

# Child-Led Participation

A Childminders Guide



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Association

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## Forewords



Scotland is changing for the better and none more so than in the way we treat our children and young people. This is especially the case for children in their youngest, formative years when they are most susceptible to the influences of the care they receive and the environments in which they are nurtured. We know a lot more about the interaction of attachment and brain development and in Scotland we have been educating ourselves in messages from research as we apply them to the development of good practices.

We are more respectful of children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Children's rights are for all children under the age of 18 years, starting from birth. Whilst we are changing our approaches to children and young people, we have a long way to go in terms of fully satisfying our international obligations under UNCRC. I have a particular responsibility to promote and safeguard children's rights and I believe we are making positive progress in establishing children's rights being at the heart of our engagement with them.

This guide is part of the path to a better understanding and practice with our children. It has adopted the framework of 'The Golden Rules' of participation as developed by my office. These were developed and produced by children and young people and it is especially pleasing to see them further developed to apply to childminding. I am impressed by the mix of interpretation and illustration of how a rights based approach can be applied in a childminding setting. It is great that participation as articulated through Article 12 is given such emphasis with very young children who are often thought too young to express a view.



Well done to SCMA in producing an easy read document that manages to explain sometimes complex issues in a simple manner. Well done to the childminders in upholding the rights of children.

I am delighted to endorse the guide and I believe it is a positive contribution to the transformation of how we care for and develop our children in the context of a rights based approach.

**Tam Baillie**  
Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

The childminding sector occupies a very distinctive niche in the provision of early childhood services and family support. In many places, they offer an attractive and flexible provision for parents many of whom have working commitments. They often provide highly valued services in home settings where other services may be at times unavailable or are less flexible. As this good practice guide identifies, given the niche they occupy, childminders are distinctively placed to respond to the needs of young people's participation through the manner in which early learning and childcare are provided in this sector. Importantly, as I am sure all expert childminders already know, attending to the participation rights of younger children will impact on the culture and practice of what counts as childminding in any given setting.

I once visited a small rural primary school in Scotland and asked about who made the decisions about how the school grounds were being developed. Was it the children or the adults? One child looked thoughtful and paused before saying: "It does not work like that here. In here it's like a family". This story perhaps helps us remember that, just like in a family where honest debate and unconditional love and support co-exist often in equal measure, when it comes to participation, there will be a need for all participants to engage and respond. In a childminding setting, the need to include all of the children in the process of listening and responding to their ideas is key but, as this guide outlines, that this is only one side of a conversation – a dialogue – between adults and children that makes decision making an intergenerational practice leading to growth, development and change for all.

This guide will, I hope, spur the childminding sector on to even greater attentiveness to the participation rights of our younger citizens. Following the themes outlined here will, I trust, assist newcomers and experts alike to refine and improve their work in this area.

**Dr Greg Mannion**  
School of Education, University of Stirling



## Contents

|                                     |    |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| 1. Understand my rights             | 6  |
| 2. A chance to be involved          | 8  |
| 3. Remember – it's my choice        | 11 |
| 4. Value me                         | 12 |
| 5. Support me                       | 15 |
| 6. Work together                    | 18 |
| 7. Keep in touch                    | 20 |
| Conclusion                          | 21 |
| Glossary                            | 22 |
| Reference List and Acknowledgements | 23 |

## Welcome to Child-led Participation: a childminders guide

Child participation is one of the core principles that every adult who works with children and young people should respect. Taking into consideration children's wishes and making their voice heard is the best way to establish a respectful adult-child connection. Child participation is particularly important in childminding, due to the informal nature of the setting.

To improve knowledge about child participation and to provide childminders with guidance for good practice, SCMA has developed this guide and accompanying Activity Leaflet. Although a number of sources have been used in the creation of this guide, its structure follows the Seven Golden Rules of Participation. These Rules were produced by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland to help practitioners all over the country get a better understanding of participation. We have slightly modified the Rules, to increase suitability for childminders, but you can find the original version, as well as many other helpful resources on the website of the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland (CYPCS): [cypcs.org.uk](http://cypcs.org.uk). Each chapter of this guide is assigned to a Golden Rule.

All of the explanations and problems tackled in this good practice guide come from difficulties that childminders highlighted during our research. Therefore, we have tried our best to answer questions about what child participation is, why childminders have to do it, how they can do it and how to prove that they have done it. The theoretical information is all in these pages, but we do understand that you need practical advice for your day to day practice. This is why we have also created an Activity Leaflet, which is an additional resource with tips and advice that you can constantly use according to the theoretical information already received.

If you would like more information on child participation there are further reading materials in the Membership Dashboard at [childminding.org](http://childminding.org). There you can find a collection of the sources used in the creation of this guide, the books, the reports, the essays that you can read to gain a deeper understanding of the subject.



# 1. Understand my rights

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – its purpose and all the rights that must be respected, with a focus on article 12

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. The UK signed the convention on 19 April 1990, ratified it on 16 December 1991 and it came into force on 15 January 1992. All UK government policies and practices must comply with the UNCRC. The focus of this guide will be compliance with article 12: “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”. Attention will be drawn to article 31 also: “States Parties recognise the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts”. However, the UNCRC must be read and respected as a whole, all rights being equally important.

