safely.

All of you can be adults that children can talk to. The advice children have given in this report can be used to make it safe for children you meet, and for them to gain trust in you. You can take the advice to heart and use it when meeting with each individual child.

First and foremost, however, each individual child has important knowledge about their own life. Each of them knows something about what they need and what helps them.

When adults make it safe enough, each child can tell them more. This enables you to make better decisions together with each child concerned. This makes the Child Protection System useful and legally safeguarded for children.

WELCOME



ABOUT THE QUALITATIVE SURVEY

The qualitative survey was carried out during the first half of 2021. Experiences and advice were collected from 110 children aged 8-19. These were systematised and summarised.

Main topics in the qualitative survey

- What needs to be done to make it feel safe for children to talk to adults in the Child Protection System
- What kind of information do adults have to give to children
- What do adults have to do when information from or about the child is going to be shared
- What do adults have to give children the opportunity to have a say in deciding
- What do adults have to do so that children's thoughts and opinions aren't influenced by adults
- What do adults have to do and how should they be in order to feel safe for children
- What do adults have to do so that children can talk in places that feel safe for them

Conducting the sessions

The children were invited to take part in the qualitative survey in collaboration with child protection services. The children themselves chose whether they wanted to participate. They could participate with other children or alone, in sessions or in one-to-one conversations. The children chose how much or little they wanted to say, and could withdraw at any time, without having to explain why. They were given information about how no one would know exactly what they had said. They were also told that the experiences and advice they shared were going to be summarised together with answers from many other children in Norway. After the sessions and conversations, the researchers were available to the participants, to chat, support and answer any questions they might have.

Out of consideration for privacy and the individual participant, the researchers worked to ensure that the children's history or family didn't become the focus in sessions or conversations. The focus was on the children's meeting with the Child Protection System and the advice the children had. The children in the photos in the report, and legal guardian(s) if the child was under 16, have given consent and approved the use of photos.

Summary of the knowledge

Once experiences and advice had been collected, the anonymised material was thematically sorted. Explanations that were repeated by many children were summarised in the form of text or bullet points. The percentages are calculated based on how many answered each of the questions.

Children from around the country

The children in the qualitative survey lived in Alta, Tromsø, Harstad, Vesterålen, Bodø, Malvik, Trondheim, Oppdal, Ålesund, Askøy, Bergen, Tysnes, Strand, Stavanger, Elverum, Oslo, Drammen, Holmestrand, Skien, Fredrikstad, Arendal and Kristiansand.

Changefactory collaborated with the following child protection systems: Vesterålen, Malvik, Trondheim, Strand, Askøy, Østre Agder, Arendal, Bamble and Elverum. Thanks again to each of these services.



CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

For more than 10 years, Changefactory has collected experiences and advice from children in child protection services. Children have explained that they have to be able to speak safely, in order to talk about what's most important.

In previous qualitative surveys, children have answered that for them to be able to speak safely, adults have to feel safe for children, children have to be able to speak in places that feel safe and children have to be given enough and understandable information. What a child says can't be shared with others without the child knowing. What the child says also has to be the starting point when something is going to be decided about the child.

Children's procedural rights

In this qualitative survey, we have asked children what adults in child protection services have to do so that it feels safe for children to talk to adults. There is a great similarity between the main answers from children and the procedural rights children have according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Below is a brief presentation of each of the procedural rights children have.

How to assess what is in the best interests of the child

- according to UNCRC art. 3 and the Norwegian Constitution \S 104

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. This applies, for example, when the Child Protection System investigates, decides what kind of help a family should receive at home, when the help is evaluated, when it is decided whether a child should be moved, how the framework around a child should be in a Residential Child Care Institution or foster home or in decisions about contact sessions.

To determine what is in the best interests of the child, adults must ensure that the child has been given sufficient and understandable information, that the child is free to express their opinions, and that the child's right to privacy is respected. These are the child's procedural rights, and they must be fulfilled before deciding what is in the child's best interests.

Child protection measures must be in the best interests of the child. What is in the child's best interests must be determined through a specific assessment. The child's opinion is a crucial factor in the assessment of what is in the child's best interests.

The child's right to information

- Implicitly follows from UNCRC art. 12 see. general comment no. 12 sections 16, 25 and 41

The UN Children's Committee states that children have the right to be given all the information necessary to express themselves freely and to participate in deciding what is best for themselves in a situation. The right to information is therefore a prerequisite for the child to be able to express themselves freely about actions and decisions that need to be taken.

The right to information means that the child must, among other things, be given information about:

- The situation and the case
- What information the adults have and who they have gotten the information from
- What happens with the information the child provides
- What decisions can/must be made going forward
- What alternative solutions are available
- What consequences the different choices can have

The information must be given in a considerate and understandable way, it must be repeated when the child needs it, and the child must be given new information throughout the process.

Children's right to express themselves freely

- UNCRC art. 12 and the Norwegian Constitution. Section 104

Children have the right to express themselves freely in all matters that concern them, and their opinion must be given due weight. National authorities have a duty to ensure this right for all children, without exception. This is an independent right that all children have, which neither parents nor other adults can limit.

Allowing children to express themselves freely is done by ensuring that:

- the child is given useful and understandable information (General comment no. 12 section 25),
- the child feels safe and respected (General comment no. 12 section 23),
- the child is allowed to speak without influence, pressure or manipulation (General comment no. 12 section 22), and
- the child can express themselves without the consent of parents or other guardians.

