

UNDERSTAND WHAT'S
MOST IMPORTANT

110 children aged 6-12 in the Child Protection System



CHANGE FACTORY

About the qualitative survey

110 children, aged 6-12, roughly the same number of boys as girls, from 11 places in Norway, have participated. 80 of the children were in families with measures of assistance and 30 were under the care of the Child Protection System. The average age was 9.5 years. The children were invited in collaboration with larger and smaller child protection services across the country.

The survey was carried out in 2018-19, with a total of 25 sessions. Between 3 and 12 children attended each session. Most children attended two sessions. In the sessions, there was a focus on getting to know each other to create a safe space for the children to participate. The children were then invited to do assignments, alone and in groups. The children were informed from the start that all participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without having to explain why. The children and guardians were informed that everything written down from the sessions would be anonymised. Explanations from the children are summarised in this report in the form of text or bullet points.

The main questions in the survey were:

- What has been good for you in the Child Protection System?
- What should have been done differently?
- Have you told the Child Protection System what was the most important for you to tell?
- What advice do you have for the Child Protection System to help children in the best way possible?

The researchers worked to ensure that the children's history in relation to their family and networks didn't become the focus in sessions. The focus was on the children's meeting with the Child Protection System. After sessions, the researchers were available to the participants, their families and guardians, for support and to answer any questions that might have come up.

THANK YOU

Thanks to you wise people

Dear brave, wise and important people who have taken part in this survey. Thank you for coming to the sessions and for wanting to talk about what has been good help and what should have been done differently in the Child Protection System. Thank you for the valuable experience and advice. Thank you for sharing so honestly about both nice, bad and sometimes hurtful things.

Thank you for wanting to teach Norway something about what the Child Protection System is like for children aged 6 - 12. We believe that the experiences and advice will help make it safer for children in the Child Protection System. The knowledge you have shared will help Norway to have a better Child Protection System for children.

Thank you as well to parents and foster parents, for accepting the invitations with openness and having the courage to say yes to the children's participation. And thank you for bringing the children to the sessions.

Thank you to the 11 child protection services across the country who have helped to contact and organise so that the children could participate. Thank you for the courage you showed by saying yes to contributing to children being able to give feedback to the Child Protection System.

Sincerely, Changefactory

THANK YOU FROM OUR HEARTS

THREE out of FOUR children don't tell what's most important

Three out of four children in this survey say that they don't tell what's most important to the Child Protection System. They may have told the reason why they're having a hard time, only told a little or told nothing. They may have told something that isn't that important, so that the Child Protection System only gets to know a little and maybe gets off track. They may have wanted to tell what's most important, but haven't been able to.

Three recurring reasons why children don't tell

1) Children don't know what will happen if they tell. They know that the Child Protection System works closely with their parents or foster parents and don't know what information is shared with them or with other adults. It can make it scary to tell. It can make them not trust adults.

2) Children think it's normal to experience what they are experiencing. They don't know that what they have experienced or are experiencing is wrong or that it's something adults aren't allowed to do to children. They don't clearly know what the Child Protection System can help them with.

3) Children don't experience that the adults collaborate with them in deciding what kind of help they or their family should get. When the adults don't collaborate with them when making decisions, it doesn't help that the adults feel kind.

Children haven't been able to talk safely and therefore haven't told. When they don't tell the most important thing, the Child Protection System doesn't get to know what the child needs help with the most. The Child Protection System has started up measures in the family, without the children having had a say in deciding what kind of help the family should get.

If the Child Protection System doesn't help with the right things, it can get worse and become more unsafe. It can also get better, but it is up to chance whether the situation at home to fundamentally improve.

1) The children don't know what will happen if they tell

When children meet the Child Protection System, they often know that the Child Protection System has spoken to their parents. They know that their parents were told first that the Child Protection System was coming and that the Child Protection System often makes agreements with their parents. At the same time, the children have to talk about something that is difficult or painful and that is about their parents. It's about someone the children care about a lot, are very insecure about, and are very dependent on - and a mixture of these.

For children, this starting point can make it almost impossible to tell. They answer the questions asked by the Child Protection System briefly or don't answer honestly. It's scary to talk when they don't know what the Child Protection System is going to do with what they say. They don't want to do anything bad to their parents. They don't want to hurt, disappoint, or talk bad about them. At the same time, there may be things that are difficult at home that children want someone to help them with.

Children often lack information about what the Child Protection System tells their parents. They may experience that the child protection workers say that they have to share the information, that it's important that their parents get to know. When children then have to tell something about adults they love, are dependent on, or insecure about, this becomes almost impossible. They can then choose not to tell what's most important.

Children often don't know who else gets to know and what they get to know. What does the school, school nurse or Children and Adolescents' Psychiatric Outpatient Services (BUP) know? Children can understand that adults often talk to other adults and that they do this without first making an agreement with the children. Children may, from a very young age, have figured this out. It makes it difficult or impossible to talk about difficult things.

For children to talk to adults who work with children, they have to be able to do so in a way that they feel is completely safe. Those of the children who wish to, need to have the opportunity to talk to someone who doesn't share information without making an agreement with the children, when the children are ready for it. This also applies to the Child Protection System.

