50 children aged 10-18 about relocation in the Child Protection System

UNDERSTAND FIRST



CHANGE FACTORY

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ChangeFactory Knowledge Centre 2025
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The photos are of participants in this study and have been approved for use
There is no connection between the children's experiences and the placement of the photos

This study was conducted with support from The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir)

THANK YOU

Dear all of you who took part in this study.

We are incredibly grateful that you were willing to use your experiences, both the good and the difficult ones, to give advice to Norway on how decisions about relocation should be made in good ways. Many of you were clear that it can have serious consequences for children when decisions are made about relocation away from, or back to, biological parents, without each child's opinion being taken into account. We felt the seriousness of this when we spoke with you.

Thank you for being so brave and for giving important advice that adults need in order to make the right decisions. You know better than anyone what it feels like to be relocated by the Child Protection System, and therefore you know a lot about how decisions about relocation should be made so that they are right for the child.

We hope that the advice in the report will be taken very seriously by those who determine the laws and regulations for relocations in the Child Protection System and by all adults who will contribute to ensuring good practice in the Child Protection System.

THANK YOU FROM OUR HEARTS



FOREWORD

This report is about children who have been relocated by the Child Protection System. Some have been relocated out of their homes. Some have been reunified with their biological parents. The experiences are many, complex and powerful.

It is enormously important that this information comes to light. The quotes from the young people make a deep impression. They show the consequences of the choices we make on their behalf. We must be willing to read them, and we must listen.

This is a reminder of what legal protection for children means. It is about being heard, understood and protected at all levels. When rights are violated, the damage is great, and often lasting. We cannot accept that in a system that is supposed to ensure the best interests of children.

The report also tells of children who dare to be completely honest with the Child Protection System. They speak up about how they feel and what is not working. It takes courage, especially when life is unpredictable. We owe it to them to listen, learn and act.

The goal is better decisions and safer processes. Children's voices must be included early, clearly and systematically. Legal safeguarding must not be an ambition on paper, but a practice in meeting with each individual child.

I hope decision-makers at all levels in the Child Protection System read what the children are conveying here. Children in very difficult life situations have given us a clear message. Our task is to turn this into action.

Marit Skivenes
Professor

IN THE FUTURE WE WANT

ADULTS TO UNDERSTAND...

In the future, adults understand that children know very well whether it is safe to live with their biological parents or not, and that making decisions without giving significant weight to children's opinions can lead to wrong decisions

Adults understand that they must make it safe for children to express their opinions honestly, and that children must know who will be told the things that children tell the Child Protection System

Adults understand that children's opinions must be important when making decisions about relocation, and that children have to be involved in the entire process

Adults understand that it can have major and serious consequences if children are reunified with their biological parents when they do not want to

...THEREFORE

In the future, adults in the Child Protection System will allow children to participate in all decisions that affect them

Therefore, adults give children all information, honestly and in ways that they can understand, when they are considering relocation and before anything has been decided

Therefore, adults give children the opportunity to have someone they trust with them during conversations, explain who will be told the things children share and find out together with each individual child how speaking with the Child Protection System can be made as safe as possible

Therefore, adults give children's opinions significant weight in decisions about relocation and reunification

BRIEF ABOUT THIS STUDY

50 children aged 10-18 participated in the qualitative study UNDERSTAND FIRST. This study was conducted between June and November 2024. All of the participants were children who had not previously participated in studies conducted by ChangeFactory (CF). Ten of the children were interviewed twice to ensure that the researchers understood the children's knowledge and to collect in-depth explanations. The average age was 16 years. In this report, we have chosen to refer to the participants as children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child applies to everyone under the age of 18

The qualitative study was conducted based on Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Section 104 of the Norwegian Children's Act, which gives all children the right to express themselves freely on matters that affect children individually and as a group. Care orders and reunification of children are matters that affect children.

Care orders and reunification

In this study, we spoke with the children about relocating away from their biological parents, being taken into the care of the Child Protection System, and returning to live with their biological parents (after having lived in one or more places, like foster homes or residential childcare institutions).

Invitation

The children were invited to participate in collaboration with the Child Protection System, residential childcare institutions, leisure clubs, through networks and social media.

