



...IDEAS...

FOR LISTENING TO THE CHILD

By Clare Hooper, chair of the Children, Young People and Families (CYF) Round Table

In her article 'Listen to the Child'¹ Sian Hancock urged us to take the Baptist principle of the priesthood of all believers seriously and create the space to listen to the voice and thoughts of the child in our midst. Another article I've been reminded of is Article 12 from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: *A child has the right to be heard and to participate in all decisions that affect them.*

Wow! I wonder how seriously we take this Right for the children and young people in our church or groups that are connected with us? What might it look like if we facilitated the participation of children (0-18) at a level

that works for their age and maturity? What would we need to do differently to enable their participation?

Here are some thoughts to help you begin to think through what might be possible if the participation of children was encouraged in the ministry and mission of our church or community space.

Children, Young People and Families



Joining the dots between church, home and community

The following practical ideas are suggested by members of the CYF Round Table:

Ideas for facilitating the participation of children

1 Scrabble (or Bananagrams) Prayers

We do this activity as a group of young families and it works really well. This activity helps make space for the children to be listened to and shows them nothing is too small, silly or too big to talk to God about.

Using a bag of Scrabble letter tiles the children take turns to pull out tiles and suggest things that the group can pray for beginning with that letter.

After three or four suggestions for a letter, another is drawn. The key is that there are no wrong suggestions. An adult or older

¹ Sian Hancock's article 'Listen to the Child' appeared in the Spring 2021 edition of *Baptists Together* magazine. Access it here: baptist.org.uk/listenchild

child writes down the list of ideas and after ten minutes or so you'll have a slightly weird but wonderful list that demonstrates something of what the children have felt is important to pray about.

Then take turns to pray making sure to let the children lead.

2 We are often so busy trying to run 'our' programme that we don't have space to sit and listen to children and young people. One way of making space to listen is using craft or lego, playdough or salt dough. However, I have seen many leaders who set the children off doing craft and see it as an opportunity to chat to other leaders and have a brew.

No! This is a great opportunity to do the craft alongside the children (even if you think you're useless at craft). It allows a gentle flow of conversation and chat, time for you to listen and be led by them.

3 When our church was deciding on the values that shaped its culture, we did lots of listening to everyone. We needed to settle on five. Everyone, including children, was given stickers to stick on their top five values and the ones with the most were the ones that were chosen. The voice of the children helped shaped the church we hoped to be.

Ideas for facilitating the participation of young people

1 After the first lockdown, we gave the running of our community coffee shop over to our young people for the summer. The coffee shop has been running since the 1980s but has always struggled to welcome younger

people. We gave them a budget and complete oversight so they could institute key changes such as a new menu, a proper coffee machine and a new room layout. They loved the experience and felt they had really contributed to the life of the church. All the changes have remained and when the young people visit our coffee shop, they can see how valued their input is.

2 In order to grow leaders, we must give young people leadership opportunities. At our church, the way we have done that is by giving them opportunity to run the youth and children's programmes. We do this using the leadership square:

- 1 I do, You watch
- 2 I do, You help
- 3 You do, I help
- 4 You do, I watch

This way the young people are taught how to lead groups and programmes (an area of church life they know well and are comfortable in) and then we hope will move onto leading in other areas of church life, as they feel called to do so.

A Blessing

May the child in our midst be a reminder of the Kingdom of God - let them be welcomed.

May the voice of the child be a reminder of the prophetic - let them be heard.

May the opinions of the child be a reminder that it's together we discern God's will - let them be known.

May the participation of the child be a reminder that God chose to participate as a child - let them take part.

CONVERSATION

How do you ensure the voices of your children and young people are heard?

Which ideas in this piece do you think you could implement at your church?

STARTERS



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She co-hosts the CYF podcast 'Joining the dots' with fellow CYF member and regional minister Emma Mohr.