2) Children lack information

Children who've had a very difficult time at home can often think that it's normal for children to feel the way they do. They may believe that what they experience happens in many families. They may believe that this is what adults do when they can't do anything better, when they're having a hard time, or when they think it's right. They haven't been taught what things should be like for children, and what the adults they live with aren't allowed to do

to children. Children can remember that adults in kindergarten or school have talked about what adults can't do to children, but few have understood that this was about what they themselves experienced. When someone in the Child Protection System has explained to them that what they are experiencing at home isn't okay, it has become safer to tell.

Children lack information about what the Child Protection System can help them with. They don't know the different ways the Child Protection System can help them when they live at home or what it takes for children to be moved. They don't know that they have the right to have a say in deciding what help the family should receive or that they have the right to have a say in what the Child Protection System does in their home.

3) The children don't experience enough collaboration from adults

Children say that they feel unsafe when the Child Protection System doesn't need to understand what's difficult or painful for the children, before they start helping. They conclude what children and families need help with, before they know how the situation at home is actually experienced by the children. Children don't know that they have the right to talk safely with the Child Protection System and that the Child Protection System has to make decisions in collaboration with them. The measures the Child Protection System decides on for a family or in a foster home should help them. Even if they meet kind child protection workers who they feel will help, it often isn't safe enough if they don't collaborate with the children.

Whether the adults listen well enough when children talk also determines a lot for safety. Some adults listen well. It can be noticeable by the way they look at them and how they talk. Then it's easier to tell. Some adults look serious, some disinterested or sceptical. Some interrupt and explain why what the child is saying isn't true. Some adults can be perceived as a bit strict or rude.

IMPORTANT ANSWERS FOR NORWAY

ERS FOR NORWAY

For children, it can feel like the adults think they know what's best for children. If children say something that the adults in the Child Protection System agree with, they listen carefully. But if they say something that the adults find difficult or disagree with, it can be easy to see it on their faces. Instead of trying to understand why children say what they say, children may experience adults trying to explain to them why and how they should or could think differently.

When children experience that the adults don't listen well or don't try to understand why they say what they say, the Child Protection System becomes unsafe and sometimes scary. Children may be afraid that the Child Protection System will guess or misunderstand what they say, and decide something that doesn't make their lives better. Then they may think that it's wisest not to tell the Child Protection System.

What child protection workers have to be good at

Training and frameworks

The way the adults in the Child Protection System meet children is often decisive for whether the Child Protection System feels safe. It's also decisive for whether children tell what's most important. Children point to the information they are given, the adults' behaviour when meeting them, what they do with what children tell them and whether they collaborate with them when something's going to be decided, as what's most important.

The Child Protection System needs to be able to:

- Facilitate so that children can speak safely
- Give children the opportunity to speak first and alone
- Give sufficient and honest information
- Ensure that children can bring a person they feel safe with
- Meet children with kindness, warmth and feelings
- Ask concrete in-depth questions
- Agree on what, to whom and when information should be shared
- Collaborate on solutions and measures
- Write in collaboration with children

Why don't child protection workers do this? Do they learn the wrong things? Don't they want to do it? Are they not allowed?

In the sessions in this survey, children who participated have heard how experiences and advice have been repeated. They've wondered why not all child protection workers just do what the children say they have to do? Some people do it, so why can't more people do it? Doesn't everyone else know that children think these things are important? Don't they know that it has to be done that way, so that children can tell what's most important? Didn't they learn this during their education? Could it be that their education doesn't teach them enough of what's most important for children? Do the managers in the Child Protection System say they can't do this? Won't the child protection workers do it that way? Do the laws for the Child Protection System say that they can't do it that way? Can't the Minister for Children or the politicians in the Storting sort this out? Don't the people who decide believe in children enough or do they think what children say isn't that important?

The summarised experiences from the children in this survey show that the the Child Protection System isn't perceived as safe enough for children. This can mean that they have too little trust in adults and then in the way the Child Protection System meets them. The order the Child Protection System does things in and how things that affect children's lives are decided don't always ensure enough trust either. Measures can be initiated without children having told what's most important. Then it's up to chance if the measures work. Three out of four children haven't told what's important for the Child Protection System to know, to be able to help the children.

The main advice from the children in this survey is also very clear. They point to a few, but very important things that are crucial for safety. The people who make laws and guidelines, the people who make training programmes and the people who make the higher education programmes, can choose to emphasise this. Without it, the new Child Welfare Act, the regulations and guidelines that go with it, could fail miserably. Child protection education and training programmes could also miss. The County Governor could check for the wrong things when they check the different parts of the Child Protection System. Little of what the children point to is an important checkpoint today.

Children's knowledge about the Child Protection System needs to become important

Dear Minister of Children and Storting politicians, will you create a new Child Welfare Act that ensures safe child protection for children and that children's basic rights in the Convention on the Rights of the Child become part of the new law, so that children can tell what's most important? And can you make sure that all competence development and other initiatives that you adopt, definitely contribute to making the Child Protection System safer and better for children?

