



How to ...

Listen and involve children and young people

Children and young people will have a view and ideas about most things to do with church, faith, life and God. Are you taking into consideration their voice in the life of your church? The reality is that churches can easily forget that children and young people do have a voice, especially when major decisions are being made.

If your church is committing to the diocese's new vision and priorities of engaging with younger generations, one easy way to respond is listening and involving children and young people. This 'How to' guide introduces participation and some of the whys, whats and hows around engaging with the views of children and young people. There is also an outline session for a consultation and signposting to other relevant information resources.

Why should the church engage with listening to children and young people?

- It enables children/young people to have a greater sense of ownership and belonging
- Offers churches a different perspective and fresh ideas
- Offers the possibility of generations shaping a different future together
- Helps all to feel valued for who they are and what they bring

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4: 12)

Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously. Article 12: UN Convention of the rights of the Child, Unicef 1989

What should children and young people be included in?

Participation in youth and children's work enables them to be involved in **1) Decision making**
2) Planning **3) Shaping and changing** **4) Evaluating impact**

What are the benefits of listening to children and young people?

- They are given the opportunity to have their views, opinions and ideas heard
- It helps avoid implementing things children and young people don't want or need
- It helps to shape the future of the church, its groups and worship
- It offers a fresh perspective, even if the ideas and suggestions are challenging
- It enables the prophetic voice of the young to be heard afresh in each generation
- It allows children and young people to work alongside adults in finding solutions
- It helps children and young people gain confidence and valuable decision making skills
- It demonstrates that children and young people are valued as fellow members of the church
- It encourages children and young people to becoming actively involved in shaping their church

- It enables children and young people realise that their voices can lead to change

How do we listen to children and young people?

There are endless ways of listening to the voices of children and young people. However, it is vital to choose a method that is age appropriate and best suits those you are listening to. You will need to plan well, obtain relevant permissions and follow all safeguarding procedures.

Method examples:

- Have an informal discussion
- Conduct a formal consultation
- Set up a focus group around a particular issue
- Set up a youth or children's council
- Have youth representatives on the church council
- Conduct a questionnaire or online survey
- Use social media, tweets, blogs and texts
- Play decision making games
- Make a model or sculpture from scrap or paint a picture, large collage or graffiti wall
- Use music, drama or role play
- Have circle time to share views and ideas
- Use photography

Remember...

Remember that participation is not just about decision making, listening also encourages active involvement.



Both parts of this can lead to empowering children and young people

Decision making

Adapted from Roger Hart

Participation

Children/young people decide, supported by adults in a form of partnership

Elements of participation

Children/young people are invited to express their views but adults make the decisions

Non-participation

All decisions are taken by the adults, children and young people are told what to do and why

Active involvement

Tony Cook 2010

Initiating and ownership

With adult support children/young people take responsibility for activities and are involved in the planning, delivery and evaluation

Occasional help

Children/young people help run activities that are mainly organised and directed by adults

Turning up

Children/young people turn up once or regularly and engage with the organised activities

So what question might we ask children and young people?

You could ask questions about:

- God, prayer or their church
- The groups they belong to or setting up a new group
- Using their gifts in the life of the church
- Connecting more with the local community or school

Children and young people will have a view and ideas about most things to do with church, faith, life and God. You just need to remember to ask them.

10 Sample questions about Church

1. Why do you go to church?
2. What do you like most about your church?
3. Is there anything you don't like at church?
4. If you could change anything about your church, what would it be?
5. What do you think God thinks about your church?
6. How do people find out about your church? How could they find out more?
7. What stops other children from going to your church? What could be done to attract more?
8. How could your church link with the local schools? Do you have any suggestions?
9. Does your church have good groups for children/young people? If NO what would you suggest?
10. What three words would you use to describe your church?

There are also 300 sample questions that unpack a number of key topics and themes on the Church of England's 'Learn 2 Listen' [website](#)