Achieving this holistic approach conjures a vision of children and young people playing, laughing, encountering richly rewarding cultural environments and engaging with ideas and with the arts and sciences. It suggests all children experiencing these types of freely chosen, spontaneous or adult supported activities from the earliest years all the way through to young adulthood, in their homes and family environments, in their communities, in schools, childcare and nurseries and through the opportunities provided by technology and online environments.

Children and young people should be involved in planning according to their age, stage and understanding. Some children and young people may need help to explain their thoughts and views. Sometimes this may be done by a person whose job it is to make sure the child's or young person's views are taken into account.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC): the Scottish Government wants to be in line with the UNCRC and has created a programme of change to make the best interests of children a priority. Let's consider how participation rights correspond with GIRFEC's eight Wellbeing Indicators

The Scottish Government acknowledges children as citizens with a contribution to make to social and political life and is committed to improving the prospects and opportunities for them to participate in issues that affect their lives. The Government's ambition is for all children and young people to become successful learners, responsible citizens, confident individuals and effective contributors (fig. 1), and this drives a programme of reform in Scotland.

Considering the influence of international law and the desire for Scotland to be the 'best place to grow up', the Scottish Government has come up with an approach called Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). GIRFEC builds on, and is reflected in a wide range of policies and strategies for all children and young people (including those who may have additional support needs). It's the bedrock for all people who work with children and young people. The approach helps childminders focus on what makes a positive difference for children and young people – and how they can act to deliver these improvements.

*“I use GIRFEC to evaluate how my service is performing. I use the Wellbeing Indicators as a benchmark of how my service should be operating. I also use it as a basis for my short, medium and long term planning. In addition I have Wellbeing Wheels for each of the children and my service overall. These are shared on a regular basis with the parents to agree next steps for their children.”*

**Donna Smith**, childminder

Childminders are vital for the achievement of relevant results, because good early years experiences are the foundation for well-adjusted children and young people, and increase their chances to realise their rights throughout childhood. Increasing awareness of the UNCRC with children, and the adults who look after them, enables them to take further steps towards creating environments and interactions which are respectful of these rights.

According to GIRFEC, listening to children is one of the most important things childminders can do to ensure that they are able to experience and enjoy their rights as set out in the UNCRC. It helps to develop respectful and confident relationships, supports and enhances learning and builds sustained thinking.



**Figure 1:** Wellbeing Wheel (each number in the Wheel corresponds to an UNCRC Article)

## Case Study: Karen Byrne

As part of her childminding service Karen uses a board outlining the eight Wellbeing Indicators of the Wellbeing Wheel (fig. 1) - Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible, Included - where she records how she meets the needs of each child in her setting and which of the eight Indicators they refer to. This allows Karen to track her minded children's progress and wellbeing, whilst meeting the demands of the Care Inspectorate's inspection process.

As each child reaches a crucial milestone in their development, Karen marks the occasion by adding the achievement to her 'Achievement Tree', which was left over from one of their Easter craft activities. The achievements can include learning to tie shoe-laces, riding a bike, or a baby being happy to be left.

Karen's 'Things to Do Board' allows input and ideas from children and parents, and she relates each activity to the Wellbeing Indicators. For example, a child wanted to make a fly, so she looked up how to make a papier-mâché model and linked the activity to all of the eight Wellbeing Indicators. Afterwards, Karen recorded the child's feedback on the board: "I didn't like the feel of the glue but liked the colours."

Childminders also have to ensure that all children and young people can access play opportunities in a range of different settings which offer variety, adventure and challenge. Children must be able to play freely and safely while learning to manage risks and make choices about where, how and when they play according to their age, ability and preference.

Childminders need to take a 'whole child' approach to practice. They need to think creatively about consulting children and families and involving them every step of the way. They should listen to what children and families have to say about what helps them best and act on this to build effective practice.

### Why don't you...

Try the Mud Kitchen activity suggested in the Activity Leaflet and link the outcomes to the eight Wellbeing Indicators.

## 2. A chance to be involved

### What is participation?

Participation can be defined as an ongoing process of children's expression and active involvement in decision-making at different levels in matters that concern them. It requires information sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and involves supporting children and young people to think for themselves, to express their views effectively and to interact in a positive way with other people.

Children can form and express views from the earliest age, but the nature of their participation, and the range of decisions in which they are involved, will necessarily increase in accordance with their age and evolving capacities. Young children's participation will be largely limited to issues relating to their immediate environment within the family, care facilities and their local community.

*"I find that if the children have an input into the activities they take part in they feel included and respected. This encourages them to get more involved in what is going on and to participate fully. The children also encourage each other to join in. It teaches them to listen to others points of view and ideas which builds their confidence. The children also often have better or different ideas than me... they are much more imaginative!"*

**Donna Smith**, childminder

Adults working directly with children have a vital role to play in listening and responding to the voice of the child. It is key to provide an environment where children feel confident and safe thus ensuring they have the time and space to express themselves in whatever form suits them.

Childminders have a crucial role to play in developing a listening culture which nurtures day to day listening and provides opportunities for children to make decisions about matters that directly affect them. Listening to children is an integral part of understanding what they are feeling and what it is they need from their early years experience.

