



Young People's Organising and
Campaigning Group (YPOC)

Guide to Meetings

Be happy
know your
rights



Introduction

Who we are

We are a group of young people aged 14+ who are currently living in foster care, residential care or have moved on from care. We call ourselves the Young People's Organising and Campaigning Group (YPOC) and we meet every four weeks.

We have all had experience of going through so many meetings and having people decide what is best for us. We have put this guide together based on what young people have told us would work better for them.

"I don't really like the meetings but I like it when the people at the LAC listen to what we need to say."

Young person aged 13

Why we wrote this guide

Some of the young people who came to the 'Tell it like it is' conference told us that meetings were a big issue for them. They felt that no one listened to them at their meeting and sometimes they did not understand what was going on. When we counted up how many meetings young people had to go to we realised that it's hard having to attend so many meetings where things can change dramatically at every one you go to.

We thought "enough is enough", so we wanted to write this guide to make people understand what we think would make meetings easier.

We sent out questionnaires to all the looked after young people aged 8 and over in Aberdeenshire and we got back 54 replies. It was great to get such a good response and to see that so many young people care about what happens at their meetings.

They told us what worked well for them and what didn't. On the basis of this and our own experiences (both good and bad) we have written this guide to try and make meetings better for all looked after children and young people.

"I don't like the meetings because they are boring."
Young person aged 12

"What I like about meetings is I can say what I want and I can say if stuff is bothering me."
Young person aged 12

Our hope is that:

People who chair and attend meetings will understand what young people want to happen in their own lives and the things that affect them.

It will help you to support young people to take part in their meetings and young people will find it easier to come along and be involved.

Who is the guide for?

The guide is for anyone who comes to meetings, such as:

- Children and young people
- Panel members
- Reporters
- Parents and relatives
- Social Workers
- Teachers
- Foster Carers
- Residential staff
- Review Managers
- Children's Rights Officers
- Other professionals

We hope you find it helpful.

"I hate everything, all they do is upset you and make you angry."
Young person aged 16

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Before a meeting

This is what we think should happen before and when setting up a meeting:

Why is the meeting happening?

Make sure we understand what the meeting is for, why it needs to be held and what will be decided at it.

Make sure we know why we have to attend the meeting.

If we have a choice about going, make sure that we know that.

**"I go because I have to."
Young person aged 10**

Please talk to us about how much of the meeting we want to attend.

If we are not coming in at the start, please don't leave us sitting around for hours.

If we don't want to go, make sure we can still give our views to the meeting.

Who will be involved in the meeting?

Make sure that we know who will be invited to the meeting and why.

**"Only invite the people that actually need to be there, I think I should get to pick who comes and every time I ask for (my teacher), but (my social worker) never invites her."
Young person aged 16**

Get our views about who we would like to be invited and why.

If we want someone to be there, please make every effort to invite them or explain to us why they can't come along.

Ask us if we want people there all of the time or maybe we just want to speak in front of some people.

Where will it be held?

We would like to be asked where we would like the meeting to be held, if this is possible.

Some of us like it to be away from our home and some of us like it to be held where we live.

Some of us don't like to travel too far to our meetings.

When will our meeting take place?

Please talk to us about the timing of the meeting to make sure that we are happy about it.

Some of us don't want to take time off school for our meetings and some of us don't mind.

Please remember that some of us get very anxious about our meetings so if they get cancelled or postponed it can be very hard for us. Please think carefully before you cancel or postpone our meetings.

Helping us prepare for the meeting

Make sure we get a chance to read all the reports a few days before the meeting or that someone can go over them with us.

The people who write the reports should go over them with us unless we choose to have someone else do this.

It would be good to have reports that were shorter and easier to read so we could understand what they mean. We think it would be a good idea to put together a short summary of the key issues for us.

Reports shouldn't go through all the past history – they should look at the here and now.

**"Don't make them so long, not so many people going... Don't bring up the past so much."
Young person aged 12**

If we want we should get the chance to write down our views for the meeting. Some of us like using Viewpoint but others of us like to use other ways to give our views.

Make sure we know who will get copies of our views and ask us who we want to see them. If certain people have to get a copy of our views, make sure we know that. Then we can choose whether we write them down or not.

We should be told about who can help us to give our views at our meetings like the Children's Rights Officers, so we can get in touch with them if we need their help.

It's really important that we don't hear anything at the meeting that has not been discussed with us beforehand.

During the Meeting

Making us feel comfortable

We would like it if meetings could be as small as possible and if we could have a say over who is invited.

