



Participation

Setting Up an Involvement Group

The following guide is designed to help Children and Young People's Mental Health Services to set up a participation group within their organisation. The ideas included in this guide are from feedback received during the young advisor's Summer PIE, the experiences of the CYP IAPT young advisors and information available on [MindEd](#).

What is participation?

Participation is the principle that service users have an active role to play in the treatment they receive and in the services they use.

Children and young people's participation is one of the **five key principles** of the CYP IAPT programme and is essential to successful service transformation. Through participation, children and young people help to shape and improve mental health services by providing feedback on their experience with that service. Participation also places emphasis on shared decision making, which means that service users have an equal role to play in making decisions about their treatment, rather than passively following the recommendations made by their mental health professional. At the shared decision level, staff initiate projects but involve children and young people in the decision-making process.

For participation to work effectively, it needs to be carried out in a meaningful way, and not just treated as a 'tick box' exercise. Services that do participation well are always thinking about how they can improve participation and make it more meaningful.

This guide aims to provide some helpful tips to set up an effective involvement group within your service.

Benefits to setting up an involvement group

There are numerous benefits to setting up an involvement group:

- It gives young people the **opportunity** to meet like-minded people
- It helps develop confidence & social skills, and provides varied **work experience**
- **Feedback**, if processed correctly within a service, contributes to improving the service for young people
- It provides **training opportunities** for the young people involved, such as mental health first aid training
- It allows for a 'Train the Trainer' style approach – young people are able to **mentor** new young people who have just started accessing CAMHS.

To recruit young people to participate, we recommend printing flyers to advertise the group and the benefits of getting involved. If possible, ask clinicians to hand out the flyer at the end of their sessions so that all young people accessing the service are aware of the opportunity. Make the first meeting short, positive and productive so that people will want to continue meeting.

How to encourage and foster involvement

There may be several barriers that might prevent young people from joining the involvement group. To help overcome potential barriers, consider the following options:

- Make the groups **accessible** with meetings held at times outside of school hours
- Work towards establishing a **feedback loop** between those involved with running the service, the clinicians and young people, so that young people can see that their opinion is valid and can lead to change. To establish such engagement requires meaningful consultation – explaining to the child or young person the purpose of the consultation/involvement and how their input will be used.
- Increase the **digital presence** – ensure there is an updated participation area on the service’s website and social media channels dedicated to participation and your involvement group. Gain followers and boost awareness by using and promoting a designated hashtag for participation work.
- **Reimburse travel** and reward young people for taking part with things like vouchers or providing food at events. You can also pay young people for their time if they are aged over 16.
- Send participation workers and young people to local **schools** to promote participation, the work of the group and the benefits to being involved
- **Link with other local CYP involvement groups** to develop a participation network to support each other and raise awareness of participation.

Considerations

When setting up an involvement group, please consider the following items that might potentially affect the running of the group. It is worth taking time to consider these areas so that you can plan to work around them and manage expectations:

- Provide a range of **involvement opportunities** to cater to each person’s strengths so that everyone has the opportunity to participate. For example, some people might fear public speaking, but would be happy to work on producing an information leaflet.
- Be aware that a young person’s **mental health** can fluctuate, which means that they may not be able to participate at certain times. There is often the expectation that the young people working in involvement are professionals and sometimes they might be paid to participate in certain activities, but there needs to be room for allowing withdrawal from certain activities in consideration of any mental ill health that the child or young person might be experiencing. Reassure the young person that participation is entirely on their own terms.
- **Suitability of the venue:** some CAMHS settings are cramped and any alternative meeting places need to have good transport links and wheelchair accessibility. Think about using community spaces.
- People do not always attend meetings or events, even after agreeing to come. Adjusting **meeting times** to outside school hours can help to mitigate this issue, as can clearly stating the benefits of involvement and ensuring these processes are well-established in services in order to fully support participation and make the young person’s attendance worthwhile.

How to demonstrate difference/measure impact

It is important to document each participation meeting so that you can monitor progress & outputs, check that the feedback has been passed on and utilised effectively, and that the resulting outcomes are explained back to young people in a consistent, transparent manner. Some ideas for measuring impact include:

- Ensure there is a **dedicated information page** on the service's website, and analyse the statistics (Google Analytics, or WordPress has an inbuilt report) to monitor traffic to the site
- Get young people involved in future recruitment through interview panels. Go through a practice run to ensure YP feels comfortable with the process.
- Continue to send out and analyse **feedback forms** to young people, CAMHS workers and those being interviewed
- Use the **Skills Tracker Sheet** (available on the collaborative website) so that young people can track their development through participation
- Write an **annual report** to submit to the board and commissioners which summarises all participation activities and highlights all the good work taking place
- Give stakeholders the opportunity to **meet the participation group** and invite them to participation events
- Send out a regular **newsletter**, co-produced with YP, to parents, staff and board members.