

Child Engagement Toolkit

M Toronto

Child Engagement Toolkit

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
What is child engagement?	3
Why is child engagement important?	4
Benefits of child engagement	5
Best practices for child engagement	6
Principles of child engagement	6
Additional tips and considerations	8
Planning for child engagement	9
Purpose of engagement	9
Level of engagement	9
Engagement methods	11
Reaching out to children	12
Consent and assent	13
Pilot testing	13
Documenting and understanding child input	14
Evaluation and follow up	15
Evaluation	15
Follow up	15
Resources	16
Checklists	17
References	19
Appendix A: Engagement activities	20
Activity: Sentence starters	21
Activity: Photovoice	22
Activity: Map my world	23
Activity: Building a super-fun kids world!	24
Activity: One wish	25
Activity: Activity evaluation	26
Appendix B: Sample consent forms	27
Appendix C: Sample child assent forms	29

Introduction

As our youngest residents, children have a unique perspective on our city. Their views and experiences can differ from what we, as adults, assume or expect. When we listen carefully to children, their experiences and opinions can enrich and even alter the course of our decisions and the plans that we make.

Engaging children informs and supports Toronto's journey towards building a healthier and more equitable child-friendly city for all children; we can only achieve this with an understanding of what living in the city is like for a child. The challenge for adults is to find the right ways to help children express their rich and invaluable perspectives. This toolkit has been designed to assist adults in engaging and listening to children in meaningful ways.

The purpose of this toolkit is to:

- increase awareness of the responsibility and benefits of engaging children in our planning and decision-making processes
- share best practices, ideas, resources and tools for planning and implementing meaningful engagement opportunities for children aged 12 and under

What is child engagement?

Child engagement is about enabling the meaningful participation of children in "opportunities to form and express their views and to influence matters that concern them" (UNICEF, 2017b, p.2). This means ensuring that children have the ability and opportunity to understand and impact decisions that affect them. The City of Toronto seeks to involve residents in multiple ways and defines community engagement as including the "policies, programs and practices that encourage and facilitate civic participation and community input into decision-making process that affect all aspects of public life" (City of Toronto, n.d., p. 6).

Why is child engagement important?

It is our responsibility

As government and community leaders, we have a responsibility to engage children, just as we have a responsibility to consult with other residents. Toronto is home to nearly 400,000 children, making up 15% of our city's population, (Statistics Canada, 2016) and yet children's voices are often missing in our city planning and conversations about civic issues.

Their input helps us to 'get it right'

As a significant resident group, we are missing a large piece of the consultation picture if we don't understand how a decision will impact children. It's much easier to consult effectively from the beginning than to reverse decisions later.

Participation is a right

Engaging children is not just good practice, it is about ensuring children's fundamental right to be heard. Article 12 of the <u>UN Convention on the Rights of the Child</u> states that children have the right to freely express their views on matters that affect them (see box below). Adults have the responsibility to listen and consider children's views.

Article 12 of the Convention establishes the right of every child capable of forming a view, to express that view freely on all matters of concern to them. It also establishes the right for their view to be given due weight in accordance with age and maturity. It recognizes children as social actors, entitled to be involved in decisions that affect them. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has elaborated Article 12 as follows:

- It applies to children as individuals as well as children as a constituency;
- All children are capable of forming views but, for example, younger children and children with communication challenges will need more support in expressing them;
- Children's lives are affected by most areas of public policy and they, therefore, have a legitimate interest in them;
- In order that their voices are heard, children need information in accessible forms, and time and space in which to express them;
- Although clearly not every wish or demand made by children can be implemented, there is a duty to take what they say seriously. They should be informed about what decisions have been made, why and how their views were taken into consideration.

Participation is a fundamental right of every child. Being involved in decisions that affect them is an inherent recognition of human dignity. It is also a means of realizing other rights.

