GUIDE

HOW TO WRITE A CHILD-FRIENDLY DOCUMENT

Summary

Children have a right to seek and receive information, including about their human rights. If this right is to be implemented in practice, the information that they receive needs to be available in ways that they can understand. One approach is to produce what are sometimes referred to as 'child-friendly' versions of documents. In this guidance, we are focusing on written* child-friendly versions of documents. These are usually short, visually appealing to children, summaries of another document, written in simple language that children understand. This guide describes a process for producing these documents with children acting as advisors.

This guidance is developed primarily for civil society practitioners wishing to advance children's rights, to help them develop or guide the development of child friendly information. It aims to show how child participation and civil and political rights can be applied in practice.

*Note: child-friendly versions can also be produced in other formats (such as videos or cartoons etc) where children require that (e.g. they cannot read) and resources permit. This guidance is intended to support the production of written child-friendly versions. However, some of the principles and processes might be helpful for other child-friendly versions.

Background

What is a child-friendly document?

- It is a version of a longer or complex document that is designed to be understood by children.

- It is most often a summary of the original document that captures the key points.

- It uses short sentences, simple language and images that aid understanding.

Note

There is no child-friendly version that will be perfect for all children, even those of a similar age and background. Sometimes it will be necessary to create more than one version of a child friendly document to accommodate the needs of different ages and abilities.

Why should we make child-friendly versions of documents?

It is a right!

- All children have a right to seek, receive and impart information in a medium of choice (Article 13, UNCRC; Article 7, ACRWC; Article 21, UNCRPD). *For example: Children have a right to learn about human rights, including their own (Article 29(1)(b) UNCRC; Article 11, ACRWC); Children who are in conflict with the law have a right to information about their rights if arrested.*

- Children are better able to exercise all their rights including their right to have their views given due weight on matters affecting them when they have information that they can understand. (Article 12, UNCRC; Art 4 (2), ACRWC; Article 7, UNCRPD)

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This right is not sufficiently respected!

- Most UN, European Union (EU) and other regional and national legal and policy frameworks are written in a way that is not accessible to children, although they may relate to issues affecting them. *This is for example the reason why EU Commission developed a recent guidance and why Save the children developed recent report "decide with us" looking at how the UN could be more accessible to children.)*

What makes a document child-friendly?

Age appropriate	Accurate
✔ **Do**: • Use simple, clear language and short sentences. • Explain difficult words. • Give examples. ✘ **Do not:** • Make it too long. Aim for 1-4 pages. • Make it too simple. Don't patronise them.	✔**Do**: • Keep to the original meaning. • Check back with the authors to be sure. • Use examples to clarify the meaning. ✘ **Do not:** • Overgeneralise if it means that it might be misinterpreted. • Include children's suggestions if the result will make the text inaccurate.
Accessible	Appealing
✔**Do**: • Use a font at least 12 pt. • Include alternative texts for all images/icons. ✘ **Do not:** • Centre or justify the text. • Use italics or capitalise whole words. • Have complicated or irrelevant images.	✔**Do:** • Use colour. • Include appropriate images. ✘ **Do not:** • Have long documents of black and white text. • Use images that are for decoration only or are too childish.

How do you produce a child-friendly document?

STEP 1: Create a first draft

Many documents are too long to give to most children at the outset so an adult will usually have to write a first draft of a shorter version. It is important at this stage to decide who the version is for as that might affect the length, language etc.

If the children you are working with are able to read the original version (you can ask them!), then (a) you might not need a child-friendly version or (b) you can involve them in producing an even better version for children using the steps below.

Make it short

An adult will need to read the long document and write a much- reduced summary. It can be useful to think about it as a very short, clear executive summary that covers the main content that would be of interest to children. The information can be presented differently (for example, in a different order or format) if it makes it clearer/easier to understand.

Here is an example of a summary of a law:

Example

Member States shall ensure that deprivation of liberty of a child at any stage of the proceedings is limited to the shortest appropriate period of time. Due account shall be taken of the age and individual situation of the child, and of the particular circumstances of the case.