The children who participated are from Tromsø, Bodø, Stjørdal, Trondheim, Molde, Ålesund, Ringsaker, Stange, Bergen, Nittedal, Oslo, Drammen, Haugesund, Stavanger, Sandnes, Bryne, Halden, Porsgrunn, Ås, Indre Østfold, Vennesla, and Kristiansand.

Methodology

To collect and systematise summarised experiences and advice from children and young people, a participatory and practice-oriented qualitative methodology is used. CF calls it the ChangeMethod. It has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. For more detailed information on the method, implementation and privacy, see page 70.

Marit Skivenes, Professor of political science, is part of ChangeFactory's board for 2024-2025. She monitors and quality-assures CF's work on knowledge collection. She has been responsible for the methodology of this study.

Definitions

"Caseworker" and "case": According to many children, it can feel both hurtful and stigmatising. Children come to the Child Protection Services with their lives. Many find it very painful to be treated as a case. Therefore, they ask child protection to use the term "contact person" instead.

Children: In this report we use the term children, as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines anyone under the age of 18 to be a child.

About the 50 participants

38 out of 50 have experienced care orders
12 out of 50 have been forcibly relocated
4 out of 50 have been relocated as a voluntary measure of assistance
34 out of 50 have lived in foster care
32 out of 50 have lived in residential childcare institutions
20 out of 50 have lived in emergency foster care

20 out of 50 have experienced reunification with their biological parents

The children were, on average, 9 years old when they were relocated by the Child Protection System away from their biological parents
On average, the children had been relocated by the Child Protection System 5 times

34 out of 50 identified themselves as she
16 out of 50 identified themselves as he

Thank you so much to adults who invited children to participate

THANK YOU SO MUCH to all adults who took the time to invite children to participate in this study. Thank you for helping to ensure children's right to express their views and to be taken seriously.

To adults in the Child Protection System

The advice in this report is important for all caseworkers in the Child Protection System, as well as supervisors, child protection managers and those of you who work in the Child Welfare Tribunal.

We know that you want to help us and make decisions that will make our lives better. To achieve this, we ask you to make sure that we feel safe enough to talk to you, so that we can be completely honest. Otherwise, it will be difficult for you to understand and to make decisions that truly help.

The adults that we are able to be honest with, are adults who give enough information and who show that they are patient, kind and want to understand. These adults take what we say seriously and do not tell other adults what we have told them, without talking to us about it first. These adults understand that it may be important to talk to us several times to make sure they have understood. They want to make decisions together with us. If they cannot do what we would prefer, they try to find solutions together with us.

Each of you can be an adult who makes it safe enough for us to tell you honestly about what is difficult, keep our trust and give us the right help. We hope you will read this report thoroughly and that it can help you in your work in the Child Protection System and in the Child Welfare Tribunal.

From child protection Pros in ChangeFactory

To politicians

Norwegian authorities decided that, as a general rule, care orders should be temporary. Reunification was supposed to be a goal. The number of children that child protection has care orders for has since decreased. The number of reunifications has increased.

This report presents advice from a study involving groups of children in the Child Protection System who have experience of care orders and reunifications. The advice clearly shows that care orders and reunification must be decided on an individual basis, for each child, as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that it should be done. The Norwegian Child Welfare Act and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is also part of Norwegian law, state that the child's views must be taken seriously when assessing what is in that particular child's best interest.

This study shows that far too many children lacked information about what alternatives were available and about what adults had thought and intended. Many children did not know what would happen to what they told the Child Protection System, and this stopped them from speaking openly. As a result, the children's wishes did not become important in decision-making. This has had major consequences for many of the children.

You politicians are responsible for the framework governing the Norwegian Child Protection System. If the Child Protection System is supposed to feel safe for children, the starting point cannot be that children who are relocated should be reunified. Such a standard solution can stand in the way of each child's right to have their best interests assessed in every decision.

The answers from this study show that the framework and practice in Norway must do more to ensure that the child's best interests are considered from the point of view of the child concerned in each care order or reunification decision.