(UNICEF, 2017a, p. 54)

Benefits of child engagement

Benefits for city services, programs, policies and spaces

Engaging with children:

- Adds a unique perspective, richness and diversity of ideas which can inspire innovative solutions and ways of doing things (Harris and Manatakis, 2013)
- Helps ensure that our services, programs and policies are meeting the needs of children
- Improves equity spaces, policies and programs that are accessible to children are often more inclusive and accessible to everyone (8 80 Cities, 2017)
- Communicates to children that they are valued patrons of our spaces or services and helps them to establish a stronger connection with the place or program

Benefits for children

Participating in engagement opportunities:

- Promotes self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy (Lansdown, 2005)
- Improves knowledge about decision-making processes and how government and other organizations work
- Develops skills for participation in our democracy (Hart, 1992)
- Promotes a sense of belonging and improves mental and social health through community engagement and empowerment (McAllister, 2008)



Best practices for child engagement

Principles of child engagement

The principles and best practices that guide community engagement with any population also form the basis for engaging children. Specific consideration should be given to engage children in a way that recognizes and then minimizes the natural power imbalances between children and adults and to ensure children are safe and respected. UNICEF describes the following basic requirements for ensuring quality, meaningful children's participation.

Quality children's participation is:

• Transparent and informative

Children must be informed of:

- why they are being invited to participate
- o how they can be involved
- how their contribution will be used
- o how much influence they will have on decision-making

Information must be presented in an accessible format that children can understand.

Voluntary

Children must understand that they are free to choose whether or not they wish to participate. Child assent is the practice of seeking children's informed agreement to participate in an engagement. Assent is different from 'consent', which is often required from parents or guardians and can hold legal weight. Children should also know that they can contribute as much or as little as they would like and that they can withdraw from an activity at any time.

See the section about Consent and Assent for more information.

Respectful

Children's ideas must be respected and they should be given open-ended opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Engagement activities should aim to build self-esteem and confidence, enabling children to contribute and feel valued.

Relevant

Child engagement opportunities should focus on issues that are relevant to children's lives. Activities should enable children to draw on their own knowledge, skills and abilities to participate and empower children to prioritize issues that have the most meaning for them.

Facilitated with child-friendly approaches in child-friendly environments
 Approaches for engaging with children need to align with their capacities by
 considering their ages, developmental abilities and individual learning needs.
 Consider concrete, child-friendly ways to introduce topics and themes that children
 may not be familiar with. Facilitators should ensure that children have a good grasp
 of the topic before asking for their input, experiences and ideas. Facilitators should
 have a flexible agenda and back up activities in case a planned activity doesn't work
 out as expected. Meeting places must be accessible to all children.

Inclusive

Children are not a homogenous group. Engagement activities must be inclusive of children from the various communities (geographic and demographic) that would be impacted by the topic that you're consulting on. In particular, special effort should be made to include children from Indigenous communities and equity seeking groups whose voices may traditionally be excluded, including but not limited to: children with disabilities, children with language barriers, children living in poverty, and racialized children. Consider whether the children you have engaged fairly represent the larger population of children who would be impacted by your consultation topic.

Supported by training for adults

Adults who will be engaging with children must have the preparation, skills, knowledge and support to facilitate children's participation in a meaningful way. If needed, seek input and ideas from persons who are trained to work with children, such as school teachers or child care educators and other opportunities for professional development.

Safe and sensitive to risk

Adults working with children have a responsibility to identify and minimize potential risks or negative consequences of participation. Like adults, some children have been through traumatic situations and a well-intended consultation question could trigger an emotional response. The potential for emotional risks and triggers needs to be considered during the consultation design, *before* children are engaged. The protection and emotional needs of the children should *always* be placed higher than the need for input and data. If there's not a good way to protect the child from emotional triggers, then the question should be removed or the child(ren) should not be engaged. During the engagement, facilitators should be sensitive to any signs that a child is no longer comfortable participating.

Child protection measures need to be in place and staff must understand their legal and ethical responsibilities. If the engagement questions and activities provide the potential for a child to disclose whether they are being hurt or abused, then children should also be told at the onset of the activity of the adults' responsibility to break confidentiality and report it to a children's aid society.

Confidential information must be safeguarded and photographs or images of children must only be used with explicit consent from parents or legal guardians.

Accountable

Following their participation in an engagement activity, children must be informed of how their contribution has been used and how their input has influenced any outcomes. Demonstrating how their input was considered and/or influenced decisions can deepen the participation benefits for children; in particular in their self-efficacy and their belief that they can influence change in their surroundings. Children should have the opportunity to evaluate the engagement processes and voice any concerns or provide ideas to improve the experience.

