Young People's Participation and Mental Health: A Protocol for Practitioners

unicef

for every child

Young People's Participation and Mental Health: A Protocol for Practitioners

Claire O'Kane & Marcy Levy

Contents

Acknowledgements and disclaimer

The cover front photo shows Aya Aghabi from Accessible Jordan. Sadly, Aya passed away in 2019. She worked as a disability consultant with UNICEF and was a great advocate for accessibility in Jordan.

Disclaimer

This resource is intended to encourage reflection and critical thinking around how to do one's best in terms of ensuring the safe and meaningful participation of young people while also protecting their mental health and helping to put safeguarding systems and supports in place. Discussion and actions around participation, mental health and psychosocial well-being, and safeguarding are complex. There is no one-size-fits-all programming approach. Careful consideration of the context and young people's best interests is required.

The protocol complements existing UNICEF guidance for safeguarding. UNICEF offers a Child Safeguarding Online Course, available to both UNICEF personnel and external organizations, to understand and meet UNICEF's child safeguarding expectations. The protocol also reflects guidance, including UNICEF's 'Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis' and UNICEF's 'Child Safeguarding Toolkit for Business'.

This protocol uses guidance from the UNICEF mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) theory of change in the Global Multisectoral Operational Framework for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support of Children, Adolescents and Caregivers Across Settings and specifically Outcome 3 on improving community capacity for non-stigmatizing, accessible, available, and quality MHPSS service delivery. Community participation is key both for Outcome 3 and this protocol. Participation recognizes the important role that children, adolescents, their families and caregivers and broader community play as drivers of their own mental health and psychosocial well-being.

Overview of the protocol and how to navigate

Why is there a protocol?

The objectives of the protocol are to support individual and organizational capacities to safeguard the mental health and psychosocial well-being (MHPS well-being) of young people in participation processes and to ensure young people's meaningful participation across programming, research, advocacy and communications.

Who is the protocol for?

▶ Programme managers and field staff who plan or implement participatory processes with young people in research, programming, advocacy or communications

▶ Young people who are actively engaged in participatory initiatives, especially if they are speaking up about sensitive issues or are living in high-risk contexts

What is the protocol?

This protocol provides practical steps, principles, and resources to safeguard young people's MHPS well-being in the context of participation and engagement.

The protocol takes users through a series of **Stepping Stones**, as follows:

Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect provides activities to help individuals become more aware of power relations, assumptions and biases concerning young people, mental health and diversity. This self-reflection can help overcome barriers to inclusive, safe and meaningful participation of young people.

Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities provides a checklist with guiding questions for users to reflect upon and assess whether sufficient time and resources (human resource capacity and budgets) are allocated to support safe and meaningful participation of young people – and how to proceed if not.

Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation offers guiding questions, a risk assessment format, and links to an interactive activity for use with young people to identify and assess risks, harms and benefits to young people's MHPS well-being arising from participation opportunities.

Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems provides guiding questions, ideas for risk mitigation actions, and links to an interactive activity with young people to plan actions that mitigate risks or harms and strengthen support systems enhancing safe participation of young people. This step also includes checklists to ensure sufficient capacity and preparations to support and sensitively respond to young people in distress and other high-risk scenarios.

Stepping Stone 5: Follow Up and Monitor Outcomes provides checklists and tools to ensure monitoring of intended and unintended outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being and follow-up with young people to increase accountable participation.

The protocol also contains a **Collaboration Stepping Stone** section, which provides a checklist of actions to create an enabling environment for young people. Staff can use this Collaboration Stepping Stone at any point, whenever young people are brought into the participatory initiative.

Complementary resources and activities are found in the appendices, including guidance on collaboration with caregivers and stakeholders, service mapping for referral pathways, steps for self-care, and additional guidance for researchers, communications and advocacy staff.

Key features of the protocol

- ▶ Can be used across sectors in development and humanitarian settings

- ▶ Can be used for online and offline participation

- ▶ Supports assessment of risks, harms and benefits, as well as risk mitigation

- ▶ Supports collaborative efforts with young people (when feasible) to identify and strengthen support systems, especially for the most vulnerable

- ▶ Integrates questions and approaches that enhance equitable and safe participation that is conflict-sensitive, gender-sensitive, inclusive and responsive to young people's developmental capacities

- ▶ Supports decision-making by young people, staff and relevant caregivers about participation activities that are appropriate and safe, with consideration of young people's best interests

- ▶ Ensures sensitive and timely responses and referrals when a young person is distressed or experiences harm

- ▶ Complements the 'Engaged and Heard!' guidelines on adolescent participation and civic engagement and the UNICEF 'Tip Sheets for Adults, Adolescents and Youth on Adolescent and Youth Participation in Different Settings'

- ▶ Complements existing child safeguarding policies and procedures

A number of key principles informed this resource (see Appendix A: Key principles). These are largely based on principles of child rights that are explicitly focused on young people (under 18 years old) but remain highly relevant to inform safe and meaningful participation of older young people (aged 18 to 24 years).

When and how to use the protocol?

The protocol is a flexible resource. Ideally, staff will use the protocol at the outset when designing any programme, research, advocacy or communication that intends to support consultative, collaborative or young person–led participation. In this way, the process can support preparations by adults and young people to create an enabling environment for safe and meaningful participation (see Figure 1: Protocol decision pathway).

The protocol is also designed to be used during and after project implementation. Used this way, the tool can improve the implementation of quality participation processes and ensure regular monitoring of intended and unintended outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being. The protocol also stipulates follow-up with young people to enhance safe and accountable participation.

Figure 1: Protocol decision pathway

Stepping Stone 1:
Self-Reflect to become more aware of power relations, assumptions and biases concerning young people and their MHPS well-being needs

Start here during the design phase – and when possible, include young people from the outset

Stepping Stone 2:
Assess Resources and Capacities to determine if there are sufficient time and resources for safe and meaningful participation

Yes

No

Stepping Stone 3:
Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation

Redesign initiative to ensure sufficient time and resources for safe and meaningful participation

If you are working in high-risk situations

Stepping Stone 4:
Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems enhancing safe participation

If any of the activities are still identified as harmful for young people after the risk mitigation measures

Redesign these activities to ensure safe participation of young people

If you are supporting the participation of young people in high-risk situations also apply checklist 4.2

Stepping Stone 5:
Follow Up and Monitor use M&E learning to enhance and improve future processes

Use the **Collaboration Stepping Stone to create an enabling environment** whenever young people are brought into the process

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

Is the protocol intended for staff working in particular sectors, such as mental health or protection?

The protocol is intended for organizations and staff working across any sector (including but not limited to education, mental health, health, nutrition, protection, shelter, water sanitation and hygiene, and climate justice).

In fact, anyone who supports young people's participation (referred to as 'users' or 'staff' in this document) can use the protocol. Examples of users include organization staff, young people who are leading their own participatory initiative, or staff working in collaboration with young people. Users may also engage other relevant stakeholders, such as parents or caregivers, schoolteachers, religious or traditional leaders or government officials.

The protocol can be applied in any context where young people aged 10 to 24 are encouraged to actively participate in programming, research, advocacy, or communications.

Can one team member apply the protocol on their own?

One team member can take the lead to read and familiarize themselves with the protocol and consider how best to use it. However, the protocol is most effective when a number of team members and young people themselves participate in the suggested activities and collective discussions about the checklist questions and actions needed.

Can the protocol be used at any stage in the participation process? And can I start with any Stepping Stone?

The protocol is most effective when used at the outset when designing any programme, research, advocacy or communication that intends to support young people's participation.

While protocol users are encouraged to use each of the Stepping Stones in consecutive order, the protocol can be used flexibly. For example, it is feasible to start from Stepping Stone 2 or Stepping Stone 3 if the project is already under way. However, it is important that **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation** is always followed by **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems**.

If a participatory project is near completion, users may also consider starting at Stepping Stone 5 to monitor outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being and to follow up with young people and relevant stakeholders to enhance accountability.

Further, checklists throughout this document can be pulled out and integrated into other project planning and monitoring efforts.

Do I need to involve young people in every stage?

Staff are encouraged to use the protocol in collaboration with young people and other relevant stakeholders (such as caregivers, community and religious elders, and government officials). Participation is more relevant and meaningful when young people are engaged from the outset.

However, it is acknowledged that in some contexts and for various reasons, users may sometimes begin planning without young people. The protocol is designed to be used in a flexible way, such that staff may apply the protocol even when young people are not yet available.

For example, some agencies have applied **Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect** and **Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities with adult staff**. They have then worked collaboratively with young people for **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation** and **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems**.

It is especially important to aim to consult and collaborate with young people during Stepping Stones 3 and 4 to ensure risk mitigation and decision-making are informed by young people's views and experiences and guided by their best interests.

Is the protocol only meant to be applied when working with young people on sensitive issues?

The resource is intended for general use, to guide and strengthen participatory work in any setting.

However, the protocol also includes particular considerations for working with young people on sensitive issues (such as on violence, exploitation, sexual and gender identity, or mental ill health) or with those living in high-risk contexts (such as those adversely affected by discrimination, armed conflict, forced displacement, migration or disaster).

Can the protocol be adapted and contextualized?

Users are encouraged to adapt and contextualize the protocol to enhance relevance and usability in their particular setting. When applying the checklists, practitioners and young people can identify how best to build upon existing resources and capacities. The scenarios can be adapted and replaced by more relevant local examples. Where possible, locally relevant visuals and video resources can be developed and used. Furthermore, inter-agency efforts are encouraged to create updated lists of formal services and referral pathways that are available within the national or subnational context, including MHPS support (MHPSS) and other forms of support (see Appendix I: Template for service mapping for referral pathways).

What do we do if our organization does not currently have access to safeguarding focal points, mental health professionals or MHPSS services?

When working with young people in participatory ways, your agency is encouraged to appoint a safeguarding focal point who young people can contact if they experience harm or discomfort. The people assigned as focal points may access existing online training on child safeguarding and psychological first aid for children to enhance their capacity.

Safeguarding focal points, in collaboration with other colleagues, are encouraged to map out and create updated information about formal services and referral pathways that are available within the national or subnational context, including MHPSS and other forms of support (see Appendix I: Template for service mapping for referral pathways). If MHPSS services are not available, you can make referrals to existing social service and health service providers. Furthermore, your agency may contact UNICEF to support collaborative advocacy and increase the availability of young person–friendly MHPSS services.

How long does it take to use the protocol?

As the protocol can be used in flexible ways and includes rich resources in the appendices, the time taken to use it will vary depending on the interests and availability of practitioners and young people. However, the appendices include illustrative plans for:
- ▶ A one-day workshop with practitioners (and young people) on **Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect** and **Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities**
- ▶ A half- to one-day workshop with young people on Stepping Stone 3 and Stepping Stone 4 to identify and address risks

Tips for using the protocol

▶ **Get familiar with the protocol.** Read through the whole protocol to get familiar with the contents before implementing these ideas. Encourage other team members to read the entire protocol, as well.

▶ **Discuss how to adapt and use the protocol in your context.** Arrange a team meeting to discuss whether and how you can apply the protocol (all or some parts of it) to strengthen planned or existing participatory work with young people. Discuss ways to adapt and use the protocol in ways that are most relevant to your context.

▶ **Plan and budget for meetings with staff and young people to apply relevant parts of the protocol.** While users are encouraged to follow each of the Stepping Stones in consecutive order starting from **Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect**, it is also feasible to start from **Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities** or **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation** if the project is already under way.

Staff are strongly encouraged to use the protocol in collaboration with young people. However, staff may apply the protocol even if young people are not yet available.

▶ **Apply the Collaboration Stepping Stone during any stage in which young people are brought into the process.** The **Collaboration Stepping Stone** will help build a safe environment for freedom of expression.

▶ **Ensure Stepping Stones 3 and 4 are implemented together. Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation** should always be followed by **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems**.

Section 2

Background

> **Valuing and prioritizing care means paying attention to process and relationships, ensuring that the ways in which we relate to each other are defined by compassion, accountability, safety, kindness and well-being.**
> – Oxfam, 2020, p. 18

Around the world, many organizations are increasing efforts to support young people's participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of research, programming, advocacy or communications on issues that concern them. Participation provides crucial opportunities to recognize and engage with young people as right holders and agents of change, to build upon young people's strengths, insights and skills, and to develop more ethical, relevant and effective programmes and policies. Consideration of young people's MHPS well-being must be carefully considered in all aspects of participation.

Two key tenets inform this protocol:

▶ Emerging evidence suggests a strong bidirectional relationship between well-being outcomes and meaningful participation.[1] Furthermore, consultations with young people affirm that there is a strong connection between their mental well-being and respectful, meaningful, and safe participation.[2]

▶ Safeguarding efforts in the context of participation must build upon young people's strengths and consider not only MHPS well-being risks but also benefits arising from meaningful participation.

> **I feel uncomfortable when someone says something hurtful and it's not properly addressed.**
> – Luigi*, youth, Brazil

Evidence on young people's participation, mental health and well-being

Young people's mental health is increasingly an important global health and development priority.[3] It is estimated that half of all mental health conditions begin before the age of 14.[4] Among adolescents, poor mental health, including anxiety and depression, accounts for 16 per cent of the global burden of disease and injury.[5] Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 15- to 19-year-olds.[6] Young people experience higher rates of chronic anxiety and depression when they are subjected to discrimination due to their race,[7] gender,[8] and sexual identity.[9] Violence between peers, and unhealthy relationships among young people, including cyberharm, have significant negative impact on young people's MHPS well-being.[10]

Increasing evidence shows that providing young people with meaningful participation opportunities enhances their well-being, development and protection.[11] Systematic reviews of young people's participation in decision-making in health, protection, alternative care, and education settings provide evidence that participation in decisions affecting them is a protective factor enhancing young people's care, safety and well-being.[12] The process of participation can result in more trusting relationships, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, and an increased sense of mastery and control,[13] each of which enhances young people's well-being and resilience.[14]

*Note: Quoted youth's names are changed throughout this document to protect their identities.

Understanding key terms
(see Appendix B: Terminology explained)

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which an individual realizes her/his/their own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to make her/his/their community.[15] For children and young people, the definition of mental health necessarily takes into account age-specific and life course markers and includes a positive sense of identity, the ability to manage thoughts and emotions, the capacity to build relationships, and the ability to learn and acquire education.[16]

MHPS well-being describes the positive state of being when a person thrives. In young people, it results from the interplay of physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual aspects that influence individuals' ability to grow, learn, socialize, and develop to their full potential. Well-being is commonly understood in three domains:[17]

▶ Personal well-being: positive thoughts and emotions, such as hopefulness, calmness, self-esteem and self-confidence

▶ Interpersonal well-being: nurturing relationships, responsive caregiving, a sense of belonging, the ability to be close to others

▶ Skills and knowledge: the capacity to learn, make positive decisions, effectively respond to life challenges and express oneself

Mental ill health is when someone is not experiencing good mental health. The person might have a mental illness or might have poor mental health without having an illness. This term includes anyone who is experiencing mental health challenges.[18]

Participation ensures the right of young people (individually or collectively) to form and express their views and influence matters that concern them directly and indirectly. Participation is about being informed, engaged and having an influence on decisions and matters that affect one's life – in private and public spheres, in the home, in alternative care settings, at school, in the workplace, in the community, in social media, in broader governance processes, and in programmes.[19]

Meaningful participation ensures that young people have space (opportunity and information) to freely voice their opinions to relevant people (audience) who seriously consider and act upon their views.[20] Participation should also adhere to the nine basic requirements for effective and ethical participation outlined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and be:[21] i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) inclusive, vi) child-friendly, vii) supported by training, viii) safe and sensitive to risk, and ix) accountable.

> **No one should give up their physical and mental health while working for human rights. We should practise what we advocate. For our own sake, now it's time to start to take good care of ourselves.**
> – Female youth activist, Amnesty International, 2021, p. 11

Evidence also suggests that participation processes can have intended and unintended positive, negative and mixed impacts on a young person's MHPS well-being.[22] Poorly designed participation processes and those that exclude young people from decisions affecting them can have negative outcomes on the MHPS well-being of young people. For example:

▶ Insufficient efforts by adults (or peers) to take young people's views seriously can make youth feel ignored or overlooked, which increases frustration,[23] fears, anxiety, sadness and despair[24] and contributes to decreased self-esteem and self-worth.[25] In turn, poor self-esteem and exclusion from decision-making increase young people's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.[26]

▶ Insensitive or inadequate responses to young people's distress or disclosure during participation processes can heighten harm and risks.[27]

▶ If young people are engaged on sensitive issues (e.g., concerning violence, sexuality, or mental health) without sufficient preparation to create a respectful environment for safe expression, young people may face backlash, discrimination and stigmatization, resulting in discomfort, fear and lower levels of self-esteem.[28]

▶ Poor staff recruitment and inadequate preparations by staff may expose young people to abuse, exploitation, or unhealthy peer-to-peer behaviours related to participation, resulting in a negative impact to their physical and mental health.[29]

▶ When participation processes are not adequately designed to include young people of different backgrounds, those left out may experience stigma, isolation and poor self-esteem.[30]

▶ If young people take on too much responsibility, their engagement can potentially result in burnout.[31]

Simply put, deliberate efforts are needed to ensure safe and meaningful participation that has a positive impact on young people's MHPS well-being.

> **I feel uncomfortable when I feel that my participation is not appreciated. I participated in an event with youth and adults; we were brainstorming and trying to give our thoughts. However, for the organizers it seemed what we shared was not enough for them. I believe that we didn't meet the agenda. There was pressure from the organizer, such that we felt that we did something wrong or we didn't think in the right way, and this affected our participation and our confidence.**
> – Sana, youth, Jordan

Scenario A:
Asking young people inappropriate questions results in distress and stigma

Background: A local NGO organizes radio programmes to raise awareness about the risks of early pregnancy.

What happened: For a live radio programme, a pregnant adolescent girl and an adolescent mother were invited as guest speakers. The adolescents accepted, as they wanted to help improve the situation of girls in their community. They were told their identities would be protected. During the live radio programme, the radio producer asked the adolescents personal questions that made them feel uncomfortable. One of the girls became distressed and started to cry, but the radio producer continued to ask her personal probing questions. As a result, both girls felt unsupported and hurt. Follow-up monitoring of the radio programme also revealed that other pregnant girls and young mothers in the local community faced increased stigma and shame after the radio series.

What is recommended: An assessment of risks, harms and benefits of young people's participation in the radio programme should have been undertaken at the outset to identify and develop strategies that would mitigate the risks. Better preparation with the radio producer and the girls would have helped everyone agree in advance which questions were appropriate to ask and ensured the girls knew they did not have to answer questions that made them uncomfortable. A supportive adult should have been present to help the girls throughout the process. Furthermore, recorded rather than live sessions would have allowed NGO staff, the girls and the radio producer to make edits and create more effective and less stigmatizing radio programmes.