A children's rights approach stresses the obligations of all those working with children and young people to make participation an everyday occurrence, particularly in decisions that affect them. But in order to implement a child's rights approach, a childminder has to completely understand what the law requires and suggests. Legal terminology can be quite tricky, and every term is essential in article 12 for the comprehension of the law as a whole. Every term must also be complied with, which is why all of them are explained below.

### Key terms of article 12:

- ★ **Child who is capable of forming his or her own views**
- ★ **The right to express those views freely**
- ★ **All matters affecting the child**
- ★ **Due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child**

Babies and very young children communicate their feelings, wishes and ideas all of the time. Article 12 stresses that **all** children have the right to express their views freely and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has produced specific guidelines on protecting the rights of young children. The UNCRC recognises that children have 'evolving capacities' – that their capacity to act, and influence and make decisions will evolve over time. This is not a straightforward or linear process correlated with age. Many factors affect a person's capacity – their individual circumstances, experiences, knowledge, and so on.

A children's rights approach recognises that there is no fixed age or stage at which a child can be said to be 'ready' to influence or make decisions – this all depends on the individual child and the matter being considered. The combination of age and maturity usually means the extent to which the child understands the decision in hand and the possible consequences of their views on that decision.

*"I change activities over time to adapt to the children's age and stage of development by being knowledgeable in child development. This means that I can ensure that they are challenged within their capabilities to build on their self-esteem and resilience; painting, for example. When the children were younger (aged one year old), I poured the paint they chose by lifting it out of the paint box and handing it to me as their hand grip and motor control was not sufficient to squeeze out paint. As they got nearer to one-and-a-half years old I moved paint into squeezey bottles that required just holding the container upside down for the paint to come out. As the children got nearer to three years old they were encouraged to pour paint themselves from original containers which require strong grip and strong squeezing of the paint (building pre-writing strength in hands)."*

**Hazel Moffat**, childminder

Participation and capacity is a virtuous circle – each supports the other. Therefore, children and young people should be provided with all necessary appropriate information and support to enable them to form and to express opinions and understand the consequences of those opinions. Young children can communicate non-verbally using body language, facial expressions and drawing through which they demonstrate understanding, choices and preferences.

**Children aged 0–18 months** can participate in decisions about food, clothing, who they want to be with and what they play with.

**Children aged 18 months–3½ years** can participate in decisions about food that they eat and how much, what they wear, activities they engage in, who they play/spend time with, which, if any, early years group they attend, and when.

**Children aged 3½–5 years** can participate in decisions about food, clothes, activities, people, groups they attend, their immediate environment, buying new equipment, menus, routines of the day, solving problems and conflict resolution, caring for themselves and others, rules and boundaries.

*"I use the Wellbeing Indicators to log each child's development and next steps within their individual care plans. With having a range of ages every day my activities tend to be multifunctional so that every child with differing abilities can take part. And thus providing opportunities for each child to develop and practice. For example I had an activity within a Tuff Tray consisting of scissor scoops, giant tweezers and various spoons and cups to play with rainbow coloured rice and pebbles. A one year old mindee enjoyed scooping with the spoons, a two year old mindee practiced using their pincer grip with the giant tweezers placing pebbles into the cups and the three year old mindee enjoyed using the scissor scoops practising their scissor movement. So all enjoying the main activity but in different abilities. With enough "tools" for all the younger children then took an interest in how to handle the scissor scoops - moving on to their next step."*

**Sarah Caie**, childminder

Article 12 does not require children or young people to express an opinion or to participate in decision-making – this would contravene basic human rights principles of respect and human dignity. If a child or young person chooses not to participate on one occasion, they should be given opportunities to re-engage at a later stage. This right can never be cancelled or removed.

'All matters affecting the child' may include the continuing complexities of everyday life, frequent informal choice making and the innumerable concealed prior 'decisions' now set in habits and routines, customs and structures, which adults tend to assume but children often question or have to learn, such as how to stand in line at school.

### Think about...

*How you can adapt your current activities to involve children of all ages.*



### 3. Remember – it's my choice

There is a need for real choices  
(including the choice to refuse participation)

A child-friendly environment is one where children feel safe and comfortable and are encouraged to express themselves freely. The friendlier the environment, the more readily children will feel able to contribute and the more they will gain from their involvement. Offering choice is the first step that needs to be taken in order to ensure a child's rights approach.

However, the quality of the choice is the most important part. Half-hearted, superficial choices do not fulfil the requirements of the UNCRC and GIRFEC. The childminder has to engage with the child and explain fully the opportunities provided, without attempting to sway the child's decisions. Once the full range of possibilities is clarified, the child then has the deciding power. Furthermore, a child can choose to refuse participation in an activity, and that is perfectly normal as well. No one should be forced into participating if they prefer not to.

Ultimately, it is a matter of judgement and a balancing act. The purpose of participation rights is to make sure that children grow up in an environment where their views are respected and they are encouraged to express themselves. This can surely be achieved with some effort from all those responsible for the child's wellbeing.

Participation is sometimes as easy as allowing free-play. Article 31 states that children have the right to play, as explained below.

