

# Readiness and Risk Assessments

Some professionals may have concerns about young people's 'readiness' to take part in participatory initiatives.

I'm not sure Ana is stable enough to join that advisory group.

But having a voice and making choices is part of the healing process.

Young people need to be at a certain stage in their recovery.

What 'stage'?

Recovery is different for everyone.

I don't think Ana is ready.

She may not be ready to stand up and speak at a conference, but she might be ready to share her views about how we could make the service better.

But she hasn't engaged in therapy yet...

Maybe this can help her feel ready for that...

Besides, it could be a chance to take part in a fun activity which may be exactly what she is ready for.

Professionals sometimes carry out assessments to help them decide which young people to approach about taking part in a project or activity.

It can help them think about what the risks might be for different young people if they were to take part, and consider how to minimise these and support their involvement.

Sometimes young people are involved in this assessment process but often they are not.

It can be awkward to talk about 'risk' when a young person is in the room,

especially if they are not fully aware of those risks.

But they need to be aware if people have concerns about their welfare.

People often think we'll always be vulnerable. There needs to be an opportunity for young people to challenge perceptions about how at risk they are —

—there's two sides to every story.

Young people might lack the knowledge and experience to know the nature of the risks and what the implications might be of taking part in a participatory project.

But they should be involved in thinking about the potential risks and potential benefits. Getting involved in a project might show people that they have vulnerabilities, but also that they have resources and strengths to keep safe.

Professionals also need to think about how ready they are and what resources they have, to support young people's engagement in participatory initiatives.



What are the aims of the project?

I want to choose what I share and how I am described.

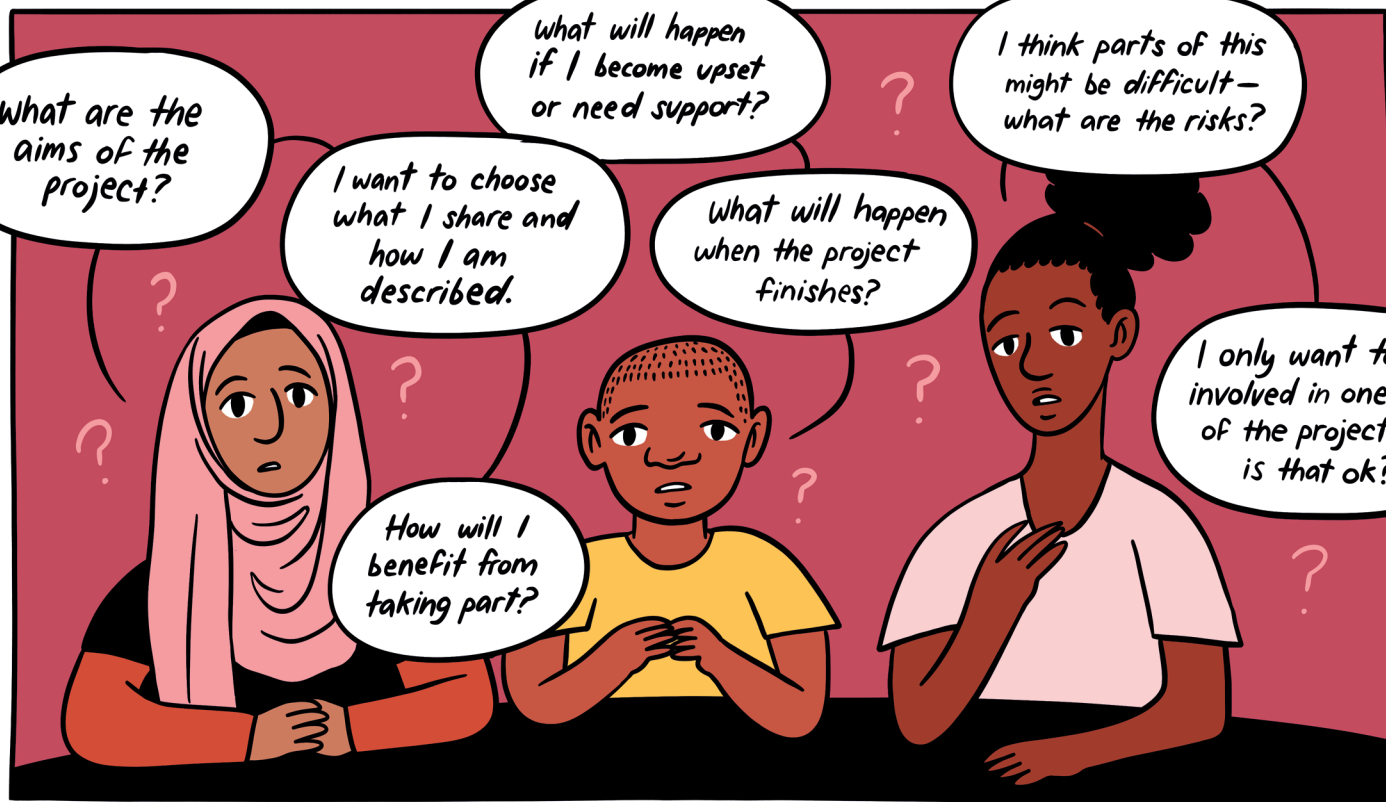
What will happen if I become upset or need support?

What will happen when the project finishes?

I think parts of this might be difficult – what are the risks?

How will I benefit from taking part?

I only want to be involved in one part of the project – is that ok?



Do we know what the risks are?  
How much risk are we prepared to manage?

How flexible can we be?

Do we have the budget to support this work properly?

Are we really committed to participation as an organisation?