© UNICEF/UN0378070/Panjwani

Stepping Stones to implement the protocol

Introduction

This section shares guidance to implement each of the Stepping Stones to inform and increase planning, implementation and monitoring of safe and meaningful participation of young people, focusing on MHPS well-being outcomes.

Figure 2: Overview of Stepping Stones
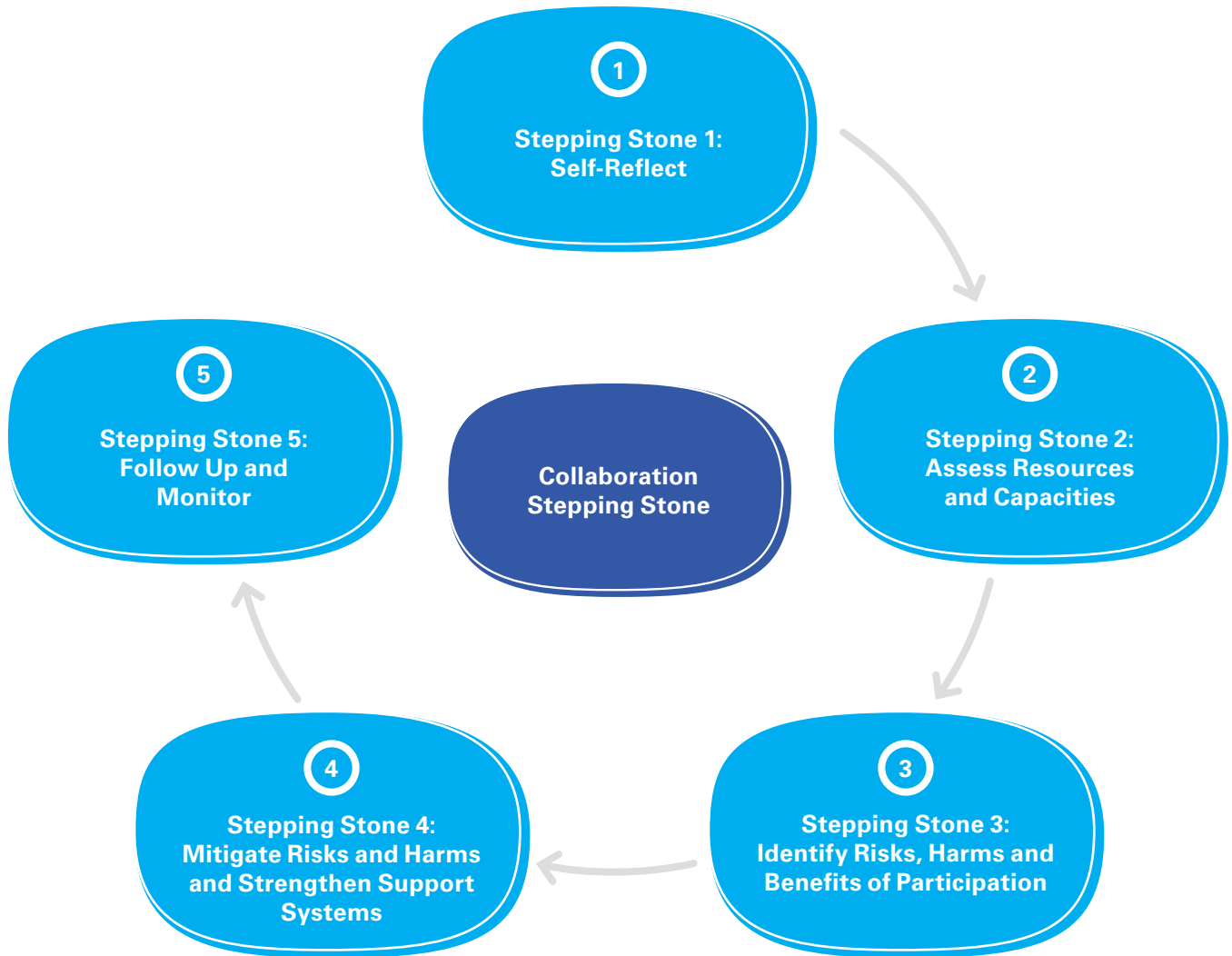
As noted previously, it is strongly encouraged that young people participate in all Stepping Stones – or in as many stages of the process as possible. The Collaboration Stepping Stone can be used during any stage when young people are brought into the process.

> **Not being able to balance our well-being with our passion to drive change forward can lead to anxiety, stress and burnout.**
> **–** Youth activist, Amnesty International, 2021, p.11

1

2

3

4

5
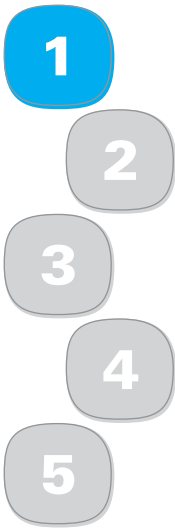
Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect

Note: Appendix C provides a sample plan for a one-day workshop with practitioners and young people to apply Stepping Stone 1 and Stepping Stone 2.

What?   **Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect** provides activities (videos, reflection questions, and value clarification activities) for users to complete individually to:

▶ Reflect on personal assumptions and biases
▶ Become more aware of power relations, attitudes and biases concerning young people, mental health and diversity that influence safe and meaningful participation
▶ Better empathize with young people and consider their perspectives and insights and identify how to work in ways that are inclusive, safe and respectful

Why?   Reflective practice helps users explore how their individual privileges, assumptions and biases influence personal attitudes and professional practices. Opportunities for young people's participation are often influenced by adults' perceptions of young people's capabilities, which may be influenced by norms or biases that undermine the capacities and contributions of certain individuals or groups based on age, gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, citizenship status, family income, care status, education level or working status, sexual identity or other factors.[32] Thus, it is essential that practitioners become aware of the power and privilege available to them (as a result of their own age, gender, race, professional status, or other factors), understand how these may influence their interactions with young people, and work to overcome bias. It is also important for young people to reflect on their own assumptions, as well as biases that affect them, so they become more aware and able to challenge discrimination and support equitable participation opportunities.

Furthermore, mental health is understood in different ways in different sociocultural contexts and is frequently associated with stigma. Staff must make proactive efforts to work in non-judgmental ways with young people and to build upon their strengths. Reflective practice is essential to help minimize actions that can discriminate against, stigmatize or undermine young people. Reflective practice helps individuals deepen their listening skills, empathy, humility, and ability to understand and effectively respond to power dynamics when working with young people (and other stakeholders).

How to use?   Staff and other stakeholders (potentially including young people, parents or caregivers, teachers, community members or government officials) should individually undertake self-reflection activities (see Checklist 1: Self-reflection activities).

❝ **People have many stereotypes of people with disabilities, so people have to be a little more empathic and they have to get off their stereotypes. Many times, we can do anything that other people can do. Many times, there are false assumptions.**
– Alejandra, youth, Costa Rica

Checklist 1: Self-reflection activities

☐ Watch a short video on safe participation and young people's well-being. Start a journal to reflect on key insights and learning from young people.

▶ Video: *Young People's Views About Speaking Up, Safety and Well-Being*

☐ Reflect on what you heard in the video:

▶ Did any of the messages shared by young people surprise you or challenge your existing conceptions of safe participation or adolescent mental health? In your journal, please note key reflections about what surprised or challenged you.

▶ Write down two or three key insights that will help you create an environment that supports safe participation of young people, with a focus on positive mental well-being.

☐ Read 'Designing Inclusive Programming: A Self-Reflection Guide' and complete at least two of the following activities, choosing those that are most relevant to your work:

▶ Linking Our Identities, exploring identity and intersectionality

▶ How Comfy Are You?, exploring stereotypes and prejudice

▶ Power Flower, exploring power and privilege

▶ Guess Who?, exploring assumptions and biases

▶ Learning to Pivot, creating a safer space

Scenario B:
Youth activists' burnout and the importance of self-care[33]

Background: Young people are often passionate about human rights, social justice, and environmental issues that affect their lives. Individuals and groups find diverse ways to actively engage as activists and change agents. This scenario draws upon Amnesty International's research and discussions with youth activists and their guidance to enhance well-being of youth activists (see Amnesty International, 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World (Volume 2): A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists'.)

What happened: Research reviewed by Amnesty International suggests that social justice and human rights activists are especially susceptible to burnout, and the authors describe how "burnout evolves gradually when you are faced with stress for long period of time…." (Amnesty International, 2021, p. 68). Here are two reflections from youth activists:

▶ "My name is Diya and at the moment I feel exhausted. We are preparing for Human Rights Day, but I am doubtful we will have any impact on the world. It's all messed up! What is the point?"
▶ "My name is Nathan and I have been very busy with my activism and school. We will have our final exams at school next week. I am nervous about those and worry whether I will pass this year. I am a member of our Amnesty International Board and have lots on my mind about what I should do, but at the moment I have a headache so I will try to do that later."

What is recommended: Refer to the publication created by Amnesty International in 2021, 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World (Volume 2): A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists'. This workbook was developed collaboratively by youth activists and adults. It provides practical guidance and exercises for young people to become more aware of their MHPS well-being and to prevent burnout. For example, young people are encouraged to identify and name sources of stress that affect them and to focus on what they can change, connect with others, play more, and ask for professional help when needed. The workbook also provides relevant exercises for young activists and adult allies to explore activism cultures, oppression and privilege, resistance, intergenerational power dynamics, and inclusive language.

1

2

3

4

5

Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities

Note: Appendix C provides a sample plan for a one-day workshop with practitioners (and young people) to apply Stepping Stone 1 and Stepping Stone 2.

What? **Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities** includes a checklist with guiding questions for staff (and other relevant stakeholders) to assess whether sufficient time and resources exist to ensure safe and meaningful participation of young people and to note action points required to address identified gaps.

Assessment questions are grouped into five themes: information and choice, diversity and inclusion, power and influence, safety and sensitivity, and resources and capacity.

Why? Meaningful and safe participation of young people takes time and requires allocation of sufficient resources – human resources, capacity-building, and budget for materials. If the assessment reveals sufficient time and resources are not in place to ensure ethical and safe participation, staff (and other relevant stakeholders) should redesign the programme, research, or advocacy to ensure sufficient time and resource allocation for quality participation processes.

How to use? Staff and other stakeholders should undertake the assessment below (see Checklist 2: Assessment of time and resources for safe and meaningful participation). Users must first think about and get clear on the participation opportunity they are planning. The questions in Checklist 2 can be used by an individual or in small groups and are designed to stimulate discussion on enhancing design, planning, and allocating of sufficient resources for safe and meaningful participation of young people. Team members are encouraged to note actions to address any identified gaps.

> **The checklist was well received and there was a rich discussion on all of the questions. Discussion centred around whether there were sufficient time and resources to ensure a safe environment to ensure safe and meaningful participation.**
> – Nazmoon, adult, Guyana

After completing the assessment, determine whether and how to proceed to the next Stepping Stone (see Figure 1: Protocol decision pathway).

▶ If the self-reflection and assessment indicate genuine opportunities exist to support safe and meaningful participation of young people, then continue to **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation**.

▶ If the assessment identifies that sufficient time and resources are not in place to ensure safe and meaningful participation, redesign the programme, research or advocacy opportunity to ensure allocation of sufficient time and resources for quality participation processes.

> **Meaningful participation requires more sustained engagement, giving feedback and ensuring young people feel comfortable with how things are represented.**
> – Rhiannon, youth, UK

Checklist 2: Assessment of time and resources for safe and meaningful participation*

Assessment questions	Actions to address gaps
A. Information and choice	▶
☐ Are plans in place to develop and share accessible information about the participation process (purpose, scope, potential risks and benefits) with young people and to ensure that young people have time to make an informed decision about whether and how they participate?	
☐ Are plans in place to share information about the participation opportunity with young people's caregivers to ensure informed consent and encourage participation of young people under the age of 18?	
☐ Are staff prepared to gather and securely store consent forms and photo release forms from young people and their guardians?	
B. Diversity and inclusion	▶
☐ Are efforts being made to reach and support the participation of young people of different genders, ages, abilities, races, ethnicities, and backgrounds who are most relevant to the programme, research or advocacy opportunity? For example, are there proactive efforts to include young people from marginalized groups and those with lived experience relevant to the programme, research or advocacy issue?	
☐ Do staff have opportunities to reflect on their own biases relating to age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, disability, care status or sexual identity that may create barriers to non-discriminatory, inclusive participation (see **Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect**)?	
☐ Does planning address any additional support needs of disadvantaged groups (e.g., childcare arrangements for young mothers, sign language interpreters for young people with hearing impairments, or budgets for internet access and digital literacy for young people who have little online access or experience)?	
☐ Do the criteria for young people's participation and representation avoid having English language as a requirement (as this is a barrier to inclusive participation)?	
C. Power and influence	▶
☐ Are organizational processes and systems in place to let young people design, implement and lead activities of their choice?	
☐ Are plans in place to sensitize relevant duty bearers and stakeholders to make sure adults are better prepared to share decision-making power with young people, listen to their views, and act on their suggestions (whenever in the best interests of young people)?	
☐ Are discussions with young people planned to ensure that they have realistic expectations of what they may or may not be able to influence?	
☐ Are adults prepared to share feedback with young people in a transparent and timely manner?	

* These questions are informed by the nine basic requirements for effective and ethical participation developed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) that participation is: i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) child-friendly, vi) inclusive, vii) supported by training, viii) safe and sensitive to risk, and ix) accountable.

D. Safety and sensitivity ▶

- ☐ Do staff have opportunities to discuss practical ways they can apply child safeguarding policies and procedures to this specific project?
- ☐ Are plans in place to ensure that all staff (and concerned duty bearers) sign a Code of Conduct with clear information about what actions and behaviours are prohibited, what the sanctions are, and how and to whom they can report any concerns?
- ☐ Are plans in place to assess and mitigate risks or harms associated with young people's participation and expression?
- ☐ Do staff have knowledge about available services for referral, including MHPSS and other services (medical, legal, protection, education, health, etc.)?

E. Resources and capacity ▶

- ☐ Does the design or plan allow sufficient time for preparation, implementation and follow-up with young people?
- ☐ Do staff have sufficient budget for young people's participation in different stages of the process? This includes but is not limited to costs of preparatory and follow-up meetings, information-sharing, translation costs, in-person transport or chaperone-related costs, accommodation, potential compensation, and support costs (e.g., costs of mobile airtime and internet data for young people)?
- ☐ Do plans and budgets allow the necessary support to ensure equitable participation (see above, Section B: Diversity and inclusion)?

Scenario C:
Awareness of stressors affecting youth in their daily lives and consideration of compensation

Background: An international non-governmental organization (INGO) wanted to develop and implement a campaign to address food insecurity. It was keen to engage youth as campaigners to reach wider audiences and to ensure that the perspectives of youth affected by food insecurity were heard.

What happened: The INGO invited youth leaders (aged 21 to 24) of three youth organizations to join their international advisory board. INGO staff asked the youth leaders to organize community-based dialogue on food insecurity with youth in at least four locations in their respective countries. The youth leaders expressed mixed emotions – excitement to become part of the initiative and frustration that they were not offered compensation for their time and efforts to organize the subnational dialogues or their time spent on the board. Funds were only provided for travel expenses and refreshments when organizing the community-based dialogues. In the COVID-19 context, the youth leaders' stress levels were heightened as they struggled to earn a living to meet their basic needs.

What is recommended: In this scenario, clearer information about compensation should have been shared and discussed with youth leaders at the outset of the process. It is important to consider financial compensation when asking youth to take on responsibilities comparable to those requested of paid staff.

© UNICEF

Collaboration Stepping Stone: Create an Enabling Environment

> **For you to participate, protection is one of the most important things, which is why we need to have a safe space for freedom of expression. A conducive environment is needed, in which people can discuss their ideas and ensure their ideas are kept confidential…so there will be no repercussions afterwards.**
> – Peter, youth, South Sudan

What? This **Collaboration Stepping Stone** is intended for use prior to and during efforts to engage young people in any of the Stepping Stones. A checklist and resources are provided for practical actions to create an enabling environment for safe freedom of expression and collaboration with young people during the participatory process. This Collaboration Stepping Stone can be used whenever young people are brought into the participatory initiative and referred to throughout all other Stepping Stones.

Why? Young people, like adults, communicate and express their views and feelings more easily when they are with people they trust and who believe in them, respect their opinion, take their views seriously, and are prepared to maintain confidentiality of sensitive personal experiences.[34] Thus, trust-building and effective communication are keys to ensuring safe and meaningful participation that has positive outcomes on young people's MHPS well-being.

It is important to allow sufficient time for icebreaker and introductory activities to help create safe spaces where young people from different backgrounds feel comfortable to share their views and feelings without fear of negative repercussions. Facilitators also need to identify and sensitively respond to peer interactions and behaviours that are not consistent with a positive and inclusive environment.

> **I think a safe space is not something that you can achieve overnight. There is the element of participatory process where all the youth members are given the space to break the ice and to create the norms among them.**
> – Ernesto, youth, the Philippines

Regular opportunities to engage in safe and inclusive spaces with peers provide a sense of solidarity, which enhances young people's individual confidence and collective power to defend their rights.[35] Thus, plans and budgets should try to encompass support for collaborative and youth-led collective action and networking initiatives.

> **A lot of young people are participating and they are interested in capacity-building – for example, leadership skills, events planning, critical thinking, negotiation and conflict management. There is also a desire for self-care and to believe in ourselves.**
> – Paul, youth, Saint Lucia

How to use? Staff and youth facilitators working with young people can use Checklist 3: Safe freedom of expression by young people from different backgrounds as a planning or monitoring tool to check that their teams have considered key actions to help create and sustain an enabling environment for inclusive and safe expression among young people.* This checklist is most effective when used during the initial stages of project planning. When young people are engaged from the outset, Checklist 3 can be used before applying Stepping Stone 1. Alternatively, the guidance can be applied before Stepping Stone 3 to help create an enabling environment for young people to feel safer to speak up about potential risks and benefits arising from their participation.

> **…[T]here are so many inherent things to a space like this, when you build it up properly, that help people become more resilient and help people find community. When you make sure a space is safe and when you make sure that people feel welcomed into a space, people feel like they can be themselves.**
> – Helen, youth, USA, in the film *Connecting the Dots*

---

* Checklist 3 is informed by the nine basic requirements for effective and ethical participation.

Checklist 3: Safe freedom of expression by young people from different backgrounds

A. Information and choice

- ☐ Young people have clear information about their potential roles and the scope or limits of their decision-making power.
- ☐ Clear information is shared with young people about how their contributions will be valued. This includes the option of providing financial compensation or other incentives, such as provision of capacity-building, certificates of participation or other relevant opportunities.
- ☐ Young people are informed that they can withdraw their participation at any time.
- ☐ Young people know who their liaison is for regular communication and coordination.

