

Ways to feel more comfortable as a researcher

The following advice and ideas have been developed from work with the project Reference Group. This group comprise people who have learning disabilities and have themselves had similar experiences while at school and college, to the young people who are involved in the 'What about us?' project. Some members of this group now work in the field of training and advocacy.

Providing advice, guidance and training to the young people is really important – we need to help them **prepare** for their work in the research project. Making sure we offer the **right sort of support** can take time and we might need to try different ways of doing this – even new ones! Keep an open mind about what might work or what might make a difference.

This aspect of providing enough preparation and the best sort of support, is likely to take longer than the 'work' or activity itself... but remember, this *process* is as important (if not more so!). See it as an integral part of whatever you are doing, rather than a separate add-on.

You may wish to work on this 'Toolkit of ideas' further, to make it more accessible for the young people you work with – maybe by using photos or symbols for example.

A Toolkit of ideas

Have someone to support the new researchers:

- a friend
- a keyworker
- a teacher
- a parent
- a carer
- other service users / peers / students.

Ask 'interviewees' if they're happy to have someone else in the discussion – AND do they want a supporter too?

Offer people ideas about people to see or places to go, if they have queries or problems:

- school / college / student council
- named member of staff
- local council
- website
- helplines.

Give the young people involved authorised 'status' for the work they are doing to make them feel more confident:

- a badge
- a project brochure

- hold a microphone
- an info sheet
- have some form of introduction/explanation to give out to clarify their role and introduce them.

Make a general announcement that the research/development work is under way:

- school/college newsletter
- announcement in assembly
- posters around school/college.

When using equipment you may need:

- someone to offer technical support and training
- a clipboard for papers
- someone to video or take photos
- a bag to carry the resources (camera, speech recorder, tapes etc).

When working in a pair or a group /team, share out roles:

- someone to talk
- someone to manage 'recording'
- someone to manage the resources
- someone who is good at 'breaking the ice'.

People need to feel prepared for what they will say and what they need to do:

- think about different scenarios of what other people might say and do – role plays?
- have a 'toolkit' of practical resources and activities – to use in practical ways of working – not just talking and writing.

Think about providing: ice breaker games, photos of people and places, pictures/words/symbols to use as 'prompts in discussions – about times of day, emotions, things that might happen etc.

When asking peoples' views

- have a 'Comments Box' somewhere in school/ college
- offer a 'drop in' surgery
- encourage votes.

Or try 'interviews':

- need to ask 'interviewees'
 - are they happy to have someone else in the discussion?
 - do they want a supporter too?
- avoid personal questions
- work with a group (eg. similar age, interests, experiences, roles?)
- make/find a comfortable place to work – easy chairs, drinks, music – let people choose where to work
- provide a 'stimulus for discussion' rather than an interview schedule.