Some people might not need to attend but just put a report in.

We would like it if meetings could be less formal and friendlier.

- Somewhere we feel comfortable.
- Think about how the seating is laid out.
- Make sure there are refreshments there – water, juice, coffee and biscuits.
- Sometimes its good to have pens and papers so we can write things down or doodle to keep ourselves calm.

We would like you to keep meetings as short as possible and to prepare properly and stick to the point. Otherwise we can find them too long and boring.

"We sometimes have a laugh."
Young person aged 13

**"Don't like people that I don't know to be there."
Young person aged 15**

Make sure that everyone introduces themselves at the start of the meeting. That helps us to know who is at our meeting and why they are there.

We find it hard when people are at our meeting that we don't know so please try not to invite them or to introduce them to us before our meeting.

Please try to make sure that we are happy with everyone who is attending. If we don't want someone to be there, please think about having them in to do their bit before we come in.

We would like for example – to have a choice if we want our teachers to be there for the whole meeting. Sometimes we don't like them to know everything about our life.

If we want to take someone for support that we like and trust we should be able to.

**"I don't like it when we have to speak in front of everyone...
Young person aged 13**

Some of us really like seeing our family at meetings, especially if we miss them. It would be good to see them for a little while before the meeting to catch up.

Listening to us

We should have the opportunity at our meetings of saying what we want to say and people should listen to us.

Give us the space to give our views. Talk to us about that at the beginning of the meeting and find out how best to do that.

**"The people doing the meeting should encourage the children to speak up for themselves."
Young person aged 16**

Some of us might want to give our views with only some of the people in the room.

Some of us might like to speak to the Chair or the Children's Hearing on our own at the start of the meeting or at some other point.

Remember that we can find it hard when everyone is talking about us, so make sure that you include us in the discussion.

Please don't bring things up at our meeting that we don't know about and that no one's talked to us about beforehand.

**"I like that they are asking me what I would like, not just what they like."
Young person aged 11**

Make sure that we understand what is being said – check it out with us.

Make sure you understand what we are saying and that you have picked us up right.

**"I am shy.
I do not like questions."
Young person aged 8**

Think about the questions you are asking us and the affect this will have on us.

When we have filled in our "Having Your Say" form, done Viewpoint or written a report, please make sure that you discuss this at the meeting and deal with what we have said or asked for.

Think about our age and level of understanding and don't put us on the spot to answer questions, if you don't think we can.

Some of us find it very hard when everything from the past is brought up again in front of everyone. Please think carefully before doing that.

What Should Happen After the Meeting?

Immediately after the meeting we should have the opportunity to speak to our family and say a proper goodbye if appropriate.

The social worker should speak to us and answer any questions and make sure we understand what is going to happen next.

We should get a Minute of our own that is age appropriate, easy to understand and will help us know what is happening.

"Everything that I don't understand, always gets explained, so I do understand."
Young person aged 13

If we want to see the review manager to check anything out then we should be able to.

We would like someone to make sure that if people agree to do things that they do it.

And to make sure we have information on how we can contact people we may want to speak to after the meeting, like the Review Chair.

Some of us find it hard to go back to school after meetings, so please find out if we feel able to do this or need some time out. It will be different for different people and different ages and may depend on what happens in our meeting.

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Here are some DO's and DON'Ts for our meetings

DO

- Remember I am the **most** important person at this meeting.
- Make meetings friendly and informal.
- Concentrate on the positive things in my life.
- Inform me who is coming to the meeting (and meet me before the meeting if possible).
- Give me the opportunity to voice my opinion **throughout** the meeting.
- I should have the right to meet the Chair in private to make sure I can state views without offending people.
- Include me in **all** discussions.
- Regularly reflect on issues raised and check with me that they are right and that I agree.
- Make sure I understand what is happening and don't just assume that I do.

“They are all ok because they are for my best and I don’t have to attend or sit in for all of them.”
Young person aged 13

DON'T

- Spend the whole time talking about me without trying to include me.
- Put too much pressure on me.
- Embarrass me.
- Bring up history all the time.
- Invite people to the meeting who I have asked **do not** attend if they don't need to be there.
- Ignore me when I try to talk – respect my opinion.
- Disrespect me just because I am a child.
- Talk about me as if I am not there.
- Leave me sitting for a long time waiting to come in.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to read this guide and hope that it has helped you understand what would make things easier for us.

Aberdeenshire 
COUNCIL

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Produced by Aberdeenshire Council - GDT13914 October 2011

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