B. Diversity and inclusion

- ☐ Young people of different genders and backgrounds are involved in planning teams (where appropriate), so they can help identify and co-facilitate activities that interest them.
- ☐ The additional support needs of young people from different backgrounds are considered during the planning stage.
- ☐ Venues and planned activities are accessible to young people with disabilities, young parents, migrant young people, etc.
- ☐ Young people with disabilities are given the choice to have a caregiver or peer who may enable their communication and participation accompany them.
- ☐ Additional facilitators or support staff who are skilled in communicating with young people with disabilities will be in attendance.
- ☐ Childcare arrangements are available for young parents during participation activities.
- ☐ UNICEF guidance from 'Take Us Seriously! Engaging Children with Disabilities in Decisions Affecting Their Lives' is applied to inform inclusive participation. For example, an inclusive environment in which young people with disabilities feel more accepted and included is created through:
  - ▶ Starting with an introduction that ensures all young people can participate
  - ▶ Building on young people's strengths to reinforce their abilities rather than focusing on what they cannot do
  - ▶ Accommodating differences and giving young people time to understand and formulate their response and to participate as they can
- ☐ Culturally suitable icebreaker games to build trust among young people and adults are used at the start of participation processes, such as a workshop, conference, or online meeting. Wherever possible, get advice from young people about icebreaker activities they think will work well and allow them to facilitate these activities if they choose.
- ☐ Participants have opportunities to discuss shared and realistic expectations regarding what may be achieved through the participation process.

- ☐ Young people and other relevant stakeholders have identified and agreed to positive ground rules. At the outset of participatory processes, participants should discuss and agree on their own positive ground rules to guide respectful, safe and supportive ways of working. Young people are encouraged to consider practical ways to enhance their own self-care, as well as a community of care among participants. Building upon participants' suggestions, the facilitators can reinforce the importance of:
  - ▶ Respecting each participant's choice to share as much or as little during discussions as feels comfortable and honouring quiet individuals while giving them an opportunity to share in a way that feels safe to them
  - ▶ Listening to one another and respecting different views
  - ▶ Protecting confidentiality and not sharing people's personal experiences outside of the room
  - ▶ Paying attention to self-care, such as taking enough time to rest or saying 'no' if they are too busy (see Appendix J: Self-care)
  - ▶ Ensuring safety and knowing who young people can report to if they feel unsafe
  - ▶ Having zero tolerance for emotional and physical unhealthy behaviour and violence among young people
  - ▶ Providing clear information and discussion about the value of their contributions and how their contributions will be recognized
- ☐ Facilitators are prepared to intervene if a young person is mocked or stigmatized during a consultation or participatory activity. Remind young people of their positive ground rules and that violence among peers and unhealthy behaviors are not acceptable.
- ☐ Creative approaches, such as art, music, drama, or digital technology, are considered to help young people of different ages and abilities feel safe and comfortable sharing their views and feelings. Young people with disabilities might have physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments. Thus, it is important to communicate or consult with them (and with caregivers when relevant) to identify and build on their abilities and preferences.
- ☐ Meeting venues are chosen that provide accessibility (including ramps, disability accessible toilets, etc.) and sufficient space for young people to talk without other people watching or overhearing what they say or do.
- ☐ Young people are consulted regarding their preference to work in separate gender or mixed-gender groups, as in some contexts young people may feel safer to freely express their views and experiences when working in groups separated by gender. Facilitators also need to remain sensitive and responsive to the feelings, views and suggestions of transgender individuals and those with gender fluid identities.
- ☐ Ways of working that promote competition among individuals or groups of young people are avoided, as these can enhance poor self-esteem and frustration in those who do not win.

C. Power and influence

☐ The ways of working with young people encompass a focus on strengthening their communication skills and opportunities to express their views and feelings. For example, young people are given sufficient time to express themselves and receive training or mentoring on communication and negotiation skills.

☐ Whenever possible, young people have regular opportunities to meet collectively in groups or forums.

☐ Regular opportunities are provided for young people to reflect on their MHPS well-being and share how they are feeling. For example, meetings could start and end with a voluntary check-in and checkout during which individuals share how they feel.

☐ Adults who interact with young people are sensitized and prepared to respect the diversity of young people's experiences and perspectives. For example, differences in views may be acknowledged and respected in meetings and reports.

D. Safety and sensitivity

☐ Young people are informed about the Code of Conduct that staff and volunteers must follow to respect and protect young people.

☐ Young people are informed about who to report to if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable.

☐ Young people are told how their rights to privacy and confidentiality will be respected and informed of any limits to their confidentiality (e.g., how any disclosures of harm will be followed up in a timely and sensitive way).

E. Resources and capacity

☐ Experienced facilitators with good knowledge are appointed or facilitators are trained to have appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to work safely and inclusively with young people in all their diversity.

☐ Young people are offered capacity-building or mentoring to enhance their skills as facilitators, peer educators, leaders, etc.

Box 1: **The 'Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation'**

The 'Adolescent Kit for Expression and Innovation' (Adolescent Kit) provides practical resources to cultivate and sustain an enabling environment for safe freedom of expression of young people. The Adolescent Kit is a package of guidance, tools, activities and supplies for supporting young people aged 10–18 who are affected by conflict, poverty and other humanitarian crises. The Adolescent Kit aims to support adolescents in difficult circumstances and to bring about positive change in their lives. The Kit promotes the Adolescent Circles approach, which supports practical efforts to bring together adolescents in a safe space on a regular basis to have fun, cope with difficult experiences, learn and work collaboratively.

Foundational guidance for the Adolescent Kit emphasizes the importance of creating a welcoming, safe, inclusive and accessible space. It provides practical guidance and describes creative tools to support such efforts, including:

▶ Supporting adolescents in developing key competencies that can help them cope with stressful circumstances, build healthy relationships, learn new skills and engage positively with their communities

▶ Designing programmes that address the interests, circumstances, abilities and priorities of different groups of adolescents

▶ Reaching out to all adolescents and supporting everyone to equally participate in and benefit from activities

▶ Working with adolescents in a participatory way that allows them to explore activities and topics that interest them, to learn through doing, and to take the lead

▶ Giving adolescents space to express themselves through art, drawing, singing, dancing, writing, storytelling, sports and drama

▶ Providing adolescents with opportunities to innovate – experiment, solve problems, and explore new ideas

▶ Supporting adolescents to build or strengthen positive relationships in their lives, particularly with family and friends

▶ Providing adolescents opportunities to contribute to their communities and take positive actions for themselves and others

▶ Connecting adolescents to useful information, programmes and support to prevent and respond to risks to their health, safety, protection and well-being

The Adolescent Kit also includes an Activity Box that includes tools and resources to help facilitators in their participatory work with adolescents. These range from in-depth guidance and instructions for running activities to quick and easy ideas to motivate participants.

Scenario D:
Analysis of risks by young people involved in advocacy and risk mitigation

Background: An NGO supporting youth-led advocacy recognized the importance of risk assessment and risk mitigation by young people who were involved in advocacy.

What happened: The NGO organized regular monthly meetings for young people to use interactive activities to prioritize, analyse and plan advocacy on an important issue concerning them. The young people decided to advocate for an end to corporal punishment in schools.

The young people analysed risks associated with their advocacy plan. One of the main identified risks was that school authorities might not take their views seriously. To mitigate this risk, the young people sought support from the local NGO to set up meetings with school authorities. Through such support, the young people's representatives were able to have a series of advocacy dialogue meetings with school authorities. As a result, a zero-tolerance policy for corporal punishment was introduced and monitored in their schools. The young people felt a great sense of solidarity from their collective efforts. They described how they had increased self-confidence and self-esteem to speak up about issues concerning them, and they felt more positive and hopeful about their future.

What is recommended: It is important for young people to assess risks associated with their advocacy plan and to have adults' support to mitigate risks. Adult supporters are sometimes better placed to help secure opportunities for dialogue between young people and adults or institutions that they want to influence.

© UNICEF/UN031814/Laet

Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation

Note: Appendix D provides a sample plan for a half- to one-day workshop with young people to apply Stepping Stone 3 and Stepping Stone 4.

What?

Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation provides a risk assessment table and guiding questions for users to identify and assess risks, harms and benefits to young people's MHPS well-being arising from participation.

It is important to assess whether a programme's risks and harms outweigh any benefits. When this is the case, you must find ways to address the risks before proceeding. In some situations, risks and harms may be so great that the proposed activity must be stopped or significantly changed to ensure safe participation. In other cases, benefits may outweigh risks and harms in terms of a programme's impact.

The level of risk is determined by considering both the likelihood of the risk and the extent of harm it may cause. It is important to keep in mind that risk does not always lead to harm. Appendix E: Interactive activity to identify benefits, risks and harms gives facilitators guidance for more detailed and interactive activities with young people.

Participation opportunities vary across different age and gender groups, as do MHPS well-being and safeguarding issues and risks. For example, participation opportunities for young women aged 10 to 14 and sensitivities around speaking up on different topics may differ from participation opportunities and associated risks for young men aged 20 to 24. Thus, the interactive activity detailed in Appendix E encourages group work among young people of the same gender identity and similar age to enhance understanding of particular risks, harms and benefits of participation based on gender, age, ability, or other diversity factors.

> **For some young people, speaking up in a public event may have implications for them back at home that may put them at risk, especially for human rights activists. We have to look at what support systems are put in place.**
> – Rosie, youth, UK

Why?

By using the risk assessment table (see Table 1), users consider and identify the benefits, risks and harms to MHPS well-being. The findings from this analysis will be used in **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems** to mitigate risks and harms and strengthen support systems for safe participation of young people.

> **There are profound ethics questions raised by attempts to ask children about sensitive topics in situations where there are no facilities for supporting them if they reveal that they are at risk.**
> – Morrow & Boyden, 2014, p. 2907[36]

How to use?   Table 1 enables users to explore and identify the benefits, risks or harms to young people's MHPS well-being arising from participation opportunities, as well as the likelihood and impact of risks. Staff, wherever possible in collaboration with young people and other relevant stakeholders, should meet to discuss and complete Table 1 (also see Appendix E: Interactive activity to identify benefits, risks and harms).

Table 1: Benefits, risks, harms and levels of risk arising from the participation opportunity

Participation opportunity (what, where, who?)	Identified benefits to young people's MHPS well-being	Identified risks or harms to young people's MHPS well-being	Likelihood of risks or harm (high, medium, low)	Severity of harm (high, medium, low)
	▶ ▶	....	....	....
	▶ ▶	....	....	....
	▶ ▶	....	....	....
		....	....	....

The findings recorded in Table 1 will be used to inform **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems**.

Key steps to completing Table 1:

▶ Be clear about which participation opportunity you are focusing on.

▶ Explore the participation opportunity's potential benefits. Identify and list the potential benefits to young people's MHPS well-being arising from the participation opportunity (i.e., young people gain self-confidence and self-esteem).

▶ Consider whether any benefits are specific to certain young people based on age, ability, gender identity, or other diversity factors. For example, young people may identify that the same older youth leaders get repeated chances to participate in external events, while younger participants do not.

▶ Explore the potential risks or harms of the participation opportunity. Identify and list the potential risks and harms to young people's MHPS well-being arising from the participation opportunity. Examples might include: There is a risk of causing frustration and anger and affecting young people's self-esteem and sense of hopelessness if young people's views are not taken seriously by adults; there is a risk of personal distress if young people are asked to share personal stories that upset them without sufficient support being available to them.

▶ Consider and write down whether the potential risks or harms may affect young people in different ways, depending on their age, ability, gender identity, or other diversity factors.

▶ Discuss whether the participation opportunity may contribute to conflict or inequalities. If so, add identified risks or harms to the list. For example, involvement of young people from one dominant ethnic group as youth leaders may increase tensions within the community, enhancing frustration and anger among young people from other ethnic groups.

▶ [Optional] Review Appendix F: Common challenges with participation and use the information to determine whether there are other relevant risks or harms to add to the list.

▶ [Optional] Assess the likelihood of risk and the severity of harm, keeping in mind that risk does not always lead to harm. Consider and note the likelihood of these risks or harms (low, medium, high), as well as the severity of harm associated with each risk (low, medium, high level of harm).

I feel unsafe when you are expected to know things that you generally don't know, something that you never really experienced before. It really causes quite a lot of uncertainty and anxiety because you then doubt yourself and you don't think that you are worthy of being in the space or you don't feel like you are going to add any value.
– Josephine, youth, South Africa

Scenario E:
Unhealthy actions experienced by young people as a result of an online campaign

Background: Due to restrictions in face-to-face meetings resulting from COVID-19, young people (aged 13 to 17) who participated in local youth group activities started to organize meetings online. The young people decided to organize an online campaign about gender equality and the rights of young people to choose their sexual orientation. The young people developed their campaign messages and decided to use Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok to share their messages and stories.

What took place: As a result of the campaign messages and stories shared on social media, some young people who were part of the campaign team experienced a negative response (both online and offline) from some school peers. Some young people were teased and mocked for their gender identity, and one young person experienced physical threats. Parents and caregivers of the young campaigners were also concerned about their children's privacy and security.

What is recommended: When organizing a campaign, it is crucial that young people and adults assess risks and benefits that may arise from their activities, identify ways to minimize and address the risks, and ensure that sufficient support to young people is in place. Adult leaders should help young people identify ways to maintain their privacy and safety during online or offline participation. It is crucial that young people know who to tell and who to turn to for support if they do not feel safe. It is also helpful to consult parents and caregivers when assessing risks, to better understand and address their worries and concerns for their children's safety. Together, young people, caregivers and other supportive adults can develop and implement strategies to enhance young campaigners' online and offline safety.

© UNICEF/UNI381270/Bongyereirwe

1
2
3
4
5
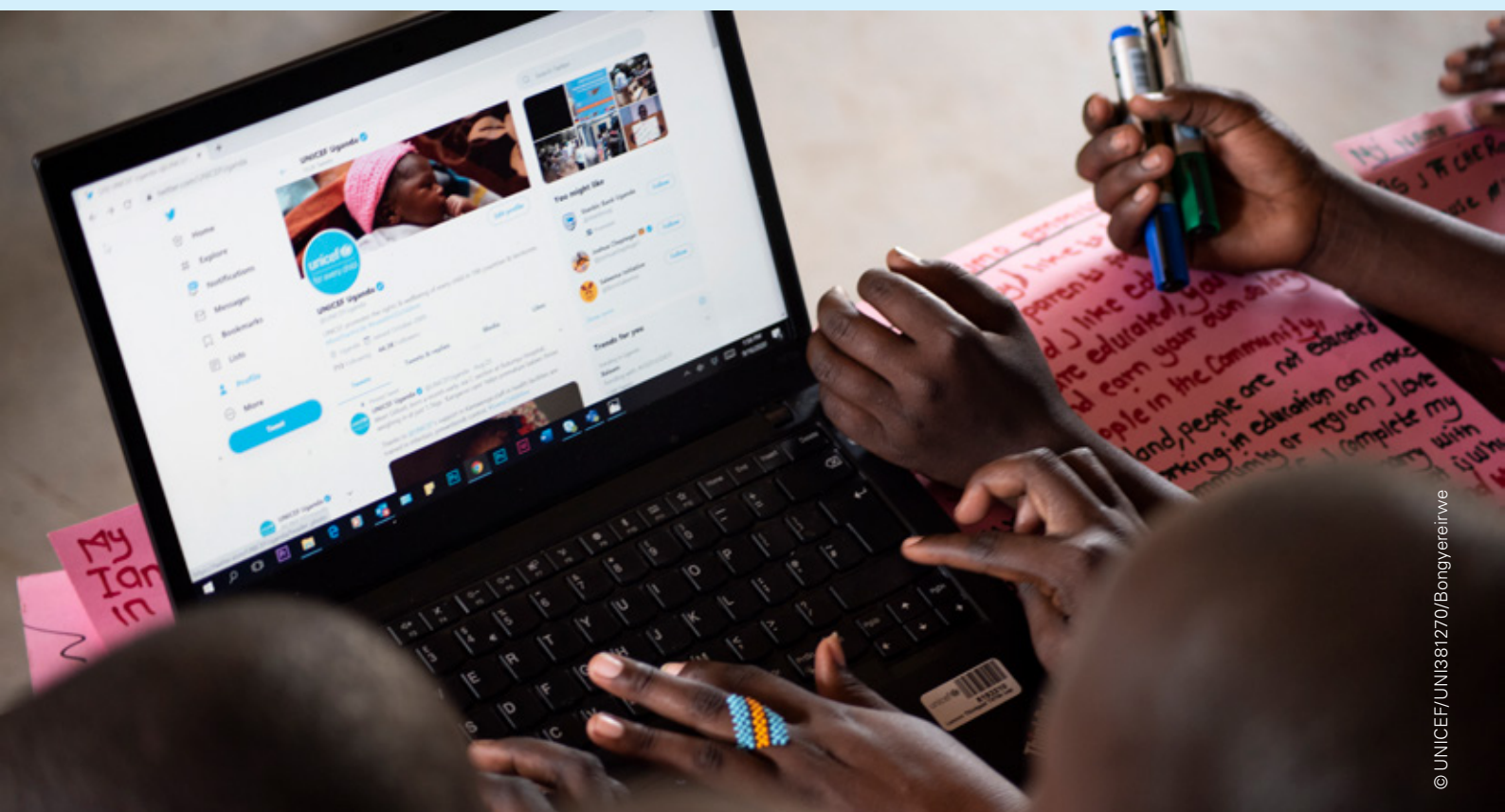
Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems

Note: Appendix D provides a sample workshop plan for a half- to one-day workshop with young people to apply Stepping Stone 3 and Stepping Stone 4.

What? **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems** is divided into two complementary subsections:

> 4.1   Risk mitigation, basic responsive support and strengthened support systems
>
> 4.2   Support for young people's participation in higher-risk scenarios (if relevant to your work)

Subsection 4.1: Risk mitigation, basic responsive support and strengthened support systems should be used after **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risk, Harms and Benefits of Participation**. It provides guidelines for developing concrete actions to mitigate and address risks and harms identified in Stepping Stone 3 and to strengthen support systems to enhance safe participation and positive benefits for young people's MHPS well-being (see Table 2). Appendix G: Interactive activity to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems provides facilitators guidance for discussions with young people to complete Table 2.

Checklist 4.1 outlines complementary efforts to ensure sufficient staff capacity for participation of young people that is safe and sensitive to risk.

Especially when working with young people under the age of 18, it is also important to collaborate with parents or caregivers to ensure their support for young people's participation. For school-based or community-participatory interventions, proactive support from teachers, school administrators, community and traditional elders is also needed. An additional optional checklist focusing on collaboration with caregivers and other stakeholders is provided in Appendix H.

