



Inclusive Focus Groups Tool

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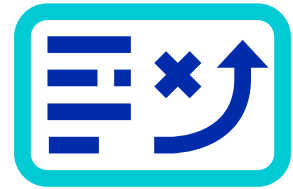
Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) can face particular and additional challenges to participating in high quality PE, physical activity and sport at school that engages them and meets their needs. Their voice may also be under-represented – School Games data highlights that 20% of schools (1 in 5) do not feel young people with SEND have a voice in school in the context of PE and School Sport¹.

The **Youth Sport Trust's, Youth Voice Toolkit** provides comprehensive information and guidance on Youth Voice, its value, and how to embed it meaningfully in schools. This Inclusive Focus Groups Tool provides specific guidance for practitioners on how to seek and hear the views of children and young people with SEND through inclusive focus groups. The tool contains guidance on:



¹Findings from 2018-19 School Games Inclusive Health Check report based on 10,780 school responses.

Planning an inclusive focus group



1 – Consent

When running focus groups with students under the age of 18 do consider if you require consent by parents/guardians. If you are having an open discussion within a school environment, additional consents over and above those the school will already have in place, are not normally required. If, however, you are recording a video or audio of the session, consult your school safeguarding and data protection procedures to check if consent is required. If you are running a focus group outside of a school environment for under 18's, it is essential that informed consent is given by both the young people taking part and their parents or guardians. Easy Read or Makaton formats can be utilised to assist the understanding of information and ensure informed consent for students.

Key Areas to cover in the consent form

- Break down of the session
- What is expected of the student/What is expected from the practitioner
- How will you keep their information safe/whether names will be used
- How participants can leave the session
- A signature space and date to give consent to taking part.



2 – Participants

Number of participants- no more than 10 participants per session. Less if this many could be overwhelming. Friendship groups - Focus groups are more effective when participants are team-mates or friends. This can increase confidence and reduce anxiety.



3 – Time

Keeping sessions short ensures that students can fully concentrate throughout the whole session. This is important for younger students and students with SEND. A recommendation would be: 30mins total, 20 mins questioning, 10 mins for off topic and follow up questions.



4 – Environment

If possible; use an environment which is well known by the students, as this can reduce student's anxiety. For example: A quiet classroom environment with a table and circular seating. This should be set up before the focus group participants arrive.



5 – Equipment

Chateez Cards – Chateez emoji cards can be utilised for ice breaker activities and to start conversations. This can encourage students who are nervous and can create a sense of individual ownership, within the session. Chateez cards can be used in a range of ways such as checking in how young people feel at the start and end of the focus group or using them to describe how an aspect of PE or sport makes them feel, and then asking further open questions to understand why.

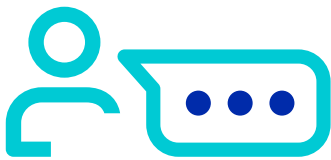
Prompt Cards – For broad questions; help narrow the topic and provide examples through using prompt cards. This helps to provide ideas on the area you are wishing to explore. Example Question: What skills have you learnt through this project? Prompt cards: responsibility, organisation, leadership, teamwork.

Introducing the focus group



The beginning of your focus group and first few questions will be critical in putting your participants at ease and encouraging discussion. Before you ask any questions, welcome the group and introduce yourself and your team. Ask the group if they are comfortable with you taking notes. Cover any practical points, for example where the fire exits and toilets are, and then begin by recapping the purpose of the research and the objective for the session (be careful not to give too much away as that could influence responses). Much of the success of group interviewing can be attributed to the development of this open environment (Krueger, 2002; Citizens Advice, 2015).

Example opening script



Hello and welcome to our session

Thank you for taking the time to join us to talk about...
My name is [insert name] and assisting me is [insert name].

We are doing a research project called... to get some information from young people about what sport and physical activity you want to participate in and why. We want to know what you like, what you don't like, and how you might be able to attend and participate in sport and physical activity more.

