

SUMMARIZED VERSION



CHILD PARTICIPATION GUIDELINES FOR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS WITH CHILDREN

ChildFund
Korea



Child Rights
Coalition Asia



Save the Children

Introduction

During this time when the world is grappling with COVID-19 – when policies are being formulated and implemented not only to respond to the pandemic and address its impacts, but also to continue the efforts for the full realization of child rights despite the pandemic – the space for child participation remains crucial, and just as the pandemic pushed most of the social interactions and social services to online platforms, spaces for child participation during the pandemic had to become more digital.

In conducting online activities with children, we have to find ways to address the issues of digital divide related to access to devices and connection, as well as the digital divide in terms of gender, disability, age/generation, and access to support from adults. We also have to manage the risks inherent to the digital environment, such as exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, privacy violations, and other forms of harm.

Getting Started



1. Child Rights Principles

All our online activities with children should be guided by the **four core principles** of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and should have the **nine basic requirements** to have an effective, ethical, and meaningful participation of children, as indicated in UNCRC General Comment No. 12.

2. The Objectives and the Expected Outputs

Our activity objectives must be **relevant and important to children**. If possible, the activity objectives and/or expected outputs are already informed by children's inputs from a previous activity.

Having clear objectives and expected outputs will help us identify the **groups of children we need to reach and the role of children in our activity**. Children can be speakers, participants, facilitators, moderators, co-organizers, observers, or a combination of these roles.

3. Methodology: Online, Offline, or Both?

Due to the digital divide, online activities could limit the participation of some groups of children and, consequently, exacerbate their marginalization. As such, we should consider conducting a **hybrid of online and offline methods** in the implementation of our activity, whenever possible. This is especially recommended for activities in which children are identified as the main participants.

The decision whether or not to conduct a hybrid method could be based on a number of factors, including the participation of different groups of children, health and safety protocols, government-mandated guidelines, availability and accessibility of offline methods, and time and skills to implement and follow up.

4. Profile of Children

In organizing our activities with children, we make sure that we are involving **children from different backgrounds and situations**. We promote respect for diversity, encourage the participation of children of different ages and children from marginalized groups, and avoid putting requirements that lead to exclusion (e.g., **having a device or a stable internet connection should not be part of the criteria for selection/ participation**).

As organizers of the activity, **we should ensure that children have the support and resources to participate in our activity**. To do this, we should be aware of the profile of the children who will be involved. Knowing this will allow us to take measures, such as providing translation, making administrative arrangements for children without devices, or implementing budgetary adjustments to ensure that children have internet connection, among others.



5. Child Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct



As child rights organizations, we already have our established codes of conduct and child safeguarding protocols that include risk prevention measures and reporting mechanisms. Yet, we need to update these in order to take into consideration the inherent risks in the online space.

- *Assessing and managing the risks* - We should identify the risks and come up with action points on how to address them. Whenever possible, our risk assessment and risk management plans should be conducted in consultation with children.
- *Keeping the online activity platform private* - We should be able to see and control who can join our activity.
- *Taking control of the online features* - We can reduce child protection risks by being mindful of features that allow interaction among participants (e.g., screen-sharing, file-sharing, and other similar functions).
- *Restricting private communications* - We can reduce risks by disabling private chat or private messaging functions in video conferencing platforms.

- *Seeking consent and respecting privacy* - When we ask for the consent of the children and their parents, we must let them know that we may not be able to contain the movement of the photos/screenshots, video recordings, words uttered, or typed messages. Along with this, we should take careful evaluation if recording or livestreaming of our online activity will pose any risk to any child.
- *Establishing reporting mechanisms* - We must introduce the Child Safeguarding Focal Person/Team and inform all children how they can reach out and report any concern, either through the online activity platform or through another line of communication outside the online activity platform. Also, in video conferencing platforms, the Child Safeguarding Focal Person/Team must have the control to block or boot out anyone violating our activity's child safeguarding policy.
- *Identifying the participants* - When using video conferencing platforms, we should ask child participants to remove their surnames and/or only use their nicknames when inputting their names/connection ID in the video conferencing platform. Moreover, we can assign connection ID titles for all types of participants in our online activity.



Organizing the Online Activities

6. Designing the Program



Our online activities with children should always be child-friendly, and we ensure this by adapting our working methods according to the children's evolving capacities; creating an environment that builds their confidence to share their views; providing them with the necessary support and resources; and giving them adequate time to prepare and form their opinions.