*"Although I plan each week in advance I always leave free play time every day. This allows the children the freedom to choose what they want to do, to work together and share, or play alone for a time. It encourages their creativity and allows them to explore without being constrained by adults (within safe boundaries). It teaches them how to make decisions and allows them to go at their own pace with no pressure."*

**Donna Smith**, childminder

Right to play

Children have a right to play. Play and recreation is vital to children's development, providing the opportunity for enjoyment, exploration, refuge, and participation in cultural and social events. Play is the very centre of children's spontaneous urge for development and should be understood as a core dimension of the quality of people's engagement with the world. And through it, children acquire social skills, and develop creativity and innovation, capacity to negotiate and to care for others, and the ability to establish, understand and abide by rules. However, central to the right to play is the principle that children must be free to create their own activities and games without adult control. In other words, the right to play is exercised through the right of children to express their own views.

*"I utilise free play within my practice, in free play my position is to observe the children, help when asked but to encourage them to try themselves, provide the resources that they need so that their imagination and learning can be inspiring to them. Free play benefits the children hugely, it allows them to build in confidence knowing their voice is heard and valued. It builds self-esteem and resilience as when an activity is child led, they will try many times to get it just right! It allows their imagination to flow. They build on their learning and creativity, by giving them the skills to be confident in their own abilities and ideas. This confidence will be invaluable throughout their lives."*

**Hazel Moffat**, childminder

You can find tips for activities in the Activity Leaflet.

**Think about...**

*What free play opportunities do you offer in your service? How do you observe the children during free play time?*

## 4. Value me

Make sure children know that their views matter

Investing in participation is investing in children and young people's wellbeing. Not only can it make services and organisations more efficient and effective and therefore better able to improve children and young people's outcomes, but the process will also have a positive impact on children's self-esteem, confidence and skills.

Research has shown that participatory activities can help children and young people develop their non-cognitive abilities, which include things like perseverance, motivation, verbal and interpersonal skills and self-esteem. Developing these skills and abilities aids children's development and overall wellbeing.

Early years is a particularly crucial life stage. If children gain key competencies which allow them to form positive, successful relationships it will have a positive effect on the rest of their life. The first step into achieving meaningful child participation is by listening to children. Through being listened to, children are more likely to be able to express their views on matters that concern them and participate in decisions that affect them, which in turn gives childminders the information to take action on their behalf.

*"My main ethos is they lead, I follow. If it is child-led, they never get bored and there are no negative behaviours."*

**Hazel Moffat**, childminder

### Listening and Responding

Listening is a process which can be supported by different techniques, activities and equipment incorporated into daily play opportunities – for example; observation, conversations, using puppets and cameras. Consultations with children often work well using a multi method approach with consideration of children's ages, interests, capabilities and consent.

There are many different ways of listening including:

- ★ Asking individual children focused questions about what they enjoyed, who they played with, what they liked or disliked, how they felt, and what they wanted.
- ★ Consulting children in small key person groups.
- ★ Noting what children said to them or what they heard children saying to others.
- ★ Observing how children interact with children and adults.
- ★ Observing children's play, their levels of engagement, involvement and schemas.
- ★ Observing children's body language, reactions and moods.
- ★ Using a range of methods to communicate with young children including signs, pictures, symbols, photos, key words, and picture boards to communicate sequence of events.
- ★ Asking children to talk about pictures they had made or cut out and photos they had taken.
- ★ Giving children access to voice recorders to record anything they wanted to say.

*"It becomes automatic and natural for activities to be child-led. You just start by asking them questions about everything and then children will just understand that they can tell you about every choice they want."*

**Hazel Moffat**, childminder

**Listening as a way of life:** Listening practice is an integral part of effective everyday practice – it is central to a pedagogic approach that focuses on developing positive relationships based on mutual respect. Listening is incorporated into all daily routines and learning opportunities.

**Listening is an ongoing process:** The process starts with listening within a respectful relationship. Children's perspectives are documented and adults engage in reflection about what has been shared. Childminders take appropriate action and feed back to children and parents. This continuous cycle enables young children's participation in children's services.

**Listening with familiar adults:** It is vital that children are listened to by adults who know them well. Children need to be comfortable and able to trust that what they share is valued and respected. Familiar adults will have knowledge about the child's language and development to enable them to reflect on meaning with children.

**Listening requires learning from children:** Reflective childminders use what they see, and hear, from young children to inform their interaction and planning with children. Your assumptions may need to be challenged in recognising children's capabilities, and your practice may need to change as a result.

**Listening to children, childminders and parents:** Respectful relationships are central to listening and enabling meaningful and ethical participation. Parents' and childminders' perspectives are considered alongside those of children to get a holistic sense of children's experiences. This cycle of feedback is very important, since childminders are the key link between children, parents and the Care Inspectorate.

**Listening to young children is part of a listening culture:** A listening culture and ethos can be developed by valuing the voices of young children, parents and childminders, so that everyone's views are taken into account to inform quality improvement.

**Listening and belonging:** Active and compassionate listening enables children to be open about feelings of inequality or isolation.



Through being listened to, children:

- ★ learn many essential skills such as listening, debating, negotiating and compromise.
- ★ reflect (on what they have heard or observed), taking account of a variety of points of view and considering them objectively.
- ★ develop a deeper sense of the needs of others; an increased sense of ownership and responsibility for where they live, play and learn.
- ★ but most importantly: they learn whether or not they have a voice that other people think is worth listening to.

