



Healthy schools. Healthy minds. Bright futures

Pupil Voice

Focus Groups: A guide





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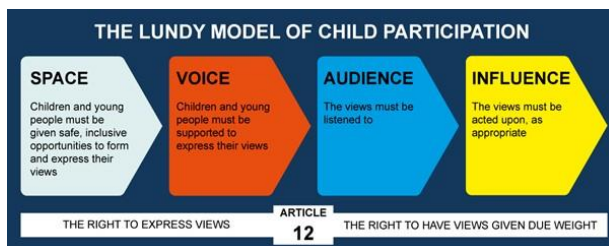
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Pupil Voice Focus Groups

Introduction

Focus groups provide a platform for children to share their perspectives and experiences, offering valuable insights into their needs, challenges, and ideas. Focus groups can assist in making actionable insights that can inform tailoring programmes and interventions to ensure children's needs are supported and met.

We have used the [Lundy Model of Participation](#), supporting Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Lundy Model is a framework developed to ensure that all children have the opportunity to express their views and genuinely impact their school environment. This model emphasises four key elements that support meaningful student involvement.



Additionally, Ofsted inspections in England have begun to pay closer attention to how schools promote pupil voice, aligning with frameworks like the Lundy Model to ensure that children's rights are upheld in practice and offered space, voice, audience and influence.

Why:

Before you begin your focus group(s) you need to have a clear intention for the focus group(s) to be meaningful. Having pre-planned desired outcomes would be useful in motivating conversations within your group(s) with the adult facilitating to help understand the capabilities, opportunities and motivation experienced by the group. Children can offer perceptions and ideas not previously considered or thought of to support them in their behaviour change journey.

The illustration below demonstrates the triangulation method of gaining insights from pupil voice. This approach will help you gather well-informed views, experiences and needs of children and aid you in identifying trends or issues relating to children's health and well-being. It will equip you to adjust and develop targeted interventions to address the needs of children and to improve their overall well-being in and beyond the school gates.



Who:

- For your focus groups to be inclusive, you would need to consider specific children with a diverse range of experiences and needs.
- Keep it short: Focus groups for children should last around 20-30 minutes, taking into consideration children's attention spans.
- The teacher or member of staff that leads the topic area and is responsible for facilitating change.

What:

- It would be advisable to use the [Health and Well-being Survey](#) to form the basis of your conversations. Plan ahead to establish your desired outcomes, which will inform question prompts and line of conversation. Choose a priority area from within the survey to guide you..
- Focus on where you want to go next - the group(s) need to have purpose and intent. What will you do with the insights you have gained?

When:

- When planning your sessions, consider the location and timing to maximise engagement. If the focus is related to a particular time of day, e.g. sedentary time in the classroom, plan to host the sessions around these times.

Where:

- Identify spaces that are conducive to the topic of discussion. E.g. if the topic is the playground, then have a “walk and talk” meeting directly at the playground. This approach allows children to better understand the discussion, rather than relying on abstract explanations. Making the meeting both practical and engaging, fostering better comprehension and involvement.

How:

Below are some examples of how you can construct your focus group(s). Feel free to tailor these activities to suit the needs of your children and focus. You might also consider holding follow-up sessions with your groups to reflect on what they have discussed, and the actions taken as a result. It would be advisable to capture discussions as they are live to help you recall and capture authenticity. You can do this by pictorial evidence, scribing or any other method children find useful.

Child-friendly instructions:

- Explain the purpose of the focus group in simple terms, depending on which health priority you have chosen to focus on, for example:

“We want to know how you feel about moving and playing during the day at school.”

- Encourage open communication, making sure they know that it's okay to say whatever comes to mind.

“There are no right or wrong answers. We just want to hear what you think.”

- The adult's role would be to facilitate the group discussion and actively listen to the conversations to understand children's needs.

Physical Activity

The purpose of conducting focus groups with children around physical activity would be to develop practical strategies to reduce sedentary time and create more health-focused learning environments. This supports a holistic approach to physical activity that reaches far wider than traditional PE and school sport.

Warm up activities:

Start with an icebreaker activity or a simple game to make the children feel comfortable. This could be something physical, like stretching or a quick round of Simon Says, to get them moving and engaged.