Adapted from UNICEF, 2017a, p. 122-124

Additional tips and considerations

Developmental and physical needs of children

- Children have shorter attention spans and will need plenty of breaks. Keep engagement sessions short.
- Small discussion groups (three to four children) can allow for deeper, more frequent engagement and more interactive time for the child participants.
- It is hard to concentrate if you're hungry or thirsty. When possible, provide healthy snacks and water.
- Choose a time of day when children will be most likely able to focus and participate. Young children may not be able to attend an event in the evening while older children are likely in school during the day.
- Make it fun! Think about how to create fun, interactive activities or turn questions into a game. See Engagement methods for ideas and suggestions.
- Be flexible! What works for one group of children may not work for another. Have a
 few activity options available in case one isn't working out as planned.

Selecting the space/venue

- Ensure that spaces and venues are accessible, safe and child-friendly.
- If children need to travel to and from the space, consider proximity to public transit and whether the space can be safely accessed by walking or biking. Provide transportation costs when applicable and feasible.
- Children are often most comfortable in a space that they are already familiar with.
- Match the space with the activity. Sit-down activities might work well in small, quiet spaces such as classrooms but may be more challenging in a gymnasium where children are used to engaging in more active activities.

Engaging families

- Engage parents, caregivers and families by making engagements easy to access –
 for example incorporate engagement opportunities into routine activities,
 programming or spaces that families already access.
- If possible, offer childminding for siblings who will not be participating in the engagement activity and for children who choose not to participate.
- Parents and caregivers are the best proxy for understanding the needs of babies and very young children (8 80 Cities, 2017).
- Remember that parents and children may have different ideas and opinions about what children prefer and experience. It's important to get both perspectives where possible.

Planning for child engagement

Meaningful child engagement requires not only listening to children's voices but taking their ideas seriously. This means establishing clear mechanisms to review, consider and respond to children's input and creating structures and policies to help embed children's participation into local decision-making in a sustainable way. As a City we provide a wide range of essential services, programs and facilities for children and their families. These functions and responsibilities provide a variety of areas on which children can, and should, be consulted, such as:

- planning for public spaces and facilities
- gathering information about local issues
- decision-making about local policies
- planning, monitoring and evaluating programs, services and facilities (UNICEF, 2017b)

Purpose of engagement

It is important to be clear about the purpose for engaging children in order to "avoid participation for the sake of participation and the risk of tokenism". (UNICEF, 2017b., p 14).

Consider:

- Why do you want to engage children?
- Is there opportunity for children to have influence on decision-making at this time?
- How will you assess or analyze the information that you receive from children?
- How will you incorporate the input from children?

Level of engagement

Children can be consulted, involved in a collaborative process or supported in activities that are initiated by children themselves (UNICEF, 2017a). The purpose and role that children will have in a project must be clear at the outset and communicated to children. The most suitable level of engagement will depend on the situation. Hart's ladder presents one way of thinking about levels of participation (see box). To determine the most appropriate level of participation multiple factors should be taken into account.

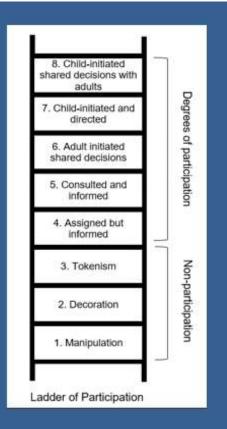
Consider:

- What is the purpose of the engagement and/or the type of decision to be made?
- What are the interests and capacities of the children who wish to participate?
- What time and resources do you have available?

Hart's ladder of participation

Hart's ladder presents one way of considering levels of participation.

- Each rung on the ladder represents a different degree of control that children have in their participation.
- Opportunities for meaningful engagement can align with any of the top five rungs, all of which include the basic requirement that children are informed and understand their participation.
- At the highest levels, children and adults work together in planning, designing, implementing and evaluating processes that are identified as meaningful by children.
- The bottom three rungs on the ladder describe activities defined as non participation. In these situations, children are involved in a symbolic way and their opinions and views are not meaningfully considered.



The top five rungs describe meaningful forms of participation:

- Child initiated, shared decisions with adults: Children conceive of a project, decisions are made together by children and adults.
- Child initiated and directed: Children conceive of and carry out a project.
- Adult initiated, shared decisions with children: Adults initiate the project but children are involved throughout the process and take part in decision making.
- **Consulted and informed:** Children are informed of and consulted in the design of the project. Children's ideas are taken seriously.
- Assigned but informed: Adults instigate and design processes. Children are informed and understand the intentions, process and why they are involved. Children have a meaningful (not decorative) role.

