

TIP SHEET FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH* ON PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCES

*Note: Tips below refer to adolescents but are intended to cover both adolescent and youth participation.



Introduction: This tip sheet provides suggestions for adolescents and youth to support meaningful participation and representation (of their peers) in conferences. A conference is a formal meeting of people with a shared interest, and it often takes place over a couple of days. Conferences may be held in person or organized online.

This tip sheet is one of a series designed in collaboration with adolescents and youth to support their meaningful participation in specific activities. The tip sheets build upon UNICEF's 'Engaged and Heard!' guidelines for adolescent participation and civic engagement

to ensure adolescents have space (opportunity and information) to freely voice their opinions to relevant adults (audience) who seriously consider and act upon their views (influence) [Lundy's model].

Suggestions are guided by nine basic requirements developed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) to ensure ethical and effective participation of adolescents that is: i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) adolescent-friendly, vi) inclusive, vii) supported by training, viii) safe and sensitive to risk, and iv) accountable.

BEFORE the conference

✓ Ask questions to find out more.

- If you are invited to a conference, ask questions to determine if it is relevant to you and your interests. Consider the question, how will I benefit from taking part?
- Make sure you have clear information about the potential roles of adolescents before and during the conference to inform your voluntary participation.
- Remember to ask about logistics and expenses. (For example, how will travel costs or internet costs be covered? Is there any compensation?)

✓ Increase inclusion, representation and participation of marginalized adolescents who are most affected by the issue(s) being addressed in the conference. You may want to consider:

- Encouraging the organizers to invite representatives from other marginalized groups.
- Suggesting alternative ways to create inclusion (for example, via video messaging or online participation).
- Consulting with wider networks and/or other adolescents from different backgrounds to help bring different perspectives.
- Giving other adolescent representatives a chance to represent their peers if you have already been to similar conferences.
- Promoting election of representatives from adolescent-led groups with opportunities for diverse representation (considering gender, age, race, ethnicity, abilities, etc.).

✓ Share your ideas and suggestions to help design the conference agenda and methods to address adolescents' interests and needs. For example, if opportunities allow, encourage the planners to:

- Include panel discussions with adolescents as speakers and moderators.
- Include workshops and small group discussions, with options to use cultural art forms or digital media to express views, ideas and priority messages.
- Have a dedicated space for adolescents to interact with their peers, rest, access free internet and charge their phones, etc.

✓ Use opportunities to gather views from your peers to be a better representative. If you are a representative who will speak on behalf of your peers (for example, as a panellist or speaker), ask adults to help you schedule preparatory meetings with your peers (especially those most affected by the conference issue). Together you can:

- Discuss and prioritize your most important issues/problems/solutions.
- Explore and analyse the causes of the prioritized problem and potential solutions.
- Identify which stakeholders you most want to influence during the conference.
- Think about how you can tailor your main messages to your specific audience.

✓ Seek support and/or training to prepare for the conference.

- Practise your presentation until you feel comfortable. Use role play, record yourself with your phone or use other methods to practise your role as a speaker and ask for someone's feedback.
- If relevant, watch online videos on your topic and about presentation skills to help you feel more comfortable to speak publicly.

- If possible, visit the conference venue to get familiar with the space or try out the online platform (e.g., Zoom) so you understand how it works (*see tip sheet on online engagement*).
- ✔ **Spend additional time preparing if you are a moderator or the facilitator of a panel discussion.**
 - See if you can meet other panel members (virtually or in person) in advance to discuss and agree upon the order of speakers in the panel discussion.
 - Do your own research. Look for well-known panellists online, view videos and check their social media accounts to get to know them better.
 - Prepare a list of questions for the speakers.
 - Practise asking open questions to keep discussion flowing. Closed questions encourage limited answers, such as yes/no, whereas open questions encourage conversation. Examples of open questions: What do you think about X? Can you tell me more about Y?
 - Practise using friendly body language (e.g., eye contact, smiles) and easy-to-understand language.
- ✔ **In collaboration with conference organizers, assess potential risks and discuss and prioritize ways to keep safe during the conference.** Make sure that you:
 - Receive information about the conference and that it is shared with your parents/guardians, if appropriate. If you are under 18 years old, you will need informed consent from your parents/guardians to attend.
 - Know you can opt out of participation at any time.
 - Understand your rights and know who to tell to if you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell.
 - Consider your privacy and safety for offline and online engagement (*see tip sheet on online engagement*).
 - Have clear information about any travel or accommodation arrangements.
 - Have a say in choosing an adult you trust to accompany you, especially if you are attending a meeting far from your home.
 - Carry an emergency contact card with you at all times if you are away from home. The card should include contact details for your accompanying adult, project liaison, hotel, and local police.

DURING conferences

- ✔ **Be comfortable.** Wear comfortable clothes. Consider dressing in layers to prepare for fluctuating room temperatures.
- ✔ **As a moderator or facilitator, remember to allow time** for introductions, main discussions, questions and answers, and final thanks to the panellists.
- ✔ **Be focused.** Use opportunities available to you. For example, as panellist, speaker, delegation member or conference participant, use your time well to share your main issues, key solution(s) and key asks.
- ✔ **Ask panellists/organizers to share feedback** with you to be respectful and accountable to you and your peers. Clearly articulate any next steps you would like to see from the conference.
- ✔ **Meet, discuss and connect** ('network') with other adolescents and adults during the conference, including during informal breaks. Request and gather the contact details of people you meet to support follow-up communication after the conference (*see tip sheet on networking*).
- ✔ **If safe and relevant, use the media** to spread your messages. Make sure you understand the social media guidelines set by the conference organizers. If you feel comfortable, consider engaging in press conferences or interviews or using social media and messaging apps (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or U-Report). Use consistent hashtags on social media.
- ✔ **Prioritize efforts to stay safe and well.** Inform a trusted adult if you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell. Request the support you need from accompanying adult(s) and make sure you always have emergency contact details so you can contact one of the organizers (or emergency services) if needed. (*For online safety, see tip sheet on online engagement.*)
- ✔ **Travel safely** with your accompanying adult during the conference, and use safe forms of transport to reach home safely at the end of the conference.

AFTER conferences to enhance accountable participation

- ✔ **Follow up and ask for feedback** from the organizers regarding how they have responded to your presentations and key messages.
- ✔ **Get a copy of any reports.** Ask organizers to share a conference report with adolescent representatives in accessible language(s) and formats, and consider asking organizers how you can contribute to ensure the final report includes adolescents' perspectives.
- ✔ **Share feedback with peers** and other supporters, especially those who helped you prepare for the conference. Share updates from the event, as well as results and next steps.
- ✔ **Reflect and learn** from your participation in the conference and its impact. What was successful? What was unsuccessful? What could be done differently next time? Why? How can you use this experience to positively influence issues that are important to you and your peers?
- ✔ **Discuss and seek support for follow-up action initiatives.** Discuss ideas with your peers and share concrete follow-up action ideas with adults to see if they can support your initiatives.

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