

CHALLENGING THE MYTHS ABOUT YOUTH PARTICIPATION

NOTES 2025

PRIORITY 1-54



INTRODUCTION TO THE MYTH BUSTING ACTIVITIES

These icebreaker activities are designed to challenge common myths about children and young people's participation. Each myth reflects an excuse, barrier, or misconception that can limit how seriously young people's voices are taken in decision-making processes.

They have been adapted from original work by Professor Laura Lundy (2025), who kindly gave permission for these to be used. The myths reflect both everyday assumptions and more systemic barriers to participation, including some that may sound supportive on the surface, but actually undermine young people's rights.

By exploring these myths together, young people and adults can start to:

- Reflect on their own experiences and assumptions
- Hear different perspectives
- Understand why meaningful participation matters

Each activity encourages open discussion before revealing the 'truth' behind the myth, so that participants have the chance to think critically and respond honestly. This approach supports deeper learning, especially when myths are explored and debunked together.

Choose the version that best fits your group's time, age and setting, and adapt as needed.

For transparency and context, Appendix 1 includes the original text for each myth. These served as the foundation for the activities in this pack. Some of the original wording has been slightly adapted to make the language more accessible to young people, while taking care to preserve their original essence and critical intent.

OPTION 1: MYTH BUSTING ICEBREAKER



Audience: Young people and adults.



Time: 15 minutes



How it works:

The suggested order for the icebreaker activity is outlined below and covers voice, inclusion, adult excuses, and systemic barriers, but without drifting too far into professional territory.

- **Myth 1:** Adults Know Best
- **Myth 3:** They Are Too Young
- **Myth 9:** They Won't Understand
- **Myth 5:** They Are Not Representative
- **Myth 4:** It Would Cost Too Much and Take Too Much Time

Read them aloud or show on screen. Then ask young people to raise their hand or move to the side of the room depending on whether they agree/disagree with the myth, think it is true or false, or fair or unfair. Invite a brief discussion i.e. ***"Why did you choose that side?"*** then reveal the answer to ***"debunked"*** myth.

Note: There are detailed facilitators notes in each slide. It is important to acknowledge that repeating a myth can 'reinforce the false stereotype'. Invite discussion before revealing the counterpoint, so the myth can be 'debunked' or 'deconstructed' together.

Extension Activity: Once completed, invite young people to:

- Come up with their own myth about children's participation.
- Write one accurate counter-message.

OPTION 2: MYTH BUSTING



Audience: Suitable for both young people and adults.



Time: 30 minutes



How it works:

The way the myths are ordered below, supports a natural learning journey for young people. Each myth builds on the last, from personal experience to system-level excuses. With the final two myths directly addressing why participation has to be meaningful. Invite a brief discussion, making sure you allow time to 'deconstruct' each myth.



What Young People Hear Directly

- **Myth 1:** Adults Know Best
- **Myth 3:** They Are Too Young
- **Myth 9:** They Won't Understand



Excuses and Barriers Adults Use

- **Myth 4:** It Would Cost Too Much and Take Too Much Time
- **Myth 5:** They Are Not Representative
- **Myth 10:** They Are Too Vulnerable



Silencing Under the Banner of Protection

- **Myth 7:** Participation Versus Protection
- **Myth 8:** It's Too Sensitive



Misleading Compliments and Inflated Beliefs*

- **Myth 2:** Children Are the Experts
- **Myth 11:** Children Are the Future



Wrapping It Up with the Core Message

- **Myth 12:** We Need to 'Give' Them a Voice
- **Myth 6:** It Would Be Tokenistic

***Note:** Inflations refers to the idea of overstating or exaggerating something in a way that seems positive, but can actually undermines meaningful participation. For example, "*Children are the experts in their own lives*" while this might sound empowering, the reality is, it over-simplifies the truth.

OPTION 3: MYTH BUSTING CHALLENGE



Audience: Suitable for both young people and adults.



Time: 20-30 minutes



Resource: Print off A4 copies of myth cards depending on the size of the group



How it works:

Hand out copies of the myths. Then in small groups, ask:

- Which of these do you hear most often?
- Which are most damaging?
- Which do you think most adults believe?