The bottom three rungs refer to activities that are not considered meaningful participation:

- **Tokenism**: Adults design activities where children appear to have a voice but children's choices are limited or non existent, they are not informed of the process, and/or their input is not seriously considered.
- **Decoration**: Adults involve children in a visible way to promote a cause. Children may or may not be informed about the issue.
- **Manipulation**: Adults intentionally use children's voices to spread a message and create the impression that these are children's views. Children may or may not be informed about the issue.

(Hart, 1992)

Engagement methods

The best method for engaging children will depend on both the purpose and level of engagement planned. Using a variety of methods can help you to reach more children and provide richer results. Some examples of methods include: surveys, interviews, drawings, photographs ("photovoice"), sculpture-building, child-led guided tours, focus groups, and role playing.

Above all, ensure that the activities are fun and interactive. A survey can be made into an interactive game where children choose 'secret envelopes' that each contain a few questions. A design charrette can be conducted using Lego or various art supplies.

Consider:

- What will make the engagement fun and interactive? Is there a way to turn this into a game, while still seeking input?
- What are the interests and capacities of the children who wish to participate?
- Do children need to be split into different groups, based on their age, cognitive interests and abilities?
- What time and resources do you have available?

Appendix A contains examples of activity plans that have previously been used to consult with children.



Reaching out to children

Strategies for reaching out and inviting children to participate will vary depending on the purpose and context of the engagement. Opportunities to engage with children can exist within institutions and community programs such as schools, children's sports leagues, clubs, camps or child care centres. Partnerships with local community organizations can be invaluable in facilitating engagement through the involvement of trusted adults who already have relationships with children and their families and the provision of familiar, safe spaces to meet. (8 80 Cities, 2017).

Consider:

- Who are the children who will be impacted by your project or service or affected by the policies being developed?
- How will you reach out to children from equity seeking groups and Indigenous communities?
- How will you ensure that the children who participate reflect the population of children you hope to learn about. For example, if you are seeking the views of Toronto's children, the group of children who participate should reflect the demographic profile of children in Toronto.
- If you are already engaging with adults, is there opportunity to expand the
 engagement to include families and children in a meaningful way? Instead of simply
 providing childminding while parents participate in a consultation, could you conduct
 an engagement activity with the children as well?

Age range

The Convention on the Rights of the Child does not set a minimum age for participation but cites a child's evolving capacity as the determining factor. While both younger and older children can participate, different age groups will require different communication approaches and have different facilitation needs and varying interests. It is also important to consider whether a child is able to provide informed consent to participate.

(UNICEF guidance note, p.19)

Consent and assent

Consent

Most organizations require consent from a child's parent or guardian prior to participation. Consents should describe the purpose of the activity, who will be involved, how information collected will be used and how the results will be shared back to participants. If the parents/guardians won't be present at the engagement, ensure that you provide enough time for consent forms to be sent home to parents, signed and returned. See Appendix B for a sample consent form. A separate media consent may be required if you are taking photographs of the participants and/or if media will be present at an event.

Child assent

Child assent is the practice of seeking children's informed agreement for their own participation in an engagement. The assent process should include a review of the planned activity and the purpose of the activity, delivered in a way that children will understand, followed by the opportunity for children to decide whether or not they would like to participate. In a group setting, alternate activities should be available for children who choose not to participate. Seeking child assent respects the rights of children to decide whether or not to participate. Assent is not legally binding for minors and does not replace consent from a parent or guardian. See Appendix C for sample child assent forms.

Pilot testing

When possible, involve a smaller group of children in developing engagement activities and/or in pilot testing the activities. Working with children throughout the process can help to answer the following questions.

Consider:

- Is the language level appropriate?
- Are complex ideas or terms explained adequately?
- How do children understand and interpret the questions/instructions? If you are unsure about how children are interpreting a question, ask them to tell you what the question is about.
- Do children find the activity boring/fun?