In designing online activities, we have to consider the **length of our online activity** based on a number of factors:

- The objectives of the online activity and the roles of children
- The profile of children
- The number of children
- The children's preference
- Familiarity of children with other participants
- Children's digital access

Closely linked with our decision on the length of our online activity, we have to ensure that we allocate **time for breaks**.

- *Health breaks*
- *Movement breaks*
- *Sensory breaks*



Designing the program of our online activity also means deciding on which **online engagement tools** to use, such as slide presentations, the tools that are incorporated already in the video conferencing platform (e.g. Zoom's Poll and Annotation functions), or online tools that can be accessed using a web browser (e.g. Mentimeter or Google's Jamboard).

In deciding which tools to use, here are some of the things we should consider regarding accessibility:

- *Number and type of device needed* - Some children only have one device. If the online engagement tool requires the use of a second device, the children who only have one device will have difficulty in taking part.
- *Images and text* - Using more images and less text is important when making child-friendly content. We also have to make sure that the text/font size of the presentations and other online engagement tools are large enough to be read by children using mobile phones.
- *Pre-set time limits* - Although having a time limit can add excitement to the activity, it can put certain groups of children at a disadvantage (e.g., children with disabilities, children not speaking the language, and children with slow internet connection).



Another thing we need to decide in the conduct of our online activity is the selection of the **online activity platform**. Whether we are looking for an online survey platform or a video conferencing app, we should take into consideration the platform's accessibility and available features, including child safeguarding features.

7. Online Facilitation and Moderation

We should take into consideration some things that are inherent to online spaces:

- During our online activity, the children will be in two spaces – the online space where we have relative control, and the physical space where we have little or no influence over.
- Non-verbal cues, through body language or facial expressions, are difficult to communicate, observe, and receive when using online platforms.
- Written communication, through chat or typed messages, has risks of being misinterpreted due to the absence of non-verbal cues.
- The use of emojis or chat stickers can help in conveying the correct message.
- In using video conferencing platforms, inputs and questions can be conveyed simultaneously through verbal means or through chat or typed messages. To make sure that no child feels left out, we have to make sure that all contributions are acknowledged.
- Stick to the agreed time as much as possible, bearing in mind the digital divide. Extending beyond the allocated time may mean losing the participation of other children.



8. Preparatory Activities



Online activities with children may demand more preparations than face-to-face activities. Some of these preparations need to be done days before the actual activity proper, while some can be conducted an hour before the start of the activity.

Here are some examples of the preparatory activities:

- Provide child-friendly information about our online activity.
- Teach children how to use the online activity platform and online engagement tools.
- Set a pre-meeting between the adult mentors and the facilitators and moderators.
- Ask the adult mentors to have pre-meetings with the children.
- Provide orientation for the parents, caregivers, or other family members who may be in the same physical space with the children during the online activity.
- If we will have workshop/breakout groups, ask children about their preference and have a ready list of groupings before the activity.
- Conduct dry runs with children, such as video and audio checks.
- Ask children to suggest ice-breakers.

9. Role of Adults



We need to have trained adults in our online activities with children. Just like in face-to-face meetings, our online activities need to have an organizing team or a secretariat; a facilitation team; a child safeguarding team; documenters or note-takers; translators or interpreters; resource persons, speakers, or moderators; and adult mentors/support for the children participants.

For online activities we also need to have a **technical support team** in charge of managing the online activity platform and providing remote troubleshooting support to the participants. We also need **someone in charge of monitoring the chat or typed messages**.

For online activities, **adult mentors/support for children** may need to provide support to the child's access to and use of the devices, as well as establish a line of communication to the child outside the online activity platform, especially if the adult mentor/support is providing support remotely.



10. Digital Ground Rules

In our face-to-face activities with children, we have the activity “house rules”. In our online activities, we should also have the setting up of digital ground rules in the opening preliminaries.

11. Informing the Children

Some of the information that children should be aware of include, but not limited to, the activity objectives, the program and schedule, the participants, the online activity platforms and online engagement tools we will use, the support they will receive, the behavior expected from all the participants, and the child safeguarding protocols and procedures.

Aside from these, we can also provide children with basic digital literacy, particularly on online safety.