Dear Health Authority and County Governor, would you check the Child Protection System so that more of the basic things from children are being investigated? Could you please use the Convention on the Rights of the Child as the most important law when you check and when children complain?

Dear Ministry and Directorate, will you create higher education programmes, training and guidelines where what's important for children in the Child Protection System is given a much larger place, that children's basic rights according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child become a significant part of it, and that you then could contribute to a much safer Child Protection System for children?

Dear professionals in the Child Protection System, will a lot more of you, as far as possible within the current framework, go out of your way to ensure that children's rights are taken into account much more when we meet you, so that the Child Protection System can feel safer for children?

Dear educational institutions, will you thoroughly go through what you teach your students both in terms of theory, methods and skills and find out if this is in agreement with the advice from children and the rights children have according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

In this report the results of the survey with 110 children, aged 6-12, from 11 places in the country are presented. They are 110 out of approximately 55,000 children aged 0-22 in Norway, in families with measures from the Child Protection System. Of all children in Norway who received help from the Child Protection System in 2019, 60% received help at home. In this survey, the proportion was slightly higher.

The advice from children in the survey is clear: Norway needs to have a stronger focus on ensuring a Child Protection System that can be experienced as safe for children to be able to tell what's most important. This has to become fundamentally important when new frameworks and training are going to be created. The human rights that children have according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child must be secured.

1

18 PIECES OF IMPORTANT ADVICE

from the children in the survey

ADVICE FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN TO TELL WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Safety determines what children tell

Understand that it's almost impossible for a child to tell

Telling the Child Protection System about something difficult at home is almost impossible for children. How do you think we can do that? When we first come into contact with the Child Protection System, we often carry memories of a life that hasn't been easy. We have strong ties to our parents, some in good and others in not so good ways. We can care about them, be worried about them or afraid of them. Siblings who we feel responsible for, are attached to and care about also often live at home. We don't want to ruin anything for our siblings, or make our parents sad, uneasy or angry.

Take the responsibility of making it safe seriously

You adults have to take the responsibility to make it completely safe for us very seriously. Although we are children, we are smart. The adults at home, in the kindergarten, at school or in the health services don't always understand this well enough. They can talk about us and write about us, without mentioning this. We take in a great deal of what adults say and do. We understand a lot about what feels safe for us and what doesn't. When we don't tell, it's about knowing whether the situation is safe enough for us to tell. We don't want to talk about anything that is difficult or painful where we live, unless it's completely safe. Who could?

Always consider talking to us first

Always consider talking to us first, to ensure our right to speak freely. Whether you've spoken to the adults at home first, often determines what we will say. The chance that we can then tell you the most important thing you should know is often much smaller. We know that many of you won't be completely open to what we tell you. Adults listen to adults a lot, children discover this quickly. Maybe you adults don't know this very well yourselves, maybe you think that this doesn't apply to you. But we can tell. We notice that you've heard other people's explanations and that you have them in your head while you talk to us.

Invite us to speak alone or with a person we feel safe with

Tell us that children have the right to speak to the Child Protection System alone, if we want to. Know that few of us get to say that we want to talk to you alone, when adults we depend on are present. Even if we've said yes once to having parents or siblings there when we talk to you, this can change. Also tell us that we have the right to have a person we feel safe with, with us when we talk to you. These are rights children have to be able to talk freely. Therefore, always ask again. Ask us in a safe way and without parents or foster parents present, if we want to talk to you alone and if we want a person we feel safe with, with us. Show us and the adults we live with that you take this right seriously.

ADVICE FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN TO TELL WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Give a lot of honest information

Give us information that you're coming over

We have the right to know that someone is coming to talk to us. You can't come over without us knowing, we might become scared or feel tricked, and it will be difficult to tell. If you come to our school, ask that an adult we feel safe with gives us information about your arrival. The adult doesn't have to say that someone from the Child Protection System is coming, but that someone is coming to talk to us about how things are for us at home and that we don't need to tell our parents for the time being. If you're coming over to our home, it's best if you contact us directly before you arrive. If you absolutely can't tell us anything before you come over, explain honestly at the start of the conversation why you chose to do it that way.

Give us a lot of honest information in the beginning

You always have to be honest with us, even when we're young. We need to understand why you say what you say and do what you do. We can feel unsafe if you withhold information. Tell us about

everything that concerns us, we have a right to know. Explain using words we understand, in a calm voice and ask us if you've explained clearly enough. Explain thoroughly that the Child Protection System can help children at home or move children. Tell us that all children have the right to feel safe, and that adults care about them and speak nicely to them. Explain with concrete examples that adults aren't allowed to use violence, say ugly things to children or do hurtful or bad things to children's bodies.

Explain that we can bring someone we feel safe with

Make sure we know, preferably before we meet you for the first time, that we can have someone we feel safe with with us when we talk to you. This can make conversations safer. Tell us it's a good idea if this is someone we're used to talking to about slightly difficult things and who doesn't get upset if we tell them about the difficult things. If we don't have a person like that, it can just be someone who we know is kind. Say that it's usually not a good idea for this to be someone who knows our mum or dad well. Tell us that at the end of the conversation there needs to be an agreement about what can be shared further, so that we don't feel unsafe that this person can share information with others.