- There are no wrong answers; everyone has their own opinions and points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what other people have said.
- Keep in mind that we're just as interested in negative comments as positive comments; negative comments can even be the most helpful.
- You'll see that we will be making notes about what you say as we don't want to miss any of your comments.
- We will be using our first names to talk to each other today, but we won't use any of your names in our reports and notes. Everything you say will be kept confidential and we ask you not to share what we talk about outside of this session.
- The information collected today will go towards a report on how to improve sport and physical activity for young people in schools.
- You can leave at any time if you no longer want to take part in this focus group.

Does everything make sense so far? Does anyone have any questions?

Introducing the focus group



Before you ask the first question, it is advisable to begin with an ice breaker tailored to your participant group. The ice breaker needs to stimulate conversation and give everyone a chance to speak. This ice breaker time is critical for building rapport and confidence. Allow five to ten minutes for this introduction and avoid rushing it as it can prepare the group well for the later discussion (Citizens Advice, 2015).

Ice breaker example

Using your hands, pass this football around the circle. When you hold the ball, 'say your name', when it goes around the circle for the second time tell us 'what sport you like'.

Focus group structure guidance

Open-ended questions with an option of a closed reply

Open questions provide the opportunity for detailed discussion on a topic, e.g., "How do you feel about sports?"

Students with additional support needs can find open questions with an expected open answer challenging to answer. Therefore, open questions - which can have a closed or open reply too, are preferred, e.g., "Do you feel you have taken part in more sport through being a part of this programme?"

Use "think back" questions

Take people back to an experience, e.g., "How did you feel when we first did trampolining in PE lessons?" (open) or "Did you enjoy trampolining in PE lessons?" (closed)

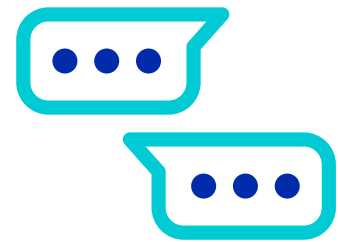
Adaptability

Every focus group is different; some questions will work with one group but will not work with another. Therefore, it is important to prepare different versions of your questions, to ensure everyone can meaningfully contribute to the session.

Silence

Don't be afraid of silence... some students need more time to process information.

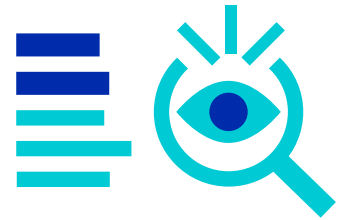
Focus group structure



Example structure

Question	Description
Opening questions	Simple question to encourage students to talk and feel comfortable in the session. Ice breaker activities or Chateez cards can be used to encourage conversation. These questions are not usually analysed.
<i>Example</i>	"Tell me your name and what are your hobbies?"
Transition questions	Transition questions should be simple questions which focus participants on the topic. These questions provide a greater depth in answer compared to opening questions.
<i>Example</i>	"Which of these cards (show Chateez cards) shows how you feel about sport?"
Key question	Main areas which you are exploring. You will need to spend the most time around these questions. It is important to explore the answers given by participants using prompt and follow up questions.
<i>Example</i>	"Do you think sport is important for all young people to take part in?"
Prompt/follow up questions	To be able to gain in-depth information; it is important to prompt students to clarify the meaning behind key answers and allows students to share situations fully. Prompt questions can also be used to encourage students who struggle with communication.
<i>Example</i>	"Would you be able to tell me a bit more about that?"
Ending questions	Ask participants to summarise the key topics you have covered in the session, through using flipchart paper. Ask them to (if appropriate) rank the importance of each area to them personally. Briefly summarise what has been covered during the session to ensure participants have nothing else to share; try to end with the question below.
<i>Example</i>	"Do you feel we have missed anything in our session today or is there anything else you would like to add?"

Analysing focus group data



1. Write up all responses.
2. Analyse each response for a possible theme.
3. Write a short paragraph summarizing findings for each theme.
4. Illustrate with powerful quotes.
5. Use your report or presentation to influence others, make changes based on the students responses or as insight to share with a group of young co-designers so you can work with them to develop ideas on how to improve PE and sport for students.

For further guidance, ideas and tools to help you implement Youth Voice go to www.youthsporttrust.org/school-support/free-resources/youth-voice-resources

Useful links

[This paper provides step by step advice in designing your focus group questions – Richard A. Krueger, Mary Anne Casey. \(2015\). Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. Book 5.](#)