

Who Should Decide?

When are we “old enough”?



Complexity



7-13 years



45 minutes



4-30



Family and
Alternative Care



Participation



Human Rights

Type of activity

Decision-making, small group discussion

Overview

Children respond to questions about who in the family should decide on different issues. After each question, the children position themselves next to a poster to show their response.

Objectives

- To reflect on decision-making processes in families
- To discuss child participation in family life
- To introduce the concept of evolving capacities

Preparation

- Prepare questions to read out: modify those at the end of the activity, if necessary.
- Make 3 signs: Children Only, Children and Adults, Adults Only.

Instructions

1. Explain that this activity is about making decisions. Ask the group to reflect on what they ate for breakfast and ask them to discuss, with the person sitting next to them, who decided what they would eat. Was it them? Was it someone else's decision? Was it a joint decision made by themselves and an adult in the family (a parent, guardian or older sibling)?
2. Put the three signs up around the room, with space around each one for a group of children to stand. Explain that you will read out a list of decisions, and after each decision, you will ask the group to think about who ought to make the decision. Tell the children that if they think that adults should make the decision, they go to the Adults Only sign. If they think the child should make the decision, they go to the Children Only poster, and if they think that the child and adults should make the decision together, then they should go to the Children and Adults sign.
3. Read out the questions one by one, and after each question wait until everyone in the group has chosen a position next to a sign. After each question, encourage the children to look around at the responses from the rest of the group. Some children will probably want to make comments but try to discourage discussion at this point: tell them there will be an opportunity to discuss their views afterwards.

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the activity using questions such as these:
 - Did you enjoy this activity?
 - Was it difficult to respond to some of the questions? Why?
 - Which questions were easier to respond to and which ones were more difficult? Why?

- Why do you think some people had different responses?
 - Is there a right answer or a wrong answer to the questions?
 - Does the age of child make a difference to the role they should have in making decisions concerning themselves? Why or why not?
2. Introduce the concept of 'evolving capacities' and explain that it means that children are expected to be given more decision-making opportunities and more responsibility in personal matters as they mature. For older children, you can refer specifically to Article 5 and Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and discuss this concept further. Ask questions about the children's own role in decision-making, such as these:
- Are you involved in making decisions in your family? If so, which decisions?
 - Are there some areas where you are the only person taking the decision? Which decisions?
 - Are there some areas where you need help and guidance from adults in order to make decisions? Which decisions?
 - Is it important for you to take decisions at home and in your family? Why or why not?
 - How could you play a greater role in decision-making at home?
3. Relate the activity to human rights by asking questions such as these:
- Why do you think that taking part in decisions which concern you is a children's right?
 - Apart from in your family, where else are decisions made which impact you?
 - Who else makes decisions about children's lives, apart from children themselves and parents?

Suggestions for follow-up

The activity 'A Constitution for Our Group' also involves children in decision-making and negotiation.

Ideas for action

Ask each person in the group to develop a strategy with the adults in their family, identifying ways in which each member of the family can be more actively involved in family life.

Invite parents to speak to the group about their views on children's participation in family life, including how the child's role in making decisions changes as they grow and develop.

Tips for the facilitator

You may like running the activity 'We are Family' as a start, before this one.

Some questions may be difficult for some of the children to answer; encourage them to choose the sign which seems like the best fit. You may need to adapt the questions for your group. You also do not have to use the different age levels: each question could be asked just once, using the age of the children taking part in the activity.

You should be aware of the family backgrounds of the children in the group you are working with. Some children may not live with a parent or parents, and may live with a guardian or foster parents. Check that the questions and the way you pose the questions do not raise sensitive issues for these children. For example, refer to "your adults" or "adults in your family" rather than "parents".

Adaptation

For a longer and more in-depth activity, ask the children to discuss their decisions after each set of questions.

For older children: ask them to identify which CRC rights the questions refer to. Ask which human rights protect the participation of children in family life? Ask why these rights are important?

You could broaden the scope of the questions by including decisions relating to school, youth clubs, community centres, or the local community. For example: Who should design the school curriculum? Who should decide how the playground is set up? Who should decide on activities in youth clubs? Who should decide issues such as new cycle routes in the town, new shopping centres, etc.? Create another poster as an option for children to go to when using such questions representing the organisation, community, school or institution in the question. Broadening the scope of the questions may also make it easier for children living in alternative family arrangements.

After each question, you could also ask the children who decides in reality. This may be useful for the debriefing.

Organise the same activity with parents, or with children together with their parents.



Handout

Questions to read out

Who should decide whether you can stay at home on your own when your family goes shopping: At 5 years old? At 10 years old? At 15 years old?	Who should decide whether you can live with both your parents after they have separated: At 4 years old? At 9 years old? At 17 years old?	Who should decide whether you can join the army: At 6 years old? At 11 years old? At 16 years old?
Who should decide whether you should wear a raincoat when going out in the rain: At 3 years old? At 9 years old? At 14 years old?	Who should decide whether you should be a vegetarian or not: At 4 years old? At 8 years old? At 13 years old?	Who should decide whether you can smoke cigarettes: At 6 years old? At 9 years old? At 15 years old?
Who should decide whether you can stay up until midnight: At 5 years old? At 9 years old? At 14 years old?	Who should decide whether you can use the Internet without supervision: At 6 years old? At 10 years old? At 16 years old?	Who should decide whether you can choose your own religion: At 5 years old? At 9 years old? At 13 years old?
Who should decide whether you can stop attending school: At 6 years old? At 10 years old? At 15 years old?	Who should decide whether you can join a local club: At 5 years old? At 9 years old? At 17 years old?	Who should decide whether you can have your own mobile phone: At 4 years old? At 8 years old? At 14 years old?
Who should decide whether you should be put in foster care, if that is what you want: At 4 years old? At 10 years old? At 16 years old?		