From ChangeFactory

HOW TO COLLABORATE WITH CHILDREN ON RELOCATION AND REUNIFICATION

Summary based on knowledge from this report, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Norwegian Child Welfare Act

GIVE THE CHILD ENOUGH INFORMATION IN A WAY THEY CAN UNDERSTAND

- Give information about what child protection is
- Give information that the child can bring an adult they trust when meeting with the Child Protection System
- Give information about what can happen to the information the child shares with the Child Protection System
- Give information about what options are available now
- Give information as soon as child protection is considering relocating the child

MAKE IT SAFE FOR THE CHILD TO EXPRESS THEIR OPINION

- Talk to the child first and alone
- Talk to the child in a place where they feel safe
- Show that you are kind, want to help and care about the child
- Be patient
- Let the child tell you a little about what they like, and talk about yourselves and what you both like, to get to know each other
- Do something together with the child that they like
- Show that you are listening to the child and taking them seriously

TALK TO THE CHILD BEFORE SHARING ANY INFORMATION FURTHER

- Talk to the child if you are planning to share something the child has said or done with others
- Explain who you are planning to share it with and why you want to share it
- Ask the child if they are okay with you sharing it with others
- If the child is okay with something being shared, find out together with the child how it can be shared
- If the child does not want it to be shared, try to understand why the child does not want this
- Take the child's reasons into account when assessing whether it is still in the child's best interests to share it

MAKE SURE YOU HAVE UNDERSTOOD WHAT THE CHILD THINKS IS A GOOD SOLUTION

- Talk to the child several times if necessary to make sure you understand
- Ask follow-up questions to make sure you have fully understood the child's opinion
- Go through what has been written together with the child, and let the child decide if anything should be removed or added

CONSIDER RELOCATING TOGETHER WITH THE CHILD

- Involve the child in every part of the assessment
- Try to follow the child's opinion as far as possible
- Explain if you cannot or do not want to follow the child's wishes
- Still try to find a way to achieve some of what the child thinks is a good solution
- Remember that you are responsible for making sure that the child's life does not get worse

CONSIDER REUNIFICATION TOGETHER WITH THE CHILD

- Reunification cannot be the goal for every child
- Consider reunification together with each individual child
- If you are considering reunification, check whether it is safe for the child
- Take seriously whether the child wants or does not want reunification
- Avoid reunification as far as possible if the child does not want to
- Remember that you are obliged to take the child's opinion on reunification seriously and that you are responsible for making sure that the child's life does not end up worse

ALL CHILDREN HAVE

RIGHTS





CHILDREN'S RIGHTS UNDER THE UNCRC

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) gives children rights that describe how children should be treated in all actions and decisions that concern them, so that adults can assess what is best for the child.

Children's right to information

- Implicitly follows from UNCRC art. 12, see GC no. 12 sections 16, 25 and 41

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to receive all the information necessary to be able to express themselves freely and decide what is best for them in the situation. The right to information is a prerequisite for the child to be able to express themselves freely about actions and decisions to be taken.

Children's right to express themselves freely

- UNCRC art. 12 and the Norwegian Constitution (Grl.) § 104

Children have the right to express themselves freely in all matters that concern them, and their opinion shall be given weight. The authorities have a duty to ensure this right for all children, without exception. This is an independent right that children have, it has no age limit. Neither parents nor other adults can limit this right.

Children's right to privacy

- UNCRC art. 16, Grl. § 102 and ECHR art. 8

No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their private life. This means, among other things, that adults cannot automatically share information from or about the child with other adults, in the service or in other services or with parents. Children shall be informed and allowed to express their views before information can be shared. There must also be a legal basis that allows sharing, and the interference with the child's private life must be necessary.

The best interests of the child

- UNCRC art. 3 and Grl. § 104

After the child has received information, the opportunity to express themselves freely and the child's respect for private life has been ensured, what is in the best interests of the child can be assessed. The UNCRC states that the best interests of the child shall be a fundamental consideration in all actions and decisions affecting a child. What is best for the child must be determined based on a specific assessment. The child's own opinions shall be a central element in the assessment.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS UNDER THE CHILD WELFARE ACT

The Norwegian Child Welfare Act also gives children rights regarding how they should be treated in all actions and decisions that concern them, so that adults can assess what is best for the child.