There is no age limit for when a child should be heard; what is of importance is whether the child is able to freely express themselves about the matter (General Comment No. 12, paragraphs 20-21)

If decisions are made that do not align with the child's wishes, the child must have the opportunity to express how they think this will affect them. As a general rule, the best interests of the child cannot be used as a justification for denying them the right to freely express themselves.

The child's right to respect for their private life

- according to Article 16 of the UNCRC, the Constitution Section 102 and Article 8 of the ECHR.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that no child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy. In practice, this means that professionals can't automatically share information from or about the child within the service, with other services, or with parents.

There must be a legal basis that allows such sharing, and the interference with the child's privacy must be necessary. In many cases, information is shared from or about the child without considering the child's right to privacy. If information is shared without the child's knowledge, the child may lose trust in the adult who shared it.

Respecting the child's right to privacy is an important prerequisite for the child's right to express themselves freely. The child must be informed of what may happen with the information they share before an adult starts talking to them. When professionals consider sharing information from or about the child with others, it is an action or decision that affects the child. Therefore, adults must inform the child that information is being considered for sharing and allow the child to express themselves freely before sharing the information. This applies to all children regardless of age. It must also be assessed whether sharing the information is in the best interests of the child.

This does not mean that other professionals, services, or parents should never be given information from or about the child. However, the procedure to ensure the right to information and to express themselves freely must be followed, and there must be a legal basis for sharing. In addition, adults must assess whether sharing the information is necessary.

New Child Welfare Act from January 1st, 2023

On June 10th, 2021, a new Child Welfare Act was passed by the Norwegian Parliament. It comes into effect on January 1st, 2023. The act takes the procedural rights of children seriously. Below are two provisions of the new Child Welfare Act:

§ 1-3 The best interests of the child

In actions and decisions that concern children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

Child welfare measures shall be in the best interests of the child. What is in the best interests of the child must be determined through a concrete assessment. The child's opinion is a central factor in the assessment of the child's best interests.

§ 1-4 The child's right to participation

A child who is capable of forming their own opinions has the right to participate in all matters concerning the child according to this act. Children have the right to express themselves to child welfare authorities independently of their parents' consent, and without their parents being informed beforehand. The child shall receive adequate and adapted information and has the right to freely express their opinions. The child shall be heard, and their opinions shall be given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

Children shall be informed about the use and accessibility of information obtained from them. The child has the right to express their views before it is decided to share the information, and their opinion shall be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

A child may be allowed to bring a person they trust to meetings with child welfare authorities. The trusted person may be required to maintain confidentiality. The rights children have, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the new Child Welfare Act, make it possible for child protection workers to meet the child in a way that ensures that trust in adults is preserved and children can tell the important things to the Child Protection System. In this way, children can get useful help.

National authorities, educational institutions, service managers and professionals who work with children all have a duty to know and contribute to ensuring children's procedural rights.



WHAT CAN BE DONE NATIONALLY AND LOCALLY

What national authorities can do

In the new Child Welfare Act, it's clearly stated that what is in the child's best interest must be decided after a concrete assessment. It also states that the child's opinion must be a central factor in the assessment of what is in the child's best interests. Children's right to express themselves freely is more concrete than in the previous law. Children's right to respect for their privacy is now in the law as a part of the right to express themselves. According to the new law, children have the right to speak to the Child Protection System regardless of their parents' consent, and without the parents being informed about the conversation in advance.

This report is a contribution from children to how these rights can be secured in the Child Protection System. Understanding and taking the advice seriously can provide good help in safeguarding children's rights in practice. Guidelines, circulars and guides have to be updated in order to be in line with the new Child Welfare Act and to show professionals in the Child Protection System how the new Child Welfare Act should be used in practice.

Things every municipality and service can do

The municipal administration and the management in the Child Protection System are important to ensure that more children in the municipality's Child Protection System can talk safely to the Child Protection System. Together you can ensure children's procedural rights in the Child Protection System. This can contribute to children being able to tell more of what's important to them to the Child Protection System. Then more children can get better help.

More than 150 child protection services collaborated with Changefactory in 2013-2016 in the professional development work "Mitt Liv barnevern" ("My Life Child Protection System"). In 2016, an agreement was reached on "Recommendations for good practice for the Child Protection System that works with children and young people" together with over 150 child protection services in Norway.

Based on this, Changefactory, in collaboration with lawyers, has drawn up procedures for how the processes in the Child Protection System can be done, that include children's procedural rights. The procedures are thus based on knowledge from children, professionals and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. They describe how children's right to information, privacy, to express themselves freely and the child's best interests can be ensured in all meetings and conversations with children, in investigations, measures of assistance, moving and contact sessions.

Examples from the procedures

- Investigation: If the child doesn't want anything or parts of what the child has told to be shared, the child must, as far as possible, be allowed to speak freely about why, before anything is shared. (the right to speak freely and privacy)
- Measures of assistance: The child is allowed to express themselves freely about what the child thinks the parents need guidance on and how this should be done, before it's decided which help measures a family should receive. (the right to speak freely)
- Relocation: the child protection system provides the child with information about why they think the child can't live at home and alternatives for moving, like foster care, network foster care, Residential Child Care Institutions, etc. (the right to information)

Read about the procedures here: https://forandringsfabrikken.no/barnevern/framgangsmate-for-prosesser-i-barnevernet

Things the educations can do

Students need to learn children's procedural rights and how to use them in their work in the Child Protection System in order for more professionals in the Child Protection system to be able to secure these rights. Students and student union representatives have clearly stated that they want to learn more about how they can secure these rights when they meet children and young people.