Discussion points

1. **Understanding sedentary habits:** Explore how and why children spend extended periods sitting, whether during class, breaks or after school, to identify common sedentary activities like screen time or sitting during lessons.
2. **Barriers to activity:** Identify factors that contribute to prolonged sedentary behaviour, such as lack of appealing alternatives, classroom routines, or limited outdoor play opportunities.
3. **Children's perceptions of movement:** Learn how children view the balance between sedentary time and active time, including their preferences and comfort levels with being more physically engaged throughout the school day.
4. **Incorporating movement into routines:** Gather children's ideas for integrating movement into classroom lessons, breaks, and transitions to reduce long periods of sitting without interrupting their focus or learning.
5. **Promoting active alternatives:** Identify what kinds of activities could replace sedentary behaviours, such as standing desks, movement breaks, and what children find appealing in these alternatives. E.g. stood behind their chairs, alternating standing on toes/heels).
6. **Social and environmental influences:** Explore how peer interactions, school policies, or even the design of school spaces impact sedentary behaviour, and how these factors could be adjusted to encourage more active habits.
7. **Health awareness:** Assess children's understanding of the health implications of too much sedentary time and find out what kind of messaging or activities resonate most with them in promoting more active lifestyles.

Guiding questions

Use open-ended and easy-to-understand questions to guide the conversation. Example questions could include:

- **"What do you enjoy most about moving at school?"**
- **"What is your favourite time of day to move around at school?"**
- **"When do you get to move the most during school?"**
- **"What activities make you feel like you're really moving?"**
- **"Are there times you wish you could move more in the school day? When?"**

Incorporating visual and hands-on activities

- **Drawing or mapping:** Provide the children with paper and stationery and ask them to draw pictures of the times they move the most at school. Encourage the children to share and discuss their drawings.
- **Movement cards:** Have a set of picture cards representing different types of activities (running, jumping, sitting, cartwheeling, etc). Ask children to pick the card that shows how they move at different times of the day and explain their choices.
- **Ranking activity:** Give children sticky notes and ask them to rank their favourite and least favourite times of physical activity (e.g playtime, P.E., assembly time, dinner time) by placing the notes on the chart below.



Interactive discussion

- Keep the conversation flowing by prompting them to explain their answers or compare their experiences.
- Be flexible with how they express their ideas. For example, if they are too shy to speak, you could ask them to act out their favourite physical activity instead.
- Guide them gently if the conversation goes off-topic but allow some free-flowing interaction to capture authentic thoughts.

Incorporating these activities can make your focus group enjoyable and interactive, allowing you to gain valuable perspectives into how children view physical activity during their school day.

Conclude with a quick evaluation and positive reinforcement

- You could also ask them for suggestions:

“If you were in charge, how would you make the school day more fun with movement?”

- End the focus group on a positive note, thanking the children for sharing their ideas and reinforcing how helpful their answers are.

“Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and ideas about physical movement. It was great to hear what you enjoy and what you think could make being active more fun. I will take all your ideas back to SLT and we will see how we can help everyone stay active during the school day”.

Emotional Well-being

The purpose of conducting focus group(s) with children around emotional well-being is to gain insights into their feelings, experiences and challenges related to their emotional health. It will allow you to understand children's perspectives on how they cope with emotions, manage stress and seek support. These discussions can identify areas of concern and highlight emotional needs that may not be visible through other methods. This will develop targeted programmes and/or interventions that are more meaningful to them.

Warm up activity

- **Feelings chart:** Use animated feelings cards (or pictures up on a screen) to help children identify and express their emotions. You might ask ***“How has your day been so far?”*** or ***“How are you feeling today?”*** If children are reluctant you might want to go first. This can encourage emotional awareness and communication.