Subsection 4.2: Support for young people's participation in higher-risk scenarios is for optional use (see Figure 1: Protocol decision pathway). This subsection provides checklists of additional actions to support young people's participation in high-risk scenarios.*

---

*High-risk scenarios may include but are not limited to programming, research, advocacy or communications engaging young people who are survivors of sexual, physical or emotional violence or torture; who live in care or are seeking asylum; who are associated with armed groups; who have experienced high levels of insecurity, displacement or conflict; who have experienced high levels of stigma and discrimination; or who have lived experiences of mental ill health or other disabling conditions. High-risk scenarios may also encompass programming with young people in contexts that are insecure or politically charged, where young people or certain groups of young people may face harm or risks of backlash through their engagement and participation.

Why? Preventive measures are critical to mitigate identified risks and harms and to strengthen support systems that enhance safe and beneficial participation of young people. When young people are distressed, they are more likely to seek support from their friends, peers, and caregivers (informal supports) rather than access formal support services.[37] Thus, protocol users – especially young people themselves – are encouraged to identify and build upon existing informal support systems, while also ensuring that referral pathways are in place for formal services if needed (e.g., counselling, protection services, legal advice, gender-based violence support, and health services).

Staff who are working in high-risk contexts or with young people in high-risk scenarios can use Subsection 4.2. In high-risk contexts, we know that heightened efforts and staff capacity are required to create and sustain a safe environment for young people's meaningful participation.

> **No one should give up their physical and mental health while working for human rights. We should practise what we advocate. For our own sake, now it's time to start to take good care of ourselves.**
> – Female youth activist, Amnesty International, 2021, p.11

© UNICEF/UN0392108/Satu

4.1 Risk mitigation, basic responsive support and strengthened support systems

How to use?

Staff (wherever possible in collaboration with young people and other stakeholders) should apply information and analysis on identified risks, harms and benefits from Table 1 (see **Stepping Stone 3** and Appendix E) to inform risk mitigation and safe participation strategies. Risk mitigation actions can both reduce risks and strengthen support systems that are available to young people. In doing so, this increases the likelihood of participation being safe and meaningful (and thus beneficial).

Key steps to completing Table 2:

▶ Building upon the findings from Table 1, list each risk or harm (especially those that are medium to high likelihood) in the first column of Table 2 – even if you have only identified one risk in Table 1.

▶ Identify and record existing informal support that is available to young people (e.g., through peers, family, community-based groups or schools) and that helps mitigate risks and enhance benefits arising from the participation opportunity. Wherever possible, encourage young people to identify their informal support systems (see Appendix G: Interactive activity to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems). Record key findings in the second column of Table 2.

▶ Identify and record formal support that is available to young people (e.g., access to helplines, counselling services, health services or protection services) and that helps mitigate the risks and enhance the benefits arising from the participation opportunity. Record this information in the third column of Table 2.

▶ Discuss and propose actions to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems for safe participation (column 4). Add action details to include what, where, when, who and with what support. This should include details about ways to address and mitigate risks, ways to strengthen existing informal support systems, and actions to strengthen formal support systems (see Table 2).

▶ Note: If any activities are considered too risky, staff and young people might decide to alter activities to ensure participation opportunities are safe and sensitive to risk. Groups might even decide not to proceed with participation opportunities involving young people if risks are deemed too high and mitigations insufficient.

▶ Use Checklist 4.1, below, to reflect on whether sufficient staff capacity and other complementary efforts exist to enhance participation that is safe and sensitive to risk. Add action points in Table 2, column 4 to address any identified gaps.

We were always protected in the environment and our views were safe and respected. Our names have been changed for our protection, and they have asked our parents' permission for us to participate.
– Yolanda, youth, Peru

Table 2: Concrete actions to mitigate and address risks and harms and strengthen support systems

Risks and harms from Table 1, especially those that are medium to high likelihood	Existing informal support systems that are in place to mitigate the risk or harm and to enhance the identified benefits of participation	Existing formal support systems that are in place to mitigate the risk or harm and to enhance the identified benefits of participation	Actions to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems for safe participation (add details: what, where, when, who, with what support)

> **We express our views, but whether they have influence is another question. There is ageism and discrimination. We come with our ideas to school, but adults say, 'No, what do you know?'**
> – Kateryna, youth, Ukraine

Checklist 4.1: Complementary efforts to ensure sufficient staff capacity for safe participation

- ☐ Staff ensure safe recruitment of staff, consultants, and volunteers, including police checks, reference checks, and orientation on safeguarding policies, procedures and codes of conduct.
- ☐ Staff, consultants and volunteers are aware of and trained in safeguarding procedures and codes of conduct, including child safeguarding, prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), and ethics and integrity.
- ☐ Staff, consultants and volunteers supporting young people's participation receive training in meaningful participation (such as the UNICEF online training on adolescent participation and civic engagement).
- ☐ Staff members interfacing with young people directly (online or in person) receive training in basic psychosocial support skills, such as psychological first aid (PFA), to sensitively respond to young people in distress or potential disclosures of abuse and to ensure timely and relevant referrals for additional support and services when required.
- ☐ Staff provide project coordinators and the safeguarding focal point with updated information about formal services and referral pathways, including MHPSS and other forms of support (see Appendix I: Template for service mapping for referral pathways).
- ☐ Staff ensure that procedures for safe, confidential reporting and referral pathways are functioning. (Note: The UNICEF online training on child safeguarding encompasses training and guidance on reporting and how to respond to a child or young person who is being harmed.)
- ☐ Staff appoint a safeguarding focal point for the project who is accessible during implementation of activities with young people. This person has sufficient skills to listen and sensitively respond to young people in distress and has up-to-date knowledge of local referral pathways.
- ☐ Staff organize meetings with parents and caregivers (or other relevant stakeholders, such as teachers, traditional elders, community members, etc.) to reinforce their support for young people's participation and their respect for young people's views and ideas (see Appendix H: Collaboration with caregivers and stakeholders).
- ☐ Staff ensure that young people know their rights and know who to tell if they feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell.
- ☐ Staff provide young people with contact numbers for the project focal point, relevant helplines, police, mental health services, etc.
- ☐ Staff record and store all data from young people (and families) in a manner that maintains confidentiality. This includes safe storage of any recordings (e.g., from Zoom meetings) and transcripts using restricted, password-protected files.

4.2 Support for young people's participation in higher-risk scenarios

How to use? Staff working with young people in higher-risk scenarios or contexts should use Checklist 4.2, in addition to Checklist 4.1, during planning and implementation of their work. This can help identify gaps and ensure sufficient staff capacity and support systems are in place to strengthen safe participation of young people.

> **[During the conference] I appreciated the presence of two mental health workers who were qualified to take care of people in crisis.**
> **–** Mutesi, youth, Rwanda

Figure 3: Story sharing uses traffic light colours to prompt young people to think about what aspects of their story and personal experiences they do and do not want to share. Encourage young people who are involved in any type of programme or meeting to consider and decide which aspects of their story they want to share and which they prefer to keep private.

Figure 3: Story sharing
(Catholic Education Melbourne, adapted from Protective Participation: The Voices of Young People on Safety, p. 36)

Things about my story I am happy to share

Things I may share with certain people

Things I do not want to share

Some information that is disclosed requires reporting by adult programme leaders, especially if a young person or someone they know is not safe.

My signature

_____

Programme leader signature

_____

Checklist 4.2: Additional actions to ensure sufficient staff capacity and systems to support young people in higher-risk scenarios

☐ Facilitators have experience working with young people in adversity in safe, inclusive and respectful ways that build upon young people's strengths.

☐ Facilitators have a good understanding of the contexts in which young people live to enhance sensitive and responsive understanding of the cultural identities, values and experiences shared by young people.

☐ All staff interfacing with young people directly (online or in person) are trained in basic psychosocial support skills, such as psychological first aid (PFA), to sensitively respond to young people and ensure timely and relevant referrals.

☐ Functioning, effective and supportive staff supervision is in place for staff to reflect on their work, interactions, challenges and responses. Supervisors should provide constructive feedback and encourage self-care and team well-being.

☐ Young people are encouraged to develop their own safety plans and identify who they can turn to for support, both through informal support networks and staff or safeguarding focal points assigned for the research or programme (see Appendix K: Protection poster for use by young people).

☐ Adults and young people are encouraged to report observations or concerns to a designated focal point so they can take preventive actions before harm is caused.

☐ Mental health or social work professionals are available during key events. While their presence might not always be necessary, it is crucial to ensure that referral pathways include contact details for mental health, social work and health professionals who can provide additional support in a timely and appropriate manner.

☐ Staff provide opportunities for young people to anonymously share their views and feelings when discussing sensitive issues – for example, through an expression box (see Box 2).

☐ Event leaders and young people discuss what young participants want to share prior to any public (offline or online) meetings or event (see Figure 3: Story sharing). Groups should also discuss ways to protect young people's privacy.

☐ Relevant stakeholders (e.g., conference organizers, panel moderators or journalists) have committed to refrain from asking inappropriate personal questions or questions that may trigger a negative experience for young people.

☐ Staff provide a quiet space for young people to get away from crowds, if relevant (e.g., during a conference).

☐ Young people's views and experiences on sensitive issues are only shared in wider communications (e.g., print or social media) if they are anonymously and respectfully represented with the informed consent of young people (see Appendix M: Considerations for communications and advocacy staff).

Box 2: **Happy and sad expression boxes**

▶ Introduce young people to the expression boxes:

 ▶ Box with a happy face where they can anonymously add notes about their positive participation experiences – what makes them feel happy, comfortable or safe
 ▶ Box with a sad face where they can anonymously add notes about their negative participation experiences – what makes them feel sad, uncomfortable, or unsafe

▶ Remind young people that if anything makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable, they are encouraged to tell supportive adults or the safeguarding focal point.

▶ Explain that the expression boxes will be placed where participants can discretely add notes. During the meeting, workshop or conference, young people are encouraged to add notes to the box about their positive and negative views and feelings regarding participation experiences.

▶ Prior to the meeting's end, facilitators will read the notes to themselves.

▶ Facilitators will then share a summary of the positive and negative experiences and encourage group discussion to identify solutions that respond to negative participation experiences, build upon positive experiences, and increase safe participation for everyone.
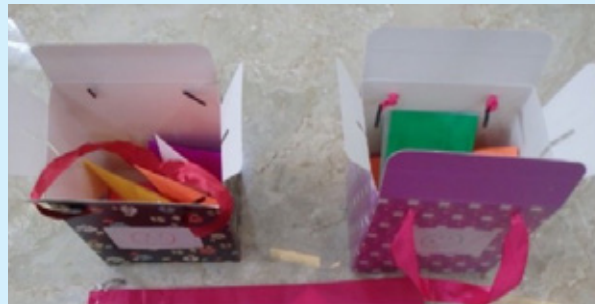
Note: For online participation, alternative approaches can be used for young people to anonymously share their views and experiences, such as through Mentimeter questions or through an online Google document.

Scenario F:
Young people's lived experience around mental health and participation in conferences

Background: In a joint effort to put children's and adolescents' mental health higher on the global health agenda, UNICEF and the World Health Organization co-hosted a two-day symposium in Florence, Italy. The event was part of Leading Minds for Children and Young People, UNICEF Innocenti's annual conference series on issues affecting children and adolescents.

What happened: With UNICEF support, an extraordinary group of young people brought their lived and learned experiences on mental health to all aspects of the symposium, engaging in the planning, implementation and follow-up of the conference alongside adult researchers, practitioners, donors and policymakers. The adolescents and youth leaders helped shape the agenda, opened the conference, facilitated and co-facilitated sessions and panels, and led conversations throughout, right up to the final sessions calling for global action.

Key observations: In addition to ensuring the meaningful participation of young people, the conference organizers put in place a number of deliberate steps to ensure sufficient supports and strengths. These included:

▶ Having one UNICEF 'champion' designated as an ombudsperson and advocate for the youth (before, during and after the conference)
▶ Asking youth participants to arrive at the venue a few days early to meet the planning team in advance, participate in final planning together with the UNICEF and WHO teams, and become familiar with the venue and environment
▶ Having psychologists attend the conference and be on call for participants (and making sure all young people had access to their contact information)
▶ Building into the agenda ample opportunities for peer-to-peer (youth-to-youth) team building and support

1

2

3

4

5
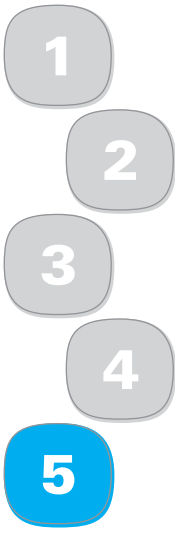
Stepping Stone 5:
Follow Up and Monitor

What? **Stepping Stone 5: Follow Up and Monitor** is divided into two complementary subsections intended for all protocol users:

5.1 Monitor outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being

5.2 Follow up with young people and relevant stakeholders to enhance accountability

Subsection 5.1 provides a checklist and tools to ensure staff (and other stakeholders) plan and use monitoring methods that allow qualitative (and potentially also quantitative) data collection on the intended and unintended positive and negative outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being.

Subsection 5.2 provides a checklist and tools for staff (and other stakeholders) to use during and following implementation of participatory work to ensure plans are in place to follow up and provide feedback to young people.

Why? It is important to establish and implement monitoring processes that allow identification and analysis of both intended and unintended positive and negative outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being (Subsection 5.1). This is particularly important when engaging young people in higher-risk scenarios so any unintended negative outcomes can be mitigated and addressed and positive outcomes (intended or unintended) can be cultivated.

Providing feedback to young people (Subsection 5.2) is crucial so young people know their views are taken seriously. Feeling ignored can contribute to young participants' feelings of sadness, anxiety and despair. In contrast, young people's self-efficacy and self-esteem increase when they feel their views are heard. It is constructive for young people and adults to reflect upon their participation processes, identify what is going well and less well and why, and share ideas of what can be done to improve the process and outcomes.

> **Questions about well-being, however defined, are bound to be sensitive, because they are concerned with feelings and emotions, material and familial circumstances, and close personal relationships and experiences. These questions may feel intrusive, may lead children to feel embarrassed and upset, and may also bring to light circumstances such as bereavement, abuse, exploitation, or neglect.**
> **–** Morrow & Boyden, 2014, p. 2904–2905[38]

5.1 Monitor outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being

How to use?   Staff, wherever possible in collaboration with young people and other relevant stakeholders, should use Checklist 5.1 during programme design and implementation. Checklist items will ensure users have identified and developed relevant monitoring methods to identify and analyse intended and unintended positive and negative participation outcomes on young people's MHPS well-being.

> **Before participating in the programme, I was very afraid and too shy to speak in public. However, I have totally changed after participating in the programme. I am brave and confident to speak in public.**
> – Kemala, working youth, Indonesia

© UNICEF/UN0410870/Ayene

Checklist 5.1: Efforts to monitor outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being

- ☐ Agencies have plans and budget to monitor and evaluate the quality and outcomes of the participation process.
- ☐ People who are involved in monitoring (staff, consultants or young people) are experienced and trained to plan and implement ethical data collection processes. This includes attention to recruitment and background checks in relation to safeguarding risks.
- ☐ Methods are used to explore both intended and unintended outcomes of participation on young people's MHPS well-being. Methods may include key informant interviews (KIIs), focus group discussions (FGDs), surveys or participatory monitoring tools (see Box 3: Before and after body mapping and Box 4 'H' assessment).
- ☐ People who facilitate monitoring activities have capacity to sensitively respond to young people in distress and know the available referral pathways.
- ☐ Young people have regular periodic opportunities to share their views, feelings and experiences about how their participation in programming, research or advocacy affects them.
- ☐ The harms, risks and benefits of young people's participation are monitored, especially by listening to young people's own experiences and perspectives.
    - ▶ What risks or harms to their MHPS well-being are young people experiencing?
    - ▶ Were the identified risks or harms from Stepping Stone 3 reduced or effectively managed through the planned actions?
    - ▶ Are there any new risks or do risks or harms persist for specific groups of young people (e.g., based on gender identity, race, ethnicity, disability or age)?
    - ▶ What further measures do young people and staff think are needed to reduce and manage existing or emerging risks or harms or to ensure sufficient support to young people?
- ☐ Findings are separated by gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity and other diversity factors.
- ☐ The monitoring findings are used to inform updated measures to increase safe participation.
    - ▶ What measures do you need to implement to reduce and manage new emerging risks or harms?
    - ▶ Do young people need additional support (e.g., counselling or referrals to services)?
    - ▶ Is any additional follow-up needed?

5.2 Follow up with young people and relevant stakeholders to enhance accountability

How to use?

It's important that young people receive feedback after a programme or advocacy opportunity so they know they were heard and understand whether their participation brought about changes. Staff can use insights from young people to enhance the safe participation of young people in ongoing and future work.

Staff, wherever possible in collaboration with young people and other relevant stakeholders, should use Checklist 5.2 during and after implementation of participatory work to ensure a plan is in place to give young people feedback. Monitoring plans should be updated to address any identified gaps.

> **I think it is important that they inform the people who participated what they are doing after. Many times, we contribute and then we go home and nothing happens. So it is very important that we are informed about what happens with the material.**
> – Angelica, youth, Costa Rica

© UNICEF/UN0286833/Dicko

Checklist 5.2: Follow-up with young people

- ☐ Agencies have plans and allocated budget to support to support follow-up with and feedback to young people.
- ☐ Platforms (offline or online) that allow young people to dialogue with relevant duty bearers or decision makers are supported so young people can influence priority issues that concern them.
- ☐ Young people are given honest and transparent feedback in a timely manner about the extent to which their views were taken into account.
- ☐ Timely and appropriate follow-up and support are provided to young people who disclosed abuse or who experienced distress or other forms of harm.
- ☐ Reflections and learning with young people are undertaken about the extent to which their participation initiative is achieving its objectives and how to improve their initiatives (see Box 4).
- ☐ Young people's representatives share feedback with their peers.

Box 3: **Before and after body mapping**

Body mapping can be used to explore changes in young people's views, feelings or experiences before and after their participation in a programme, research or advocacy. This body mapping exercise allows young people to explore changes in their lives, knowledge, behaviour, attitudes or feelings that arise as a result of their participation. These changes may be positive or negative, expected or unexpected.

We recommend implementing the body map activity in separate gender groups and ensuring sensitive and adapted use of the tool in different cultural contexts. If a young person volunteers for their body shape to be traced for a body map, ask them to place their arms by their side and legs together, and have a young person of the same gender and similar age group volunteer to trace the body's external outline. In situations where it is considered too sensitive or embarrassing to draw around a young person's body, facilitators can provide the group with a pre-drawn body shape. Furthermore, direct questioning about sexual body parts is discouraged, unless the activity is facilitated by professionals with expertise in sexual and reproductive health, safeguarding and MHPSS.

This exercise is adapted from the inter-agency toolkit for monitoring and evaluating children's participation, 'A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation, Booklet 5: Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation', pp. 42–44.

Time needed: 60–90 minutes

Resources: Flip chart paper, non-permanent coloured pens (or chalk or crayons), tape

What to do:

▶ Introduce the 'before and after' body mapping exercise that will enable separate groups of girls and boys to explore changes in their lives or in young people's knowledge, behaviour or attitudes that are an outcome of their participation. These changes may be positive or negative, expected or unexpected.