An example of a decision in a student parliament:

- OsloMet will become a children's rights university, with an emphasis on children's four basic procedural rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in all fields of study that train students to work with children.
- OsloMet must introduce knowledge directly from children into the syllabus for all relevant fields of study.

Several student parliaments at colleges and universities have decided that they want children's procedural rights included in the syllabus and as a part of the teaching in the educations of professionals who will meet children.

From Bufdir's case management circular

In the proceedings circular from August 2022, the following is stated about children's procedural rights:

Consideration of the best interests of the child is one of the fundamental principles in Norwegian Child Welfare Law. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has specified that "the best interest of the child" is both an overarching principle, a procedural rule and an independent right for the child. The child protection system must always assess whether actions and decisions will be in the best interests of the child. This is stated, among other things, in Section 104 of the Norwegian Constitution, Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention on the Rights of the Child) and Section 4-1 of the Child Welfare Act.

The child's best interests must be a fundamental consideration in all actions that affect children, whether they are carried out by public or private welfare organisations, courts, administrative authorities or legislative bodies (Article 3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child). Research and systematised experiential knowledge are central to the Child Protection System's professional assessments and the discretionary assessment of what is in the child's best interests.

The right to participation and influence applies throughout the decision-making process and for all matters concerning the child, not just when legal or administrative decisions are made. The child will, for example, have the right to participate in the selection of a foster home or Residential Child Care Institutions, in the assessment of contact sessions, preparation of action plans and in the use of coercion in Residential Child Care Institutions. The duty covers all bodies that have tasks under the Child Welfare Act.

The Child Protection System must ensure that the child's opportunity to participate takes place in a safe environment. The child must be given sufficient and adapted information based on age and maturity, and the Child Protection System must facilitate for the child to be able to express themselves freely, either verbally or through non-verbal communication.

The UN Children's Committee emphasises that the child must be able to "freely" express their views. This means that it must be done without pressure, manipulation or undue influence, and that the child can choose whether he/she wants to make use of the right to be heard.

The child's right to participate means that the Child Protection System cannot simply assume that the child does not want to talk to the Child Protection System if this information comes from the parents. In such cases, the Child Protection System must ask to contact the child directly to ask if the child wants to have a conversation.

A central source of information is the child themself, and it is important that the best possible collaboration is established with the child. A good relationship with the child will contribute to the child perceiving the Child Protection System's assistance as help and support. Insight into the child's own experience of the situation is necessary to be able to assess what is best for the child.



INFORMATION

For children to know enough about what concerns them, they have to be given enough and understandable information. Then it can be easier for them to say what's important to them, so that the Child Protection System can feel safe. Adults can then make good decisions for the children more easily.

From children's rights

In order to ensure that children can express their views freely and safely, it is important that the child receives all the information and guidance that it needs. Those responsible for speaking with the child must make sure that the right to information is secured, as it is a prerequisite for the child to be able to make clear decisions (UNCRC art. 12 and General comment no. 12 par. 16,25).

ADVICE

Advice on what adults have to give information about for children to be able to talk safely:

Give information about what children are allowed to express their opinion about

- they get to know what they have the right to and can say something about in their own lives
- they get to know that something can be done or changed
- they can give their opinions more easily
- they can open up more to adults in the Child Protection System
- without it, children can't know what they can have opinions about
- the Child Protection System may forget to ask for children's opinions

What adults have to give information about:

- what the child can talk to you about
- · what you want the child to have an opinion about
- · what the child can have a say in deciding

Give information about why you need to know children's opinions

- it may be safer to tell
- they won't have to feel afraid
- they may be able to avoid feeling painful or bad feelings
- it can become easier to express their opinion

What adults have to give information about:

- · what the child's opinions will be used for
- that the child's opinions won't be used against the child

Give information about what can happen with what children say

- they can feel safer and trust the adult more
- it may be easier to talk about what is most important
- they can feel like they have more control
- it can be scary not knowing, because it's about children's lives

What adults have to give information about:

- what the word confidentiality specifically means
- that you won't share anything the child has said before you've spoken to them first
- that you and the child can work out what to do together if the child says no
- if you intend to tell the adults at home
- if you intend to tell other professionals
- why you want to share information
- · what you intend to tell

Give information about the help children can get

- children need to know why they are in the Child Protection System
- children need to know what's going to happen next
- children need to know about their options

What adults have to give information about:

- what's written in the concern report
- how often the contact person talks to the adults the child lives with
- why the child is in the Child Protection System
- · why the child is called into a meeting
- what has been said in meetings
- · what options the child has
- · where they will move, if they are to be moved
- whether they will stay where they live now for a short or long time



EXPERIENCES

What children could be given enough information about

15% were told what they could express their opinions about 7% were told a little about what they could express their opinions about

17% were told who was going to know what they had said 9% were told a little, or sometimes, who was going to know what they had said

Summarised experiences

- · what they could express their opinions about
- · who would get to know what they had said
- how they could get hold of their contact person
- why the Child Protection System needed to know the child's opinions

How it has turned out for children:

- it's become easier to express their opinion when they know what they can have an opinion about
- it's become easier to understand why the Child Protection System is asking about something, when they say why they need to know the children's opinions
- it's been nice to know how they can get in touch with the contact person
- it's become calmer inside children when they know this

What children could be given too little information about

73% weren't told what they can express their opinions about

74% weren't told who would get to know what they had said

Summarised experiences

- · what children could express their opinions about
- · who would get to know what they had said
- how they could get hold of their contact person
- why the child protection system needed children's opinions

How it has turned out for children:

- it's become difficult to tell something, when children don't know what they can have an opinion about
- they've felt that the Child Protection System isn't interested in children's opinions
- they've become insecure when they haven't known who'll know
- they haven't told, when they don't know who'll know
- they've lost trust when the Child Protection System shares information
- they've become scared, insecure or irritated
- it's felt bad not knowing how they could get in touch with the Child Protection System
- it's been bad having to ask carers for the Child Protection Systems contact information
- they haven't needed to know how to get hold of their contact person

QUOTES

When I meet her, she usually says it's between us. I haven't heard of her telling anyone else so I'm pretty sure she doesn't.