Discussion Points

- **How do you handle feelings?** Ask children how they deal with emotions like anger, sadness, or worry, and discuss strategies that help them feel better.
- **What makes you happy or stressed at school?** Encourage them to share what situations or activities bring them joy or stress, helping to identify both positive and challenging areas in their school experience.
- **Who do you talk to when you're upset?** Discuss who they feel comfortable speaking to when they are feeling low and explore the importance of having trusted adults or friends for support.
- **What helps you calm down?** Focus on techniques or activities that help them calm down when they feel overwhelmed, like breathing exercises or talking to someone.
- **How do you support your friends?** Talk about how they help friends who are feeling sad or anxious, promoting empathy and peer support.
- **What emotions do you find difficult to understand?** Explore which emotions they struggle to understand or express and discuss ways to identify and manage these feelings. (e.g butterflies in the stomach can be both exciting and anxious feelings but children may not be able to distinguish which emotion).
- **How do you feel when you make mistakes:** Discuss how making mistakes impacts their emotions, helping to build resilience and a growth mindset.

- **What does being kind look like?** Encourage a conversation about kindness and how being kind to others and themselves affects their emotional well-being.

Interactive Discussions

- Keep the conversation flowing by prompting them to explain their answers or compare their experiences.
- Be flexible with how they express their ideas. For example, if they seem shy to speak, you could ask them to act out their feelings and draw or write about them instead.
- Guide them gently if the conversation goes off-topic but allow some free-flowing interaction to capture authentic thoughts.

These discussions can help children better understand and manage their emotions, improving their well-being, whilst also helping you to identify strengths and areas of improvement within the provision to help support the children.

Conclude with a quick evaluation and positive reinforcement

- You could also ask them for suggestions:
“If you were in charge, what would you do to help everyone be happy and healthy?”
- End the focus group on a positive note, thanking the children for sharing their ideas and reinforcing how helpful their answers are.

“Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and ideas about emotional well-being. It was really helpful to hear how you feel and cope with your emotions. I will go back to SLT and tell them about what we discussed in our group. This will help us to help support you in school”

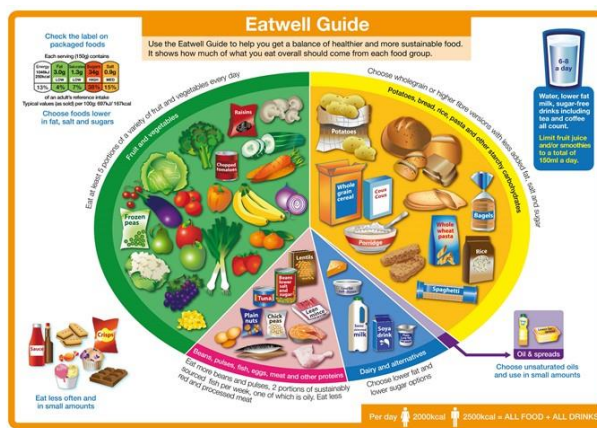
Eating well

The purpose of conducting a focus group with children around nutrition-based health messages is to gather their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours related to healthy eating. It provides an opportunity to understand their knowledge of nutrition, sustainability, food choices, and growing and cooking in school and at home. By engaging children directly, you can assess how well they understand the health messages, identify gaps in their knowledge, and discover what motivates or discourages them from making healthy choices. The insights gained can help tailor health educational programs (DT and other cross-curricular links) to be more relatable and effective for children, ensuring that the messaging resonates with their preferences and experiences.

Warm up activities:

Activity 1: Food group sorting relay

- **Objective:** Ice breaker to get children talking about eating well. To help children understand different food groups in the Eatwell Guide.
- **Materials:** Pictures or actual food items (plastic or real) representing different food groups.
- **How to play:** Lay out pictures or food items at one end of the room and have the Eatwell Guide food groups (e.g., fruits and vegetables, proteins, dairy, etc.) labelled in baskets or hoops at the other end.
- Each child walks/runs to the pile of food, picks one item, and walks/runs back to place it in the correct food group basket. (opportunities to get them moving)



Activity 2: Guess the food

- **Objective:** Engage children's senses to identify foods and learn about their benefits.
- **Materials:** Bags or boxes to hide various healthy food items, blindfolds.
- **How to play:**
 - Place different healthy foods in bags or boxes.
 - One child is blindfolded, and they are handed a food item. They can feel, smell, or even taste (if appropriate) the food and try to guess what it is.
 - After guessing, talk about which food group the item belongs to and why it's important.

