

Checklist for impactful co-design with children

This resource provides a series of reflexive prompts and practical examples for adult decision-makers doing co-design with children. Adult decision-makers may include practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers.

The checklist was developed based on insights from research in Aotearoa New Zealand, which sought to understand how children's (aged 5-13 years) ideas for health-promoting local environments are brought to life through co-design.



Empowering children within co-design

Being intentional about children's influence

Curating who is involved

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Contact: Tiffany Williams, Te Kura Neehi/School of Nursing, Waipapa Taumata Rau/University of Auckland, email tiffany.williams@auckland.ac.nz



Empowering children within co-design

A shared code of conduct between children & facilitators

Offering creative activities that align with children's preferences

Asking thoughtful questions like 'what things do you care about here?' & using follow up prompts like 'why is that?'

Verbally acknowledging the importance of children's experiences & connecting their input to broader legacy, like environmental impact

Food or small gifts of appreciation to acknowledge children's contributions

Place-based education & place-making activities like community planting & clean-up day, nature-based workshops, site visits, learning skills like map reading & water testing, drawing & photographing, art, or learning Indigenous cultural narratives

Feedback to & from children during the process using artist's impressions, photos of the process, a word cloud of their ideas, or images of potential outcomes

Sharing before & after photographs of co-design outcomes with children

Installing a physical artefact at the site to recognise children's contributions

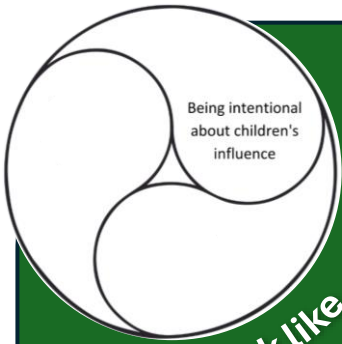
Offering feedback to a local child/youth reference group or a wider network of children (if feedback to the original group of children involved is not possible)

Reflexive prompts...

- Are we committed to centring children's lived experiences?
- How will we show gratitude to children?
- Are we asking thoughtful questions of children, & have we allowed time to explore in-depth responses?
- Are our activities appropriate for varied capacities & ages?
- Have we included place-based education or activities?
- Do we have a plan for ongoing feedback to & from children, & does feedback enable children to let adults know if what they heard from children was correct?
- If children are invited into adult decision-making spaces, have we got a plan for supporting them (e.g., mentoring, skills)?
- Have we considered power dynamics & empowerment for children of different cultures?
- Are children supported to choose if they participate, their level of involvement, & different ways to express their views?
- Do we have an evaluation plan in place that includes gathering children's perspectives?

Notes

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Being intentional about children's influence

May look like...

Mapping out an impact pathway, from children's ideas to outcomes

Confirming allocated timeframes, including for implementation of ideas

Discussing an alternative activity with the school/setting for any children who decline to participate, & ensuring children are safe to decline

When inviting children to participate, ensuring they know the 'what', 'why', 'how' & 'when' of the process to inform their decision

Consider inviting influential local decision-makers to participate, like a council traffic engineer or an elected local board member

Having strategies to refine diverse ideas, such as testing adults' ideas (if known) with children, asking yourself 'who is this for?' to prioritise suggestions from different groups, or involving someone with design skills

When presenting ideas on behalf of children, use quotes, exciting & easy-to-understand reports, images, & audio/video recordings (with permission)

When children are presenting their own ideas to decision-makers, ensuring children are adequately supported & respected

Reflexive prompts...

- Have we identified key adult decision-makers & is there appetite or agreement for considering children's views?
- Can existing or new designs be changed based on children's input?
- Are we clear on project timeframes & are they sufficient for seeking & considering children's input in decision-making?
- Do invited children know what will be asked of them, what their involvement may (or may not) yield, & any parameters?
- Have we considered involving a local adult decision-maker in the co-design process with children?
- Have we tailored information for children to be understandable & relevant?
- Are we prepared to hear children's diverse & grand ideas whilst tactfully managing children's expectations, & do we have a plan for refining ideas?
- Do we have permission from children involved to share their ideas with others (e.g., quotes, outputs, images, recordings) & can we involve children in deciding how ideas will be shared?

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Curating who is involved



May look like...

Including children from diverse cultural groups, from less advantaged areas, & who may need additional support to participate

Partnering with local organisations or schools to engage children

Involving a facilitator with youth development or education training

Having relatable facilitators, considering age, gender, cultural background, & local relationships

Allowing time for 'getting to know you' activities to build trust

Incorporating ongoing reflection for facilitators

Using engagement techniques such as recognising children's strengths, active listening, & repeating their ideas to clarify meaning

Reflexive prompts...

- Are we taking an inclusive view of children who should be involved in co-design?
- Whose input is most needed on the topic or place of interest?
- Will we engage with children through a school, & have we considered other options?
- Have we considered how we could involve local Indigenous groups or organisations alongside children?
- Do adults have training & processes to ensure children's safety?
- Are adult facilitators relatable to children involved?
- Do adult facilitators have a genuine belief in the value of children's ideas & a willingness to work alongside children?
- Do adult facilitators have training &/or skills in engaging respectfully & creatively with children?
- Are adult facilitators able to work collaboratively with others, such as co-facilitators & local community partners?
- Are adult facilitators reflexive & able to connect with children, embrace a level of uncertainty, & learn through the process?
- Where children are engaged with adult decision-makers beyond the adult facilitators, are we confident those adults will engage respectfully with children?

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