We talked a few years ago, then it came up that if things aren't done the right way, he said that I was allowed to say my opinion about it. Good that I know that.

It's good because then I get to say things I couldn't say to my mother.

They've said that they ask so that they can find solutions or come up with examples.

It prepares me for what I can have an opinion about. Then I think a little more clearly about what I really want. Gives me some time to prepare.

I've always thought that I could have an opinion about things when I got older, but I never get to.

I haven't been told what I can have an opinion about, they're very bad at that.

I don't get to know that what I've said has been shared with others, but I realise it when someone else starts talking to me about it, and they haven't heard it from me. Feels a bit like being in a police interrogation. They just want to get a lot of information without giving anything in return. Suspect for living my own life.

It becomes difficult when they take away all your opportunities by not telling you what you can have an opinion about.

I definitely don't bother explaining a lot of things to the Child Protection System and I'm terrified that they'll share it. So then I won't say anything.

If I say something to someone, and I don't get to know that they've shared it to someone else, then I don't feel like talking. Don't feel like I can trust them.

I will live in fear. My word doesn't mean more than my mother's.

I was in a situation where I needed to call the Child Protection System or talk to them but didn't know how. The only alternative was to ask my foster mum to call. But that doesn't work when she's the problem.



SHARING INFORMATION

For children to be able to talk safely, adults need to talk to children before sharing any information about them. This has to be done in a way that feels safe for children. Children can then gain trust in the adult and be able to tell what's important to them.

From children's rights

Children have the right to respect for their privacy (UNCRC art. 16, ECHR art. 8 and the Norwegian Constitution § 102). In order to share information, the sharing must have a legal basis and it must be necessary. Children also have the right to information and to express themselves freely when adults are considering sharing information from or about the child. Adults must also, before sharing, consider whether it is in the child's best interest to share.

ADVICE

Advice on what adults have to do for children to be able to talk safely:

Understand that it can be bad or hurtful when you share information

- there's a reason why the child is in the Child Protection System
- it can get very bad for the child
- there may be more violence at home
- the child may lose trust in adults

What adults need to do to understand:

- · always remember that it's about each child's life
- · ask the child what might happen at home if you tell
- you have to take extra care that the child is safe after you've shared information

Talk to the child before anything else is said

- you don't know what feels safe until you ask
- it can be bad or hurtful if you say something without the child knowing
- the child can prepare for what will happen when they get home
- the child may stop trusting you if you don't collaborate with them before information is shared

What adults have to do before information is shared:

- explain why you want to share the information
- find a solution together with the child
- · let the child say what they think
- find out together with the child who you can tell, how to tell and what to tell
- meet the child in the middle if you disagree
- explain clearly to the child if you think a situation is dangerous
- · don't change what you agreed on

Be brave if children say no

- children always have a reason why they say no
- if something is told without the child wanting it, the child may stop telling

What adults have to do if the child says no:

- ask the child to explain why they're saying no
- talk warmly and with kind voices and words
- ask the child if they want to talk about it with a person they trusts
- find out together with the child what can be done
- · respect, as much as you can, that the child says no

Don't break the trust

- it may become safe for the child to tell more of what's important
- children can't tell honestly if you share information without talking to the child first
- children may be afraid to talk openly, in case you share it

What adults have to do to keep trust:

- find out together with the child what should happen next
- make children feel secure that you aren't going to share
- don't decide something based on something the child has done a long time ago

Be honest about what is written down

- children know what they themselves have said, and can help so that it's written down correctly
- adults may have misunderstood, in which case the child must be given the opportunity to clarify
- the child may be less afraid that something has been written down incorrectly

What adults have to do when writing something down:

- write it down exactly as the child has said it, not in keywords
- don't assume what an abbreviation means, ask what it means
- set aside time to make a summary of the conversation together with the child
- let the child read through it after the talk and make corrections if something has been written incorrectly

EXPERIENCES

Adults who spoke to children, before they shared information

18% haven't experienced that adults shared information without the child wanting it

Summarised experiences

- · asked the child if the adult could share information
- let them write down what the adult could share
- didn't share if the child didn't want to

How it has turned out for children:

- · they felt that adults wanted to listen and understand
- they've gained trust, and trusted the adult more
- it's felt safe, nice and important
- it's felt like the adult really cares

Adults who didn't talk to children before they shared information

78% have experienced that adults have shared information without the child wanting it

Summarised experiences

- · didn't ask them if they could tell share the information
- shared information without it being okay for the child
- not shown or told what they have written down

How it has turned out for children:

- it's become scary and unsafe
- they've been disappointed, and sometimes angry
- they've lost trust in adults
- they've felt let down by the adult
- they've told less or stopped telling
- they've felt that the situation has worsened

QUOTES

When I said some things, quite serious things, they listened to me. They kept it a secret.

