Ethics Studio

Consent processes with young people.
Is parental consent always necessary for under 18’s?
General Issues for children and young people:

- capacity to understand what the research entails
- possible coercion by parents, peers, researchers or others to participate in research
- conflicting values and interests of parents and children
Capacity to be involved in the decision to participate based on different levels of maturity:

- infants, who are unable to take part in discussion about the research and its effects;
- young children, who are able to understand some relevant information and take part in limited discussion about the research, but whose consent is not required;
- young people of developing maturity, who are able to understand the relevant information but whose relative immaturity means that they remain vulnerable. The consent of these young people is required, but is not sufficient to authorise research; and
- young people who are mature enough to understand and consent, and are not vulnerable through immaturity in ways that warrant additional consent from a parent or guardian.
4.2.8 An ethical review body may approve research to which only the young person consents if it is satisfied that he or she is mature enough to understand and consent, and not vulnerable through immaturity in ways that would warrant additional consent from a parent or guardian.

4.2.9 Some exceptions to vulnerability include:
- No more than low risk research
- Benefit other similar children/young people AND either:
  - Estranged/separated from parents/guardian
  - Need to protect safety/wellbeing of young person
Consent from child or young person without parental consent is possible if:

- If young person is mature enough to understand
- In instances where the young person is of ‘developing maturity’, the research needs to be:
  - Low risk (no more than discomfort)
  - The aim is to benefit young people
  - There are additional reasons not to involve parents
Best interests of the child

Participation in the research should not compromise the best interest of the child.

A child’s refusal to participate must be respected in instances when capacity for consent is evident.
Case example

• Assessing level of interest and engagement in STEM classes and comparing male and female Year 8 students.
• The school is heavily invested in this topic and wants to encourage all students to participate.
• Surveys will be conducted in class time.
• The school has standing parental consent for research and wants to provide an opt out consent process for parents/guardians.
  • Is this possible?
  • What if a child does not want to participate?
Standing parental consent

Schools may arrange for standing parental consent to be given for a child’s participation in research that:

- is for the benefit of children; and
- comprises no more than overt observation in school classrooms or anonymous or coded (potentially identifiable) questionnaires or surveys on subject matters not involving sensitive personal information or personal or family relationships.

- For any other research, except under the conditions described in paragraphs 4.2.8 and 4.2.9, specific parental consent is needed for each project.
Case example

• Assessing young people’s experience of the post-school transition
• Focusing on recent school leavers
• Will focus primarily on well-being outcomes and satisfaction with pathway chosen
• Some school leavers are under 18 years of age
• Do we need to ask for parental consent?
  • <16 year olds?
  • 16+ year olds?
• What if I was assessing anxiety?
• What if I was focusing on unemployed samples?
Thank you

Next Ethics Studio dates:
• 16 Oct
• 21 Nov
• 10 Dec