Tell us what information needs to be shared

Explain that you always have to make an agreement with us before you share anything we have told, with the people at home or with other adults. Tell us what kind of information you think you HAVE TO share and who you'll share it with. If we don't know this, it will be very difficult to tell you anything. When you give us information about the duty of confidentiality, you have to explain very carefully what kind of things you think you HAVE TO share. Remember that we have a right called the right to privacy and that's why you have to talk to us before you share most of what we tell you. If we say no to you sharing some information, you have to find out why we say no, in order to protect the trust we have in you. You have to tell us honestly that you have to share some things, but that you will always make an agreement with us before you share anything. And remember that if you say it, you HAVE TO keep it. Then we'll have more control and it feels safer to tell.

ADVICE FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN TO TELL WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Show warmth and that you want to understand

Kindness, warmth and feelings create security

For it to be safe enough to tell, children need to be met with kind, warm eyes. The voice and words you use also have to feel warm and kind. A serious face and stiff body language make us feel insecure easily. Feel free to practise, many of you may seem more stiff than you think. When we are met with warmth, it creates a lot of safety and it becomes easier to tell. When we talk about difficult or painful things, show us with real emotion that you take in what we are saying. A tear in the corner of your eye or a sentence about how it feels to hear what we're saying can create a lot of safety in us. Explain that you can bear to hear what we say, and that we're strong to have endured a lot. At the same time, explain that it shouldn't have been like that, that's why you have those feelings. Most of us would also like to be held or given a hug when we talk about something bad.

Get to know us and show that you believe in us

In the beginning, we need to get to know you a bit to feel safe with you. You can ask about what we like and tell us about things you like. It's also a good idea to talk about something nice or funny. Then we can see that you're ordinary and kind people. We feel more safe with you and that can make it easier to talk about what's difficult and painful.

We also need, right from the start, to know that you believe that what we tell you is the way it has felt to us. It helps to decide whether we continue to tell. It's uncomfortable and scary to continue if you don't clearly show that you believe us and take what we say seriously. If it seems like you think we're exaggerating or not telling the truth, we quickly stop telling. And then we can get help that doesn't help and continue to live in bad things, because we don't tell what's most important.

Listen carefully to what we say

Tell us that you know you can't understand how we feel if we don't tell. Then we can understand that what we're about to tell is important to you. To be able to consider telling you something, we need you to listen VERY carefully. It's crucial to be able to tell what's most important. We notice if you listen through your eyes and body language. We quickly notice if you're engaged and if you follow up on what we say. Are you the kind of adults who don't get what we say and just move on to something new? Ask us more in depth about exactly what we're saying, to understand better. Don't interrupt or repeat what we say, then we can easily stop telling. If you look at the clock a lot, it can feel like you want to finish quickly. To be able to tell, we constantly need to know that you'll listen to understand.

Show us that you want to understand, with open, concrete questions

Ask questions in kind and calm voices. The questions have to be open, so that we can answer exactly how it feels. Ask as few yes or no questions as possible. Also ask concretely, in a warm voice about what makes us happy, what makes us angry, what makes us afraid and how we feel inside. Ask about what it's like at home when it's good, and what can make us afraid at home. Ask concretely about bad and good feelings or situations. Then we'll feel that you really want to know. Clearly show and tell us that no answer is right or wrong. Ask more in depth instead of trying to guess or interpret what we meant. Please tell us humbly at the end of the conversation, tell us what you've understood, so that we can speak up and clear up misunderstandings.

Meet us often enough, so that we can tell

We may have gone a long time without telling. When something bad has been kept a secret for a long time or trust has been broken, it can feel like it's completely impossible to tell. The difficult or painful things can be firmly stuck inside us. Maybe we haven't understood that we've experienced something we weren't supposed to experience. We may have lost trust in adults, when they have shared information with other adults without making an agreement with us. We may have experienced that adults have stopped talking to us about something bad we talked about, without us understanding why. Instead, we need you to continue to meet and talk with us. To feel safe enough to tell what's most important, we usually need to meet you several times. We can't be pressured, just met with a lot of warmth and safety and with the certainty that you won't share information without making an agreement with us.

ADVICE FOR MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR CHILDREN TO TELL WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Collaborate on solutions**Make an agreement with us when and to whom**

For it to be safe enough to tell you something important, we need to know that you'll always make an agreement with us on what, when and to whom something will be shared. This applies to younger and older children. Talk to us about what you want to share to whom, and why. Listen carefully to what we think about it. If we don't want something to be shared with our parents or other adults, you have to take it seriously and try to find out why it's important to us. Wait to share the information, until it feels safer for us. We know how things will be at home if you share information. We'll continue to live there, you mustn't make it more difficult for us. First and foremost, you have to protect us. If you share information with our parents or other adults without making an agreement with us, all trust can be broken and we'll stop telling you the important things about how we're doing at home. If something needs to be shared, talk to us about when, so you don't break our trust. We often know something about when it's best to contact our parents. We also often know something about which times feel better for us if you're going to tell other adults.