They've said that no one will know what they write down. They've said, for example, is it okay for mum or dad to read this?

I know that the one I have now doesn't share information. The other one did. The good one lets me look through notes and say what can be shared if I want.

I think it was nice. It would have been very bad if I had said something and they had written it down and suddenly dad had read it.

It feels safe to know who knows. You know where the information goes.

It feels really good when they ask permission to share information. It feels like they care about how you feel and that they care about you.

They've shared information without my knowledge. It's uncomfortable. It hurts my feelings and I feel like I can't trust the person anymore.

They've shared information with mum and dad. That has created challenges.

They say they have to have my approval, but they tell people whether I give it or not.

I noticed it in the look on my mother's face when she came home. Felt so damn small. Went straight back out and didn't come home for 2 days. Was terrified to meet her.

The reason I don't trust them is that they've broken their promise once. They shared information without my permission. So they just lie.

The thing is that they write down the wrong information. They use the information in a wrong way. Then the adults will get the wrong information.

I shut down. Close up the wall in front of my heart. Don't let anyone in.

I saw that it affected us and my family. I was scared and sad. I talked less, became less honest.

I overthink everything people say or do. Just think they know everything.



SAFE DECISION-MAKING

For decisions adults in the Child Protection System make to be safe and useful for children, adults have to collaborate with children about the decisions they have to make. Children can then have the opportunity to tell what is important to them, and why it's important. It can lead to decisions being safer and more useful for them.

From children's rights

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the best interest of the child must be a primary consideration in all actions concerning children. This means that what is in the best interest of the child must be considered in all matters and decisions, and that the consideration of the child's best interests must be given great weight. The child's opinion must be a central element in the assessment of what is best for the child (UNCRC art. 3, the Norwegian Constitution § 104)

ADVICE

Advice on what adults have to do for children to be able to talk safely:

Let the child choose a safe person

- the safe person can know and understand the child
- it can feel good to have someone there that the child trusts
- the safe person can help so that the child can talk safely
- it may be easier for the child to answer honestly
- the safe person can help the child in conversations with the Child Protection System

What adults have to do:

- explain that it's the child's decision who that person will be
- ask if and when the child wants to be accompanied by a person they trust
- · ask the child who it should be
- ask if the child wants to talk to that person before talking to the the Child Protection System

Let the child say something about who in the Child Protection System they want to talk to

- only the child themself knows who they trust
- the child may dread having to talk to someone they don't want to talk to
- the child may be afraid to ask themself or is afraid to seem rude
- if the child is able to tell more, they can get good help more quickly
- it can make it easier for the child to accept help from the Child Protection System

What adults have to do:

- right from the start, let children be involved in deciding who they want to talk to
- tell them that it's important that they get to talk to someone they feel safe with
- find out with the child how they can say who they want to talk to
- tell the child that you understand that not everyone feels safe with the same person
- tell them that you won't be angry or disappointed, no matter who the child chooses
- if the child doesn't know any other adults in the Child Protection System, tell the child about them

Let the child decide if they want to talk alone

- children often have good reasons for wanting to talk alone
- the adults the child lives with may be all or part of the reason
- it can be difficult to talk honestly in front of the adults the child lives with
- the child may be afraid that adults will get angry or upset
- for the child to be able to tell their wishes.

What adults have to do:

- ask if the child would prefer to talk to you without the adults the child lives with
- ask the child about this when you're alone with the child
- say that it's perfectly fine whatever the child chooses
- explain that adults can join in parts of the conversation, if the child wants to
- ask before each conversation, or make an agreement with the child when you should ask
- decide together with the child how to tell the adults they live with that they can't join in the conversation
- say that you want to help, as best you can, so that things will be good for the child

Give the child the opportunity to change their contact person

- the child often knows what's best for them
- the child often isn't able to tell if they don't feel safe with their contact person
- if the child doesn't trust the adult, they should be allowed to choose to talk to someone else
- conversations can become unsafe if the child isn't allowed to change their contact person

What adults have to do:

- tell the child that they can change their contact person if they don' feel safe
- tell adults not to get angry or upset if the child wants to change their contact person
- make sure that the child can be completely honest about whether feel safe with their contact person
- take the child seriously if they wants to switch, and find a solution together

EXPERIENCES

What children could have a say in deciding

7% had a say in deciding who in the Child Protection System they wanted to talk with

4% had a say in deciding a little about who in the Child Protection System they wanted to talk with

46% were allowed to choose whether they wanted to include adults they live with in meetings 4% sometimes got to choose whether they wanted to include adults they live with in meetings

31% were given enough information that they could bring an adult they felt safe with 3% were given some information that they could bring an adult they felt safe with

Summarised experiences

- which adult in the Child Protection System they would like to talk with
- whether adults they live with should be included in conversations
- whether they wanted to bring an adult they felt safe with to conversations

How it has turned out for children:

- it's become safe to bring the person to conversations
- it's become easier to talk without the adults they lived with in the room
- they've become happy inside to be able to take part in the decision

What children weren't allowed to have a say in deciding

89% weren't allowed to say who in the child protection system they wanted to talk to

49% were not allowed to choose whether they wanted to talk with or without adults they live with in meetings 66% weren't given enough information about being allowed to bring an adult they felt safe with

Summarised experiences

- which adult in the Child Protection System they were going to talk with
- whether adults they live with should be included in conversations
- whether they wanted to bring an adult they felt safe with to conversations

How it has turned out for children:

- they've lost trust in the Child Protection System and stopped telling
- they've felt like they're losing control over their lives
- they've felt pain inside and that they aren't taken seriously
- it's been bad to not bring an adult they felt safe with
- they haven't been able to talk with adults they lived with present in conversations
- they've been afraid of how the adults they lived with would react

QUOTES

Wasn't allowed at first, but a little later. I don't like to say things when my mother is there, because she gets upset because I have such heavy thoughts.