Each group ranks them and justifies their top and bottom choices. Facilitate feedback and debunk the top myths.



MYTH 1

‘ADULTS KNOW BEST’

“YOU DON’T NEED TO ASK CHILDREN WHAT THEY THINK, BECAUSE ADULTS KNOW BEST.”



MYTH 2

‘CHILDREN ARE THE EXPERTS’

“CHILDREN ALWAYS KNOW EXACTLY WHAT’S BEST FOR THEM, BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE.”



MYTH 3

‘THEY ARE TOO YOUNG’

“CHILDREN ARE TOO YOUNG TO HAVE A REAL OPINION ABOUT IMPORTANT THINGS.”



MYTH 4

‘IT COST TOO MUCH AND TAKES TOO LONG’

“WE CAN’T ASK YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT THEY THINK. IT COSTS TOO MUCH AND TAKES TOO LONG.”



ADULTS MIGHT HAVE EXPERIENCE, BUT THEY DON'T LIVE IN CHILDREN'S SHOES. IF THEY DON'T ASK, THEY'LL MISS THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER.



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE EXPERTS IN THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THEY ALWAYS KNOW WHAT'S BEST IN EVERY SITUATION. ADULTS AND CHILDREN NEED TO WORK TOGETHER, BECAUSE BOTH BRING SOMETHING IMPORTANT.



USED TO SHUT DOWN CHILDREN'S VOICES. ALL CHILDREN, EVEN VERY YOUNG ONES, CAN HAVE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT WHAT AFFECTS THEM.

YOU DON'T NEED BIG WORDS TO SAY SOMETHING IMPORTANT.



LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE IS NOT A LUXURY, IT'S A RIGHT.

THERE ARE QUICK AND LOW-COST WAYS TO INVOLVE CHILDREN. BY DOING SO, IT CAN AVOID MISTAKES BEING MADE AND SAVE TIME.



MYTH 5

‘THEY ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE’

**“THERE’S NO POINT LISTENING TO A FEW
YOUNG PEOPLE, BECAUSE THEY DON’T
SPEAK FOR EVERYONE.”**



MYTH 6

‘PARTICIPATION VERSUS PROTECTION’

**“YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD BE PROTECTED FROM
DIFFICULT TOPICS BY KEEPING THEM OUT OF IT.”**



MYTH 7

‘IT’S TOO SENSITIVE’

**“SOME THINGS ARE TOO UPSETTING OR DIFFICULT
TO TALK ABOUT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE.”**



MYTH 8

‘THEY WON’T UNDERSTAND’

**“THERE’S NO POINT ASKING SOME YOUNG PEOPLE.
THEY WON’T UNDERSTAND WHAT’S GOING ON.”**



**EVERY CHILD HAS THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD,
even IF THEY ARE THE ONLY ONE
SPEAKING. NO GROUP SPEAKS FOR
EVERYONE. LISTENING TO A SMALL GROUP
IS ALWAYS BETTER THAN IGNORING THEM
ALTOGETHER.**



**YOU CAN'T PROTECT CHILDREN PROPERLY
WITHOUT LISTENING TO THEM. AND THEY
WON'T SPEAK OPENLY UNLESS THEY FEEL
SAFE.**

**BEING SAFE AND BEING HEARD GO
TOGETHER.**



**AVOIDING SENSITIVE ISSUES DOESN'T
PROTECT YOUNG PEOPLE, BUT CAN LEAVE
THEM FEELING ALONE AND ISOLATED.**

**THE SAFEST WAY TO TALK IS TO ASK
YOUNG PEOPLE HOW.**



**UNDERSTANDING COMES IN DIFFERENT
WAYS. SOME YOUNG PEOPLE USE WORDS,
OTHERS USE PICTURES, SIGNS OR ACTIONS.**

**WHAT MATTERS IS FINDING THE RIGHT
WAY TO INCLUDE EVERYONE.**



MYTH 9

'IT WOULD BE TOKENISTIC'

"THERE'S NO POINT ASKING YOUNG PEOPLE, BECAUSE IT'S NEVER GOING TO LEAD TO REAL CHANGE."