▶ In each gender group, ask for a volunteer to lie down on the sheets so that the shape of their body may be drawn around. Draw around their body shape with pens or chalk.

▶ Draw a vertical line down the middle of the body. Explain that this young person is a girl or boy from their community. The left-hand side represents the young person before their participation in the programme, and the right-hand side represents the young person after their participation (now).

▶ Encourage them to think about the body parts to explore and to record before/after changes (positive or negative) on Post-it Notes. For example:
  ▶ The head: Are there any changes in their knowledge or what they think about/worry about/feel happy about? Are there any changes in the way adults think about young people?
  ▶ The eyes: Are there any changes in the way they see themselves/their family/their community? Are there any changes in the way adults see young people?
  ▶ The ears: Are there any changes in how they are listened to? Are there any changes in how they listen to others or what they hear?

- ▶ **The mouth:** Are there any changes in the way they communicate with their peers, their parents, their teachers or others? Are there any changes in the way adults speak to them?
- ▶ **The shoulders:** Are there any changes in the responsibilities taken on by girls or boys?
- ▶ **The heart:** Are there any changes in the way they feel about themselves or in their attitudes to others? Are there any changes in the way adults or their peers feel about them?
- ▶ **The stomach:** Are there any changes in their stomach? In what they eat?
- ▶ **The hands and arms:** Are there any changes in what activities they do? How they use their hands or arms? Are there any changes in the way adults treat them?
- ▶ **The feet and legs:** Are there any changes in where they go? What they do with their legs and feet?
- ▶ Think about and draw any other changes.

- ▶ In plenary, discuss the following questions:
  - ▶ Which are the most significant changes they have experienced because of their participation in the process and why?
  - ▶ Are they aware of any differences in the changes experienced by young people due to their age, gender or other factors?
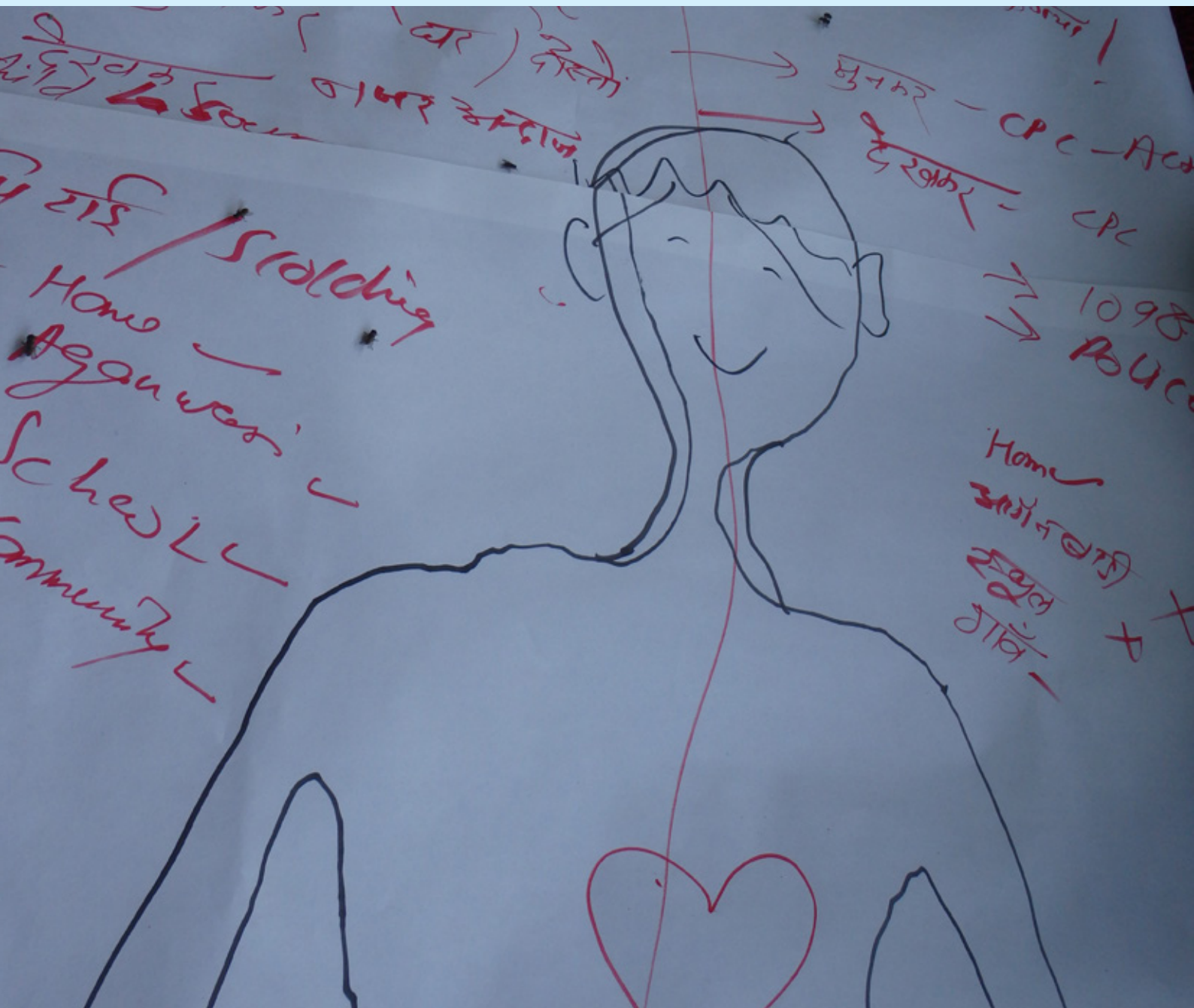
Box 4: **'H' assessment tool**[39]

The 'H' assessment is a monitoring and evaluation tool that can be used easily with and by young people to explore any initiative's strengths and weaknesses and to share young people's suggestions for improvement. This activity is most effective when used in small groups of five to eight people, with opportunities to share and discuss findings.

Practical steps:
1. Draw the shape of an 'H' on a large flip chart.
2. In the left-hand column, draw a happy face and label 'Strengths/Successes'.
3. In the right-hand column, draw a sad face and label 'Weaknesses/Challenges'.
4. Below the middle 'H' bar, draw a light bulb to represent bright ideas for suggestions to improve the initiative.

Strengths/Successes	Assessment of initiative: *(Today's date and number of people who are part of this assessment)*	Weaknesses/Challenges
☺		☹
	Suggestions to improve:	

5. In groups, ask participants to label their chart with the name of the initiative they are assessing and to add the date and number of people who are part of the 'H' assessment (for example, seven young women aged 14 to 19).
6. Encourage participants to discuss and complete their chart, filling in details under each heading.
7. If the 'H' assessment has been undertaken by various groups, ask each group to present their assessment and have a larger discussion on the main findings.

Scenario G:
Frustration and anger experienced by young people and increased risks, when there is no clear follow-up to young people's demands

Background: Organizers of a national conference on climate change recognized the need to engage and listen to youth climate activists.

What happened: Young people who were part of a community-based climate justice action group were invited to participate in a national climate conference. The youth representatives prepared and delivered a keynote speech with clear demands to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, including the establishment of safe bicycle routes in their city and reduced costs for public transport. However, three months after the conference no concrete action had been taken by national government authorities. As a result, youth representatives felt frustrated and angry, with reduced trust in government authorities. Some young people described a sense of hopelessness and dropped out of the action group, while others suggested organizing more militant actions for environmental action, even if that meant coming into conflict with the law.

What is recommended: To enhance young people's safe and meaningful participation, programme or advocacy staff needed to prepare government authorities and increase their readiness to take young people's views seriously and provide them with timely feedback. Furthermore, programme leaders needed to understand how long changes and follow-up might take and to clearly communicate that information so young people would have realistic expectations.

Section 4

Appendices

Appendix A: Key principles

This appendix provides a description of each of the principles that underlie this protocol.

Accountability to young people as right holders enhances meaningful participation. Duty bearers and programmers should support participatory research, programming and policy developments; seek and listen to young people's perspectives; take action to enhance fulfilment of young people's rights; and ensure transparent feedback to young people on progress and results.

Child rights principles ensure that programming respects young people and their views with an additional focus on safeguarding.

▶ **Participation:** Young people have the right to be heard, to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have their views influence decisions that concern them. Young people must be provided with information, time, and space to share their views, feelings and ideas on matters that affect them, including research, programmes and advocacy. They should have opportunities to meet and talk with relevant duty bearers or actors to influence decisions and matters that concern them.

The rights of young people to be heard and actively engaged are central to this protocol. Young people need to be involved in discussions to identify and assess potential risks, harms and benefits arising from their participation. Their views inform decision-making that is in their best interest, building upon their strengths and suggestions.

▶ **Best interests of the child:** Young people's interests should be a primary consideration in all actions or decisions that concern them, both in the public and private spheres. The term 'best interests' broadly describes actions that serve an individual's well-being. Such well-being is determined by a variety of individual circumstances (gender, age, level of maturity and experiences) and other factors (e.g., presence or absence of supportive caregivers or peers).[40] The principle of best interests should guide the design, implementation, monitoring and adjustment of programmes, research, and advocacy affecting young people. Moreover, young people should be active participants in defining their best interests, taking into consideration their evolving capacities.[41]

▶ **Non-discrimination:** The right to participate should be realized without discrimination. Discrimination and exclusion can occur through one or multiple intersecting and overlapping dimensions of inequity. Young people should not be discriminated against on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality, or immigration status or for any other reason. Proactive

measures are needed to address discrimination and inequities and ensure safe and equal opportunities for young people to enjoy their participation rights.

▶ **Survival and development:** Adults have fundamental duties to protect and safeguard young people's rights to survival and development. A holistic understanding of young people's development and survival needs should inform the design of programmes and research, and young people should be supported to use their own strengths and resilience to maximize their opportunities for survival and development. Furthermore, when young people have experienced violence or other difficulties, participation should be designed in a way that enhances health, self-respect and dignity to promote physical and psychological recovery.

> **It is important for me to have an opportunity to express myself in decisions that affect me, because it's my life and I can better determine what's best for me, especially with support from my parents.**
> – Mary, youth, Cameroon

Disability-inclusive efforts must be proactive to engage young people with disabilities and support their safe and meaningful participation. Young people with disabilities often face additional barriers to participate in decisions affecting them. These may include stigma and discrimination because of their disabilities, inaccessibility of some venues, lack of access to information in suitable formats (e.g., sign language), and others.[42]

Do no harm is a key humanitarian principle that sets out to avoid exposing individuals, groups or communities to further harm as a result of action, inaction, or the process of providing assistance.[43]

Equity and inclusion are crucial. Staff must prioritize respect for the dignity and worth of each individual, regardless of age, gender, race, ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, origin, wealth, birth status or ability. Systematic efforts are required to ensure that strategies and processes for young people's participation transform, rather than reinforce, existing patterns of exclusion, discrimination and inequity. Equitable participation is critical to safeguarding and positive MHPS well-being outcomes, as exclusion contributes to isolation, frustration, and lower self-esteem, which are risk factors for poor mental health and increased vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.[44]

Gender-sensitive and -transformative programming considers gender, age and related social norms when designing safeguarding measures for participatory processes. Given their specific social position, vulnerabilities and gendered experiences, adolescent girls, young women and transgender young people may each face different risks and may react to and benefit from participation opportunities differently than adolescent boys and young men.[45] In some sociocultural contexts, young people may be reluctant to discuss some issues (e.g., violence, sexuality, well-being, or family planning) if they are in mixed-gender groups, thus opportunities for gender-specific group work with young people can be considered where relevant. Young people with different gender identities should be consulted about the settings and ways of working that make them feel safe and comfortable to express their views. This ensures programmes or research design that responds to their preferences.

Efforts to promote gender equality will enhance opportunities for safe and meaningful participation of young people with different gender identities.

Life course approach aims to increase effectiveness of interventions throughout a person's life. Although the right to participation applies to every child from the youngest age, its nature and scope inevitably change as individuals reach the second decade of life. The concept of 'evolving capacities' means that as adolescents acquire greater maturity, their levels of agency and autonomy to take greater responsibility and exercise their rights increase. However, giving adolescents more influence in decision-making does not remove their entitlement to continued protection under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) or the obligation to promote their best interests.

Participation opportunities, as well as MHPS well-being and safeguarding issues and risks, vary across different age and gender groups. Thus, it is important to tailor design of participatory processes according to the specific interests, needs and perspectives of young people from different age, gender and background groups.

Respect for privacy and confidentiality is emphasized by young people when defining young person–friendly processes and services.[46] Confidentiality refers to a person's right to have any information about them treated with respect. An individual's right to privacy and confidentiality must be respected during programmes or other interactions that encourage expression and participation. Staff must also ensure sensitive and timely follow-up regarding any identified safeguarding concerns or other support needs.[47] Confidentiality does not mean keeping harmful secrets. When first meeting young people, staff must inform them about any limits to confidentiality and types of follow-up if young people are being harmed or are harming others. Staff must know national laws that require a duty to report disclosures of abuse or harm to young people.

Strengths-based approach emphasizes people's self-determination and strengths. It is a philosophy and way of viewing individuals and groups as resourceful and resilient in the face of adversity. A strengths-based approach is not prescriptive; there is no one-size-fits-all model. It recognizes that individuals are aware of their situation and aims to ensure that individuals are always at the heart of decision-making on any matters that concern them.[48] This approach positions young people and local adults as knowing how best to identify practices that will enhance their expression and well-being.[49]

Appendix B:
Terminology explained

This appendix provides a more detailed explanation of terminology used throughout the protocol.

Capacity means the combined strengths, attributes and resources available within a community, organization or society. Capacity may include infrastructure, institutions, human knowledge and skills, as well as collective attributes, such as social relationships, leadership and management.[50]

Child safeguarding means proactive measures are taken to limit direct and indirect collateral risks or harm to children arising from the work of UNICEF, its personnel or associates. Risks may include those associated with physical violence (including corporal punishment); sexual violence, exploitation or abuse; emotional and verbal abuse; economic exploitation; failure to provide for physical or psychological safety; neglect of physical, emotional or psychological needs; harmful cultural practices; and privacy violations.[51]

Conflict sensitivity is the ability of people within an organization to understand the context within which the organization operates; understand the interaction between the intervention and that context; and act upon this understanding to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on conflict.[52]

Do no harm is a key humanitarian principle that sets out to avoid exposing children and adults to further harm as a result of action, inaction or the process of providing assistance.[53]

Gender is a social and cultural construct that distinguishes differences in the attributes of women and men and girls and boys and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of women and men. Gender-based roles and other attributes thus change over time and vary across cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and likely behaviours of both women and men (femininity and masculinity).[54]

Harm means to damage or injure physically or mentally.[55]

Inclusion is about bringing children, adolescents, youth and adults into a process in a meaningful manner. It is the process of improving conditions for individuals and groups to take part in society and to fully enjoy their rights.[56]

Meaningful participation ensures that young people have:
▶ Space: Young people need safe and inclusive opportunities that provide them with space and time to form and freely express their views and opinions.
▶ Voice: Young people should be provided appropriate information to inform their views, and they should be able to use the media of their choice to communicate their views and to negotiate decisions (e.g., verbal expression, creative theatre, art or digital media).
▶ Audience: Young people's views must be respectfully and seriously heard by those with the power and authority to act on them (e.g., government officials, parents, social workers or doctors).

▶ **Influence:** Young people's views should receive proper consideration, and young people should receive timely feedback about the outcomes and extent of their influence.[57]

Participation should also adhere to the nine basic requirements for effective and ethical participation outlined by the Committee on the Rights of the Child,[58] namely that participation is i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) inclusive, vi) child-friendly, vii) supported by training, viii) safe and sensitive to risk, and ix) accountable.

Mental health is defined by WHO as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."[59] For children and young people, the definition of mental health necessarily takes into account age-specific and life course markers, and includes a positive sense of identity, ability to manage thoughts and emotions, capacity to build relationships and the ability to learn and acquire education.[60]

Mental health and psychosocial well-being describes the positive state of being when a person thrives. In young people, it results from the interplay of physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional, social and spiritual aspects that influence an adolescent's ability to grow, learn, socialize, and develop to their full potential. Well-being is commonly understood in three domains:[61]

▶ **Personal well-being:** positive thoughts and emotions such as hopefulness, calm, self-esteem and self-confidence
▶ **Interpersonal well-being:** nurturing relationships, responsive caregiving, a sense of belonging, the ability to be close to others
▶ **Skills and knowledge:** the capacity to learn, make positive decisions, effectively respond to life challenges and express oneself

Mental health and psychosocial support is used to describe any type of support that aims to protect or promote psychosocial well-being or prevent or treat mental health conditions.[62]

Mental ill health occurs when someone is not experiencing good mental health. They might have a mental illness or they might have poor mental health without having an illness. This term includes anyone who is experiencing mental health challenges.[63]

Participation is the right of adolescents and youth (individually or collectively) to form and express their views and influence matters that concern them directly and indirectly. Participation is about being informed, engaged and having an influence in decisions and matters that affect one's life, in private and public spheres, in the home, in alternative care settings, at school, in the workplace, in the community, in social media, in broader governance processes, and in programmes.[64]

Protective factors are any attributes, characteristics, or exposures that decrease levels of adverse symptoms or outcomes.[65]

Resilience is the ability of an individual, system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, adapt to and recover from the hazard's effects in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of essential structures and functions.[66]

Risk is the potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets that could occur to an individual, system, society or community in a specific period of time.[67]

Safeguarding means taking measures to protect all children from harm that may arise as a result of their interactions with organizations. UNICEF has an organizational duty to do no harm to children. UNICEF's commitment to child safeguarding demonstrates a collective obligation to regulate and prevent all forms of harm to children with whom staff come into contact. This duty is to ensure the organization does not fail to meet children's necessary needs or provide protection.[68] Additionally:

▶ **Measures to protect** include vetting and training personnel, mitigating risks, reporting concerns, investigating allegations and assisting victims.
▶ **All children** includes any child who comes into contact with staff and partner staff in programmes or operations.
▶ **Harm** includes physical violence, sexual violence exploitation and abuse, emotional and verbal abuse, economic exploitation, neglect, harmful practices and privacy violations.

Vulnerability describes the characteristics and circumstances of individual children, households or communities that make them particularly susceptible to the damaging effects of a shock or stress.[69]

© UNICEF/UN0378182/Panjwani

Appendix C: Sample one-day workshop for Stepping Stones 1 and 2

This appendix provides a sample plan for a one-day workshop with adults or young people to introduce the protocol and use **Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect** and **Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities**.

It is important for workshops leaders to read and become familiar with the protocol beforehand to prepare for the workshop and adapt the workshop plan according to the context and time availability of participants.

Before the workshop: Download and print all necessary materials referenced within this sample plan; download or prepare the video and have a computer ready to screen it for participants.