Documenting and understanding child input

Input from children should be documented thoughtfully, taking care to avoid placing an "adult interpretation" on children's voices. Strategies such as asking children further questions or paraphrasing then repeating back what a facilitator has heard in order to clarify can help to ensure that children's input is recorded and understood accurately (Harris and Manatakis, 2013).

What may at first seem like a far-off idea can have underlying concrete program or policy implications. Asking questions can help facilitators to better understand the meaning that a child wishes to convey.

For example:

- A child who suggests having people line the sidewalks to give them high fives on their way to school, may explain that this would make them feel like they're part of the group. This child may be asking for ways to feel more included.
- A child who would like jelly beans hidden all over the playground may actually be looking for more interactive and whimsical elements.

It is especially important to ask children to explain pictures or sculptures that they create to ensure you understand their ideas as they intend them to be. The pictures or sculptures are often the engagement tool, while the child's explanation is often the data.

Consider asking the following questions:

- Why is this important to you?
- How would this make you feel?
- What would be different if we made this idea happen?
- How is this different from what happens now?



Evaluation and follow up

Evaluation

Evaluation should include both an assessment of the engagement itself as well as the outcomes and impacts of the children's participation. Evaluation of the engagement opportunity by both the organizers and participants can help to identify strengths and areas for future improvement.

Consider:

- · Who attended?
- Did everyone participate?
- Who was missing?
- What worked well?
- What would you change?
- How has the information collected been used?
- What was the impact on the project?

Follow up

Children's participation must be valued and recognized. Following up and providing feedback, in a suitable child-friendly way, lets children know that their contribution was important, that their ideas are being taken seriously and shows their ability to influence change.

Consider:

- How will you thank or provide recognition for the children who participated?
- How will you communicate back to the children who participated to let them know how ideas are used? For example, will you share project updates, reports, results of decisions or invite them to follow up events?
- How will you communicate the results to others?
- Are there opportunities for ongoing or further engagement?

Resources

The following resources can help you learn more about engaging and considering children in planning and decision-making.

City of Toronto

- <u>Child Friendly Policy Framework:</u> guides policy and advocacy work related to the health, development and well-being of children aged 0-12 in Toronto.
- <u>Child Friendly Policy Assessment Tool</u> is a decision support tool that uses an equity lens to examine how a program or policy may impact children's health and wellbeing.
- Raising the Village: an initiative by the Toronto Child and Family Network that brings together data and research to better understand child and family wellbeing in Toronto.
- Young Minds, Strong Voices: child engagement report: a summary of key findings from a child engagement pilot project and future considerations for deepening child engagement practices in Toronto
- Citizens of Today: Deepening child engagement practices in Toronto: a research paper exploring how children aged 6-12 participate in the decision-making in Toronto and how opportunities for their participation can be advanced. (Please contact <u>childfriendlyTO@toronto.ca</u> for this resource).

National and global resources

- <u>Child in the City</u>; compiles tools, resources, and innovative examples from around the world to support cities to be child-friendly. There are several examples and ideas of child participation and child-focused planning.
- <u>UNICEF Child-Friendly Cities:</u> includes tools, guides and tips on making cities child-friendly. Child participation in planning and decision-making is a critical component of their framework.
- <u>Building Better Cities with Young Children and Families</u>: outlines strategies and key principles for civic engagement with young children and families, by 8 80 Cities in partnership with the Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- <u>Involve Young People in Civic Matters</u>: a guide produced by Child Friendly Edmonton that outlines tools and resources for engaging children
- <u>Children's Voices</u>: a principled framework for children and young people's
 participation as valued citizens and learners, produced by the University of South
 Australia in partnership with the South Australian Department for Education and
 Child Development.

Checklists

The following list may help you determine if you are prepared and if engaging with children is appropriate at this time.

Have you considered:	Yes	No/ NA
Why you want to engage children?		
The purpose of the engagement and/or type of decision to be made?		
The type of information you are seeking (e.g. new ideas, feedback, prioritizing)?		
What the policy, service or organization will gain by engaging with children?		
Is there opportunity for children to have influence on decision-making at this time?		
How the input you receive from children will be assessed or analyzed?		
How the input from children will be incorporated?		
What level of engagement would be appropriate (consider Hart's ladder)?		
Whether adequate time and resources are available?		
Do the organizers and facilitators have the right level of skill and support/training needed to proceed?		
How you will reach out to children and ensure that the process is inclusive?		
What partnerships may be beneficial for reaching out to children and carrying out the engagement?		
How the children will benefit from participating?		
The interests and capacities of the children who will participate?		

