



**INFORMING  
FUTURES**

1625 Independent People

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## **PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES**

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This resource is part of the Informing Futures toolkit. It was co-created with young people, and reflects what they felt practitioners most needed to understand in order to work successfully with care and custody experienced young people.

For more information or queries on any of the topics covered in this toolkit, or to find out about training and consultancy we can offer please contact [enquiries@1625ip.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@1625ip.co.uk).

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# CHALLENGE 1

## YOUNG PERSON 'HAVING A BAD DAY'

We had a day when Alexis was having a bad day. They were living in a shared house at the time of the start of this project, and there were some conflicts between housemates. On the day we were due to film Alexis' interview things had escalated that morning. When I text a reminder of where and when we would meet they didn't reply, which was not like them. When I called nearer the time of the interview to check in, Alexis explained the situation and sounded very stressed, but they had a plan and were on their way into the office to speak to a duty housing worker.

If they hadn't decided on their own course of action I'd have taken 5 minutes to plan one with them. I offered to delay the interview, in a calm manner, and suggested I came down to the office in half an hour to see how they were, and that we could walk together to the filming location if they felt up to it. By the time I did this, and with the offer of a walk together, Alexis had calmed down and felt up to being interviewed. I tactfully suggested that remaining involved in the project was a positive action on a difficult day, might be a welcome distraction and reiterated that I was grateful to them, being involved I spoke to the film company about the situation, and we moved our lunch break/switched up our schedule.

### For reflection

- How do you respond when young people are not in the right frame of mind?
- Are you able to acknowledge your own emotional responses to this, and remain consistent, predictable and reliable for the young person?

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## CHALLENGE 2

# DEALING WITH 'UNWORKABLE' SUGGESTIONS

At the initial mind mapping stages of the project the young people had lots of ideas for the film, some of which weren't ultimately practical as things progressed and some that weren't quite right in terms of tone as things developed. At all stages of the process I took all ideas on board, everything got written down, every idea was discussed at least briefly. If I felt it may not be achievable, I floated this possibility and explained why and sought out other ideas. I also tried to ensure that young people were aware that we had limited time, budget, and were all clear on the audience of the film and its aim. We recapped informally at the start of most meetings, and when I did an initial screening just for those involved I pointed out where some initial ideas had been kept.

### For reflection

- How do you respond to ideas which aren't practical or workable?
- Are you clear on what ideas or suggestions you can and can't approve, and what the process is for this?
- Are you really open to hearing young people's suggestions, or do you have an agenda?

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## CHALLENGE 3

# DISENGAGEMENT

I had enough young people involved that I could afford to lose the odd one if their circumstances changed, or they decided the project wasn't for them. One person got a full time job and could no longer make meetings, sometimes making part of one though if I was able to start them later in the day. I regularly kept in touch, but in a way that wasn't pushy, and instead regularly thanked them for their contributions so far. One person who couldn't make meetings I offered the option to feedback thoughts on things via text/email.

### For reflection

- How do you think young people feel about disengaging from a project?
- Are you able to acknowledge the young person's right to prioritise other activities over yours?
- What (if anything) can you do to maintain relationship with young people when this happens?

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# CHALLENGE 4

## YOUNG PEOPLE UPSET BY OTHERS

Asking young people to get involved and contribute their feelings, thoughts and opinions comes with emotional risk. Some of our young people were not accustomed to working in a group and found it upsetting if others did not appear to be listening, or made dismissive comments about their suggestions. The facilitator has an important role in ensuring everyone's voice is heard, and that everyone communicates respectfully about ideas and suggestions. To help with this, we used a simple set of ground rules which can be summarised as ROCKS

- Respect
- Openness
- Confidentiality
- Kindness
- Safety

These principles were outlined at the beginning of the session – you can bring a picture of rocks as a reminder to leave in the centre of the table during the session.

When young people do become upset, they may need some quiet space or 1:1 time away from the group. If resources allow it is always helpful to have enough staff available so that someone can step outside the group if they need to.

### For reflection

- Are the spaces you use for your activities suitable? Do they allow individuals to step away and have some privacy or 1:1 time if they need it?
- What else could you do to create an atmosphere in which young people feel safe to share their ideas and suggestions?