Materials needed: Flip chart paper, pens, tape, coloured paper, printouts of relevant materials (including the scenarios and exercises for group work).

Time	Topic	Facilitator notes

30–45 minutes	**Icebreaker introductions and purpose of the session**	▶ Use icebreaker introduction games (for example, see Act for Youth icebreakers and energizers).
		▶ Explain that the protocol is designed to support individual and organizational capacities to safeguard the mental health and psychosocial (MHPS) well-being of young people in participation processes, especially when working on sensitive issues or in contexts affected by adversity.
		▶ Explain that this workshop will allow participants to:
		  ▶ Explore opportunities for meaningful and safe participation focusing on young people's MHPS well-being
		  ▶ Reflect on assumptions, biases, and power relations to support inclusive participation
		  ▶ Discuss and assess the availability of resources to support meaningful participation
		▶ Discuss and agree on positive rules for this workshop to encourage active and respectful participation of all.

30–45 minutes	**Explore key terms and definitions**	▶ Place key words on flip chart (e.g., one word per half a flip chart page). Words may include: Participation, mental health, mental health and psychosocial well-being, meaningful participation, risk, harm, safeguarding, etc. ▶ Consider use of a world café–style activity for small groups of participants to move around the room and share and write brief descriptions of what each of these key words mean to them. ▶ Share the participants' ideas and look at the definitions from Appendix B: Terminology explained to ensure common understanding of key terms.

30 minutes	**Brief overview of the Stepping Stones**	▶ Show each of the Stepping Stones and the Collaborative Stepping Stone. Briefly introduce each Stepping Stone using information from Section 1. Overview of the protocol and how to navigate.
20 minutes	**Break and energizer game**	
30 minutes	**Stepping Stone 1: Self-Reflect** **Watch and reflect on the video**	▶ Briefly introduce **Stepping Stone 1**. Explain that it provides activities for users to reflect on assumptions, biases and power relations to support inclusive and respectful participation. ▶ Watch the video, *Young People's Views About Speaking Up, Safety and Well-Being*. ▶ Either individually or in small groups, reflect on what participants heard in the video.
45–60 minutes	**First activity from** 'Designing Inclusive Programming: A Self-Reflection Guide'	▶ Individually or working in small groups, have participants complete at least two of the following activities (one before lunch and one after lunch), choosing those that are most relevant to your work: ▶ Linking Our Identities, exploring identity and intersectionality ▶ How Comfy Are You?, exploring stereotypes and prejudice
60 minutes	**Lunch break**	▶ Power Flower, exploring power and privilege ▶ Guess Who?, exploring assumptions and biases
45–60 minutes	**Second activity from** 'Designing Inclusive Programming: A Self-Reflection Guide'	▶ Learning to Pivot, creating a safer space
20 minutes	**Break and energizer game**	
45–60 minutes	**Stepping Stone 2: Assess resources and capacities** **Discuss and complete checklist**	▶ Introduce **Stepping Stone 2: Assess Resources and Capacities**. ▶ Either in plenary or in groups, followed by a plenary session, discuss Checklist 2: Assessment of time and resources for safe and meaningful participation. Discuss and record actions to address any identified gaps.

45 minutes	**Discuss scenarios and share action ideas**	▶ Divide the participants into groups. Give each group one or two scenarios from the protocol (see scenarios A–G) or create or adapt your own scenarios and explain that each group will have 25 minutes to:
		  ▶ Read and reflect on their scenarios and identify the most interesting takeaways
		  ▶ Discuss any insights or ideas that may be relevant to their own participatory processes
		▶ Ask each group to briefly present their reflections in a plenary discussion.

10 minutes	**Next steps**	▶ Discuss and agree on practical ideas and next steps for team members to apply Stepping Stones 1 and 2.

Appendix D: Sample half- to one-day workshop for Stepping Stones 3 and 4

This appendix provides a sample plan for a half- to one-day workshop with young people to introduce and use **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation**, and **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms, and Strengthen Support Systems**.

As with Appendix C, it is important for workshops leaders to read and become familiar with the protocol beforehand to prepare for the workshop and adapt the workshop plan according to the context and time availability of participants.

Before the workshop: Download and print all necessary materials referenced within this sample plan.

Materials needed: Flip chart paper prepared with Tables 1 and 2, printouts of relevant materials (including the scenarios), pens, tape and coloured paper.

Time	Topic	Facilitator notes
30 minutes	**Icebreaker introductions and purpose of the session**	▶ Use icebreaker introduction games (for example, see Act for Youth icebreakers and energizers). ▶ Briefly introduce the protocol in relation to your specific participatory project. ▶ If participants have completed the workshop on Stepping Stones 1 and 2 (see Appendix C), provide a brief recap of key findings. Otherwise, introduce the protocol. ▶ Explain that this workshop will allow participants to: ▶ Identify risk, harms and benefits of young people's participation in a specific project ▶ Explore ways to mitigate risks and harms and strengthen support systems ▶ Review project plans and develop risk mitigation actions to enhance safe beneficial participation ▶ Discuss and agree on positive rules among participants to encourage active and respectful participation of all.
30 minutes	**(Optional) Explore key terms definitions**	▶ If not already done in a previous workshop, explore the meaning of key terms (see Appendix C for detailed activity).
20–30 minutes	**(Optional) Brief overview of the Stepping Stones**	▶ Show each of the Stepping Stones and the Collaboration Stepping Stone. Briefly introduce each Stepping Stone using information from Section 1. Overview of the protocol and how to navigate.
20 minutes	**Break and energizer**	

45 minutes	**(Optional) Discuss scenarios and share action ideas**	▶ If not already done in a previous workshop, discuss scenarios (see Appendix C for detailed activity).
60 minutes	**Lunch break**	
45–90 minutes	**Stepping Stone 3: Identify risks, harms and benefits of participation**	▶ Explain that **Stepping Stone 3** helps participants identify risks, harms and benefits of participation in relation to their specific participatory project. ▶ Lead the group through this process using Appendix E: Interactive activity to identify benefits, risks and harms.
20 minutes	**Break and energizer**	
45–90 minutes	**Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate risks and harms, and strengthen support systems**	▶ Explain that **Stepping Stone 4** helps participants plan risk mitigation actions and strengthen support systems. This activity builds upon the activity that was just done, and allows discussion around ways to reduce the identified risks and harms. ▶ Use Appendix G: Interactive activity to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems.
45–60 minutes	**(Optional) Self-care activities**	▶ Introduce and try out various self-care activities (see Appendix J: Self-care).
10 minutes	**Next steps**	▶ Discuss and agree on practical ideas and next steps for team members to apply Stepping Stone 3 and 4.

Appendix E: Interactive activity to identify benefits, risks and harms[70]

This activity can be facilitated with young people and other relevant stakeholders during **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits of Participation** to identify and assess benefits, risks and harms to young people's MHPS well-being arising from participation opportunities. Supportive adults should be prepared to respond sensitively to young people's concerns and have knowledge on existing referral pathways and available services.

Time needed: 45–90 minutes

Materials needed: Coloured pens or coloured stickers (red, green, yellow), flip chart paper, regular pens, notebooks, and index cards or Post-it Notes. Create a large flip chart version of Table 1. Workshop leaders should prepare themselves by reviewing the Table 1 instructions.

1. Introduce the activity. Explain to young people, staff and other concerned stakeholders that it is important to assess potential risks, harms, levels of risks, and benefits arising from the participation opportunity. It is important to assess whether benefits outweigh potential risks and to find ways to address risks and harms arising from participation. Remind participants that some risks and harms may be bigger and therefore harmful. In some situations, risks may be so great that the proposed activity needs to be stopped or changed to ensure participation that is safe.

2. Explain to the group that their analysis will inform risk mitigation and decision-making for young people's safe participation. Also explain that decision-making should be guided by the principles of 'do no harm' and 'best interests' to make sure young people remain at the forefront when making decisions.

3. Introduce the importance of risk mitigation actions both to reduce the risks and to strengthen support systems that are available to young people. Explain that in a follow-up step, participants will identify risk mitigation actions and ideas for strengthening support systems to ensure young people's safe and meaningful participation.

4. **Explore what MHPS well-being means.** Ask young people and other relevant stakeholders what MHPS well-being means to them. When identifying and assessing risks, harms and benefits, encourage young people and other relevant stakeholders to share their views and feelings about how participation opportunities may positively or negatively affect their MHPS well-being, including:

   ▶ Personal well-being: positive thoughts and emotions, such as hopefulness, calm, self-esteem and self- confidence
   ▶ Interpersonal well-being: nurturing relationships, responsive caregiving, a sense of belonging, the ability to be close to others
   ▶ Skills and knowledge: the capacity to learn, make positive decisions, and effectively respond to life challenges and express oneself

5. **Explore the participation opportunity's potential benefits:**

   ▶ Have young people work individually or in same-gender or -age pairs. Ask them to think about the participation opportunity and to consider whether their participation would enhance their personal well-being, interpersonal well-being, or skills and knowledge to make positive decisions and effectively respond to life challenges. Ask them to write a list of likely benefits on an index card or Post-it Note.

   ▶ Next, create groups that bring together participants of the same gender identity and similar age group (e.g., 10 to 13 years, 14 to 17 years, 18 to 24 years). Encourage everyone to share the benefits they identified and to group similar benefits together, placing the main benefits on index cards or Post-it Notes.

   ▶ In a plenary session, encourage groups to share the main benefits of participation and discuss similarities and differences between each group's answers.

   ▶ Place index cards of the benefits in the large flip chart version of the Table 1 'identified benefits' column:

Table 1: Benefits, risks, harms and levels of risk arising from the participation opportunity

Participation opportunity (what, where, who?)	Identified benefits to young people's MHPS well-being	Identified risks or harms to young people's MHPS well-being	Likelihood of risks or harm (high, medium, low)	Severity of harm (high, medium, low)
	▶ ▶	....	....	....
	▶ ▶	....	....	....
	▶ ▶	....	....	....
		....	....	....

6. **Now explore the participation opportunity's potential risks and harms.**

   ▶ Have young people work individually or in same-gender or -age pairs to think about and create a list of potential risks or harms they might face if they participate. Risks may be physical or emotional, encompassing situations that make them feel uncomfortable or less confident. Encourage participants to think about risks and harms they might face during all stages of the process – preparation, implementation, and follow-up. Ask them to write down the main risks and harms in their notebooks.

▶ Working in same-gender or -age groups, encourage everyone to share the risks and harms they identified and to group similar risks together, placing the main types of risk and harm on index cards or Post-it Notes.

▶ In a plenary session, encourage groups to share the main types of risks and harms and discuss similarities and differences between each group's answers.

▶ In contexts where there are inequalities or conflicts based on gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, family income, or rural, urban or camp setting, it is also important to discuss whether a participation opportunity could contribute to further conflict or inequalities. If so, add index cards or Post-it Notes to reflect such risks or harms.

▶ Place index cards or Post-it Notes listing risks and harms in the large flip chart version of the Table 1 'identified risks or harms' column.

▶ [Optional] Review Appendix F: Common challenges with participation to determine whether there are other relevant risks or harms to add to the list.

7. Assess the likelihood of each risk occurring, as well as levels of harm, keeping in mind that risk does not always lead to harm.

▶ Hold a large group discussion and use coloured stickers or pens to identify if risks are:

▶ Highly likely to happen (red sticker or red star using a red marker pen)

▶ Somewhat likely to happen (yellow sticker or yellow star using a yellow marker pen)

▶ Unlikely to happen (green sticker or green star using a green marker pen)

Figure 4: Levels of harm

LOW LEVEL OF HARM   MEDIUM LEVEL OF HARM   HIGH LEVEL OF HARM

▶ Explain to participants that they will now discuss the potential level of harm to young people. Introduce the three circles (with each flip chart page spread out along the floor):

Consider each of the risks that were identified as red (highly likely to happen) or yellow (somewhat likely to happen). Take one of the risks and read it out loud. Encourage volunteers to share their views and feelings about how this risk might negatively affect young people's mental health or their emotional or physical well-being. The facilitator should make a note of the views shared (in their own notebook) and encourage participants to place the risk's index card or Post-it Note on the circle that corresponds to the severity of harm (low, medium or high).

Note: An alternative movement activity can be used to consider the severity of harm. Use chalk (or string and tape) to create three large circles on the floor and label them 'low', 'medium', and 'high' level of harm. Make sure the circles are large enough so multiple young people can stand inside them.

Read aloud one identified risk at a time and ask individuals to move to the circle that represents whether they think this risk would cause low, medium, or high levels of harm to young people's mental health or emotional or physical well-being. Encourage volunteers to share their points of view and feelings about how this risk might negatively affect them or their peers. In addition to making a note of the views shared, the facilitator should also note how many young people stepped into each circle.

▶ Record the results in the large flip chart version of Table 1.

▶ Repeat this activity, exploring all the risks that are categorized as red or yellow and recording the results in Table 1. Also ask the group members if they would like to explore any of the risks categorized as green or low likelihood.

8. [Optional] Explain that in the next activity (see Appendix G: Interactive activity to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems), young people and other relevant stakeholders will have opportunities to share their ideas for actions that reduce risks and to consider if any activities should be stopped or changed, especially for likely risks or those that cause any level of harm.

9. If you have time and interest, divide young people into groups and encourage them to prepare and share a five-minute drama of key risks and possible solutions to reduce those risks and ensure young people's safe participation.

© UNICEF/UNI308008/Schermbrucker

Appendix F: Common challenges with participation

This appendix can be used during **Stepping Stone 3: Identify Risks, Harms and Benefits** to consider common challenges and potential risks or harms to young people's MHPS well-being when engaging them in participatory programming, research or advocacy. Protocol users can reflect on Table 3: Common challenges with participation and MHPS well-being, to identify whether any of these commonly faced challenges may be encountered in their particular context.

Table 3: Common challenges with participation and MHPS well-being

Basic requirement*	Common challenges and their potential impact on MHPS well-being
1. Participation is transparent and informative	▶ There might be a lack of information in accessible formats to meet the needs of some young people (e.g., no efforts to provide Braille documents, sign language interpretation, or easy-to-read formats for youth with learning disabilities). This can make young people from certain backgrounds feel overlooked or excluded. ▶ Insufficient efforts to secure informed consent from guardians can have negative consequences for some young people. ▶ Young people's unrealistic expectations about their participation and what it will achieve can result in frustration and anger. ▶ Young people can feel overwhelmed if they receive too much information or if information is shared in formats that are hard to understand.
2. Participation is voluntary	▶ Young people might feel pressured to participate by staff, teachers, parents, guardians or peers. ▶ Individuals might not be informed that they have the right to withdraw. ▶ Young people might feel shy, anxious and hesitant to express their views and feelings.
3. Participation is respectful	▶ Programmes might suffer from tokenism or lack of respect for young people's participation (especially girls, those with disabilities, and other marginalized groups) from parents, caregivers, traditional elders or officials. In many sociocultural contexts, young people are expected not to speak in front of adults, and young people's contributions are often underrecognized and undervalued. ▶ Young people might be scolded for speaking up or their views may be not be seriously considered. This can contribute to frustration, anger or helplessness. ▶ Adults or other young people might demonstrate a lack of respect for diverse and differing perspectives among young people. ▶ Young people's existing time commitments (e.g., for study, work, household and family duties, or leisure) might not be sufficiently considered. As a result, the participation opportunity can become a source of stress as young people try to juggle different activities.

* The nine basic requirements for effective and ethical participation developed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) requires that participation be: i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) child-friendly, vi) inclusive, vii) supported by training, viii) safe and sensitive to risk, and ix) accountable.

4. Participation is relevant	▶ Young people might be asked to join activities that are not relevant to their daily lives. This creates a sense of burden and frustration, especially if they are busy with other tasks (e.g., education, work, or leisure activities). ▶ In some contexts, adults might use and manipulate young people's views as a tool to legitimize adults' own positions and political interests.
5. Participation is adolescent-friendly	▶ Participation that is not designed in adolescent-friendly ways that reflect young people' interests and abilities can lead to stress, poor self-esteem, or boredom. ▶ Insufficient time might be invested in trust-building with and among groups of young people and concerned duty bearers, making it intimidating for some young people to speak up or express their views and feelings. ▶ Insufficient attention paid to safe and inclusive locations for participatory processes (e.g., a venue that may not be accessible or suitable for young people with disabilities or for young people from certain ethnic or religious groups due to local traditional practices or attitudes) can lead to exclusion, stigma and isolation.
6. Participation is inclusive	▶ In many sociocultural contexts, discrimination based on age, gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, race, ethnicity, HIV status, and other factors makes it harder for some young people to express their views and to participate in different activities. If proactive efforts are not made to ensure inclusion, disadvantaged groups may be excluded (e.g., if a non-accessible venue is selected for meetings or if no efforts are made to adapt facilitation and materials for young people with disabilities). ▶ Often, insufficient efforts are made to reach and involve young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and to listen to young people of different ages, genders, abilities, racial and ethnic groups, etc. This can fuel exclusion and inequality. ▶ Efforts to involve disadvantaged groups that are not carried out in respectful and sensitive ways can enhance stigma, discrimination and poor self-esteem. ▶ Allowing the same young people to have repeated participation opportunities can contribute to jealousy and frustration from peers while also leading to burnout in young people who frequently take part. ▶ Giving certain individuals or groups privileged opportunities to participate or access capacity-building and other leadership roles can exacerbate existing power inequalities based on gender, ethnicity, religion, family income or other differences. This can contribute to frustration, conflict or a sense of hopelessness among excluded young people.
7. Participation is supported by training	▶ Training might not be provided to staff or young people. This results in poor quality and unsafe participation processes that contribute to increased risks, distress, stigma, low self-esteem, or frustration among young people (especially those who are more disadvantaged).

8. Participation is safe and sensitive to risk	▶ Adults who are not adequately screened and prepared to support young people's participation can cause intentional or unintentional harm of young people's MHPS well-being.
	▶ Insufficient time to build trust among young people increases the risk that young participants will feel uncomfortable expressing their views or worry that they might face negative repercussions when speaking up.
	▶ Insufficient respect for privacy and confidentiality of young people's views and feelings can enhance sadness, discomfort, and anxiety and can increase risks of being the target of unhealthy behaviours and discrimination.
	▶ Young activists might face different physical, psychological, and digital security challenges arising from their participation or their unmet expectations of public engagement.
	▶ In some contexts when speaking out, young people might face threats, retaliation, scolding or abuse from adults or their peers, especially if they talk about sensitive issues or participate in contexts where norms are hostile to young people's participation. This can contribute to stress and emotional or physical harm.
	▶ Adults who are not prepared to respond appropriately to disclosures or negative peer behaviour can cause further harm to young people involved.
	▶ Young people might be asked personal questions or asked to share distressing personal stories and might not receive sensitive and timely support afterwards. This can exacerbate young people's distress and contribute to stigma and discrimination.
	▶ Some young people take on a lot of responsibility and might feel overwhelmed by their participation or activism on social justice or other issues that are important to them. This can result in emotional exhaustion and burnout.
	▶ Young people might spend a lot of time participating in action or advocacy issues to the detriment of their education, training or employment, which ultimately can harm their physical and mental health.
	▶ Young people might choose to use skills and platforms for political actions or activism that expose them to threats and conflict with the law, which may subsequently contribute to anger, fear, stress, or emotional and physical harm.
9. Participation is accountable	▶ Young people might invest time and energy to participate but not receive any feedback from concerned adults, which can enhance frustration, anger and a sense of hopelessness.
	▶ Additional damage can occur when young people do not have access to effective procedures for redress or appropriate support when faced with challenges or harm.