Find solutions together

You're supposed to decide things that are in the best interest of the child. Before deciding on these solutions, you always have to listen carefully to what we think. If we haven't been able to talk to the Child Protection System in a way we felt was safe, you can't really decide anything in our best interest. What you decide can affect us and our entire family. Our opinions have to have a lot of weight when something important to us is going to be decided. We are just as valuable as adults. You are the CHILD Protection System, so you have to spend most of your time and energy talking to us. We have to find solutions together and they have to be based on what we think is good for us. We have the right to say something about this, both when we are young and older. You have to attach importance to what we say, as far as possible. This means that you have to consider it carefully if you're going to decide on a solution that isn't based on what we say.

Write in collaboration with us

Tell us what whatever's written down is being used for and what it may be used for in the future. All children need to know this. Write kindly about us, in collaboration with us. Think about what it would be like to read what someone else had written about you. Remember that words can hurt and be careful to write things that are true and not just interpretations of what we've said. We're able to make agreements about what you write down from an early age. It can be done easily, just with a little chat about it at the end, when we summarise together. When we are a little older, we can see if what you've written down was right for us. Then we'll see if you've misunderstood something and we can correct it together, before others get to read the transcript. If we don't feel like saying anything about what's going to be written down, remind us what it can be used for later on in our lives.

Collaborate with us on safe conversations

Make an agreement with us whether we want to talk to you alone or with our parents or foster parents, or whether we want to bring an adult we feel safe with. You always have to ask us about this when we're alone. If you have to talk to our parents, you can talk to us alone first and then we can either talk to our parents together, or you can do it alone if we don't want to join in. Make an agreement with us before you decide this, so that it's on a day that suits everyone. It becomes very bad for us when we have to cancel plans with friends or leave our favourite class in school. We also need to know how long the conversations will last, so that we can know when we can do something afterwards.

Collaborate with us on safe collaboration meetings

Make an agreement with us on how meetings about us can be done as safely as possible for us. If not, meetings with many adults feel serious and scary. Show warmth and smile. It has to be allowed to laugh, then it becomes easier to talk about bad things. We have the right to be part of the meetings, from a very young age. We have the right to always have a person we feel safe with, with us, if we want to. It's best when someone we feel safe with leads the meeting. Before the meeting, we need to talk about what will happen there, so that it's about something that's important to us. We also need to talk about where the meeting should be, perhaps in a place we like and where we can do an activity at the same time. Often something is going to be decided that is important to our lives. Without us there, you'll have to guess what the best solution for us is. If we aren't going to be there, a person that we say we feel safe with needs to be there, to say what's best for us. After the meeting you should talk to us to ask how we think the meeting went and what we think about what has been decided.

2

EXPERIENCES
from children in the survey

About getting information

Summarised experiences

What children haven't learned or learned too little about:

- that the Child Protection System wanted to talk to them, but they didn't understand enough about why
- why the Child Protection System wanted to talk to them and what they could help with
- what adults in the family weren't allowed to do to them
- what the words and explanations from the the Child Protection System meant
- that children can ask the Child Protection System about things they don't understand and information they lack
- they could get quite a lot of information, but something was missing to make it completely safe

How it has turned out for children:

- embarrassing or unsafe to ask what words or phrases mean
- difficult to tell and to speak honestly
- they haven't known that something adults have done to them is not allowed

Quotes

I had no idea who they were. It was quite scary to talk to them. They could have announced in advance that they were coming over.

I wasn't able to talk to the adults in the Child Protection System, because I didn't know why they wanted to know so much. They didn't say why. I also didn't know what would happen if I told.

They often speak in pretty strange words that are difficult for children to understand. They should ask if I understand.

I notice quite easily when they don't say everything, their faces change a little.

They asked how it was at home but they didn't say that adults aren't allowed to hit and say mean things. How was I supposed to tell them then?

About talking alone

Summarised experiences

When children have been allowed to speak to the Child Protection System alone

- it felt safer to talk to the Child Protection System when they were allowed to talk alone
- they were able to say whether they wanted to talk alone, if they were asked alone in a room

When children haven't been allowed to talk to the Child Protection System alone

- it was difficult to tell honestly when foster parents or siblings were there
- they were afraid that foster parents or others in the family might become sad, disappointed, upset or angry
- it was difficult to answer honestly whether they wanted to talk alone, if they asked in front of the people it was about
- it's become difficult to say that they don't want to have more people there
- it could be difficult to tell when unfamiliar adults in the Child Protection System were there

Quotes

The lady I spoke to from the Child Protection System was quite nice. She asked if we could talk alone and I understood the questions.

I think it's safer to talk to the Child Protection System when mum and dad aren't there. But neither the Child Protection System nor my parents are trying to make it happen.

I don't know how to say that I don't want my siblings there when we talk. They don't ask, and I don't dare to ask.

I almost always meet them at school together with my brother. My brother doesn't like me telling how things are at home. He tells mum, and she gets disappointed and mad at me.

