

# TIP SHEET FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH\* ON PARTICIPATION IN ADVOCACY EVENTS

\*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 advocacy events. Advocacy events are designed to influence a particular change in policy or practice, and they may take many different formats. Examples include: Organization of a meeting among working children's representatives, employers and trade union leaders to negotiate improved practices for protection from exploitation; a round-table discussion between adolescents and health authorities on the importance of sharing clear, easy-to-understand sexual and reproductive health information; use of an international day (e.g., International Children's Day) to share key messages.

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 advocacy events

### ✓ Ask questions to find out more.

- If you are invited to an advocacy event, ask questions to determine if it is relevant to you and your interests.
- Make sure you have clear information about the potential roles of adolescents before and during the event to inform your voluntary participation.
- Remember to ask about logistics and expenses. (For example, how will adolescents' travel costs be covered?)

### ✓ Increase inclusion, representation and participation of marginalized adolescents who are most affected by the advocacy event issue(s). 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 your wider network 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 events.
- 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 advocacy agenda and methods in ways that respond to adolescents' interests and needs. For example, if opportunities allow:

- Get involved in core planning teams.
- Consider using creative methods, cultural art forms or digital media to express views, ideas and priority messages.

### ✓ Use opportunities to gather views from your peers to be a better representative. If possible, meet with other adolescents affected by the advocacy event topic(s) to share your experiences and ideas.

- Discuss and prioritize your most important issues/problems.
- Explore and analyse the causes of the prioritized problem and identify potential solutions.
- Identify which stakeholders you most want to influence during the advocacy event.
- Think about how you can tailor your advocacy message(s) to your specific audience and what supporting arguments you need.
- Identify stories that illustrate your priority and message(s), as people connect and are often more ready to act when they hear persuasive and emotive stories.

✓ **Seek support and/or training to prepare for the advocacy event.**

- Use role play or other methods to practise your advocacy role (e.g., as a speaker).
- If relevant, watch online videos about your topic and advocacy skills to help you feel more comfortable in developing and sharing your key messages.

✓ **In collaboration with event organizers, assess potential risks and discuss and prioritize ways to keep safe during the advocacy activities. Make sure that you:**

- Receive information about the advocacy event 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 participate.

- Know can opt out of participation at any time.
- Know your rights and who to report to if you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell.
- Consider 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 contact details of the project liaison and emergency services if you are away from home.

## DURING advocacy events

✓ **Be comfortable.** Wear comfortable clothes. Consider dressing in layers to prepare for fluctuating temperatures.

✓ **Introduce yourself and encourage the development of a respectful, collaborative environment** where each individual can freely express their views and be heard.

✓ **Meet and converse with the right people.** Identify and find ways to share your advocacy messages with the people you most want to influence.

✓ **Be focused.** Use opportunities available to you (e.g., being a panellist, speaker or part of a delegation) to share your story, focusing on the main problem, key solution(s) and key asks.

✓ **Understand final agreed-upon points.** Try as much as possible to be satisfied with, or at least clear about, the final agreed-upon points and next steps from the advocacy event.

✓ **Mobilize supporters** through informal networking. Request and gather contact details of other adolescent representatives and adults to support follow-up communication after the event (*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 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) to share your stories and messages and mobilize additional supporters. Use consistent hashtags when applicable.

✓ **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.*)

## AFTER advocacy events to enhance accountable participation

✓ **Follow up and ask concerned, influential adults for feedback** regarding how they have responded to your advocacy messages.

✓ **Participate in reports.** Identify opportunities to feed into the final report and ask the organizers to share key reports/notes with adolescent representatives in accessible language(s) and formats.

✓ **Share feedback with peers,** especially those who helped you prepare for the advocacy event and other supporters. Share updates from the event, as well as results and next steps.

✓ **Reflect and learn** from your participation in the advocacy event. 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 advocacy initiatives.** Discuss ideas with your peers and share concrete follow-up action ideas with adults to see if they can support your initiatives.

**Acknowledgements:** Written by Claire O’Kane, drawing upon advice and feedback from youth representatives Sara Cognuck González, Camila González, Breanna Hyde and Rasheem Martin; and UNICEF staff Marcy Levy, Fabio Friscia, Ticiana Garcia-Tapia, Jumana Haj-Ahmad, Kristine Hansen, Miles Hastie, Tanvi Jain, Marina Komarecki, Joanna Lai, Chantelle Booyesen, Maria Emilia Numer, Massimiliano Sani, and Amy Wickham. Edited by Amy Souza.