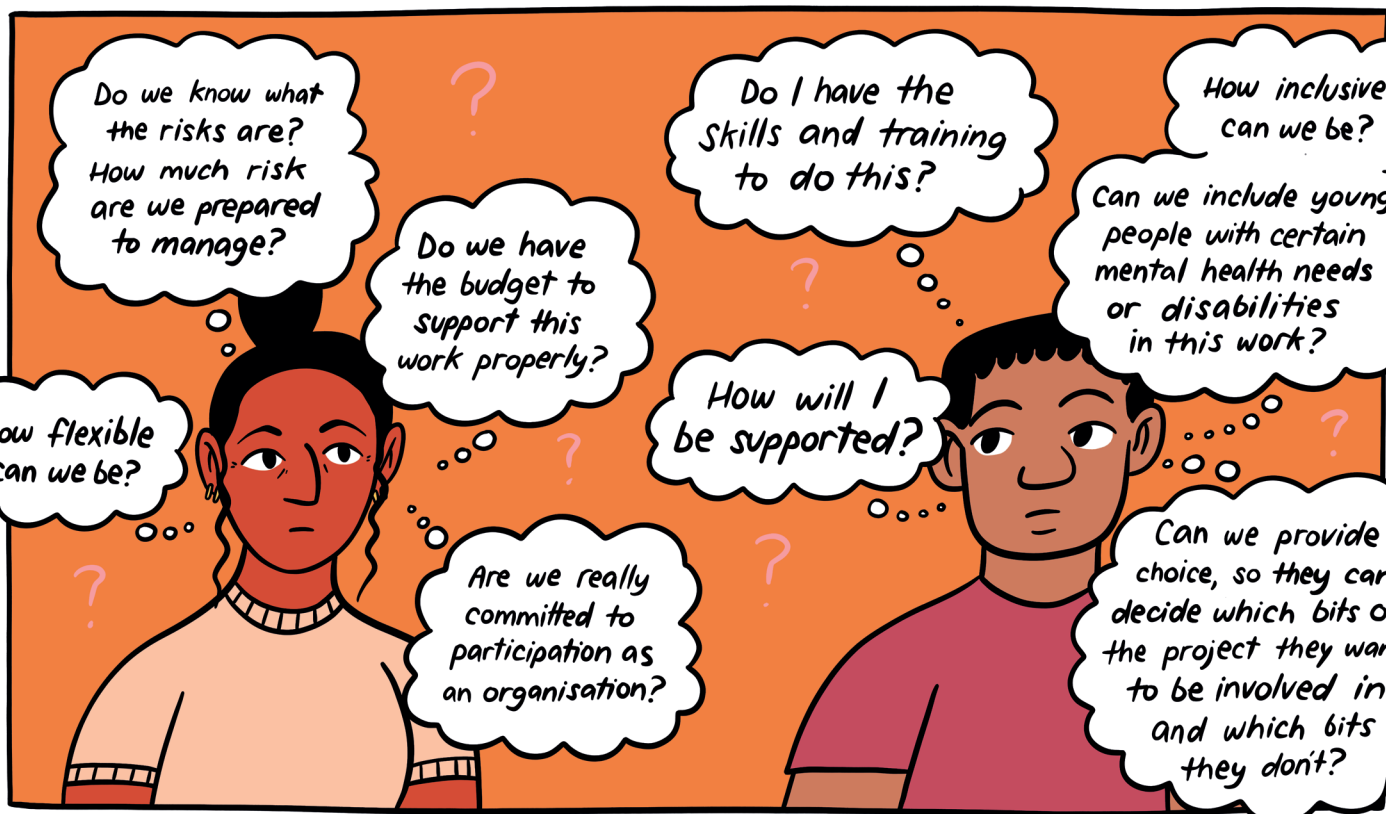
Do I have the skills and training to do this?

How will I be supported?

How inclusive can we be?

Can we include young people with certain mental health needs or disabilities in this work?

Can we provide choice, so they can decide which bits of the project they want to be involved in and which bits they don't?



# Concluding Thoughts

## For young people

- It is important for professionals to draw on their knowledge and experience to anticipate what risks may be involved for you if you choose to engage in participatory activities. You need to be aware of these risks so that you can make an informed decision about whether to participate or not.
- Professionals have a duty to keep you safe and although you have a right to be heard and to participate, you also have the right to be protected from harm. Professionals can sometimes find it difficult to balance these two sets of rights.
- Professionals may have been involved in similar initiatives before so may have a good sense of how potentially challenging certain activities may be and may draw on that knowledge when making an assessment.
- It is equally important for you to have the opportunity to share what you feel may or may not be a risk and share any ideas you may have for minimising risks.

## For professionals

- It is your role to consider and think about potential risks associated with a particular project. However, it is also important to think about the potential benefits of engagement for a young person as participation may enhance protection.
- Recovery is not linear and it is different for everyone. This means it may be difficult for you to know when someone may be 'ready' to take part in a particular activity.
- You cannot predict everything – the benefits or the risks. Involving young people in conversations about the activity may enable you to build up a better understanding of whether the young person is ready, how risks could be mitigated, and how they can be supported to engage.
- Readiness is a two way process. You, and your organisation, need to consider how well prepared and resourced you are to commit to, and support, the safe and meaningful participation of young people before introducing opportunities to young people.

To reference this resource, please cite: Cody, C. and Soares, C. (2023) 'Readiness and risk assessments' from *Seeing things from both sides: A comic to help young people and professionals understand each other's views about young survivors' participation in efforts to address child sexual abuse and exploitation*. Luton: Safer Young Lives Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire.

Comics are by Maria Stoian.

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