It would've been completely different if mum had been there, then I wouldn't have been able to talk completely honestly.

It's better to talk alone. Don't have to think about their feelings, only think about what's in my head.

You feel you have more freedom. It makes me safer.

I always get to choose who I want to bring, if I go to the Child Protection System with my foster mother or foster father.

They've asked me in front of my parents and it's not good. It's bad that they ask right in front of them, you don't want to hurt their feelings.

I've tried to change contact person many times but they refuse to let me change.

We only get assigned a person and then you're lucky or not.

It feels like what I have to say isn't important. They're more concerned with getting information from everyone else but me.

I wish I didn't have to bring my mother to meetings.

Don't trust my case manager so I don't say much. If I had been allowed to talk to someone else I might have said something.

You get hurt inside because no one listens to you. I don't trust them anymore. They do the exact opposite of what I want. It becomes wrong.

Don't get me wrong, I love my foster mum, but it isn't easy to talk about things related to your biological family when she's sitting there.

I don't tell the worst things when dad is in the room. He's the one who does things to me. How was I supposed to say things when he was sitting there?

INFLUENCE AND PRESSURE



INFLUENCE AND PRESSURE

Adults can influence children in direct and indirect ways, both with words, tone of voice, voice and body language. They can influence by what and how they say something to children. For children to be able to talk honestly, they have to be able to talk without being pressured or influenced.

From children's rights

That the child must be able to express themself freely also means that the child must not be manipulated or subjected to undue influence or pressure. The child shall express their own views, not the views of others. (General Comment No. 12 paragraph 22)

ADVICE

Advice on what adults have to do for children to be able to talk safely:

Say that what the child thinks is okay

- the child has to feel that what they say is right
- the child may feel that they've lost when they don't get to say what they mean
- it may be safer when the child is told this
- the child may be afraid of being told off if they don't know that what they think is okay

What adults have to do:

- explain that nothing the child feels or thinks is wrong
- say that the child doesn't need to be afraid of disappointing anyone
- $\boldsymbol{\cdot}$ say that no suggestions or opinions are stupid
- say that you can bear to hear how life feels for the child
- explain that you want to know what the child really means
- use a kind voice and kind words
- $\boldsymbol{\cdot}$ ask the child if anyone has tried to tell them what to

Say what you think, without it sounding like a conclusion

- children want to hear what you think, as long as it doesn't come across as fact
- it's easier for the child to be honest about their opinions

What adults have to do:

- say what you think, without making it sound like it's more important than the child's opinion
- say that you want to know the child's opinion, even if they think something different from you
- respect the child's opinions if you don't agree
- · find solutions together with the child

Don't force the child to talk about something they don't want to

- $\,\cdot\,$ the child rarely likes it when someone pressures them
- when adults pressure it can become unsafe
- \cdot the child may need time to be able to tell honestly

What adults have to do:

- allow a little more time if the child needs it
- say that it can wait until next time if there is something the child doesn't want to talk about now
- wait to ask about something, if the child has said no several times

EXPERIENCES

Why children haven't felt pressured or influenced

38% haven't experienced that adults have tried to pressure them or influence their answers

Summarised experiences

- · adults have made it safe for them to not answer
- adults have asked questions to understand exactly what they mean
- children have been able to express their own feelings and opinions

How it has turned out for children:

- it's felt good to express one's own opinions
- it's felt good inside the child when they were able to tell
- they may have had a bad conscience for not having said something the Child Protection System wanted to know

Why children have felt pressured or influenced

53% have experienced that adults have tried to pressure them or influence their answers

5% have sometimes experienced that adults have tried to pressure them or tried to influence their answers

Summarised experiences

- it has felt like adults have decided on a conclusion
- adults have asked questions in a way where they seem angry, or after something
- it has felt as if adults have tried to twist what children have said
- children have felt that their opinions are pushed down or set aside
- it has felt like adults would give them consequences if they didn't say anything
- it has felt like adults have pressured them to tell something the child didn't want to tell

How it has turned out for children:

- they've become sad, irritated or angry
- they've become uncertain, confused or afraid of saying the wrong thing
- they've felt that trust has been broken
- they've given up a little, and started to believe what the adults were saying
- they've answered what they thought adults wanted them to say, in order to be finished

QUOTES

They've tried to get me to talk about how it is at my mother's place. Then I'll say I don't want to. They listen to what I have to say a lot, if I don't want to, they don't pressure me.

I feel that the Child Protection System has protected me when I've spoken, that my opinions are important.

I was impressed with my case manager. If I hesitate, she says you don't have to talk about it.

They spend a lot of time and use arguments that are supposed to be good for me to make me believe it.

They think they know what's best for you, but you know what's best for you, you know yourself best.

They pressure with facial expressions or body movements, then they'll just breathe heavily. That's when I realise that they aren't happy about what I said.

