



Creating a welcoming and inclusive research environment

Top tips for research with children, young people and families

These tips are based on what young people told us across all workshops. Use them to help you create a welcoming research environment.

Make the space comfortable

- Choose a room that feels calm, not cramped or noisy
- Avoid harsh lighting or rooms with lots of distractions.
- Make sure there is privacy and a space to withdraw to
- Let young people sit where they feel safest, in the circle, on a sofa, or slightly to the side.



Young people told us: “tight circles, bright rooms and being fully exposed can feel overwhelming.”

Welcome different ways of being



- Say clearly that **fidgeting, moving around and stimming are OK**
- Let them bring comfort items — a **teddy, fidget toy, headphones, or something to hold**
- Don't label these things as “childish”; they help with focus and confidence.

Direct message from a young person: “Fidget toys are not childish.”

Give time to settle

- Start with light conversation and everyday chat
- Don't jump straight into questions
- Give people time to warm up, especially if they arrive nervous or late
- Allow breaks or quiet moments whenever needed.



What we saw: confidence grew when the pace was gentle and flexible.

Keep group size and layout supportive



- Small groups can feel safer, especially for LGBTQIA+ and anxious young people
- Avoid forcing big circles or making everyone speak in turn
- Let participants choose a spot that feels less exposing.

A young person told us “A one-on-one or small group is easier to be vulnerable in.”

Use clear, short, direct communication

- Keep instructions simple and avoid long speeches
- Explain one step at a time
- Repeat things if needed without making it awkward
- Check in with: “Does this make sense?”



Young people told us: “Be clear about what you're asking.”



Allow different comfort needs

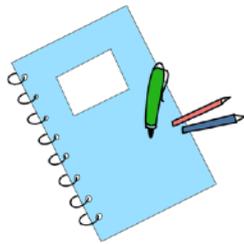
- Offer **fidget toys**, cushions or quiet corners
- Normalize getting up, stretching, or pacing during discussions
- Provide **water, snacks**, and reminders to take breaks
- Don't take quietness or lack of eye contact as disengagement.

Observed behaviour: some YP used stimming, soft toys, or headphones to regulate their feelings.

Support emotional and cultural safety

- Don't make assumptions about identity, sexuality, culture or home life
- Create a space where people feel accepted *without needing to explain themselves*
- Use inclusive language and ask what terms they prefer.

*Young people told us: "Don't assume stereotypes."
"It feels more comfortable being in a racially diverse space."*



Make participation flexible

- Allow dipping in and out of activities
- Let them choose creative tasks (music, drawing, storytelling) if talking is hard
- Give choices about how to respond — verbally, on paper, or through creative work.

What worked: music-making and creative exercises increased confidence and joy.

Reduce practical stress

- Pick a location that is **easy to get to**
- Explain where to go, how long the session lasts and what will happen
- Avoid rushing consent or paperwork.



A young person told us: "If it was too far away or difficult to reach, people wouldn't bother."



Be human, warm and approachable

- Use humour naturally
- Share a bit about yourself so you don't feel like an authority figure
- Maintain a relaxed tone — "let's chat" rather than "let's assess you".

What this showed: a friendly atmosphere reduced nerves and encouraged openness.

A welcoming environment is one where young people can **move, fidget, bring toys, ask questions, take breaks, be themselves, and feel genuinely safe.**