We should note that children's participation has outcomes for adults as well as for children, as argued by Dr Greg Mannion, Senior Lecturer at the University of Stirling. He suggests that child-adult relations and practices - such as those in childminding settings - are always co-constructed by both children and adults. Members of each generation reciprocally affect and are affected by the places and spaces they share. Noticing the reciprocal nature - intergenerational exchanges if you like - of childminding practices could be a starting point here.

Dr Mannion also draws attention to the interpretation of the UNCRC, asserting that 'cosy', conservative readings of the UNCRC mean that sometimes children's right to be heard is seen as being in the gift of adults. The risk here is that 'what matters' will be constrained by adults. Thus, for child participation to be more authentic, additional features beyond listening to children's views have to be added. One is the requirement for the young person's view to actually have influence: the view must be acted upon, as appropriate. Another might be that children and adults have a chance to dialogue being ready to change their minds as they encounter each other's views.

*"I would like to think I am always there to listen to the children in my care at any time, as and when issues arise or they want to chat. However, on a more formal basis I do a review of the week with them most weeks. This may be on a Thursday or Friday (I alternate this to make sure that all the children get a chance to contribute). I ask them what activities they have enjoyed and what they haven't liked as much. I ask them what activities they would like to do the following week. If there are any school holidays coming up we have a discussion about what we are going to do then. I also like to get their input if I am planning on buying any new resources for example, we decided together what new play equipment I was going to provide for the garden. I also have children's feedback questionnaires that I do with them every six months."*

**Donna Smith**, childminder

**Think about...**

*How you gather feedback from your minded children. Do you have group discussions? Or could questionnaires work well for your service?*

## 5. Support me

Help children understand by meeting their communication needs

In order to express views freely, children need:

- ★ Information which is relevant, appropriate and made available in forms and at a level which they can understand.
- ★ 'Spaces' where they are afforded the time, encouragement and support to enable them to develop and articulate their views clearly and confidently.
- ★ Safety to explore and express their views without fear of criticism or punishment. Children should feel confident that they are allowed to express concerns and opinions, even when they challenge those of adults.

*"I feel in my setting it is important to listen to the children's ideas, thoughts, feelings and anything they want to chat about. Every day we sit around the big table for lunch or sit in a circle for snack and chat about our day, new achievements, hobbies, interests, healthy eating...wherever the child's thoughts take us. I want to ensure every child feels confident to be open and honest and want them to feel respected. Having this window of time where we are all together is always a wonderful experience and something I have taken from my childhood and put it into practice in my setting."*

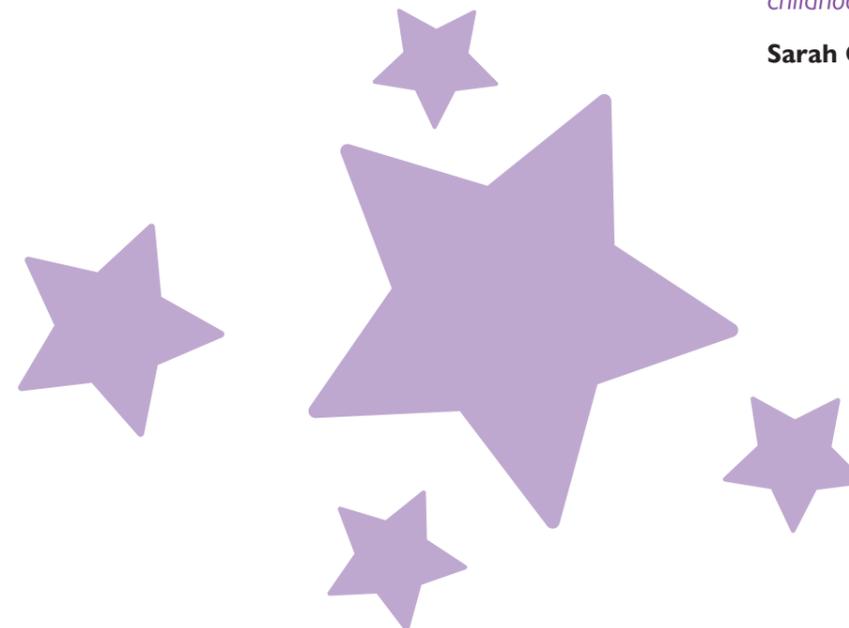
**Sarah Caie**, childminder

Help children that require additional help, whether it is for understanding, or for an actual ability to participate

Quality in childminding for young children with additional needs includes these key components, though not meant as an exhaustive list:

- ★ One main childminder, who knows and understands the children, gives them time and listens patiently to what they want to say or do.
- ★ A small number of children with whom the child can develop strong bonds and friendship.
- ★ Being allowed to play, using whatever is around for the play, and running, climbing and jumping.
- ★ The home and garden of the childminder, which is a safe and well-known environment.
- ★ Visits to the local environment, shops, playgrounds, parks and so on, where the child recognises people, houses, trees and animals.
- ★ Regular visits to a playgroup where the child can meet more children and adults.

The Golden Rules Symbols resource has been developed to help children with additional needs communicate. Find out more in the Activity Leaflet.