Then I don't quite understand what they want to achieve, I get very confused. I don't really know what to answer because it's completely open. The first few times I was with the Child Protection System, they asked me about things and I said I didn't want to answer them. Then they changed the questions, got me to talk about something else, to then make me answer the questions they really wanted.

There were a lot of decisions for me, but they were trick-questions. You want this, don't you? Manipulation at its finest.

The Child Protection System has often made up their minds. If there's something you have to tell, they start asking leading questions, as if they already have the answer.

If they pressure me, it gets worse for them, so I don't bother saying anything.

You start to believe in it and put your own thoughts aside, because they're adults with education and we are children.

They talk about one thing so much and explain so much that my brain begins to believe them, even though my heart says no.



ADULTS WHO FEEL SAFE

For children to be able to talk safely, the adult they're talking to has to feel safe for the child. If not, adults may lose the opportunity to learn something important and help the child with exactly what the child needs. Adults need to take the time to figure out how to make it as safe as possible for every child to be able to talk safely.

From children's rights

Adults must ensure that it is safe enough for children to express their views. Adults must understand and receive training concerning the child's right to be able to safely express their point of view (BK art. 12 and General comment no. 12 par. 49)

ADVICE

Advice on what adults have to do for children to be able to talk safelv:

Show that you are kind

- the child can gain more trust in you each time
- it may be easier for the child to talk about the most important things
- · honesty can be important for the child to be able to trust you
- the child can become more certain that you don't judge them

What adults have to do:

- be as happy, pleasant and positive as you can
- · smile as often as you can
- use a kind and calm voice
- say nice things, for example that you're happy to see the child
- give hugs to all children who want one
- practise how to look kind
- · show reactions when the child tells something
- be yourselves

Get to know each other well enough

- it may become easier to talk
- · the child can trust you more

What adults have to do:

- set aside time to get to know each other well enough
- explain who you are and what you're going to do
- ask and show interest in other things in the child's life
- try to be a bit of a buddy

Show that you want to understand

- the child can feel that you care
- the child can gain trust in you
- · it can become safer
- the child can feel that you're on the child's side

What adults have to do:

- show that it's important to you that the child can say what they want to say
- look at the child while they're talking, don't just sit and write things down
- show with your eyes and body that you're interested
- ask follow-up questions to what the child says
- · don't interrupt when the child is talking
- · don't make arguments against children

Show that you want to help

- the child can feel that they are worth something and that the adult cares
- the child can talk about difficult things in order to get useful help

What adults have to do:

- show that you really want to help children
- show that you understand that something is difficult
- be open regardless of what the child wants to talk about
- admit it and say you're sorry if you make a mistake

Ask to be able to understand

- it may be easier to answer direct questions
- it may be easier to tell more if you ask, than if the child has to say it without you asking

What adults have to do:

- ask more questions to understand what has happened
- ask more to fully understand what the child means
- ask instead of becoming worried right away
- ask a lot of questions before making a decision
- ask instead of contradicting children
- ask as kindly and carefully as you can
- · don't beat around the bush, ask directly

Talk often and long enough with children

- the child may need time to open up
- the child may be disappointed when you don't have enough time

What adults have to do:

- meet the child as often as they wish, if possible
- talk to, or send a message to, the child outside of the times set up for conversations
- set aside enough time for the conversations
- respect that the child doesn't want to say anything right away
- be patient

Take what children say seriously

- the child can get better help
- the child can open up more
- the child can feel that you're listening properly
- the child can gain trust, or more trust, in you

What adults have to do:

- believe that what the child says is how it is for the child
- answer as best you can to messages or when the child calls
- listen carefully to what the child wants and try to understand properly
- explain that you will try to do something about what the child says

EXPERIENCES

Why children have been able to talk honestly with an adult in the Child Protection System

32% have been able to talk honestly with an adult in the Child Protection System

21% have been able to talk a little honestly with an adult in the child protection system

Summarised experiences

- they've known that the adult cared about them and wanted to help
- they've trusted the adult
- the adult has set aside enough time for them
- they've gotten to know the adult well enough
- the adult wasn't crucial for them to be able to tell

How it has turned out for children:

- they've felt that they've been allowed to keep control
- they've felt that the situation improved afterwards
- it has felt safe and they could trust the adult more

Why children haven't been able to talk honestly with an adult in the Child Protection System

46% haven't been able to talk honestly with an adult in the Child Protection System

Summarised experiences

- they didn't get to know the adult well enough
- they haven't felt that the adult really cared about them
- they've felt that the adults aren't listening
- they've felt that they weren't taken seriously
- · they haven't trusted the adult
- they didn't get enough time together with the adult
- they've had to change adults often
- they've tried to tell a little honestly, but haven't been able to tell completely honestly because adults have done something bad with what they said

How it has turned out for children:

- they've become angry, sad or scared
- they haven't felt seen and heard
- they've given up
- they've lost trust in the adult
- they haven't been able to tell honestly what they need

QUOTES

Showed that they actually care, not just about the job but about the person, and they manage to show it. Later he asks how did it go with the costume? What drawings have you made? He remembered it.

She was honest from the start. She didn't hold back information from me. She told me the things she knew and gave me lots of information. She simply made it safe.

It was the chemistry. She is quite youthful and natural and there are many who try to be youthful.

I'm not just a case file. He sees that I'm a human being with my needs and feelings.

Sometimes I've been able to talk honestly, if I've gotten to choose who and where myself and that I've gotten to steer the conversation the way I want it to go.

The difference between a safe and unsafe adult is that with the unsafe adult, it completely locks up. With a safe adult, I'm able to say what I need to get help.