Appendix G: Activity to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems[71]

This activity can be facilitated with young people (and other relevant stakeholders) during **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems**. It must be used after Stepping Stone 3 (because Table 1 must have been considered and completed.)

Time needed: 45–90 minutes

Materials needed: Coloured pens, flip chart paper, regular pens, notebooks, index cards or Post-it Notes, completed Table 1 (on flip chart or typed up), Table 2 example and an empty large flip chart version of Table 2 for use by participants.

1. Introduce the activity to mitigate risks and harms, enhance the benefits of participation, and strengthen support systems. Introduce the importance of risk mitigation actions both to reduce the risks and to strengthen support systems that are available to young people.

    Building upon the earlier activity (see Appendix E), explain that young people, staff and other relevant stakeholders will discuss and plan actions to reduce the identified risks and harms, especially those risks whose occurrence was identified as medium to high likelihood. Mitigation actions may include decisions to change proposed programme activities if activities are considered too risky.

    This step also includes consideration of practical ways to strengthen support systems that are available to young people. Support systems may include informal systems of support provided by peers, family, or civil society actors, as well as referrals to formal services, such as counselling, protection, legal, or health services.

    In a plenary session, introduce Table 2 and share an example on how to use it.

Table 2: Concrete actions to mitigate and address risks and harms and strengthen support systems

Risks and harms from Table 1, especially those that are medium to high likelihood	Existing informal support systems that are in place to mitigate the risk or harm and to enhance the identified benefits of participation	Existing formal support systems that are in place to mitigate the risk or harm and to enhance the identified benefits of participation	Actions to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems for safe participation (add details: what, where, when, who, with what support)

2. In Table 2, list each risk identified during the activity from Appendix E, being sure to highlight those that are medium to high likelihood (whatever the level of harm).

3. If time allows, first work in gender- or age-specific groups, followed by a plenary session, to identify existing informal support. Informal support might include support from peers, family members, or community-based groups. Note the forms of informal support on index cards or Post-it Notes and add these to the second column of Table 2.

4. If time allows, first work in gender- or age-specific groups, followed by a plenary session, to discuss existing formal support that is available and add key findings to the third column on formal support systems. Formal support might include access to helplines, counselling services, health services, or protection services.

5. Discuss and propose actions to mitigate risks and strengthen support systems for safe participation. Be sure to include discussions about ways to strengthen both informal and formal support systems. Add specific suggested actions to column four and include details regarding who is responsible for making sure these actions occur, when they should be implemented, and what support is needed to ensure they happen.

Note: If any activities are considered too risky, young people and staff should discuss and make decisions about whether to change the activities to ensure participation opportunities that are safe and sensitive to risk. In some situations, a decision may be reached not to proceed with any participation opportunities involving young people, if risk likelihood is deemed too high and risk mitigations insufficient.

Appendix H: Collaboration with caregivers and stakeholders

This appendix provides a checklist to enhance collaboration with caregivers and other relevant stakeholders to increase safe and respectful participation of young people. This appendix can be relevant during **Stepping Stone 4: Mitigate Risks and Harms and Strengthen Support Systems**.

Young people should be approached as social actors within the wider context of their families, peers, communities, schools, workplaces, and governance systems. Caregivers often play a critical role in enabling or hindering adolescents' safe participation, encouraging or discouraging young people to express their views and feelings and acting upon or dismissing their ideas and feelings. Caregivers may be gatekeepers, supporting or blocking young people's access to services, including MHPSS.[72] Thus, it is important to collaborate with caregivers and other relevant stakeholders and encourage them to value and support the participation of young people of different gender, age and ability groups.

For a school-based participatory initiative, it is important to secure support from teachers, principals and school administrators for inclusive, safe and meaningful participation. Protocol users may also want to collaborate with traditional elders, community leaders, and other influencers to support positive changes in social norms and attitudes for equitable and safe participation of young people of different ages, genders, abilities and backgrounds.

© UNICEF/UN0377918/Panjwani

Checklist 6: Actions to enhance collaboration with caregivers and other relevant stakeholders to increase safe and respectful participation of young people

☐ Share information with caregivers and young people in accessible formats and local languages. Include transparent communication about the opportunity's background and purpose, timing, young people's intended role, intended audience, relevant costs and how they will be covered (e.g., transport, food, refreshment, phone and internet access costs), and compensation for young people. Make sure documents are in an easy-to-read format and add visuals and Braille versions where possible.

☐ If relevant, organize a meeting with traditional elders to secure and promote support for participation of young people from different backgrounds (including those with different gender identities, young people with disabilities, out-of-school young people, etc.).

☐ Create space for caregivers and other relevant stakeholders to meet with organizers and express their views on the benefits of young people's participation, as well as their concerns, worries, proposed solutions and risk mitigation ideas for safe participation of young people of different genders, ages and abilities.

☐ Make sure organizers respond to caregivers' and stakeholders' questions about the participation opportunity and inform them of any efforts made to minimize and address identified risks or concerns.

☐ Ensure organizers act upon caregivers' and stakeholders' suggestions to enhance safe participation and ensure that young people's best interests are a primary consideration for any decisions and actions.

☐ Ensure caregivers have provided informed, written consent for adolescents who are under 18. As participation opportunities evolve, share updated information with caregivers and renegotiate informed consent.

Appendix I: Service mapping

This appendix provides a format to develop and maintain an updated service mapping to help link young people to services they may need. You may add rows if necessary. Be sure to revisit this information to keep it updated, at least yearly.

Identify services in seven main categories, with room for you to add your own:

A. Education and skill building
B. Protection from violence and exploitation
C. Mental health and psychosocial support services
D. Health and nutrition
E. Social protection and livelihoods
F. Legal aid
G. Youth participation
H. Other

Important note: Include contact details for a youth-friendly focal point, wherever possible.

Country:
Programme location(s):
Date the service mapping was updated:

Services provided	Name of organization/actor	Address, phone number, email and focal point name, if available	Other details (e.g., opening hours, eligibility criteria, associated costs)

A. EDUCATION AND SKILL BUILDING
(e.g., formal and informal education, technical skill building institutions, life skills training)

B. PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION
(e.g., child protection services, domestic violence response services, one-stop centres, hotlines and helplines, designated police units to address violence)

Services provided	Name of organization/actor	Address, phone number, email and focal point name, if available	Other details (e.g., opening hours, eligibility criteria, associated costs)

C. MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

(e.g., peer support groups, child- and youth-friendly spaces, family support, spiritual support groups, counselling, mental health social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, drug addiction support)

D. HEALTH AND NUTRITION

(e.g., primary health care, emergency health care services, HIV prevention and support services, sexual and reproductive health services, nutrition services)

E. SOCIAL PROTECTION AND LIVELIHOODS

(e.g., social protection schemes, including cash transfers, business start-up grants and microcredit; economic literacy groups; livelihood training)

F. LEGAL AID

(e.g., lawyers, ombudsman, legal aid providers)

G. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

(e.g., youth groups, clubs or councils; peer-to-peer initiatives; civic engagement initiatives)

H. OTHER

Appendix J: Self-care

The below content on Self-care was taken directly from UNICEF's Youth Advocacy Guide (2022).

Serving as a young activist can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also take a toll on your emotional and mental health. Common challenges and feelings that young people experience in their advocacy journey include stress, distress, anger, guilt, disappointment, overwhelm, lack of motivation, fatigue and hopelessness. These are normal feelings! And they can all be difficult to manage at times.

Each young person deals with their experiences differently. Sometimes you may feel overwhelmed and like your feelings are impossible to handle. Other times you may feel like you can handle your feelings, but they are always in the back of your mind bothering you. It is important to recognize that you have internal and external skills, knowledge and support that you can draw upon to find help and healing.

As young activists and advocates, you care about the issues, pain and challenges that other people face. Empathy might be one of your strengths. While caring for others may come easy to you, becoming aware of your own needs and taking care of yourself might seem harder. Maintaining a balance between the energy you put towards caring for others and caring for yourself is important for the work you do and for your own well-being. The following pages include ways to care for your emotions (including stress), how to ask for help, and where to find help.

For more in-depth resources on mental wellness and advocacy, including definitions related to mental health, see 'A Global Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit' (Orygen) and 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World: A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists' (Amnesty International).

Caring for your emotions

To strive towards better physical and mental health, learn how to identify your emotions and how to handle them – this is also known as emotional regulation. Here are some ways to do this:

Check in with yourself regularly. Learning to become aware of how you feel is the first step towards managing your feelings. Make space each day to ask yourself: What feelings have I experienced today? What are the top three common feelings I have experienced this week? Think about what may have contributed to how you felt, good and bad, to help you identify triggers that make you feel bad or those that give you a boost.

Keep reminding yourself that all feelings are OK. Learning to accept how you are feeling and to not dismiss your feelings is important. Remember that it is normal and healthy to feel a range of emotions. Sometimes, however, emotions lead to negative thoughts that affect how you act and cope. It can help to reframe this kind of negative thinking. Here are some examples of how to do that:

▶ "Having unpleasant feelings makes me weak" ⟶ "Facing my difficult feelings takes strength and courage"

- "My feelings aren't as important as other people's feelings" → "My feelings are just as valid as those of other people"
- "Other people expect me to be positive all the time"→ "This is an unrealistic expectation; negative or difficult feelings are human"
- "I can't face my negative, difficult feelings" → "I can find positive ways to cope and I have resources available to me"

Find positive ways to cope. When you experience negative or difficult feelings, it's important to find positive and safe ways to help you get through them. Some ideas include:

- Listening to music
- Watching your favourite movie or TV show
- Eating healthy meals
- Talking to a friend
- Getting a hug from someone you trust
- Getting advice from a trusted adult
- Moving your body for some exercise
- Reducing online screen time

Another activity is to write down three things you find fun and enjoyable and three people in your life who always help you feel good. Keep these as your go-tos when you feel you are having a difficult time.

Respectfully communicate what you want and need. Feedback from youth advocates around the world reveal a common theme: Sometimes, it can be hard to say no or to ask for the things you need. In fact, being assertive is a learned skill, and as with any skill you become better at it with practice. As a youth activist and advocate, you might be good at communicating what you think and standing up for issues or others. How might you apply those same skills to communicating and advocating for your own needs? Here are some tips:

Assertiveness is a way of behaving in which you are able to communicate your feelings, thoughts and beliefs in an open, honest manner without violating the rights of other people

- Take time to think about what you want and need, as opposed to only what others want and need from you.

  - Use 'I' statements. Ask for what you want or need by starting with 'I' or 'my':
    - "My worry is that…"
    - "I think that I…"
    - "I feel that I…"
    - "When I'm…"
    - "I need to…"
    - "I would like to…"
    - "I hope that…"

- Say no. Learning when and how to say no is an important way to take care of yourself. Saying no can be difficult. Here are some thoughts and phrases that might help.
  - Let others know that they matter, but you do, too:
    - "I appreciate that, but no thank you."
    - "I care about you, but I can't."
    - "I can see why this might suit you, but it doesn't work well for me."

- ▶ Suggest an alternative, but make sure it's one that works for you:
    - ▶ "Today I don't have time, but perhaps in a few weeks?"
    - ▶ "This isn't very realistic for me, perhaps you could ask X?"
    - ▶ "I don't want to do X right now, but what about if we did Y instead?"

Manage stress. Many experiences or events can cause stress in daily life, and some larger events can cause greater strain. You're not alone. Everyone experiences stress at some point in their lives, and different techniques can help you handle this in a positive way.

Checking in with yourself, as noted above, is a good start. Simply pause to think and reflect. What are the top three things that have caused you stress this week? What are the top three things that have helped you reduce stress this week? You can't escape stress, but you can aim to maintain balance in your life.

It may also be useful to recognize how stress affects your body and mind:

- ▶ Emotional symptoms might include feeling sad or withdrawn or experiencing sudden overwhelming fear, intense worry or severe mood swings.
- ▶ Physical symptoms might include a racing heart, fast breathing, sweating, headaches, nausea or vomiting, loss of appetite or drastic changes in weight.
- ▶ Behavioural symptoms might include engaging in arguments or sudden outbursts of anger, self-harm, increased or unusual drug or alcohol use or smoking, withdrawing from friends or family, changes in sleeping patterns or drastic changes in personality.
- ▶ Cognitive symptoms might include racing thoughts, inability to concentrate or cloudy thinking.

For more practical skills to help cope with stress, see the WHO publication 'Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide'. A few minutes each day are enough to practise the self-help techniques discussed in the guide, which can be used alone or with the accompanying audio exercises.

Determining when you need help

It can feel scary to admit that you need support, but doing so is a sign of courage and strength.

Remember: You don't need to reach a breaking point before you ask for help. Here are eight signs that you might need support with managing your feelings or supporting your mental health and well-being:

- ▶ Finding it hard to get out of bed or feeling tired all the time
- ▶ Withdrawing from and avoiding friends or tasks you need to do
- ▶ Losing interest in usual activities
- ▶ Having trouble concentrating
- ▶ Experiencing irritability
- ▶ Feeling sad most of the day, nearly every day
- ▶ Having thoughts or feelings of wanting to harm yourself, or feeling like there is no point to life
- ▶ Experiencing any of the above for more than a couple of weeks

Finding help*

Maintaining a healthy mind and body means consistently looking for different actions you can take and methods you can use to support your journey. It's equally important to know where to get information and support when you need them. You are never alone. Different support structures and methods are available to you at different points along your advocacy journey. Building a strong toolkit filled with supportive resources can help during difficult times.

You already have some tools that have taught you how to breathe, reflect on a situation or feelings, and gently move through adversity. If at any point you feel you are having a true mental health crisis, call your local emergency number or your medical contacts for referrals. If, however, you are not facing an emergency, you can find support in your friends and colleagues. When you need:

▶ Comfort, talk to a friend who you trust
▶ Guidance, turn to an adult you trust
▶ Support, talk to a community leader or someone in your community who supports you
▶ Perspective, interact and engage with other young people going through similar situations

Though asking for help can feel scary, assistance from other people can positively change your life. If you are struggling and don't know what to say or how to express that you need help, try some of these examples:

▶ When you don't know what you need: "I'm feeling _____. I'm not sure what to ask for, but I think I need some support."
▶ When you don't have close people nearby: "I know we don't talk much. I'm going through a tough time and I feel like you're someone I can trust. Are you free to talk (day/time)?"
▶ When you feel stuck or out of options: "I'm struggling and what I've been trying isn't working. Can we (meet up/Skype/etc.) on (date)? I'd love your help in thinking through some ideas and making a plan."
▶ When you don't want to talk about it: "I'm in a bad place but I'm also not ready to talk about it. I'd love to chat/do an activity together to help me feel distracted."
▶ When you need to feel connected: "Can you check in with me (on date/every day) to make sure I'm doing OK?"
  ▶ "I haven't been doing well. Would you mind texting me every morning to say hi? It would really help me."
  ▶ "Hey friend. I've been kind of sad lately. Do you want to Snapchat/send selfies to each other before bed every night, just to check in? It'd be nice to see your face."
  ▶ "I'm feeling down. What do you think about being self-care buddies? We could text each other once a day, something that we did to care for ourselves, and would love to have any ideas you have?"
  ▶ "I've been isolating myself lately. What do you think about checking in with eachother a few times a week? I'd love to be in better touch."

---

* with thanks and credit to Sam Dylan Finch for this content

Your toolkit isn't complete without additional resources. Take some time to find the supportive organizations and groups in your communities (before you need them). Some examples include:

- ▶ Helplines: Find the phone numbers or web addresses for local, provincial, national and international helplines that support mental and physical health.
- ▶ Support groups: Seek contact information for various groups that offer peer support, whether online or in person.
- ▶ Websites: Keep a list of organizations focused on mental health and well-being, along with their website information.
- ▶ Social media: Follow accounts that provide daily motivation, as well as the accounts of organizations focused on mental health and well-being.
- ▶ Professional groups: Join groups of people with similar interests to support your cause and your journey; they may also help when you are feeling overwhelmed.
- ▶ Professional: See a mental health worker during difficult times.

Appendix K: Protection poster for use by young people

Adapted from Plan International and Save the Children (2013): 'Together for protection: A young person's guide to keep self and others safe (age 13-17)'

This resource can be printed and used by young people to add names and contact details of relevant people and agencies who can provide support when needed.

My Name:	Helpline	Parents/Caregivers
	Friends	Family Friends
	Teachers	Child Protection Service
	Police and Emergency	Social Worker
	Emergency SMS Group	Protection Websites
	Child Ombudsperson	Safeguarding focal point
	Others	

Appendix L: Considerations for research staff

Each of the Stepping Stones outlined in the main protocol is relevant and important for research staff to follow to enhance safe participation of young people.

An ethical approach must be central to decisions when designing and implementing research involving young people, either as researchers or as informants. Adult researchers must:

▶ Consider ethical concerns that may arise
▶ Reflect upon and mitigate potential risks and harms
▶ Determine whether participation will provide sufficient benefits to young people
▶ Ensure participation that is safe and sensitive to risk

Adults who support research that engages young people must be experienced in ethical research, and sufficient support networks and referral mechanisms must be in place.

> **What contributions are children asked to make to the study? What are the risks or costs to children, such as use of their time, embarrassment, and intrusion? What are the benefits for children who take part, such as satisfaction, increased knowledge, and time to talk to an attentive listener? Are there risks if the research is not carried out?**
> – Morrow & Boyden, 2014, p. 2904[73]

© UNICEF/UN0311854/Andrinivo

Checklist 7: Actions to enhance ethical research involving young people

☐ Researchers, evaluators and data collectors should familiarize themselves with and apply 'UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis'.

☐ Wherever possible, researchers should seek ethical approval for research through their institution's established ethics committee. Findings and plans developed from using this protocol can then inform an application for ethical approval.

☐ Researchers should have knowledge of the sociocultural context and local language used by young people.

☐ Where relevant, researchers must seek support for young people's participation from relevant gatekeepers (e.g., parents, caregivers or village leaders).

☐ Researchers must comply with local legislation regarding age or circumstances that allow for informed consent of young people under 18. In the absence of this legislation, evidence-generation involving young people under the relevant age of majority as defined by local law must take into account their competencies and circumstances relating to their autonomy. When autonomy is limited or where cultural norms dictate, researchers must seek consent from a guardian, parent or caregiver.