Discussions points

- **What do you like or dislike about school meals?** Ask children to share what foods they enjoy and dislike from the school menu, helping to understand their preferences and identify areas for improvement.
- **How do you feel after eating certain foods?** Discuss how different foods make them feel, exploring the connection between food and energy, concentration, or mood.
- **What makes a healthy meal?** Encourage children to share what they think makes a healthy meal, promoting awareness of balanced nutrition and the importance of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- **What snacks do you eat?** Talk about their favourite snacks and how often they choose healthy options versus less nutritious ones, helping them reflect on their snacking habits and having a balanced diet.
- **Why is breakfast important?** Discuss the role of breakfast and how eating in the morning impacts their energy and focus during the school day and beyond.
- **Where do you learn about healthy eating?** Explore where they get information about healthy eating (e.g., home, school, TV) and discuss what they've learned about making good food choices.
- **How can we make healthy food fun?** Ask for ideas on how to make healthy eating more enjoyable, such as creative recipes, fun presentations of food, or cooking activities.
- **What drinks do you have?** Talk about the types of drinks they consume, like water, juice, or sugary drinks, and discuss the importance of hydration and choosing healthier beverages.

- **What could the school do to help you eat better?** Invite suggestions on how the school could support healthier eating, such as adding new meal options, improving the taste of healthy foods, or having more food education activities.
- **How do you feel about trying new foods?** Discuss their experiences and attitudes toward trying new foods and how to make it easier and more fun for them to experiment with different flavours.

These conversations can provide valuable insights into how children perceive food and what could encourage better eating habits in school.

Interactive Discussion

- Keep the conversation flowing by prompting them to explain their answers or compare their experiences.
- Be flexible with how they express their ideas. For example, if they seem shy to speak, you could ask them to write or draw instead.
- Guide them gently if the conversation goes off-topic but allow some free-flowing interaction to capture authentic thoughts.

Conclude with a quick evaluation and positive reinforcement

- You could also ask them for suggestions:

“If you were in charge, what would you do to help everyone make healthier choices?”

- End the focus group on a positive note, thanking the children for sharing their ideas and reinforcing how helpful their answers are.

“Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and ideas about eating well. You all came up with some really good ideas. I will take all your ideas back to SLT and will see how we can use your ideas to make changes to help you make healthier choices.”

Poverty

The purpose of this focus group is to provide you with invaluable insights into how socioeconomic challenges affect children's experiences, perspectives and learning. It will also help children understand the concept of poverty in a sensitive, age-appropriate way. This guidance aims to foster empathy, encourage kindness, and provide children with tools to understand how they can help others. By discussing poverty, you will help children become more aware of their experiences and those of others, reducing stigma and encouraging inclusiveness.

Warm up activities:

To help children understand the purpose of the focus group on poverty, warm-up activities can set a positive tone and clarify the topic in an age-appropriate way. Here are some warm-up activities you might consider:

Activity 1. Storytime with discussion

Read short, age-appropriate stories about characters who face challenges due to a lack of resources or support. Below are some examples of books you could use.

Each of these books introduces themes of empathy, needs, and challenges in a way that children can relate to, making them good conversation starters for a focus group on the impacts of poverty.

Please note: Living Well Schools has partnered with the [Story Project](#), find their recommended reading list in the Independent-led Resources on the LWS website for further resources.

Book	Blurb
"Those Shoes" by Maribeth Boelts	This story follows a boy named Jeremy who wants a pair of shoes that "everyone" seems to have, but his family can't afford them. The story explores themes of want vs. need, kindness, and understanding financial challenges.
"A Chair for My Mother" by Vera B. Williams	This book tells the story of a family saving up to buy a comfortable chair after losing their belongings in a fire. It introduces themes of saving, need, family support, and appreciating the little things.
"Last Stop on Market Street" by Matt de la Peña	This book follows a young boy and his grandmother as they ride the bus through the city, noticing different people and places. It's a great starting point for talking about diversity, empathy, and finding beauty in different life circumstances.