About bringing someone you feel safe with

Summarised experiences

When children have been allowed to bring someone they feel safe with:

- the child protection workers showed that they were happy that these people were there
- it's felt safer to tell

When children haven't been allowed to bring someone they feel safe with

- they haven't been asked to bring anyone with them
- they've thought it would be smarter if they had been able to bring a person, because they know the children better

Quotes

I was able to bring my teacher with me, who I feel really safe with. It became a little easier to talk to them.

I've been in the Child Protection System for a long time but it's only been a few months since they asked if I wanted a safe person with me when I talk to them.

My handball coach knows me quite well and the Child Protection System doesn't, so it was nice when he could help make it a little safer to explain.

Wish they asked me if I wanted to bring someone I feel safe with. I think I could have said a bit more then.

About getting to know each other a little

Summarised experiences

When children have gotten to know the adult:

- it's been easier to get to know the adult when they seemed kind, warm and not so serious
- it's been easier to tell, when children first got to know the adult a little
- it became safer to tell when they met the contact person more often

When children haven't gotten to know the adult:

- they've become insecure when they've had to talk to adults they don't know
- they've been afraid when adults were serious and asked questions before it felt safe enough
- they could forget important things they wanted to tell, when too much time passed between conversations
- they've somewhat given up on telling the important things, when the adults in the Child Protection System were replaced often

Quotes

The one I have now, I've had for a long time. She's very kind and I can trust her. It's safer to meet when I know her well and know she's kind.

It's safe to talk to them, because they've visited me many times. I feel like I know them well.

I almost never meet them and feel my tummy ache before I talk to them. It becomes scary to talk.

If they get straight to the point like that, I'm not able to say anything important. My heart says no.

It hurts inside when the child protection workers are so busy. When you want to talk a little or play with them, but they don't have time.

About body language and emotions

Summarised experiences

When adults have a body language that feels safe:

- adults have had a kind and calm voice
- adults have given good hugs
- adults have shown with their face, body and hand gestures that they're kind
- adults have clearly shown that things children experience are not okay
- it's become less scary for children to tell more about how things are at home

When adults don't have a body language that feels safe:

- adults have had somewhat strict voices
- adults have smiled little
- adults' bodies have seemed a little stiff
- it's become unsafe for children to talk about how things are at home

Quotes

It became easier inside me when the lady in the Child Protection System told me that it was not okay for my dad to drink and that that was why she came. Then she wondered what I thought about this. It felt easier to tell about how things were.

Some adults in the Child Protection System look very serious and speak in stern voices. It gets pretty scary. I become scared of what I should say.

It's different to talk to the people in the Child Protection System than it is talking to most other adults I know. They are so stiff and don't feel quite real. I don't know why they're like that.

We quickly hear it in their voice if they care. Smiles are almost like a power plant. It can be contagious, if children are upset.

About feeling trust

Summarised experiences

When children notice that adults trust them:

- it's felt like the adults take them more seriously
- they've gained more trust in the Child Protection System
- they've felt like they can tell adults about important things

When children can't tell that adults trust them:

- it's felt like the adults haven't believed them
- it's felt like adults in the Child Protection System have believed parents or other adults more than the children
- they've noticed that what they say is checked with their parents, then it's become unsafe to talk
- it hasn't felt useful to tell when what they say is being doubted

Quotes

The woman I speak to in the Child Protection System is very kind. I see that all she wants is to help me and that she believes what I say. I think that soon I can tell her the worst thing.

The Child Protection System doesn't trust or won't believe what I say, it's very uncomfortable. They should trust the children more. If one of the parents hits, but lies and says they don't hit, the Child Protection System should always believe what the child says.

I can tell that the Child Protection System listens mostly to the adults. I won't bother telling them anything more. There's no point.

When I told, they chose to trust my parents over me. I won't want to say more. I've completely stopped telling. Now I just say that it's fine at home, when I'm really having a hard time.

About being listened to

Summarised experiences

When children notice that they're being listened to:

- adults have shown with their eyes and body language that they want to listen
- adults have asked questions in a way that shows they want to know more
- adults have asked questions in a way that shows they want to understand correctly

When children are unsure of or notice that they aren't being listened to:

- adults have interrupted in the middle of what children are telling
- adults have explained or asked about other things when children have just started to tell
- adults have guessed, misunderstood or written down the wrong things
- children have felt that the adults think they have the answers in advance
- children have become afraid that the Child Protection System will decide something that won't help
- children have answered questions from adults briefly and haven't told what's important

Quotes

The woman in the Child Protection System asks me about things. I feel that she wants to. I can see it in her face and eyes that she wants to understand.

The Child Protection System listens more to adults than children.

The way the Child Protection System is now, it can't be called child protection.

I notice that they don't listen well because I feel things become more exaggerated. If I say a small thing, it becomes very big. It's scary.

A long time ago, I could talk to the Child Protection System about bad things. Then I told them that my mother drank too much. They did something about it. Now mum drinks too much again, but I can't tell. The one I have now talks to my mum more than to me.