Where the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children more or better rights than the Child Welfare Act, the Convention shall be used.

§ 1-3. Best interests of the child

In actions and decisions that affect children, the best interests of the child shall be a fundamental consideration. Child protection measures shall be in the best interests of the child. What is in the best interests of the child must be decided after a specific assessment. The child's opinion is a central element in the assessment of the best interests of the child.

§ 1-4. The child's right to participation

A child who is capable of forming their own opinions has the right to participate in all matters that concern the child under this Act. Children have the right to express their views to child protection regardless of their parents' consent and without their parents being informed about the conversation in advance. The child shall be given sufficient and appropriate information and have the right to freely express their views. The child shall be listened to, and the child's views shall be given weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

Children shall be informed of what information from the child may be used for and who may have access to this information. The child has the right to express their views before it is decided that the information shall be shared, and the child's views shall be given weight in accordance with their age and maturity.

A child may be given the opportunity to bring a person with them in meetings with child protection in whom the child has particular trust. The person in charge may be required to maintain confidentiality.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS UNDER THE REGULATION ON CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

The Regulation on Children's Participation in child protection clarifies the rights children have to participate and to have a safety advocate with them. The regulation also obliges employees in child protection to document the opinions of children and the weight they are given compared to other considerations.

§ 6 Documentation of the child's participation

Child protection services shall document how the child's participation is ensured in the case processing and decisions, cf. Sections 12-4 and 12-5 of the Child Welfare Act. This means that, among other things, the following shall be documented:

a. what information the child has received,

b. what the child has been heard about,

c. what the child has said or expressed in other ways,

d. whether the child has agreed to the account of the child's opinion and

e. what weight the child's opinion is given compared to other considerations.

If, exceptionally, the child has not been given the opportunity to participate, this shall be justified and documented. If the child has not wished to participate, this, and the child's possible justification, shall be documented.

§ 7 The child's right to have a safety advocate

A child may be given the opportunity to have a person with whom the child has particular trust in meetings with child protection services, cf. the Child Welfare Act, § 1-4, third paragraph. The child protection shall inform the child as early as possible of the possibility of having a safety advocate. Child protection services shall document whether the child has been informed of the possibility of having a safety advocate, and whether the child wishes to have a safety advocate.

KNOWLEDGE FROM 50
CHILDREN ABOUT

RELOCATION



ADVICE

FROM 50 CHILDREN

GIVE ENOUGH INFORMATION SO THAT CHILDREN CAN TELL HONESTLY

In order for a child to be able to tell honestly how they are feeling at home, the child has to be given enough information. Adults have to give the child information about what the Child Protection System is and what it can help with. Adults also have to give information about what can happen if the child tells something to the Child Protection System and that the Child Protection System will not share what the child tells them without agreeing with the child first.

When the child receives this information, the child can gain more trust in you. It will be safer for the child to tell honestly to the Child Protection System about how they are feeling at home, the child can feel more in control and be more prepared for what can happen.

Give information about child protection

- explain that you are from child protection
- explain what child protection is and what you can help with
- explain why you want to talk to the child
- explain what you want to talk to the child about
- explain that you really want to help the child
- explain what adults at home are not allowed to do to children

Give information about what might happen if the child tells something to child protection

- explain honestly what might happen, and when it might happen, if the child tells you something that you think requires action
- explain why the child protection do it this way
- explain that you will not do anything until you have talked to the child about it first

Give information that you will make an agreement with the child before sharing anything further

- explain who you can tell
- explain what you can tell before you do it
- explain that you will write transcripts after conversations and meetings, and what you write down

Give information about different options

- explain that parents can get guidance while the child lives at home
- explain that child protection can relocate the child to a foster home or a residential childcare institution
- explain what a foster home is, who can be foster parents, and what it is like to live in a foster home
- explain what a residential childcare institution is and what it is like to live6 in one
- explain to the child that foster homes and residential institutions can be in the same town or county, or further away
- explain how relocation can happen

MAKE IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN TO TELL HONESTLY ABOUT HOW THEY ARE DOING WHERE THEY LIVE

In order for a child to tell honestly how they are doing where they live, child protection has to make it safe enough for the child. Adults have to show that they are kind, calm and patient. They have to take time to get to know the child, talk in a place where the child feels safe, and make it safe for the child to express their opinion.

