

# GUIDELINE ON INTERVIEWING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

AUGUST 2017

This guideline on interviewing children and young people expands on elements of Rule 25 of the AMSRS Code of Professional Behaviour (the Code).

This Rule states that:

*Researchers must take special care when interviewing children and young people. The consent of a parent or responsible adult must first be obtained before collecting information from*

- a) children, defined as under 14 years, and
- b) young people, defined as 14-17 years, when sensitive information is being collected.

The following comments are designed to give further guidance on this Rule.

## 1. Definition of “sensitive information”

In the case of anyone under the age of 18 years, where the information to be collected is “sensitive information” as defined by the Privacy Act, researchers must seek the consent of a responsible adult.

“Sensitive information” is defined in the Privacy Act to mean information or an opinion about an individual’s:

- racial or ethnic origin
- health information
- political opinions
- membership of a political association, professional or trade association or trade union
- religious beliefs or affiliations
- philosophical beliefs
- sexual orientation or practices
- criminal record
- genetic information
- biometric information that is used for certain purposes
- biometric templates

Note that the definition includes an individual’s opinions as well as personal health information.

Where the research involves any subjects or circumstances that might reasonably be judged to be of concern to parents or guardians of the young person (e.g. violence, drug taking), but does not include “sensitive information” as defined by the Privacy Act, it is advisable to seek the consent of a responsible adult.

## 2. Clarification of “a parent or responsible adult”

The term “responsible adult” includes a child’s guardian or teacher and may also include a welfare or social worker.

## 3. The consent process

Sufficient details about the project should be given to the parent or responsible adult to enable them to give informed consent. This includes:

- the name and contact details of the organisation conducting the research
- the type information that will be collected
- the reasons for selecting the child and any impacts the interview may have on the child
- a description of the procedure for giving consent
- an explanation of how the child’s identifiable research information will be used and protected and
- an explanation of any product testing.

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For example, if the child will be asked to test a product or service, the responsible adult must be given enough information about the product or service that he or she can make an informed decision about the child's participation. When testing products, if practicable, the responsible adult should be allowed to see the product to check that it is safe to handle, use or eat.

Consent for a parent or responsible adult is also required when photographing or recording children. When consent cannot be obtained, images must be deleted.

There are no exceptions to the need to obtain informed consent. If the interviews take the form of intercept interviews in a public place - for example at a park or swimming pool - and an adult is accompanying a group of children or young people (and is, therefore, responsible for them) he or she may give permission for the interview.

Researchers must not approach a child in a public place for a research interview unless he or she is accompanied by an adult.

If the research is being conducted online or by phone and the parent or responsible adult is not nearby, the researcher may ask the child for the adult's contact details so that informed consent may be sought.

The permission from a parent or other responsible adult must be and researchers should record the identity of the person providing consent and their relationship to the child. It is advisable to make sure there is some form of permanent record that consent has been granted.

## 4. Interviewing methods and permissions

The following table provides a guide to obtaining permission according to interview method, age and subject matter.

	TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING	FACE TO FACE INTERVIEWING	ONLINE INTERVIEWING**
UNDER 14 YEARS	Always obtain permission from a parent or responsible adult	Always obtain permission from a parent or responsible adult  A responsible adult should be present during the interview at all times	Recommend they not be allowed to join a panel  Invitation*** to participate in an online research project should always be sent to a parent or responsible adult
14-15 YEARS*	Recommend obtaining parental permission and always obtain permission for any interview containing 'sensitive information'	Recommend obtaining parental permission and always obtain permission for any interview containing 'sensitive information'  Recommend that a responsible adult is present during the interview at all times	Recommend they not be allowed to join a panel  Recommend that invitation *** to participate in an online research project is sent to a parent or responsible adult  Obtain permission for any interview containing 'sensitive information'
16-17 YEARS*	Obtain permission for any interview containing 'sensitive information'	Obtain permission for any interview containing 'sensitive information'	Can join a panel  Obtain permission for any interview containing 'sensitive information'

\* **Note:** If you intend to interview young people, aged 14-17, on subjects that might reasonably be judged to be of concern to parents and guardians (e.g. violence, sex, drug taking), but do not involve 'sensitive information', it is advisable to seek the consent of a parent or responsible adult.

\*\***Note:** ISO 26362, the standard for market and social research access panels, includes specific requirements when recruiting children or young people to a panel.

\*\*\***Note:** the invitation should be sent via separate email directly to the parent or responsible adult.

## 5. Interview subject matter

The subject matter of the interview or discussion and the specific questions must be age-appropriate. The line of questioning should not disturb or harm the child or young person - for example, asking them about things which may upset or embarrass them – in line with Rule 8 of the Code: *'Researchers must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are in no way harmed or adversely affected as a direct result of their participation in a research project'*.

## 6. Interviewers and working with children screening programs

Make sure that the people coming into contact with children or young people when conducting a research project are suitable for the task. This applies to researchers moderating groups or conducting in depth interviews as well as to interviewers working on quantitative projects. It may also apply to moderators of online discussions.

Pre-employment screening of adults and volunteers who come in contact with children is mandatory and legislated for across most states and territories in Australia. These laws help to protect children from sexual or physical harm. However, there is no national framework and each state and territory has their own procedures and requirements.

Some states and territories require special checks or police checks for market and social research interviewers. This applies to researchers conducting group discussions or individual in depth interviews with children or young people as well as interviewers conducting a quantitative interview.

Information on specific requirements for each state and territory is available from:

<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/pre-employment-screening-working-children-checks-and-police-checks>

## 7. Reporting of child abuse

Very occasionally, when conducting fieldwork – quantitative or qualitative – the interviewer or researcher may come across an instance where they suspect some form of child abuse within the household.

Note that the interviewer or researcher may be obliged to report any suspected case of abuse to the authorities. Each state in Australia currently has different requirements for the reporting of suspected cases of child abuse. For example, it is mandatory to report child abuse in the NT.

Full details on reporting requirements are available from <http://www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/pubs/factsheets/a141787/>

In summary, it is essential that all research conducted with children and young people is conducted to the highest standards. The responsible parent or guardian must be confident that the child or young person's safety, rights and interests are safe-guarded.