Before, I was afraid to talk to the Child Protection System. They don't understand anything. They change the subject all the time when they disagree. They always twist what I say. If I show emotion it becomes a big deal or a concern. They don't listen to me.

It sticks with me, not being believed. I say a lot less because I'm sure people won't believe me. It really sticks.

The Child Protection System easily takes the parents' side, so they think that adults are right.

It's a bit disappointing that they don't want to know. They get to know mum's opinion and not ours, or how it is for us.

I've never spoken safely with the Child Protection System. They don't keep promises. They pretend they can decide everything in your life.

She can't be trusted, she talks down to me, and then I talk down to her too. It's mutual respect.

My Child Protection lady is mostly concerned with looking at the clock and ending the conversation after exactly 30 or 45 minutes.

They should spend more time with each individual child, instead of talking to the family and other family members.



PLACES THAT FEEL SAFE

Talking in a place that feels safe can make it easier to tell important things. Different places can feel safe to different children, and a place that has felt safe once may not do so another time. Adults have to find out together with children where it's safe enough to talk.

From children's rights

The Convention on the Rights of the Child art. 12 gives children the right to express themselves freely. The UN Children's Committee states that in order for children to be able to express themselves freely, it must also feel safe to express themselves. This means that adults must be providing an environment in which the child feels respected and secure when freely expressing their opinion. (General comment no. 12 para. 23)

ADVICE

Advice on what adults have to do for children to be able to talk safely:

Let the children choose where they want to talk

- children are different and feel safe in different places
- the child can feel safer
- it can help the child to answer more honestly
- it isn't certain that the child is bold enough to say where they want to talk, so you have to ask them
- it may feel less stiff
- where children feel safe can vary from time to time

What adults have to do:

- ask when you're alone with the child
- ask openly where the child wants to talk
- ask the child if you should suggest places where you can talk and things you can do together with the child
- ask if there's anything the child wants to do while you talk
- don't guess, or think you know where the child wants to talk
- · ask again each time you're going to meet the child

Make sure that the place where the child is talking feels safe to them

- the child can become safer and more relaxed
- it may be easier to talk honestly

What adults have to do:

- make sure that no one can overhear what's being said
- make sure that no one can come in while the child is talking
- make the room cosy, with for example pictures, cushions, plants or colours
- have some games or activities lying around that can be used if the child wants to

EXPERIENCES

Why children have been able to talk in a place that feels safe

31% have been asked where they want to talk 7% have sometimes been asked where they want to talk

59% have talked in a place that felt safe to them 8% have sometimes talked in a place that felt safe to them

Summarised experiences

- they've been asked openly where they want to talk
- adults suggested places where they could talk
- the place they were at, or the activity they were doing, made it safe to tell
- the place wasn't crucial for them to be able to tell

How it has turned out for children:

- it has felt safe
- it has become easier to talk
- they've felt that they've been in control

Why children haven't been able to talk in a place that feels safe

62% haven't been asked where they want to talk 33% haven't talked in a place that felt safe to them

Summarised experiences

- adults haven't asked them where they want to talk
- adults haven't suggested any places
- adults have chosen a place and it wasn't safe for them
- the place wasn't crucial for them to be able to tell

How it has turned out for children:

- they haven't been able to talk honestly
- it hasn't been safe to tell
- it's felt serious or stiff

QUOTES

When we go for drives, I relax and just talk. I'm able to talk completely safely.

We sometimes went for a walk. Hadn't asked about it but she suggested it and it made me happy. I loved it.

So in my case, I hate meeting rooms inside the Child Protection System or in offices. When they ask if I would rather go for a walk than sit in a room, I say yes.

The lady offers to pick me up from school and take me for a drive. Gives me different options, grab an ice cream or go to Starbucks.

Before I could choose a place, I didn't say anything. Now I can talk more easily when I'm in the forest or sitting by the lake.

Never been asked where I want to talk, I didn't know I could.

They say "it's best for you if we talk at school". They've given me choices, you can talk here or here or here, but not a free choice. It wasn't "what do you want?".

When I'm in a small room I get claustrophobic. It makes it hard to tell. I close up and look down a lot.

I hate sitting at a table and talking to the Child Protection System. It feels so serious

My heart beats every time I go into a meeting room.

CHANGE FACTORY KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people have to feel that the school, kindergarten, support services, police and legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all over Norway have experiences from meeting these systems and advice on how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, in order to develop and ensure the quality of good systems for children and young people.

More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

For more than 10 years, Changefactory (CF) has systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, support services, the police and the legal system. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened Changefactory Knowledge Centre, to collect knowledge from children and young people about the public systems. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to gather and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people about the systems they are in. CF seeks collaboration with similar organisations.

Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. CF has called it the Changemethod. The Changemethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It greatly considers that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many diverse children and young people to participate. It's based closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected directly from children and young people in sessions or interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safely as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by children to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on the main findings from children about what adults have to be like, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. No links are made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places in the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children.

Children and young people present

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the qualitative surveys can also be invited, as pros, in communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

Selected publications



Understand what's most important
Advice from 110 children on what the Child Protection System has to do for children to be able to talk safely



Needs to help for us Advice from 101 children on how family guidance has to be for it to feel safe and helpful for children



It's about us
Advice from 100 children on how
contact sessions has to be decided
for it to feel safe



They think they know best Advice from 152 children on how residential childcare institutions have to be for it to feel safe living there

when it's safe enough we can tell the important things