When the child feels that adults are safe, want to help, understand and take the child seriously, it can be easier and safer to tell honestly how they are doing where they live. Children can start to trust the adults and feel that there is a point in telling them.

Remember that children are different and that no situations or lives are the same

- if child protection does not talk to the child to find out how what is happening at home feels to the child, child protection may end up making the wrong decision
- even if the situation is similar to another situation, it may feel different to different children
- just because something works for one child, does not mean that it will work for another child
- children know what it feels like for them to be at home and what can help

Talk somewhere other than an office

- talk to the child in a place where they would like to talk, like taking a drive, at a café or restaurant, on a walk, at a playground or somewhere else
- do an activity while talking with the child, if the child would like to

Be calm and patient

- speak in a calm and friendly voice that does not feel strict
- have a relaxed body language and smile
- do not speak loudly or make sudden movements, as this can remind the child of past experiences
- be patient
- ask questions to show the child that you are listening and want to understand better

Show that you are kind, want to help and care

- show kindness and that you care by doing or saying kind things, like remembering something you have talked about and asking about it later, or taking the child to a café
- ask the child how they are doing and what you can do to make things as good as possible for them
- show that you are honest and trustworthy by doing what you say you will do
- show that you care about your job by telling the child why you chose to work in child protection

Show that you listen to the child and take them seriously

- show that you are open and want to listen to what the child has to say
- show that you are listening when the child speaks
- be curious and ask questions
- show that you want to understand and help
- explain that you will take what the child says seriously, and show that you do so

Get to know the child

- tell the child about yourself so that they can get to know you too, for example, something you like to do or something you are interested in
- ask the child questions to get to know them. Examples of questions could be what the child likes to do, whether the child has friends that they like to be with, and whether there is anything the child is interested in

Talk about or do other things at the beginning of the conversation

- talk a little about other things at the beginning, for example, how the child is doing, activities, free time, animals, friends, where the child likes to travel
- play together with the child at the beginning, if the child wants to

Talk to the child before sharing anything further

- explain why you want to share something the child has told you and to whom
- ask the child before you share anything further to parents or other adults
- do not share anything when you have told the child you will not do so

MAKE IT SAFE FOR CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEIR OWN OPINION ABOUT WHETHER THEY WANT TO RELOCATE

After child protection has given the child enough understandable information, and ensured that adults have made it safe enough for the child to honestly tell them how they are doing where they live, child protection can ask the child whether the child wants to relocate or not.

For a child to express their opinion about relocation, child protection must make it safe enough for the child. The adults have to let the child choose who they want to express their opinion to, and ask about this in a safe way. If adults become unsure whether what the child is saying is the child's own opinion, they must kindly ask the child directly and ask for details. If the child insists that it is their opinion, child protection has to trust them.

When child protection makes it safe for the child, it can become safer for the child to express their opinion honestly.

Let the child choose who they want to express their opinion to

- ask the child to find out who is the right person for the child to tell their opinion to
- ask the child who they trust and want to express their opinion to
- give the child examples of who the adult could be, like a safety advocate, someone in child protection or the person who will make the decision
- let the child answer which adult feels safest for them
- do not hint at a particular person
- do not pressure the child to choose someone they do not want

Make it safe when you ask

- talk to the child without the parents in the room
- talk about something nice or pleasant first
- explain that you will not share what the child tells you with their parents until you have spoken to the child

Ask the child whether adults have influenced

- ask directly if you think that the child is not expressing their own opinion, do not beat around the bush
- ask "has anyone told you to say this?"
- ask more questions about what the child tells you, so that the child has to explain more
- ask simple and understandable questions

Trust that it is the child's opinion

- stop asking if the child is expressing their own opinion, if the child has clearly said and repeated that it is
- remember that the child may feel that child protection does not believe them if child protection continues to ask
- remember that child protection can also misinterpret things

DECIDE TOGETHER WITH THE CHILD

For decisions about relocation to be made in ways that make the child feel safer and not feel hurt, child protection and the Tribunal have to make decisions about what should happen together with the child. Child protection must talk to the child first and alone, make it safe for the child to express their opinion and tell the child about different options. The child must be involved throughout the entire process and must be spoken to before it is decided that the child should relocate or that the case should go to the Tribunal. If child protection or the Tribunal disagrees with the child, the child must be told what they think and why.