☐ Researchers must ensure that young people know they have the right to refuse to participate, even if their parent or guardian has provided informed consent for their participation.

☐ Researchers (including youth researchers) should be trained in psychological first aid (PFA), equipping them with knowledge and skills to support young people who experience distress or disclose abuse or other harmful experiences, and should be able to make appropriate referrals.

☐ Researchers should be trained on good communication strategies with young people, including young people with disabilities, and on the use of non-stigmatizing terms in local languages (see Appendix M: Considerations for communications and advocacy staff).

☐ Researchers must ensure a clear plan is in place to deal with instances in which young people disclose information that requires reporting.

☐ Researchers must ensure they have a list of functioning referral pathways with access to MHPSS and other relevant services prior to engaging young people in research.

☐ When designing research tools, researchers must empathize with young people and consider the emotional impact of questions they intend to ask. Questions for interviews, surveys or focus group discussions must be carefully designed to avoid negative reactions from young people.

☐ Data collection tools should be designed in ways that are appropriate to young people's interests and capacities and should be pilot tested with young people to adjust and improve them.

☐ Adult leaders should provide young researchers with mentoring, support and supervision, as well as opportunities to reflect on their strengths, challenges and worries while undertaking research. Supervisors should encourage young researchers to prioritize self-care (see Appendix J) to avoid burnout and stress that may accumulate from gathering and analysing data on the situations of young people affected by adversity.

☐ Researchers should develop clear and transparent criteria for inclusion or exclusion of young people in research and data collection processes, taking into consideration the importance of informed consent, non-discrimination, relevance, participant safety and principles of do no harm.

- ☐ Researchers should ensure that daily income of young people and their family members is not adversely affected by taking time to participate in research activities.
- ☐ Researchers should inform young people and caregivers about ways their privacy and confidentiality will be protected during and after the research (including safe storage of all personal data) and also explain any limits to confidentiality (e.g., that adults must report if a young person is being harmed or is harming others).
- ☐ Researchers should reassure young people that there are no right or wrong answers.
- ☐ Researchers should allow sufficient time for young people to formulate and share their views, experiences and ideas.
- ☐ If an individual becomes distressed during data collection, the researcher must immediately stop asking questions and offer appropriate emotional support. Researchers should have knowledge to make relevant referrals, if needed.
- ☐ Researchers should ensure disaggregation of research or data by gender, age and other relevant diversity factors.
- ☐ Researchers should provide young people with opportunities to validate research findings, to avoid misrepresentation of views.
- ☐ Researchers should provide young people with feedback on the research findings.
- ☐ Adult leaders should ensure that young researchers are appropriately acknowledged as co-authors or contributors and given tangible awards, such as certificates or stipends.

Appendix M: Considerations for communications and advocacy staff

Each of the Stepping Stones outlined in the main protocol is relevant and important for communications and advocacy staff to follow to enhance safe participation of young people. This appendix identifies additional specific considerations for communications and advocacy staff when actively engaging young people affected by adversity, especially when exploring sensitive topics. It includes a checklist and guidance on:

▶ Actions to ensure informed consent and safe sharing of stories
▶ Inclusive language to enhance respect and dignity for young people, especially those who experience adversity

> **Language is deeply powerful, both expressing and shaping our world. The words we choose, written or spoken, and the meanings we attach to them influence our thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviour. Words can make us feel included and respected. They can also be used to label, exclude or discriminate. This can affect a person's sense of self and lead to further disadvantage and social exclusion.**
> – Mental Health Complaints Commissioner Language Guide, Victoria, Australia, 2020, p. 3

As part of Stepping Stone 3 and Stepping Stone 4, it is necessary to assess risks associated with sharing of information and materials and to develop and implement strategies that mitigate and reduce risks. Securing informed consent from young people prior to using their stories, experiences, blogs, photos or videos is integral to such efforts. Furthermore, if young people are under the age of legal consent, communications and advocacy staff must also secure informed consent from young people's parents or guardians.

Checklist 8: Actions by communications and advocacy staff to ensure informed consent and safe sharing of stories

- ☐ Provide young people (and guardians for young people under the age of majority as defined by local law) access to transparent information that clearly explains how, when, where and why young people's stories, experiences, blogs, photos and videos will be used.
- ☐ Secure written informed consent or assent from young people for use of stories, experiences, blogs, photos and videos.
- ☐ Secure written informed consent from young people's parents or guardians if young people are under the age of majority as defined by local law.
- ☐ As part of the risk assessment, assess risks arising from sharing young people's stories, experiences, blogs, photos or videos in publications, on the internet or on social media sites. Take into consideration young people's own perspectives on the risks and risk mitigation strategies.
- ☐ Use inclusive language (see Box 5: Guidance for inclusive language).
- ☐ Discuss and identify ways to protect young people's anonymity and privacy, especially if information shared by young people is considered sensitive. For example, change names to ensure anonymous quotes, do not reveal specific locations, do not show faces in videos, and ensure any shared information will not reveal a young person's identity.
- ☐ Discuss and put in place plans to respond to any negative reactions or comments on communication staff's social media posts that include young people or their stories.
- ☐ Abide by General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) when collecting data. In Europe, the Data Protection Act 2018 requires organizations and individuals to process personal information fairly and lawfully, ensuring protection of young people's well-being.
- ☐ Ensure all communications staff are sufficiently aware of the process and relevant focal point to ensure referrals for young people or other audiences who reach out in response to posted content.

Box 5: **Guidance for inclusive language**

('Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World (Volume 2): A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists', Amnesty International, 2021, p. 48)[74]

Everybody, especially communications staff, should think about the language they use, the language or content of materials shared, and the impact language may have on young people's MHPS well-being. It is important that language and content shared by UNICEF and its partners enhance respect and dignity for young people, especially those who experience adversity. Staff and other relevant stakeholders should apply guidance for inclusive language (Amnesty International, 2021):

▶ Recognize the impact of words. Do not use language that portrays people as passive or directly defined by a condition, diagnosis, or social or physical characteristics. For example, avoid referring to someone as 'challenged' or 'handi-capable'. Instead, you can use 'people living with a disability'.

▶ Ask. If possible, always ask to find out an individual's word preferences. For example, instead of referring to someone as 'a victim of...' ask what alternatives they would like to use, such as 'a person who has experienced…' or 'a survivor'. People might prefer a term you have not come across yet. By asking you get a chance to learn what they feel comfortable with.

▶ Choose your words carefully. Be aware of the discriminatory and derogatory connotation of words. You may think a word is innocent, but it might have a history of supremacy and oppression.

▶ Always try to use inclusive language. For example, 'older person' instead of 'senior' or 'elderly'. 'Act in solidarity' instead of 'taking a stand with'. 'Wild' instead of 'crazy' or 'insane'. 'Humankind' instead of 'mankind'.

Appendix N:
Other useful resources

▶ Action for Children, 'Keeping Myself Safe. Practitioner's toolkit for developing effective relationships with vulnerable young people', 2014.

▶ Amnesty International, 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World (Volume 2): A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists', 2021.

▶ Child Resilience Alliance, 'Toolkit for Supporting Community-Led Child Protection Processes', 2018.

▶ Church World Service, 'Putting Safety and Dignity First: A guide to protective action in programming', 2012.

▶ Collaborative for Development Action, 'The Do No Harm Handbook: The Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict', 2004.

▶ Girl Hub, 'Girl Safety Toolkit: A Resource for Practitioners', 2014.

▶ Humanity & Inclusion (Operations Division)/F3E, 'Incorporating the Principle of "Do No Harm": How to take action without causing harm; Reflections on a review of Humanity & Inclusion's practices', 2018.

▶ IASC, 'IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings', 2007

▶ IASC, 'Basic Psychosocial Skills: A Guide for COVID-19 Responders', 2020.

▶ UN Population Fund, 'Interagency Gender-Based Violence Case Management Guidelines: Providing Care and Case Management Services to Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Humanitarian Settings', 2017.

▶ Orygen, 'A Global Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit: A Resource to Drive Action to Address Youth Mental Health', 2020.

▶ Oxfam, 'Shaking Up to Move Forward: Visions for stronger partnerships between youth movements and social organizations', 2020.

▶ Plan International, 'Sticks and Stones: A training manual for facilitators on how to increase the involvement of children in their own protection', 2013.

▶ Plan International and Save the Children, 'Together for protection: A young person's guide to keep self and others safe [age 13-17]', 2013.

▶ Rising Youth, 'Designing Inclusive Programming: A Self-Reflection guide for Youth Engagement Activators & Rising Youth Event Facilitators'.

▶ Save the Children, 'A Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation: Tools for monitoring and evaluating children's participation; Booklet 5', 2014.

▶ Save the Children, 'Fun, Safe, Inclusive: A half-day training module on facilitation skills', 2016.

▶ Save the Children, UNICEF, WHO and The MHPSS Collaborative, 'I Support My Friends: A training for children and adolescents on how to support a friend in distress', 2021.

▶ UNFPA, UNDP, DPPA/PBSO, FBA, 'Youth, Peace and Security: A Programming Handbook', 2021.

▶ UNICEF, 'Ethical Research Involving Children', 2013.

▶ UNICEF, 'Guidance on Risk-Informed Programming', 2018.

▶ UNICEF, 'Mental Health and Psychosocial Technical Note', 2019.

▶ UNICEF, 'Engaged and Heard! Guidelines on Adolescent Participation and Civic Engagement', 2020.

▶ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Compendium of Community Based MHPSS Resources', 2020.

▶ UNICEF, 'Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for Children in Humanitarian Settings: An Updated Review of Evidence and Practice', 2020.

▶ UNICEF, 'Tip Sheets for Adults, Adolescents and Youth on Adolescent and Youth Participation in Different Settings', 2021.

▶ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Procedure for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis', 2021.

References

1 Lloyd, Katrina and Leslie Emerson, '(Re)examining the Relationship Between Children's Subjective Wellbeing and Their Perceptions of Participation Rights', *Child Indicators Research*, vol. 10, no. 3, 23 May 2016, pp. 591–608.

2 Ibid.

3 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Adolescent Mental Health Matters: A Landscape Analysis of UNICEF's Response and Agenda for Action', UNICEF, New York, 2020.

4 Booysen, Chantelle, et al., 'Young people will transform global mental health: A call to prioritise global action on mental health for young people,' Policy Brief, Young Leaders for the Lancet Commission on Global Mental Health and Sustainable Development, 2019.

5 World Health Organization, 'Adolescent mental health fact sheet', WHO, Geneva, Switzerland, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>, accessed 26th January 2021.

6 Ibid.

7 Williams, David R., 'Stress and the Mental Health of Populations of Color: Advancing Our Understanding of Race-related Stressors,' *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, vol. 59, no. 4, December 2018, pp. 466–485.

8 Anita Riecher-Rössler, 'Sex and gender differences in mental disorders', *The Lancet Psychiatry*, vol. 4, no. 1, January 2017, pp. 8–9.

9 Ploderl, Martin and Pierre Tremblay, 'Mental health of sexual minorities: A systematic review', *International Review of Psychiatry*, vol. 27, no. 5, November 2015, pp. 367–385.

10 Kwan, Irene, et al., 'Cyberbullying and children and young people's mental health: A systematic map of systematic reviews', *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, vol. 23, no. 2, February 2020, pp. 72–82; Le, Ha Thi Hai, et al., 'Mental health problems both precede and follow bullying among adolescents and the effects differ by gender: A cross-lagged panel analysis of school-based longitudinal data in Vietnam', *International Journal of Mental Health Systems*, vol. 13, May 2019.

11 United Nations Children's Fund, 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings: An updated review of evidence and practice', UNICEF, New York, November 2020.

12 Griebler, Ursula, et al., 'Effects of student participation in school health promotion: a systematic review', *Health Promotion International*, vol. 32, no. 2, January 2014, pp. 1–12; Kennan, Danielle, Bernadine Brady, and Cormak Forkan, 'Supporting children's participation in decision-making: A systematic literature review exploring the effectiveness of participatory processes', *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 48, no. 7, January 2018, pp.1985–2002; Lloyd and Emerson, '(Re)examining the Relationship Between Children's Subjective Wellbeing and Their Perceptions of Participation Rights'; Marcus, Rachel and Alex Cunningham, 'Young people as agents and advocates of development: Evidence gap map report', Overseas Development Institute, London, October 2016; Vis, Sven Arild, et al., 'Participation and health – a research review of child participation in planning and decision making', *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 16, August 2011, pp. 325–335.

13 Ibid.

14 Oliver, Kylie, et al., 'Building resilience in young people through meaningful participation', *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health (AeJAMH)*, vol. 5, no. 1, May 2006, pp. 1–7.

15 World Health Organization, 'Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020', 2013.

16 United Nations Children's Fund, 'The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind. Promoting and caring for children's mental health', UNICEF, New York, 2021.

17 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Mental health and psychosocial technical note', UNICEF, New York, 2019.

18 Orygen, 'A Global Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit: A resource to drive action to address youth mental health', 2020.

19 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Engaged & Heard! Guidelines for adolescent participation and civic engagement', UNICEF, New York, 2020.

20 Ibid.

21 Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 12 The Right of the Child to be Heard*, United Nations, New York, 2009, CRC/C/GC/12, paragraph 134.

22 Marcus and Cunningham, 'Young people as agents and advocates of development'; O'Kane, Claire and Ornella Barros, 'It's Time to Talk: Children's views on children's work: Lessons learned from a global participatory research project', Kindernothilfe and Terres des Homme International Federation, Duisburg, Germany, March 2019.

23 Kennan, Brady and Forkan, 'Supporting children's participation in decision-making'.

24 Leeson, Caroline, 'My life in care: Experiences of nonparticipation in decision-making processes', *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 12, no. 3, July 2007, pp. 268–277; Winter, Karen, 'The perspectives of young children in care about their circumstances and implications for social work practice', *Child & Family Social Work*, vol. 15, no. 2, March 2010, pp. 186–195.

25 Ibid.

26 Feinstein, Clare and Claire O'Kane, 'Children and adolescent's participation and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation', United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy, September 2009; Nakkeeran, Nanjappan and Barathi Nakkeeran, 'Disability, mental health, sexual orientation and gender identity: Understanding health inequity through experience and difference', *Health Research Policy and Systems*, vol. 16, article no. 97, October 2018; O'Kane, Claire, Ornella Barros, and Nicolas Meslaoui, 'It's Time to Talk: Children's views on children's work', 2nd edition, Kindernothilfe and Terres des Hommes International Federation, Duisburg, Germany, April 2019; United Nations, *Leaving no one behind: The imperative of inclusive development: Report on the World Social Situation 2016*, UN, New York, 2016.

27 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'.

28 Amnesty International, 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World (Volume 2): A Well-Being Workbook for Youth Activists', January 2021.

29 Munro, Emily, 'The protection of children online: a brief scoping review to identify vulnerable groups', Childhood

Wellbeing Research Centre, UK, August 2011; Stoiova, Mariya, Sonia Livingstone and Rana Khazbak, 'Investing risks and opportunities for children in a digital world: A rapid review of the evidence on children's internet use and outcomes', United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Discussion Papers, Florence, Italy, January 2021.

30 Johns, Michelle, et al., 'Strengthening Our Schools to Promote Resilience and Health Among LGBTQ Youth: Emerging Evidence and Research Priorities from the state of LGBTQ. Youth Health and Well-being Symposium', *LGBT Health*, vol. 6, no. 4, May/June 2019, pp. 146–155; Feinstein and O'Kane, 'Children and adolescent's participation and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation'; *Leaving no one behind*.

31 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World'.

32 International Medical Corps, International Rescue Committee, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund et al., *Inter-agency gender-based violence case management guidelines, Providing care and case management services to gender-based violence survivors in humanitarian settings*, January 2017; Chang, Valerie, Sheryn Scott and Carole Decker, *Developing Helping Skills: A Step by Step Approach to Competency*, Brooks/Cole Cengage Learning, California, 2017.

33 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World'.

34 Action for Children, 'Keeping Myself Safe. Practitioner's toolkit for developing effective relationships with vulnerable young people', Action for Children UK, Watford, UK, 2014.

35 O'Kane and Barros, 'It's Time to Talk'.

36 Morrow, Ginny and Jo Boyden, 'Ethics of researching children's well-being', pp. 2895–2918 in *Handbook of Child Well-Being: Theories, Methods and Policies in Global Perspective*, edited by Asher Ben-Arieh, et al., 2014.

37 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'.

38 Morrow and Boyden, 'Ethics of researching children's well-being', pp. 2895–2918.

39 Save the Children Norway, 'A Kit of Tools for participatory research and evaluation with children, young people and adults', Save the Children Norway, Oslo, 2008.

40 The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *Minimum standards for child protection in humanitarian action*, 2019.

41 Ibid.

42 'Engaged & Heard!', pp. 53–54.

43 'Child-Centred Multi-Risk Assessments'.

44 Feinstein and O'Kane, 'Children and adolescent's participation'; O'Kane, Barros and Meslaoui, 'It's Time to Talk', 2nd edition; Vis, et al., 'Participation and health'.

45 'Engaged & Heard!'.

46 World Health Organization, 'Making health services adolescent friendly: Developing national quality standards for adolescent-friendly services', WHO, Geneva, Switzerland, 2012; 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'.

47 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'.

48 Department of Health and Social Care, *Strengths-Based Approach: Practice Framework and Practice Handbook*, United Kingdom, 2019.

49 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'.

50 United Nations Fund for Children, 'Guidance on risk-informed programming', UNICEF, New York, April 2018.

51 'Engaged & Heard!'.

52 Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 'How to guide to conflict sensitivity', February 2021.

53 Plan International, 'Child-Centred Multi-Risk Assessments: A field guide and toolkit', Plan International, United Kingdom, July 2018.

54 'Guidance on risk-informed programming'.

55 Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. 'harm (n.)', <www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/harm>, accessed 26th January 2021.

56 'Child-Centred Multi-Risk Assessments'.

57 Lundy, Laura, 'Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2007, pp. 927–942.

58 General Comment No. 12.

59 'Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020', p. 38.

60 'State of the World's Children 2021'.

61 'Mental health and psychosocial technical note'.

62 Ibid.

63 'Global Youth Mental Health Advocacy Toolkit'.

64 'Engaged & Heard!'.

65 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'.

66 'Guidance on risk-informed programming'.

67 Ibid.

68 United Nations Children's Fund, Agora Online Child Safeguarding Training on child safeguarding, UNICEF, New York, 2020.

69 'Guidance on risk-informed programming'.

70 O'Kane, Barros and Meslaoui, 'It's Time to Talk', 2nd edition.

71 Ibid.

72 'MHPSS for children in humanitarian settings'; Villatoro, Alice, et al., 'Parental recognition of preadolescent mental health problems: Does stigma matter?', *Social Science Medicine*, vol. 2016, November 2018, pp. 88–96.

73 Morrow and Boyden, 'Ethics of researching children's well-being', pp. 2895–2918.

74 'Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World'.