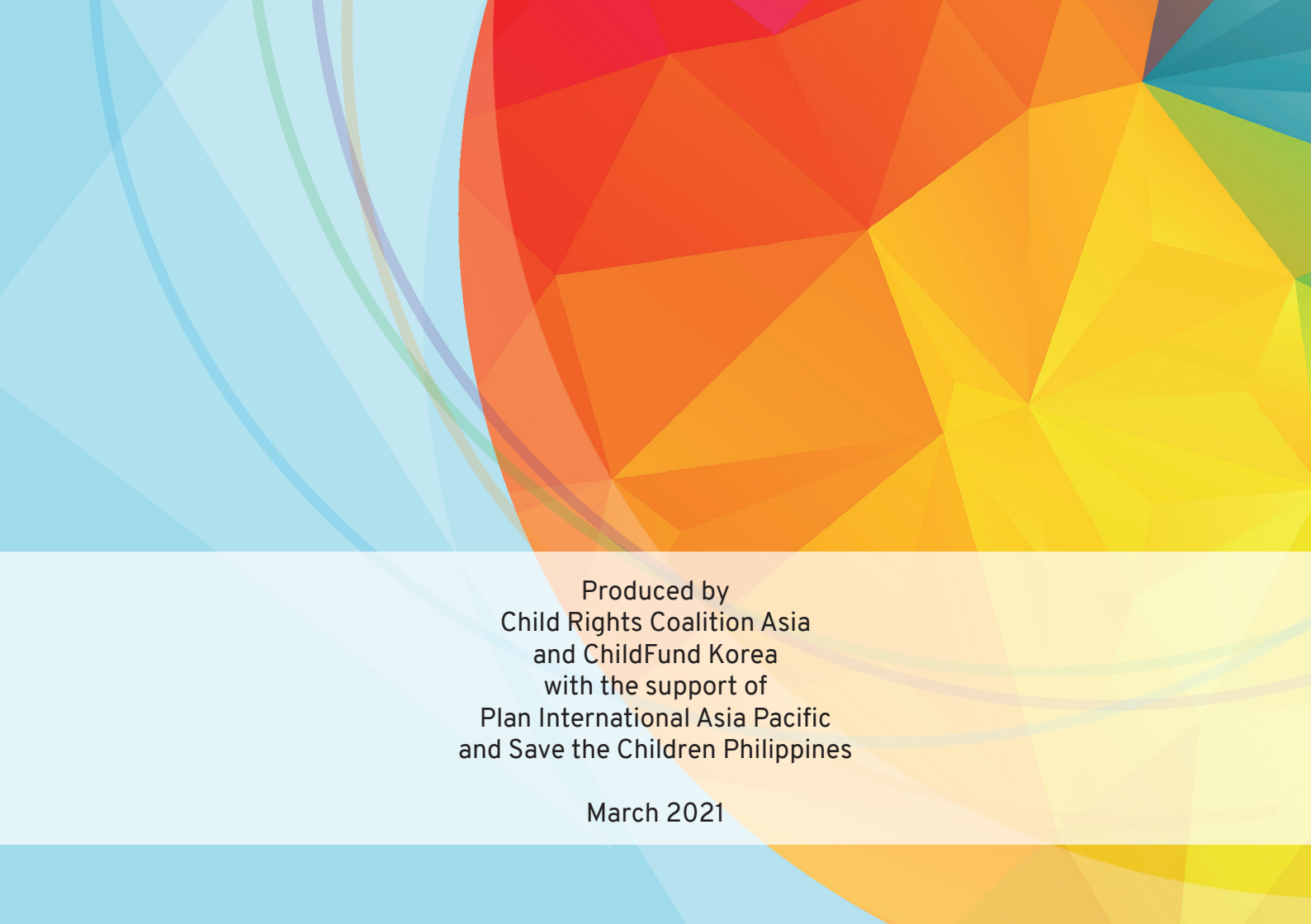


Post-activity

12. Follow-up and Evaluation

We have the accountability to provide follow-up and evaluation. These may include providing a space for children to give feedback on our online activity, either as part of the program or as a “take home” task, informing the children about the results of their participation, telling children how their inputs will be or have been used, or providing opportunities for children to be part of the follow-up processes.





Produced by
Child Rights Coalition Asia
and ChildFund Korea
with the support of
Plan International Asia Pacific
and Save the Children Philippines

March 2021