

# ESRO: Conducting Research with Children (Safeguarding Policy)

## ESRO CODE OF CONDUCT

1. At ESRO we believe that children<sup>1</sup> must be protected from harm at all times. The core work we do as a research agency means that we come into contact with a wide range of children and young people from all different sorts of backgrounds. Sometimes the experience of young people is the focus of our research; at other times, we encounter young people when the focus of the research is elsewhere.
2. Although not yet adult in the eyes of the law, sometimes it is necessary and the right thing to do to conduct research with children and young people – to understand their experiences and perspectives, and to research topics which children or young people may feel unable or unwilling to discuss openly with other adults in their lives. This particularly applies to research briefs relating to public services designed for children and young people.
3. As professional researchers, we are bound by a number of codes of conduct relating to research ethics. Beyond our professional code of conduct, as an organisation we believe every child should be valued, safe and happy. This code of conduct outlines our approach to ensuring that children we have contact with are, to the best of our ability, protected from harm. The code of conduct is for use by all of our researchers, our commissioners and their stakeholders.

## OBJECTIVES

- To protect the rights of children and young people physically, mentally, ethically and emotionally and to ensure they are not exploited
- To ensure good quality research and promote professionalism
- To protect researchers from accusations of improper behaviour
- To ensure children are protected from harm and are safe to live healthy and happy lives

## 1. RESEARCHERS

- 1.1 All ESRO researchers must have enhanced DBS clearance (Criminal Records Bureau), obtained or updated within the last two years
- 1.2 All ESRO researchers must agree to abide the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, the Social Research Association Code of Conduct, and the Association of Social Anthropologists Code of Conduct

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<sup>1</sup> Under the Code, children are defined as those aged under 16 years. (There is no recommended minimum age for research among children but it is expected that researchers will involve very young children directly in research only when this is necessary and appropriate to the particular project). These Guidelines also provide additional best practice for research with young people aged 16 and 17 years.

- 1.3 All ESRO researchers working with children and young people must agree to abide by the ESRO 'Conducting research with young people' Code of Conduct.

## 2. CONSENT

- 2.1 Researchers shall ensure that consent of a parent or responsible adult (*acting in loco parentis*) must be obtained before interviewing a child under 16; young people aged 16 and 17 may consent for themselves.
- 2.2 Researchers shall ensure that the adult is given sufficient information about the nature of the project to enable them to provide *informed consent*.
- 2.3 Consent by the responsible adult<sup>2</sup> provides the researcher with permission to invite the child/young person to participate in a project.
- 2.4 The child/young person must make their own choice regarding whether or not they want to take part in the research. Researchers will make every reasonable effort to verify that the young person understands purpose of the research and implications of participation.
- 2.5 Wherever possible, the consent of the parent or responsible adult AND the child must be verifiable, for example in the form of a signature on a paper consent form. Where this is not possible, the researcher must make every reasonable effort to obtain a secure and verifiable form of consent.

## 3. RESEARCH CONTENT AND SUBJECT MATTER

- 3.1 Care must be taken to ensure that children or young people are protected from any contentious, disturbing or distressing subjects, stimulus or areas of questioning for their age group.
- 3.2 Special care is needed when interviewing young people about issues which could upset or worry the child, where issues risk creating tension between the child and their parents (or other relationships), where issues relate to potentially sensitive family situations or have a racial, religious or political angle.
- 3.3 If there is a valid or important research justification for covering any of these sensitive subjects in a research project, it is essential that a full explanation is given to the responsible adult and that their full consent is obtained. Steps must also be taken to ensure that the child/young person is not worried, confused or misled by the questioning.