<p>“The Can Man” by Laura E. Williams</p>	<p>This story is about a boy who wants a skateboard and decides to collect cans to earn money. In the process, he meets a homeless man who collects cans for a living, which opens up an understanding of different life experiences and needs.</p>
<p>“Maddi’s Fridge” by Lois Brandt</p>	<p>This story follows two friends, Sofia and Maddi. Sofia discovers that Maddi’s fridge is empty because her family doesn’t have enough food. The story explores friendship, empathy, and the importance of supporting those in need. •Afterward, ask the children how the character might have felt, what they might have needed, and what could have helped them. This introduces the idea of needs and challenges.</p>

Activity 2. “If I had one wish”

- Ask each child to complete the sentence, “If I had one wish to make my school (or life) better, I would wish for...” They can answer aloud or draw their answer.
- This encourages children to think about what they need or want, making it easier for them to share related experiences later.

Activity 3. “What makes a good day?”

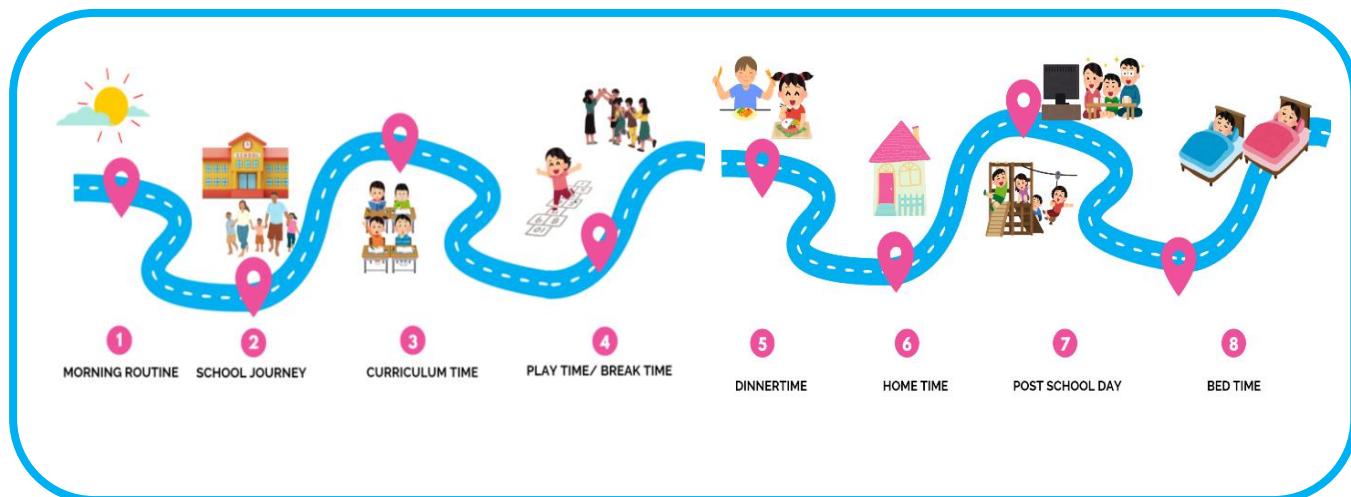
- As a group, generate ideas for “What makes a good day at school?” You can write or draw their responses on a board or poster.
- This can help them think about what is important to them and gently introduces the idea of the things they need to feel supported and happy.

Activity 4. “Imagine you’re a superhero” game

- Tell the children to imagine they are superheroes with the power to make school or home better for everyone. Ask what they would change.
- This activity encourages children to think about problems they see and gives them an empowering, imaginative way to express solutions.

Activity 5. Emotion cards activity

• Show children cards or images of different emotions (happy, sad, worried, excited) and ask which feelings they have experienced at school and beyond and why. Use the road map below to gain a better insight as to when this occurs.



• This can help children understand and express feelings in a simple way, making it easier to discuss challenges. It will also highlight times of the day that children struggle, especially before and after school and how it impacts the child's whole day. Issues and barriers around sleep hygiene, routine, mealtimes etc. may become highlighted. Speak to your Living Well Schools Lead to signpost you to appropriate support for this.

Each of these warm-up activities helps create a supportive and relatable environment, preparing children to engage thoughtfully in the focus group conversation.

When discussing poverty with children, it's essential to use language that is respectful, inclusive, and free from judgment. This helps children understand the topic empathetically and without reinforcing stereotypes or stigmas. Here are some examples of words to avoid and suggested alternatives for phrasing conversations about poverty in a non-discriminatory, sensitive way.