Gemma was referred to the SCMA Community

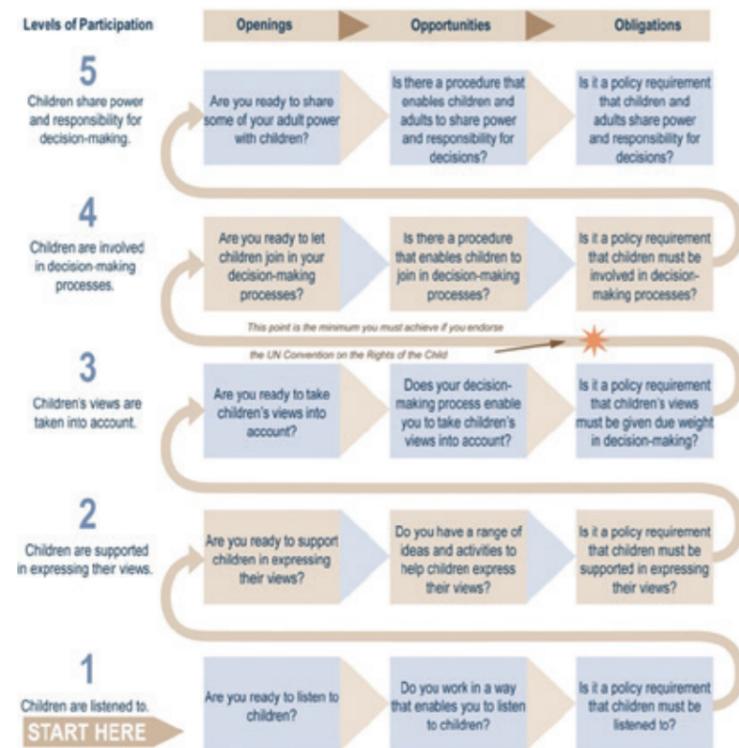
**Case Study:** Gemma's story

Childminding Service via her Social Worker. At just two years old Gemma had already had a very chaotic and traumatic life as both her parents were abusing drugs. This impacted greatly on their ability to parent Gemma and she had been removed from their care and was being permanently looked after by her maternal aunt. Gemma was displaying signs of low self-confidence, lack of trust and attachment difficulties.

The Community Childminder sought to improve Gemma's speech, language and communication skills by participating in Rhyme Time and Bookbug sessions available at the local community library. These sessions were delivered by the children's library assistant once a

week. As the class consisted of a variety of pre-school children Gemma was able to mix with her peers which improved her social skills.

She encouraged Gemma to explore picture books and encouraged Gemma's aunt to continue this work at home. As the benefits were visible Gemma's aunt was keen to continue the good work to improve Gemma's communication and social skills.



**Participation model:** Shier's diagram

Shier describes five levels of children's participation with three stages of commitment by adults at each level: openings, opportunities and obligations. The first two demonstrate how adults are ready to engage with children and young people as a result of the settings policies. The result is a logical sequence of 15 questions that can be used as a tool for planning participation.



## 6. Work together

Benefits and outcomes when true participation is evidenced, due to the creation of a respectful mutual exchange, through listening and responding

- ★ Children develop strong communication skills.
- ★ They gain a sense of achievement and an increased belief in their own ability to make a difference.
- ★ Children who are used to expressing themselves may be more vocal about abuse or exploitation.
- ★ They gain political and social knowledge and awareness of their rights and responsibilities.
- ★ Child participation leads to the fulfilment of other rights.
- ★ Children learn how to be active and responsible citizens.
- ★ Working together helps develop positive relationships between children and adults; it promotes a positive image of children within their communities, among professionals and among their peers.
- ★ Having a meaningful role to play within a project creates opportunities for personal development among children who are often excluded.
- ★ Involving children in our work provides a means of protecting them from harm and preventing them from being invisible when discussing plans, shaping policies and designing services or making decisions that affect their lives.
- ★ Children are given authority to hold duty bearers to account, to ensure adults think and behave in a way that respects children and childhood.

*“I run with child led themes from their interests and introduce different natural resources to enable open ended play linked with the theme. I feel there shouldn't be an “outcome” as such but follow the flow of a child's imagination and creativity. In following this practice I am encouraging confidence, a child's right to choice and building self-esteem.”*

**Sarah Caie**, childminder

Children, where participation is evidenced, showed improved: communication skills and language; confidence, self-esteem and independence; ability to initiate engagement with adults, and other children; children were calmer, concentrated more, shared and took turns better.

### Case Study: Smelly Welly Club

Shettleston Community Growing Project (SCGP) has transformed a derelict piece of wasteland in Glasgow's East End into a community garden, allotments and mini-orchard for all local residents – from toddlers to pensioners – to use and benefit from.

As part of SCGP, the Smelly Welly Club is an outdoor learning project providing opportunities for local children and young people to work with their neighbours, learn new things and help to make a difference in their community.

Norah Stewart is a childminder who plays a big part in the SCGP and as one of the founders of the Smelly Welly Club, she has seen things grow from strength-to-strength giving local children a fun sense of purpose in their community.

The club goes on trips to the local woods, where they take part in outdoor activities and explore the woodland, looking for wildlife.

“The parents think the club is fantastic too; they love it when the children go home with lots of fruit, vegetables and herbs. There's even a Sunday club, where many parents take their children along to the club outwith the normal days. It's all because they love it and they want to go and help out.

“The overall project has helped to bridge the gap between the older residents and the young people. In this area of Shettleston, there's not a lot for youngsters to do.

“Everyone involved in the SCGP lives nearby and there is a real community spirit. The adults try to involve the children in their activities, so they might ask a wee one to take something to the compost, so they are constantly learning.”