About having a say in decisions

Summarised experiences

When children are allowed to have a say in decisions:

- children have been allowed to make suggestions or wishes
- the Child Protection System has asked thoroughly for the child's opinion
- children have said something adults agree with
- things have improved for the child afterwards
- children have felt they can trust the Child Protection System and tell what's important

When children aren't allowed to have a say in decisions:

- adults haven't spoken to the child before making big or small decisions
- it hasn't felt like adults are interested in hearing what children wish
- if children have said something that adults don't agree with, the adults usually decide
- what's been decided, quickly becomes wrong for the child
- it's become easy for children to lose faith that the Child Protection System can help

Quotes

I think the Child Protection System has just been good. They listen to me and I get to decide. I decided where I was going to live when I couldn't live with mum and dad anymore. I still live there, and I'm doing very well there.

I'm not allowed to have a say in decisions. She just says that it should be like that and like that. It means that there's no point in telling. It also gets pretty scary.

I think it's bad and difficult to talk to the Child Protection System. I've talked about a lot of things and about what I need help with, but it doesn't seem like they want me to have a say in decisions.

I find it safe to talk to them because they find solutions together with me when they talk to me. I think things have gotten better after talking to them.

About sharing information with professionals

Summarised experiences

When adults talk to the child before telling other professionals:

- the Child Protection System have made an agreement with children, before any information is shared
- it became easier to believe that the Child Protection System can help them and make things better
- it became safer to talk, and children have dared to tell more

When adults tell other professionals without talking to the child first:

- children have noticed that what they say is shared with adults in other services or at their school
- children haven't known when the adults have to share information and it has become difficult to tell honestly
- children have become afraid that other adults will find out what they've said and that bad things can happen
- it has felt scary for children to tell when they didn't know what was going to happen when they told the Child Protection System

Quotes

The Child Protection System says I can decide how they're going to share information and when they'll share the information. Then I can trust them.

What makes it unsafe is that they share what I've told with others in the Child Protection System and BUP. When several people make an even bigger deal out of it, things become a thousand times more difficult than they were. Now I don't dare to say small things anymore, I know they'll become big.

The woman at the Child Protection office said that what we talked about will stay here, and that she was going to tell me if anything was going to be shared, but that they wouldn't tell the school and things like that. Then it's quite safe.

The Child Protection System says things to my teacher, and the teacher says things to the Child Protection System. They know everything about me all the time. I say as little as possible to them now. I don't bother talking to them, there's no point.

It becomes more difficult to tell things when they continue to share it. The point of talking to them alone is to be able to tell things I don't want them to share. At least not right away.

About sharing information with guardians

Summarised experiences

When adults talk to the child before sharing information with guardians:

- the Child Protection System has made an agreement with the child before they share anything
- it's become safer for children to tell something, when they know that this is being done

When adults share information with guardians without talking to the child first:

- children have become afraid that their parents or foster parents will worry, get upset or angry
- children have found it uncomfortable when parents or foster parents want to talk about what the child has told the Child Protection System
- children have had to talk to parents or foster parents about something unpleasant or painful

Quotes

I find it easy to tell them secrets because they don't share things. They show me what they write down and what they're going to tell my parents. Before I go, they ask if it's okay for them to show what we've written down to mum and dad.

After I've talked to the Child Protection System, they go into a room with dad. I don't know what they talk about and I don't dare ask. It feels as if they're talking about what I have just told.

I can't tell them anything, because they can share it with dad. Some things I don't want dad to know yet, but the Child Protection System should know. But dad might get embarrassed or upset.

When the Child Protection System tells mum and dad what I've said, they pressure me to talk to them about it afterwards. But I don't want to, I just get scared.

About writing

Summarised experiences

When writing doesn't feel safe:

- children haven't known what adults write down, why or who's going to read it
- it's become scary to talk
- children have told what they thought adults at home wanted them to say, because they knew they would be able to read it
- children have learned from adults at home that what was written about them wasn't nice
- children have read some of what has been written about them and found out that it doesn't match what they've told
- children have found out that what has been written down have been misunderstandings that could have been clarified

Quotes

When I know that mum and dad are going to read what I've said, I only say things that I know are okay for mum and dad to hear.

When we talk together, she writes a transcript and sends it to my parents and asks if what I have said is true. And then they bring it up with me.

I heard from my mother that they said I wasn't mature. It was painful to hear. Now I don't like the Child Protection System anymore. I think they could have told me that themselves instead.

Sometimes I say things that aren't true because dad told me to. I also don't dare say other things, because dad can read it.

They haven't checked with me that they've understood correctly and then they quickly misunderstand when I write.

When they write everything down on a piece of paper, it gets scary and it seems like they're going to tell everyone. I won't bother telling them about things then.

About meetings

Summarised experiences

When meetings don't feel safe:

- when children haven't participated in meetings, they've become afraid that the adults will say or decide something that makes it worse
- many adults were often present in the meetings, and children haven't been able to talk honestly
- adults have often decided where and when the meetings would be
- it's felt painful when the Child Protection System suddenly has to cancel meetings at the last minute

Quotes

It's uncomfortable when the Child Protection System has meetings that I'm not allowed to go to. It feels like they're going behind my back. I won't get to know exactly what's going on, only what the adults tell me.