Words to Avoid	Alternatives
"Poor"	"People who don't have as much money" or "People who are struggling financially."
"Homeless" or "Don't have their own home"	"People experiencing homelessness" or "Some people live in rented houses."
"Don't have money" "Can't afford things"	"Struggling to pay for things right now."
"Can't afford a school dinner"	"Some children/families prefer to make packed lunches"

To encourage meaningful discussion on poverty, keep questions simple, open-ended, and focused on feelings, experiences, and needs. Here are some guiding questions to help children share in a respectful, supportive way.

Discussions points

1. Daily Life and Needs

- What are some things you need at school or at home to help you feel happy and comfortable?
- Are there things you sometimes wish you had but don't? What are they, and how would they help you?
- Can you tell me about a typical school day? What's something that makes your day better?

2. Challenges and barriers

- What are some things that make it hard for you to do well in school?
- Are there times when you feel left out because you don't have something others do? Can you share an example?
- Have you ever had to miss out on something at school or with friends because it cost money?

3. Well-being and Support

- Who do you talk to if you have a problem or need help with something?
- What are some things at school that make you feel supported and safe?
- How does it feel when you can't get something you really need or want?

4. Ideas for Change

- What's something that could make school easier or more fun for you?
- If you could change one thing at school to make it better for everyone, what would it be?
- If you could tell adults who make the rules one thing about what children need, what would it be?

5. Extra-curricular activities/ having fun

- What kinds of activities or hobbies do you enjoy after school? Are there any you'd like to try but haven't been able to?
- Do you find it easy to join in with friends at school? What helps or makes it harder?

Action your findings

Once you have completed the focus group using the [COM-B model](#) to understand the needs of children related to physical activity, eating well, emotional well-being and poverty, the next steps will involve translating these insights into practical actions. Below is an example of a structured approach: **Please note it is vital to feedback outcomes of discussions to children.** It helps them feel valued and heard, reinforcing that their opinions matter. Feedback also helps them understand the impact of their contribution, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership. Additionally, it builds trust, encourages continued participation and enhances their learning by demonstrating how their ideas influence decisions and actions.

1. Analyse and reflect on findings

Identify key patterns: Look for recurring themes or barriers in the children's responses related to their capabilities, opportunities, and motivations. For example, if many children express a lack of confidence in making healthy choices, this highlights an area for skill-building.

Highlight needs and strengths: Create a list of both the needs and the strengths of the children. Where are they excelling (e.g, understanding the importance of physical movement) Where do they need support (e.g, access to healthy food).

2. Collaborate with stakeholders

Engage parents: Share the insights from the focus group with parents through newsletters, workshops, schools website. Emphasise how they can support healthy habits at home, e.g encouraging physical activity, providing low-cost nutritious meals verses takeouts.

Work with colleagues and Governors/ Trustees: Discuss the results with other teachers, the school's leadership team, consider how these findings can influence whole school initiatives.

3. Develop a targeted action plan

What's next? Where do you need to drive change to scaffold for children's needs and implement practical steps to support healthy lifestyle habits? Can this be incorporated into the school's improvement plan?

4. Monitor progress and adjust

Set benchmarks and goals: Establish clear, achievable goals for each area (e.g., increasing daily physical activity by 30 minutes, improving the variety of vegetables consumed, or teaching children three new emotional regulation strategies).

Track behaviour changes: Use informal observations and feedback from children and parents to monitor whether the interventions are making a difference.

Adapt based on feedback: Continue to engage with the children through the triangulation method mentioned in the introduction. If something isn't working, modify the approach to better meet their needs.

5. Incorporate healthy habits into school culture

Celebrate success: Highlight progress through school assemblies, newsletters, or special events that celebrate healthy behaviours in line with the current reward system.

6. Professional development

Staff training: Offer training sessions or resources to help teachers incorporate health-related learning into their subjects. This could include professional development in nutrition, physical education, or mental health support.

By taking these steps, a teacher can ensure that the insights from the focus group translate into meaningful changes that support children's physical, emotional, and mental well-being.

Thank you for taking the time to read and implement the Living Well Schools Focus Group toolkit.

For further support or to share any positive experiences, please contact your Living Well Schools Lead. Alternatively, please email schools@mylivingwell.co.uk.