Example of a consultation with children/young people about church

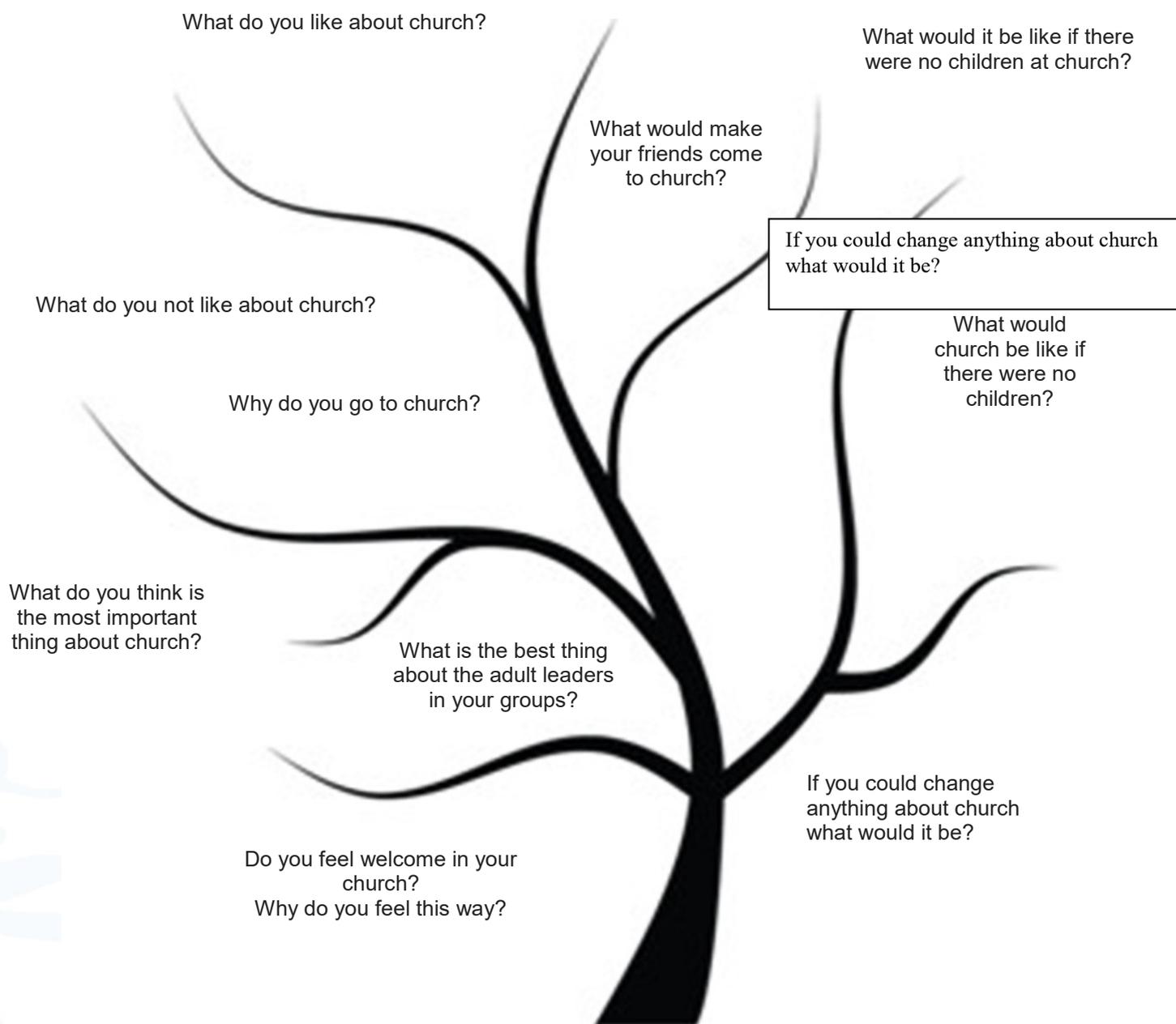
This session is a great tool for finding out children and young people's views on the church. The session works best with refreshments suitable for the group at the beginning. Start with introductions and an explanation of the session before the activities begin. Encourage everyone to be honest with their answers and affirm the children/young people that their opinions matter.

Activity 1: To get the children/young people moving and making decisions, invite them to stand in the middle of the room and ask them to choose their preference, by moving to the right wall or to the left wall.

- **Fizzy drink** (to the left) – OR - **Milkshake** (to the right)
- **Chips** (to the left) – OR - **Pasta** (to the right)
- **DVD** (to the left) – OR – **Cinema** (to the right)
- **Kindle** (to the left) – OR – **Book** (to the right)
- **Chocolate** (to the left) – OR – **Haribo** (to the right)
- **iPad** (to the left) – OR – **Smart phone** (to the right)

Activity 2: Divide the children/young people into smaller groups and give each group an 'Ideas Tree' (see next page) a handful of leaf shaped Post-its and pens. Their task is to answer each

question by writing on the Post-its and sticking them on the relevant branches. Allow about three to four minutes for each question.



When all of the questions have been answered, invite each group to feed back.

Activity 3: Of all the things the children/young people have said on the leaves, ask them to pick the 6 leaves they would most like to feed back to the church PCC about their views of church. End by asking the children/young people if any of them would be prepared to feedback to the PCC.

Monitoring Impact

Monitoring the impact is another integral part of the listening process. After consulting with children/young people, following the 5 steps below will help you monitor and evaluate their contributions. Also remember that it is important that the governing bodies with children/young people have shared ownership of how suggestions are actioned, implemented and monitored. This following form has been designed to help keep records.

1) Consultation information

Group consulted:

Date of Consultation:

Subject of consultation:

Facilitated by:

2) Main points the children/young people have requested to be taken forward to the PCC for consideration:

Comments:

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3) Action to be implemented, as agreed by the PCC: (to be fed back to the children/young people)

Comments:

4) Record of PCC discussion

Date taken to PCC :

Agreed review date of actions:

PCC chair signature:

5) Monitoring

By the **agreed review date**, what has changed as a result of implementing the agreed action?

Comments:

Other useful 'How to...' guides on involving children and young people in the life of your church include; 'How to involve young people on the PCC' and 'How to involve children and young people in appointing a new vicar'.

If you would like further advice please contact Dan Jones the Diocesan Youth and Children's Adviser on 0117 906 0100 | daniel.jones@bristoldiocese.org

This how to guide combines material from the Church of England's "Learn to Listen" website - a comprehensive range of tools and resources which enables churches to explore and engage in listening to the voice of children and young people, written by Tony Cook the Youth Adviser for the Diocese of Bath and Wells. If you would like more information on "Learn to Listen" please contact Tony on 01749 685133 | tony.cook@bathwells.anglican.org

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