Have you considered:	Yes	No/ NA
Is the topic relevant for children? Is there flexibility for children to identify their own priorities?		
 How you will ensure that children are informed of Why they are being invited to participate How they can be involved How their contribution will be used How much influence they will have on decision-making 		
How you will ensure that children know that their participation is voluntary?		
How you will demonstrate respect for children's ideas?		
Are the activities and methods that will be used to engage with children well-suited for their capacities, considering ages, developmental abilities and individual learning needs?		
How you will ensure that children are well-prepared and supported to participate in an informed way?		
Are spaces or venues child-friendly and accessible?		
How you will ensure that participation is safe and that any potential emotional, social or physical have been considered and minimized?		
How you will evaluate the engagement?		
How children who participate will be thanked or provided recognition?		
How children who participate will be able to evaluate the engagement?		
How you will communicate back to the children who participate to let them know how their ideas are used?		
How you will communicate the results to others?		
Are there opportunities for ongoing or further engagement?		

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Appendix A: Engagement activities

Activities:

Sentence starters	21
Photovoice	22
Map my world	23
Building a super-fun kids world!	24
One wish	25
Activity evaluation	26

Notes:

- All of the activities can be completed by groups of children or individually
- The activities can be modified for different settings. For example:
 - o can be used for in-person child engagements such as during focus groups
 - o can be shared online with options for children to submit their responses
 - o can be shared with partner organizations or teachers to implement
- Consider the ownership of any work that children create. If possible, take photographs and return originals

Activity: Sentence starters

- ♠ Objective: To learn about children's ideas and feelings on a topic through words or drawings.
- Participants: Children who are able to draw or write and understand the sentence starters
 - Approximate time: 20-30 minutes
 - Materials: Crayons/markers, paper
 - **▶** Instructions:
 - 1. Determine the topic about which you wish to engage children. *For example*: describing a child-friendly city.
 - 2. Create appropriate sentence starters.
 - 3. Print the sentence starters onto a handout or poster.

For example:

Imagine a city that is friendly for all children! In this child-friendly city...

Kids feel...

Kids see...

Kids hear...

Kids do...

4. Introduce and discuss key concepts in child-friendly language.

For example: Discuss the theme of friendliness and how friendly people make us feel. Then support the children to relate their ideas of 'friendliness' to a city. Consider the people, the places and things that happen there and discuss this as a 'child-friendly city'.

- 5. Invite children to use words or drawings to share their ideas.
- 6. Seek clarification when possible to gain a richer understanding and to avoid "adult interpretation".
- ★ Ways to adapt the activity:
 - Use audio/video recording to collect verbal responses
 - Invite children to add their own sentence starters

Activity: Photovoice

♠ Objective: To discover children's perspectives, likes and dislikes about a space or neighbourhood using photography.

Participants: Children who can communicate their feelings about a space or neighbourhood

Approximate time: 60 minutes

Materials: Camera

♦ Instructions:

- 1. Determine the topic/issue and area that you are inviting children to explore.
- 2. Introduce and discuss key concepts in child-friendly language.
- 3. Provide or ensure access to a camera and invite children to take photos related to the topic. Invite children to include a photo of their hand in the foreground of the photo giving a thumbs up or thumbs down to show how they feel about what is in the photo. *Example*:



4. Seek clarification when possible to gain a richer understanding and to avoid "adult interpretation".

★ Tips:

- Seek permission before including people in photographs
- Consider completing the activity as part of a neighbourhood walk led by children

★ Ways to adapt the activity:

 For children who may require additional support to express their likes/dislikes (for example very young children or children who have disabilities that affect communication) consider if a parent, caregiver or support person who knows the child could support them to participate.

Activity: Map my world

♠ Objectives: To learn children's ideas and feelings about a neighbourhood through the creation of a visual child-perspective map.