Member States shall ensure that deprivation of liberty, in particular detention, shall be imposed on children only as a measure of last resort. Member States shall ensure that any detention is based on a reasoned decision, subject to judicial review by a court. Such a decision shall also be subject to periodic review, at reasonable intervals of time, by a court, either ex officio or at the request of the child, of the child's lawyer, or of a judicial authority which is not a court. Without prejudice to judicial independence, Member States shall ensure that decisions to be taken pursuant to this paragraph are taken without undue delay.

Governments must keep children out of detention unless there is no other option.

Tip: The shorter the better

It is just a starting point on the road to understanding – a helpful way of signposting what is in a document/ law/ policy. If possible, have a link to the full document for children or their supporting adults who want to know more.

STEP 2: Create a draft child-friendly version

Once you have completed a short summary of the main points that you want to include, make this summary as child-friendly as possible. This means that you need to use simple, clear language and make the draft appealing and accessible.

Use simple language

There are lots of words and terms that adults use that children do not use or will not understand. Use the simplest verbs and nouns that you can. Here are some examples:

Verbs:

- communicate – tell/say
- consult – ask/talk to
- disseminate – share
- ensure – make sure
- participate – take part

Nouns:

- Children's rights – the promises that governments made so that children can have a good life
- Bullying – when children are mean and unkind to each other, not just once but again and again.
- Strategy – plan

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Example one

The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment wrote a 19-page (over 10,000 words) report on Children's Rights and the Environment available here: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/017/29/PDF/G1801729.pdf

The Child Friendly Version is available here: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Environment/SREnvironment/UNSREnvir_English.pdf

Make it appealing and accessible

Children have told us[1] that they do not want to see lots of black and white text. They like:

- Short and clear documents. If it is over 4 pages, try and organise it in compact sections.

- Bullet points.

- Images that are relevant to the material and help understanding. (Not random stars and flowers.)

You also need to make it accessible to children with disabilities. To include children with visual impairments or those who are dyslexic, you should:

- Use a clear legible font, San Serif, such as Ariel, size 14.

- Don't centre or justify text or use italics or fully capitalised words.

- Do use Alt-Text (a tool which provides captions to explain images for those who are visually impaired).

- Don't use images that are over complex.

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[1] *From research with children in many projects.*

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Tip

Some things can be hard to express simply. In these cases, children often like an example of it in practice. For example:

Digital environment – this is when you go online on phones or computers.

Example 2: Fully accessible child-friendly document

- These are some things that this way says governments must do:
- Give children and their families information about their rights in a way that they can understand.
- Make sure that children have a lawyer and are able to speak to the lawyer in private.
- Check what a child needs to be safe and well.

Tip

Children like icons and these are often freely available in Word or graphic design packages. If children have access to a computer, they can search and select their own icons.

STEP 3: Consult with children

Consult a group of children who are similar in age, gender and background to the children who will use the document. If it is for children generally, we suggest working with 8-10 children aged 11-1 from diverse backgrounds

NOTE: Get the children's and parents' or caregivers' consent to take part.

- For an example of a consent form please check EU guidance page 20.

- For an example of an organisation's safeguarding policy, you can refer to child safeguarding policy and measures developed and taken by Terre des Hommes and Thoughtshop foundation in India: https://issuu.com/tsfoundation/docs/cpp_a5-web

Show the children the draft that you have created and ask them these questions:

- What do you think about this document?

- Is it too long/too short?

- Is there anything you don't understand?

- Can you suggest good ways of explaining anything you found difficult?

- Do the images used make sense or do you have other suggestions? Would the children like to add images that they drawn themselves or choose images/icons from a bank (e.g. on Word to be sure there is copyright)?

STEP 4: Revise and repeat

Revise the version in the light of the children's feedback (making sure that you don't lose accuracy). Check back with the children that they are happy with the changes that you made and/or have any other suggestions. Repeat this stage until the children are happy with the final version.

When reporting back to children, make sure that you are clear where their suggestions have / have not been able to be taken into account, and why. Always explain what you have done. If they have made suggestions that you cannot use, explain why.