### Benefits and outcomes for childminders

- ★ Childminders find out directly from children about the issues that affect them, rather than guessing what they think.
- ★ Childminders are motivated by being more directly accountable to children and by the need for children's rights to be met.
- ★ Childminders feel more motivated about the value of their work.
- ★ Children offer creative ideas and suggestions and a fresh perspective.
- ★ Working with children is fun, energising and multi-dimensional.

### Outcomes for childminders:

- ★ An increased commitment to listening to young children.
- ★ A shift towards a more child-focused perspective.
- ★ A deeper understanding of children.
- ★ Earlier identification of children's needs.
- ★ Greater confidence to respond to children's needs.
- ★ Better relationships with children and parents.

*“What do I gain from the children in my care participating in matters that affect them? Having happy confident children that know that their voice is being heard means that I have a happy working environment. It also means that the children do not push boundaries as they are very rarely bored. The children are focused on their activities, it being child-led means that they learn more easily and their parents are happy because the children are happy to come to my setting thus giving me the benefit of good working relationship with parents too. This also impacts on my grades from the Care Inspectorate; evidencing a child-led environment has led to my service being awarded grade 6. I have a good reputation and very rarely have empty spaces within my childminding business”.*

**Hazel Moffat**, childminder

Childminders' skills in observation and reflective practice improved and as a result they:

- ★ developed a more personalised curriculum,
- ★ became more effective as key persons,
- ★ were less prescriptive in planning,
- ★ improved session records and evaluations,
- ★ felt they were listened to more,
- ★ felt they worked better together as a team.



## 7. Keep in touch

There is a link between the childminder, the parent and the Care Inspectorate, all focusing on the wellbeing of the child. The focus of inspections by the Care Inspectorate is on outcomes for children and less on policies the service has in place

The purpose of this guide has been to emphasise the importance of child participation and the development of a relationship based on respect, compromise and listening. However, the childminder does not only have a relationship with the child, but also with the parents and the Care Inspectorate. Every one of these people have the wellbeing of the child as their main concern and thus, should work together to achieve it. The Care Inspectorate has to make sure that the child's best interests are respected. Childminders have to describe how their care is built around the eight Wellbeing Indicators and provide evidence of how they support children.

This allows the Inspector to focus on the actual care childminders provide and gather outcome-focused evidence allowing feedback to childminders about the quality of care they are delivering.

Participation is one of the areas of interest, not only because childminders have to conform to European and Scottish law, but because it is the right thing to do in order to encourage the healthy development of a child. Accordingly, when being inspected or questioned about participation, the Care Inspectorate does not expect a report with a written participation strategy, as much as simple proof that the childminder is providing the child with a choice in all matters that affect him.

The Activity Leaflet offers advice on how to provide evidence of participation during inspections.

### Case Study: Childminders on the Inspection process

In 2015, the Care Inspectorate shifted focus from paperwork to the more practical aspects of childminding. Some childminders told SCMA they are delighted inspectors now talk to the minded children and are less focussed on paperwork. Pauline, a childminder from Wishaw, said; "Susan was my Inspector and she was lovely. Sitting on my living room floor, she talked and played with my minded children, and then she came with us in the car to do the nursery run.

"The children loved her and kept asking to her to play; they showed her all their work, and then asked her to watch as they helped to make lunch. She didn't look at a lot of paperwork as I had everything noted in my self-assessment and had everything to hand in the children's individual files.

"I have to say, it is brilliant that the new inspections are all about the children. That's the way it should be and should stay - so, well done to the Care Inspectorate for these changes."

Carol Ann, a childminder from Inverclyde, agrees; "The whole process was no hassle at all - everything went well. I showed Karen [Care Inspector] my minded children's files, and that every child has a Wellbeing Wheel in their folder which I can share with their parents. I also explained – in my own words – how the wheel relates to the things we do and how I meet the children's needs.

"The inspector spent some time talking to the children and I felt that we talked a lot more than before. It wasn't all about ticking boxes – she observed, chatted and took time to look through the child's folder.

"I couldn't fault the overall experience, it was really relaxed."

A participation strategy does not have to involve impressive gestures and big words in a report. You have to learn to see the proof that is already there. To alleviate the fears and the stress that childminders face when thinking of an inspection, we have gathered useful guidelines for childminders to use with children in their care. However, the best method of ensuring participation is working closely with the parents and the child, so you

understand the wants and the needs. Meaningful conversations are the key to a successful practice.

*"Be confident. It's not about the paperwork anymore; the Care Inspector sees the proof through behaviour. Just do your normal routine, showing how you include children, e.g. offer them choices of food, choices of different toys."*

**Hazel Moffat**, childminder

### Participation model: the Reggio-Emilia approach

The Reggio Approach is a complex system that respects and puts into practice many of the fundamental aspects of the work of Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky and many others. It is a system that lends itself to: the role of collaboration among children, teachers and parents; the co-construction of knowledge; the interdependence of individual and social learning; and the role of culture in understanding this interdependence.

Children have the right to be recognised as subjects of individual, legal, civil, and social rights; as both source and constructors of their own experience, and thus active participants in the organisation of their identities, abilities, and autonomy, through relationships and interaction with their peers, with adults, with ideas, with objects, and with real and imaginary events of intercommunicating worlds.