Participants: Children who are able to write or draw and understand the idea of a map

Approximate time: 30-60 minutes

Materials: Crayons/markers, large roll of paper, stickers (red, yellow and green dots or smiley, neutral and sad faces)

▶ Instructions:

- 1. Determine the space or neighbourhood that you are inviting children to explore.
- 2. Introduce and discuss key concepts in child-friendly language.
- 3. Invite children to create a big picture of the public places in their neighbourhood. Prompt children to include many types of places (e.g. parks, playgrounds, routes to and from school, libraries, community centres etc.).
- 4. Support children to label the spaces.
- 5. Once the picture is completed, prompt children to think about how they feel about these spaces. For example: What is child-friendly? What is not child-friendly? How do they feel when they go to these places? Do they feel safe here?

6. Invite children to draw symbols or put stickers on the picture to show how they feel

about each of the spaces.

Example:

7. Seek clarification when possible to gain a richer understanding and to avoid "adult interpretation".



★ Tips:

Consider preparing for the activity by doing a child-led neighbourhood walk

Ways to adapt the activity:

Use playdough or Lego to create a three dimensional map or model

Activity: Building a super-fun kids world!

- **Objectives:** To discover children's perspectives about a space by having them imagine and create a model of that space and identify important elements.
- Participants: Children who are able to write or draw and understand the idea of planning/building a space
 - Approximate time: 30-60 minutes
 - Materials: Crayons/markers, large roll of paper, props such as plastic builder hats

Instructions:

- 1. Determine the space that you are inviting children to create. For example a new community centre, a new park, new sidewalks.
- 2. Introduce and discuss key concepts in child-friendly language.
- 3. Invite children to role play and imagine themselves as builders of the space. Provide props such as plastic builder hats or magic wands if appropriate.
- 4. Invite children to design and draw the space.
- 5. Support children to label elements of the space.
- 6. Seek clarification when possible to gain a richer understanding and to avoid "adult interpretation".

★ Ways to adapt the activity:

• Use playdough or Lego to create a three dimensional map

Activity: One wish

♠ Objective: To discover what is important to children through an imagination activity.

Participants: Children who are able to draw or write, understand the idea of a wish

Approximate time: 15-30 minutes

Materials: Crayons/markers, paper

Instructions:

- 1. Determine/suggest the topic/issue that you are inviting children to explore.
- 2. Print the wish sentence onto a handout or poster, filling in the blank with the topic/issue to be explored.

"You are granted one wish to____. What do you wish for?"

For example: You are granted one wish to change something about Toronto to make it more child-friendly for all kids. What do you wish for?

- 3. Introduce and discuss key concepts in child-friendly language.
- 4. Invite children to use words or drawings to share their ideas.
- 5. Seek clarification when possible to gain a richer understanding and to avoid "adult interpretation".

★ Ways to adapt the activity:

• Use audio/video recording to collect verbal responses

Activity: Activity evaluation

- ♠ Objective: To provide an opportunity for children who have participated in an engagement activity to give feedback.
- Participants: Children who are able to communicate their feelings and ideas on recent events
 - Approximate time: 5-10 minutes
 - Materials: Crayons/markers, paper
 - Instructions:

Invite children to share their ideas about the activities they have completed. Let them know that their opinions are important and help us to improve the activities.

Suggested questions:

- What did you think about today's activities?
- Were there any questions or activities that you didn't understand?
- Ask the "continue, start, stop" questions:
 - Continue: What did you like that we should keep doing?
 - Start: What do you think we should do next time?
 - Stop: What didn't you like that we should not do next time?

Appendix B: Sample consent forms

An invitation for your child to participate in the Young Minds, Strong Voices project

Dear Parent or Guardian,		
On	, staff from the City of Toronto will be joining the after-school program to lead some fun and	
interactive	activities that will help make Toronto a child-friendly city. The activities are part of an exciting	
new proje	ct called "Young Minds, Strong Voices", which gathers the ideas and experiences of children about	
the public	places they visit in Toronto.	

This letter is to share information about the project, the activities, and the information that will be collected and to ask whether you give permission for your child to participate.

What is the Young Minds, Strong Voices project?

Young Minds, Strong Voices is a project by Toronto Public Health (TPH) and Toronto Children's Services (CS). The purpose of the project is:

- to hear from children 6-12 years old to develop a better understanding of how welcome and safe children feel in public spaces in Toronto (e.g., their routes to school, parks, community centres, before and after school programs, etc.) and what can be done to help children feel welcome and safe in these spaces.
- to see if these activities are a good way to gather input from children about what makes Toronto a child-friendly city.

What will the activities be?

