

## Checklist for co-creating safe spaces with young people participating in research

Reniers, Renate; Campbell, Niyah; Mitchell, Lizzie; Saunders, Charlotte ; Singh, Hannah; Tresadern, Charlie; Zaidi, Fatima; Dauvermann, Maria

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# CHECKLIST FOR CO-CREATING SAFE SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH



**2023**

# INTRODUCTION

## Creating safe spaces in research

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As researchers, it is imperative that we provide safe spaces for young people to participate in research. By 'safe space', we mean 'a place intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threatening actions, ideas or conversations' (Merriam-Webster, 2022). This is particularly relevant to the field of mental health research, where participants may be asked to engage in activities that require them to discuss or reflect on experiences of poor mental health. Such activities can be upsetting for participants and so it is important to consider what actions can be taken to best reduce risks of negative experience for participants. This will also lead to improved research data quality.

Currently, there is limited information to inform the creation of safe spaces for young people participating in research. We felt that there was a need to address this gap through the creation of a new checklist resource that was co-developed with young people.

To facilitate this, we worked with the Institute for Mental Health's Youth Advisory Group (IMH YAG), based at the University of Birmingham. The IMH YAG is made up of young people aged 18-25 with lived experience of mental health difficulty or experience of supporting a young person with lived experience of mental health difficulty.



# INTRODUCTION

## Creating safe spaces in research

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Co-development of this resource was facilitated through two in-person workshops hosted at the University of Birmingham. Although sessions were structured and led by IMH researchers, we were keen in expressing to IMH YAG members that they were the experts in the room and made efforts to facilitate sessions in an informal manner. This was important to us as we wanted to take steps to ensure that young people felt comfortable to express themselves and steer activity within the sessions.

We reflected on experiences of both involvement in the development of research as well as participation in mental health research studies. These reflections were used to generate top tips for researchers on steps that could be taken to design safe spaces for young people to partake in research.

Through our discussions, we identified three key themes: confidentiality and consent, fostering trust and feeling safe. Our checklist centres around how to best accommodate these needs and we have presented practical tips on how this can be addressed at three different stages of research participation: before, during and after.

We hope that this checklist will support researchers to consider what steps can be taken to ensure that children and young people participate in research that makes them feel safe and empowered.



# THEMES

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## CONFIDENTIALITY & CONSENT



- Fully informed consent is obtained
- Contributions are confidential
- Participants understand that they should only disclose what they are comfortable with

## FOSTERING TRUST



- Develop ground rules
- Consider group size
- Contact with the same researchers

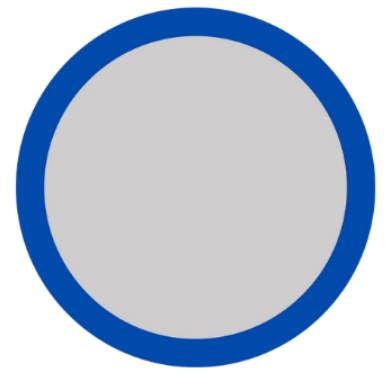
## FEELING SAFE



- Develop a safe word or gesture
- Develop ways of communicating discomfort

# BEFORE THE STUDY

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## MUST HAVES

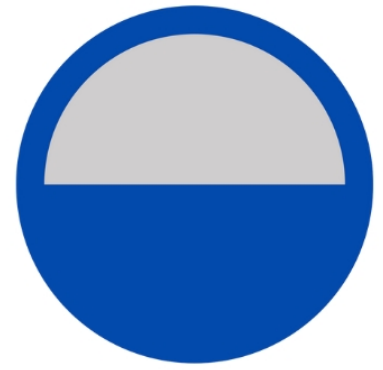
- Provide clear and simple information
  - What is expected from the participant?
  - What support is available pre-, during and post-study?
  - What is the data being collected going to be used for?
  - Short-term and long-term expectations and impact of the study
- Offer informal chat opportunities for participants to ask questions
- Complete confidentiality agreement before the first research activity
- Screening before the first research activity (i.e., phone call, remote and video call or questionnaires)
- Keep consistency of contact with the same researcher
- Agreement on an individual 'safe word' or 'safe gesture'
- Discussion of 'signs of stress' to act on
- Co-produced 'safe space' - work with young people in the designing of the research activity to understand if the approach is suitable

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Video recorded information sheets and consent forms
- Short video tour of the research setting with directions of how to get there
- Brief video introduction of the researcher
- Send reminders in the weeks coming up to the study

# DURING THE STUDY

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## MUST HAVES

- Remind participants that they are able to opt out at any time and assure them that there are no consequences for doing so
- If previously agreed, remind participants of any 'safe words' or 'safe gestures' that can be used to communicate discomfort
- Being aware of any signs of stress displayed whilst young people are participating in research and have confidence taking actions to support them
- Checking in with participants and providing support during any breaks in activity

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide options that will best allow young people to familiarise themselves with the activity and/or space that they will be participating in. Examples include seeing topic guides in advance or having time to engage informally in the space that activities will be taking place in
- Minimise distractors in the environment
- In the case of focus groups, being attentive to any group dynamics which may be having a negative impact on participant's experiences (e.g. people dominating discussion, tone being used by other participants)

# AFTER THE STUDY

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## MUST HAVES

- Facilitating reflection/debriefs:
  - Providing opportunities to discuss the experience of participation with a member of the research team
  - Give participants the option to say things in the absence of the focus group
- De-compression through activities - It can be valuable to provide post-study activities, to allow young people to move their thoughts away from the topics discussed. This can be facilitated through informal chat and/or activities (e.g. games)
- Show appreciation for participants
- Ask participants about their preferred method of communication
- Send a follow-up e-mail or text that signposts young people towards available support
- Give participants the option to stop communication
- Make sure participants feel comfortable asking for help

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ask for feedback from participants
- Keep participants updated on what is happening with the research
  - Once a year and when publications come out



# THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

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CREATE A  
RELAXED  
ATMOSPHERE

REMOVE  
STRESS  
AND  
PRESSURE

CLEAR  
COMMUNICATION

PROVIDE  
CHOICES

OFFER  
ADDITIONAL  
SUPPORT

KEEP  
IN  
TOUCH



## SUGGESTED CITATION

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## WEBSITE LINKS

Merriam-Webster. Definition of safe space [online]. Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/safe%20space> [Accessed 28th June 2022].

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