> If a document is quite long (more than two pages), you can divide the work among smaller groups of children. Give them a written copy and ask them to make all their changes on the draft and then feedback.
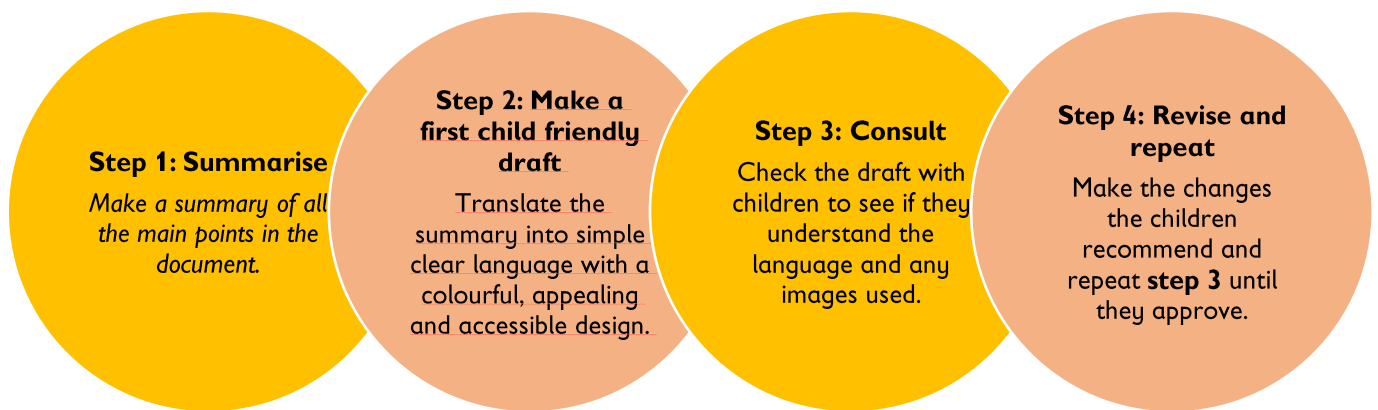
Note:

- If the document is to be produced in more than one language, it must first be translated by an adult who should also try and keep the language in the translation

as simple as possible. Ideally, this will then be checked with a group of children who speak the language following the process described in Step 2.

- Some children may be interested in reading the original text, so make sure you have it available

- If you have developed or are developing with children a child friendly version of a law, policy, UN report, UN resolution, UN or regional recommendations, you may want to discuss with the children how these could be used by children at the very beginning of the process and also at the end. Understanding how children will use it may impact the amount of information/detail that is included.

Creating a child friendly document – the process

Step 1: Summarise
Make a summary of all the main points in the document.

Step 2: Make a first child friendly draft
Translate the summary into simple clear language with a colourful, appealing and accessible design.

Step 3: Consult
Check the draft with children to see if they understand the language and any images used.

Step 4: Revise and repeat
Make the changes the children recommend and repeat **step 3** until they approve.

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Useful Resources

Here are some examples of child-friendly versions of documents that were made using the process above:

UNICEF's child-friendly versions of the UNCRC
https://www.unicef.org/sop/convention-rights-child-child-friendly-version

European Union Strategy on the Rights of the Child
https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/eu-strategy-rights-child-and-european-child-guarantee_en

Council of Europe: Lanzarote Convention
https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168048bb6e

The Nine Basic Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation
https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/nine-basic-requirements-meaningful-and-ethical-childrens-participation/

The European Union also has a guide for writing child friendly versions of documents that contains a **useful glossary of child-friendly words and suggested images**. You can access it here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/guide-creating-child-friendly-versions-written-documents_en

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Contact and document details

If you want to know more or provide feedback, please contact: howtochildrights@rb.se

HOW TO CHILD RIGHTS is a series of practical, high quality, tried and tested tools, to support effective and innovative programming for children's rights across the sector.

Although initiated and coordinated by Save the Children, the Series is created to support all practitioners within the sector and is developed in close collaboration with partners.

For more tools, please visit: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/article/how-to-child-rights/

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