Starting from this point of reference, we recognise the right of children to realise and expand their potential,

placing great value on their ability to socialise, receiving their affection and trust, and satisfying their needs and desires to learn. And this is so much truer when children are reassured by an effective alliance between the adults in their lives, adults who are always ready to help, who place higher value on the search for constructive strategies of thoughts and action than on the direct transmission of knowledge and skills.

As a childminder you are a keen observer, documenter, and partner in the learning process who allows the children to:

- ★ Ask their own questions and generate and test their own hypotheses.
- ★ Explore and generate many possibilities, both affirming and contradictory.
- ★ Use symbolic languages to represent thoughts and hypothesis.
- ★ Communicate their ideas to others.
- ★ Through the process of revisiting the opportunity to reorganise concepts, ideas, thoughts and theories, construct new meaning.

#### To do...

Look at the tips for proving participation in the Activity Leaflet. Do you already do most of these? If not, could any of the suggestions work within your service?

## Conclusion

Hopefully this guide provided you with useful and interesting information. We are optimistic that it will help many childminders improve their service and provide children with real choices in matters that affect them. We tried to indicate that participation is done not only because the law requires it, but also because it is the right thing to do and has benefits for both children and childminders.

The guide followed the structure of the Seven Golden Rules created by the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. Their resources are a brilliant way to continue to improve your service and their website ([cypcs.org.uk](http://cypcs.org.uk)) is there to keep you up-to-date.

### Want to find out more?

Check out the Activity Leaflet and Further Reading documents available from the Membership Dashboard at [childminding.org](http://childminding.org).

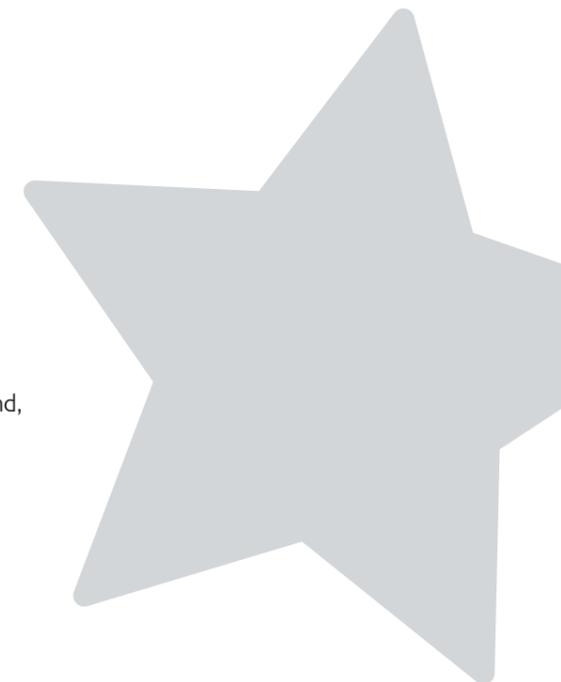
## Glossary

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Alliance</b>                 | A relationship based on similarity of interests, nature, or qualities.   |
| <b>Co-construction</b>          | The reciprocal processes of interaction between two people (in this case adult and child, which shape the processes and outcomes for both of them).  |
| <b>Conflict resolution</b>      | A way for two or more parties to find a peaceful solution to a disagreement among them.  |
| <b>Correlated (with age)</b>    | Something which has a mutual relationship or connection with the age of the child, in which one thing affects or depends on another.   |
| <b>Curriculum</b>               | The means and materials with which children will interact for the purpose of achieving identified educational outcomes.  |
| <b>Ethos</b>                    | The fundamental character or spirit of a person; the underlying sentiment that informs the beliefs, customs, or practices of a person or a group of people.  |
| <b>Evolving capacities</b>      | The increasing capability of children to discern and make decisions, as they grow up.  |
| <b>Holistic</b>                 | Emphasising the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts.  |
| <b>Interdependence</b>          | The mutual reliance between two or more people or groups of people.  |
| <b>Linear process</b>           | One in which something changes or progresses straight from one stage to another, and has a starting point and an ending point. Hence, if you describe something as non-linear, you mean that it does not progress or develop smoothly from one stage to the next in a logical way. Instead, it makes sudden changes, or seems to develop in different directions at the same time. |
| <b>Non-cognitive abilities</b>  | Abilities not related to the process of acquiring knowledge through the senses, experience, or reasoning, for example perseverance, motivation, etc.   |
| <b>Participation strategy</b>   | The plan of action implemented to ensure a child's right to be involved in making decisions, planning, and reviewing any action that might affect him/her.   |
| <b>Participatory activities</b> | Activities that involve a child or group of children taking part in them   |
| <b>Pedagogic approach</b>       | An approach that sees teaching as an art and the teacher as the best educator for children.  |
| <b>Symbolic language</b>        | A language that employs symbols either extensively or exclusively; especially one that has been artificially constructed for the purpose of precise formulations (for example, for the aid of people with special needs).  |

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- ★ After Participation (A handbook of children and young people's participation)
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- ★ Care Inspectorate ([careinspectorate.com](http://careinspectorate.com))
- ★ Carol Ann Tracey, childminder
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- ★ Stirling-Clackmannanshire Childminding Groups
- ★ The Scottish Government ([gov.scot](http://gov.scot))
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