In the meetings, some adults look mad. It can feel like being in front of a judge. It isn't that safe. I understand that they have to take notes, but not that much. Instead, they have to look at me when they speak.

It can feel scary when it's just me and a lot of adults at the meeting. I should be able to bring a person I feel safe with. Then I would know that I could get support and it would be a little easier to say what I mean.

About children and legal certainty

Almost 30 years has passed since Norway ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. With the Convention on the Rights of the Child came a new way of thinking about children. Children have rights. It was recognised that children need extra protection through different rules than those who apply for adults. In many areas, children have less legal certainty in proceedings than adults. Children cannot always exercise independent party rights, separately from their parents. To remedy this, children's human rights contain a number of requirements for how to proceed when children are involved. In Norway, we have to some extent secured children's rights, such as the principle of "the best interests of the child" and children's right to express themselves. The challenge is to understand the connection between children's basic rights and thereafter arrange so that they can be fulfilled.

In the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, there are four fundamental rights in particular that strengthen children's legal security: the best interests of the child, the child's right to be heard, the child's right to information and the child's right to privacy.

These rights are interconnected and interdependent. A prerequisite for correct decisions about children is that a concrete assessment of the child's best interests has been made. The UN Children's Committee has described a legally binding connection between the child's best interests and the child's right to be heard: It is impossible to assess the child's best interests in the right way without securing the child's right to express themselves freely. (From general comment no. 12, paragraph 74: "In fact, there can be no correct application of article 3 if the components of article 12 are not respected.") Adults must be aware that, according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they have to take the child's opinion into account when assessing the child's best interests.

This interpretive statement represents an important development in the understanding of children's right to be heard freely, and more and more people consider that this right is the key to ensuring children's legal security. A further prerequisite for ensuring the child's right to be heard freely is that the child has received sufficient and adapted information and that the child's right to privacy is respected. Reference is made here in particular to a report from the Ombudsman 2019/5021 where they write the following: Children and young people, regardless of age, have the right to confidential contact with health personnel without the consent of the parents, when this is necessary for the child's safety or welfare. This right must, among other things, be seen in the context of children's right to be heard and to be able to express their opinions freely.

This statement relating to health care for children must also have equal importance for children in the Child Protection System. Children's fundamental rights stay the same regardless of whether it is school, the Child Protection System or health that is being discussed.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the ECHR (the European Convention on Human Rights) set clear requirements for procedures in actions and decisions concerning children. The challenge in Norway is that the special laws do not, in the same way as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, facilitate the proper protection of children's procedural rights. There is a growing recognition that the four basic rights, previously mentioned, in the Convention on the Rights of the Child are crucial for children's legal security. A provision in the Child Protection Act on the right to participation, for example, does not provide sufficient protection if a provision in the The Public Administration Act on parents' right of access to information undermines this right. It is high time that various pieces of legislation are harmonised in relation to the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

CHANGEFACTORY KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people have to feel that the school, kindergarten, support services, police and legal system are safe and useful for them. Children and young people all over Norway have experiences from meeting these systems and advice on how they can be the best possible. Authorities, professionals and students often lack this knowledge from children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, nationally and locally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent and, together with other knowledge, be part of the knowledge base, in order to develop and ensure the quality of good systems for children and young people.

More than 10 years of collecting knowledge

For more than 10 years, Changefactory (CF) has systematically collected experiences and advice from children and young people about how they experience school, kindergarten, support services, the police and the legal system. In 2017, the Prime Minister opened Changefactory Knowledge Centre, to collect knowledge from children and young people about the public systems. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to gather and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people about the systems they are in. CF seeks collaboration with similar organisations.

Participatory and practice-oriented method

In order to collect, systematise and disseminate summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented method is used. CF has called it the Changemethod. The Changemethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It greatly considers that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that help many diverse children and young people to participate. It's based closely on a participatory method used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Safety is most important

The experiences and advice are collected directly from children and young people in sessions or interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as safely as possible for the children and young people who participate. The adults who facilitate are, among other things, trained by children to meet children and young people with openness and human warmth. This is based on the main findings from children about what adults have to be like, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

Experiences and advice are summarised

Experiences and advice from the sessions are documented in transcripts and other written and visual documentation. The data is summarised and systematised. No links are made to theory. Experiences and advice that are repeated by many children and young people in many places in the country, become the main answers. We call this knowledge directly from children.

Children and young people present

The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in the qualitative surveys can also be invited, as pros, in communication and professional development. The pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

Selected publications



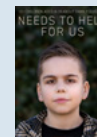
It's about us

Advice from 100 children on how contact sessions has to be decided so that it feels right



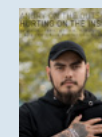
They think they know best

Advice from 152 children on how residential childcare institutions have to be for it to feel safe living there



Needs to help for us

Advice from 101 children on how family guidance has to be so that it feels safe and helpful for children



Angry on the outside, hurting on the inside

Advice from 101 children on how to meet children who are angry and use violence

Changefactory Knowledge Centre
Published 2020, 2nd version 2022
Project leader Tora Smith Aulie
The photos are of participants in the survey