## 4. FIELDWORK PRACTICE

- 4.4 Where full and informed consent from a responsible adult has been granted and the child/young had agreed to participate in the research, it is not necessary for the responsible adult to be present during the interview/fieldwork.
- 4.5 Parents or responsible adults and young people must be informed of the nature and value of any incentives being offered to the child at the time consent is being sought.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Responsible adult' is the person with responsibility for the child/young person's safety and welfare at the time of the research. This is most typically the parent or guardian, but could also be a school teacher. It is not a person who have limited or specific responsibility for the child, such as a lifeguard or youth worker

- Any incentives should be suitable and acceptable for the age of the child/young person and fitting for the task required.
  - Researchers must take reasonable precautions to ensure that incentives or vouchers are not used for the purchase of inappropriate age-restricted products and/or age inappropriate products.
- 4.6 Parents and young people must be informed of any recording, monitoring or observation of the interview/fieldwork. The young person/child will be reminded of their right to withdraw from a research project at any stage, to withhold their answers to particular questions or withdraw data pertaining to specific area or subject matters.
- 4.7 Researchers shall ensure that the language and content of all research materials and interactions be sensitive to the language, needs and feelings of the age group involved in the research, without being patronising.
- 4.8 Research must be conducted in a safe and appropriate environment. Care must be taken to avoid any physical contact with the child/young person. The researcher must never ask or encourage a child or young person, either directly or indirectly, to engage in any risky, inappropriate or illegal behaviour.
- 4.9 If it becomes clear that participation in fieldwork is directly or indirectly leading to risky behaviours that would not under normal circumstances be taking place, fieldwork will be terminated and Consent-givers (and/or other appropriate authorities) informed.
- 4.10 While the researchers' role is not to provide advice or guidance, they can if agreed with the client in advance, signpost the respondent to resources or organisations who may be able to provide information, support or advice relating to any personal issue or behaviour.
- 4.11 Any disclosure of a confidential nature which may be potentially harmful, or engender the risk of subsequent harm<sup>3</sup> occurring to the child or young person must be dealt with in a sensitive and responsible manner. Where a child discloses that they have been harmed or that they are at risk of abuse, or the interviewer suspects this is the case then the researcher should follow the Safeguarding Policy (Section 5).

## 5. SAFEGUARDING

- 5.1 At ESRO we are committed to the protection of children from harm at all times and recognise the potential role we have to play in supporting safeguarding processes within the local communities where our research takes place.
- 5.2 We also believe that the highest standards of research ethics and principles must be upheld at all times. As such, we will seek to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents throughout our research.
- 5.3 The only exception to this is, in line with the Children Act (1989), where a child discloses that they have been harmed or that they are at risk of harm, or the interviewer suspects this is the case. In which instance the researcher should inform ESRO's Safeguarding lead and follow the ESRO Safeguarding Policy.

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<sup>3</sup> This includes physical, mental, ethical and emotional harm

- 5.4 Becky Rowe<sup>4</sup> (Managing Director) will take lead responsibility for dealing with safeguarding / child protection issues that arise during our research. This includes providing advice and support to other staff, liaising with other staff, and working with other agencies. In her absence the designated person will be Dr Robin Pharoah<sup>5</sup> (Founder Director).
- 5.5 If the researcher and/or Safeguarding Lead has reasonable cause to suspect that a child they have come into contact with during the research, either directly or indirectly, is suffering or is likely to suffer significant harm a referral must be made the appropriate authority without delay and in order that the child can be protected if necessary. This is likely to be local social services via their first contact line, but could also be the police.
- 5.6 If it is suspected that a child's health or development is being impaired or there is a high risk of impairment (such as, malnourishment or socialisation) without intervention, the researcher and/or Safeguarding Lead must make a referral according to procedures set out by the relevant Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 5.7 If a professional intermediary has been involved in the commissioning, recruitment or set up of the research, the researcher should, while respecting the child's confidentiality, seek to ascertain the level of any involved intermediary's awareness of the child's needs and if in any doubt that the child's needs are not being met the researcher and/or Safeguarding Lead must make a referral according to procedures set out by the relevant Local Safeguarding Children's Board.
- 5.8 Throughout any suspected safeguarding issue, the researcher must ensure that any disclosure of a confidential nature, which may be potentially harmful to the child or young person, must be dealt with in a sensitive and responsible manner.

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