Participating children will be involved in fun and interactive activities that will include drawing and discussing public places they visit regularly. Using their imagination, they will be asked to create or act out the most child-friendly public spaces possible. The activities will take about 90 minutes in total.

Participating in these activities is voluntary. The activities will be explained to the children at the start of the session and each child will have the opportunity to choose whether or not to participate. Other activities will be available for children who do not participate. Participating children may also choose to skip an activity or question if they choose.

How will the privacy of my child be protected?

The names of the children will not be used in any of the project reports or summary documents.

Notes will be taken during the session. Only staff working on this project will have access to the notes. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential, except in specific situations where the disclosure is required by law. Under the Child Protection Act, the City has a duty to report child abuse and neglect.

All notes and audio files will be kept in a secure location and will be destroyed seven years following completion of the project.

Pictures may be taken during the session. With your permission, photos of your child participating in the activities may be used in related documents and materials. Please see the "multimedia consent form" for more information about how the photographs will be used and to let us know whether or not you give permission for this.

How will the information be used?

Once the project is completed (later in 2017), we will share the summarized results with the children and families who participated in the project.

The information gathered from the children will help inform how Toronto can be a child-friendly city. The results will be presented in reports and summary documents and will be publicly available. They will be discussed at various planning meetings and may be included on websites managed by the City. The names of children will not be included in any of the results documents.

In the future, the results may also be presented at workshops or conferences or included in documents for Council.

Are there any risks for my child if they participate?

We will be asking children about the things they like and dislike about the spaces they visit and how welcoming the space is. If your child has had negative experiences, these questions may cause some discomfort or remind them of unpleasant memories. Staff will watch for any signs of discomfort. If a child appears uncomfortable, staff will discreetly provide support and allow the child to participate in other activities if they wish.

Further information:

If you have any questions about this child engagement session, please contact:

**Please return to your child's a	er-school program by
Consent:	
I am the parent/legal guardian of	<u>.</u>
	Child's name
I have read the above information	and:
☐ I agree to my child part	cipating in the Young Minds, Strong Voices project.
☐ I do not agree to my ch	d participating in the Young Minds, Strong Voices project.
Date	Parent/Legal Guardian name

Appendix C: Sample child assent forms

Sample Child Assent form for 6 to 8 years:

Young Minds, Strong Voices "To join in or not to join in"

It is your choice whether or not to join-in today's activities. First, we want to make sure you know what it means to join-in.

We want Toronto to be a great city for children.



You have good ideas and we want to hear from you!

We will be talking, drawing, and acting about what you like and don't like about the public places you visit



It is totally up to you to choose whether or not join-in.



You can answer only what you what to.

What you say will be kept private, unless you suggest that you or another child are being hurt or abused.



Now you get to choose:

I choose to: (circle one):

Join-in Not join-in

Sample Child Assent form for 9 to 12 years:

Young Minds, Strong Voices "My decision to participate or not"

It is your choice to participate or not participate in today's activities. It's totally up to you. And it's okay if you don't want to participate. But before you decide, we want to make sure you know what participating means. Together, we'll read each section below and if you understand what it says, write your initials in the grey box.

	I understand that taking part in the Young Minds, Strong Voices will help adults understand the following question:
	What will help children feel safe, comfortable, and happy when they visit a new place?
Child to initial	Children have great ideas and important experiences. I understand that these activities will help other children share their own ideas and
	experiences about things that matter to them.
	I understand that the activities will involve drawing and acting with other children.
	I understand that we will be asked questions about the types of public places we visit, about how we feel when we're at these places, and about what makes us feel this way.
Child to initial	I understand that I will have a chance to write down my answers if I don't want to share in front of the other children.
	I understand that it is my decision whether to participate or not. It is okay if I don't want to participate in today's activities.
Child to initial	I understand that even if I participate, I only have to answer what I want to answer. I can stay quiet or say 'pass' if I don't want to answer something.
	I understand that whatever I say will be kept private by the adults asking the questions.
Child to initial	I understand that there is one exception: if I say something that suggests that someone might be hurting me or another child, the adults will have to tell someone else to ensure that I am safe.

Now you get to choose:

I have thought about it and I choose to: (circle your choice below):

Participate

Not Participate

in Young Minds, Strong Voices

in Young Minds, Strong Voices