MYTH 10

'THEY ARE TOO VULNERABLE'

"SOME YOUNG PEOPLE ARE GOING THROUGH TOO MUCH. IT IS BETTER NOT TO INVOLVE THEM."



MYTH 11

'CHILDREN ARE THE FUTURE'

"WE DON'T NEED TO LISTEN TO YOUNG PEOPLE NOW. THEY'LL HAVE THEIR SAY WHEN THEY'RE OLDER."



MYTH 12

'WE NEED TO 'GIVE' THEM A VOICE'

"YOUNG PEOPLE NEED ADULTS TO GIVE THEM A VOICE."



IT'S A HUMAN RIGHT, SO THIS SHOULD NEVER BE AN EXCUSE FOR DOING NOTHING. PARTICIPATION IS NEVER PERFECT. ADULTS NEED TO DO THEIR BEST WITH WHAT RESOURCES THEY HAVE, AND KEEP IMPROVING.

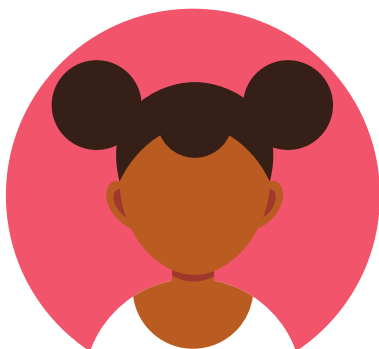


BEING VULNERABLE DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULD BE LEFT OUT. IT MEANS BEING HEARD IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT.

FEELING SAFE AND SUPPORTED CAN HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE PART IN A WAY THAT WORKS FOR THEM.



YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE HEARD ABOUT THINGS THAT AFFECT THEM TODAY, NOT JUST WHEN THEY ARE OLDER.



YOUNG PEOPLE ALREADY HAVE A VOICE. ADULTS DON'T NEED TO GIVE CHILDREN A VOICE, THEY JUST NEED TO TAKE WHAT THEY SAY SERIOUSLY.

APPENDIX ONE:

- **Adults Know Best:** Adults often know a lot but they can't know what children know, feel or experience if they can't ask them.
- **Children are The Experts In Their Own Lives.** Children have expertise but they are often not the only ones with expertise in the matters affecting them.
- **They Are Too Young:** The right is affordable to all children capable of forming a view. Every child can express themselves on issues that matter to them, including the very youngest.
- **It would cost too much and take too much time:** It's a right not an option. There are lots of ways that adults can engage quickly with children that cost little to nothing. Engagement often identifies waste and saves money and time.
- **It would be tokenistic:** It's a human right so this should not be an excuse for doing nothing at all. Participation is never perfect. Do your best with what you have, learn and improve.
- **The are not representative:** Few group (including adults who make these statements) are. However, each individual child is entitled to be heard. The task is to make sure children involved cover as diverse a range of experiences as possible.
- **Participation versus Protection:** This is a false dichotomy. You can't keep children safe if you don't hear them and they won't speak if they don't feel safe.
- **It's Too Sensitive.** If it affects children, they have a right to heard, especially on 'sensitive' topics. The best way to find out how to do this in a way that is safe and comfortable is to ask them.
- **The won't understand:** Used generally particularly for children with disabilities, especially learning difficulties. Article 7 of the UNCRPD requires that children enjoy the right to be heard on an equal basis with other children and should be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance.
- **They Are Too Vulnerable:** The more vulnerable the child, the more important it is to heart them. Excluding them makes them more vulnerable. The key, as ever, it to make it safe and provide support.
- **Children Are The Future:** True but not the main reason for listening to them. It's their right to be heard in the present, about the past, present and future.
- **We Need To 'Give' Them a Voice:** Up there with 'amplifying' their voice. They have a voice, the role of adults is to take it seriously. Note: they shouldn't need megaphone to be heard. A whisper and/or meaningful silences need to be heard to.