When the child notices that the adults want to take the child's opinion seriously and try to meet them halfway, the child can feel safe, in control and feel that the adults want to make decisions together with them.

Decide together with the child so that it will be right and safe

Then the decision can be right:

- the child can speak up if child protection has misunderstood
- the child knows what they want and what is good for them
- the child can feel more at home and safer where they live

The child can feel safer:

- the child can trust child protection more
- the child can feel safer
- the child can experience having power in their own life
- the child can have their right to be heard

If not, the child can experience difficult feelings:

- the child can feel trapped and alone where they relocate
- the child can feel stepped on or worthless
- the child can feel anxious

Involve the child throughout the entire process

- involve the child from the very beginning, before anything has been decided, and until a decision is to be made
- talk to the child several times along the way about what the child thinks and wants

Make sure you understand the child's opinion

Ask questions to check that you have understood:

- check with the child at the end of the conversation that you have understood correctly, by asking "is this what you meant?" and "have I understood correctly?"

Look at what has been written together with the child:

- let the child read through what has been written and correct anything if you have misunderstood something before it is saved or shared further

Talk with the child several times:

- talk with the child several times before anything is to be decided, to learn as much as possible from the child
- ask several questions to learn more about the child's opinion
- listen carefully when the child tells you something

Find solutions together with the child if you disagree with the child

- openly explain why you do not agree with the child
- explain what you think is good for the child and why you think so
- say "we feel" or "we think" instead of "we want", so that the child does not feel that you have already made up your mind
- ask openly and calmly what the child thinks and why
- go as far as possible to do as much of what the child wants as possible
- suggest other solutions if what the child wants is not possible
- find a solution where you and the child are heard equally
- do not force the child to do something they do not want

CHILD PROTECTION MUST MAKE IT SAFE WHEN A CHILD WANTS TO RELOCATE

THE MAIN ANSWER FROM CHILDREN IS THAT CHILD PROTECTION HAS TO ALWAYS ASK EACH INDIVIDUAL CHILD WHAT WOULD MAKE THEM FEEL SAFE WHEN THEY WANT TO RELOCATE.

EACH OF THE CHILDREN IN THIS STUDY WAS PRESENTED WITH DIFFERENT SCENARIOS FOR HOW ADULTS IN CHILD PROTECTION CAN MAKE IT SAFE WHEN A CHILD WANTS TO RELOCATE AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS, BUT THE PARENTS DO NOT WANT THE CHILD TO RELOCATE.

The child and the contact person (caseworker) talk together first and agree on a solution, then the contact person tells the parents that it was child protection that has decided it.

74% answered that this could have been safe for them

- then the child does not get the blame
- then it is child protection that accepts the consequences, not the child
- the parents may take it more seriously when child protection says that they have decided it

26% answered that this could not have been safe for them

- parents can become aggressive or show difficult feelings
- child protection should not lie

The contact person asks the child if there is another adult in the child protection whom the child trusts and who they would like to come with them to tell the parents.

46% answered that this could have been safe for them

- it can make it safe for the child to have someone they feel safe with present
- the parents cannot object to the decision made by the child protection

54% answered that this could not have been safe for them

- the child should not have to be involved
- there should not be anyone from child protection talking to the parents

The contact person asks the child if there is another adult in child protection that the child trusts who could go to the parents alone, after they have talked to the child

42% answered that this could have been safe for them

- it is safe that the child does not have to be involved
- it is safe that it is an adult the child trusts

58% answered that this could not have been safe for them

- the child may be blamed and/or face consequences
- it should not be the child protection that tells the parents

The contact person asks the child if there is another adult the child trusts (a safety advocate), whom the child would like to go to the parents and tell them, together with the child

38% answered that this could have been safe for them

- it may feel safer if someone other than the child protection tells the parents
- the adult can help to make sure the child's opinions are heard better

62% answered that this could not have been safe for them

- the child protection should take responsibility and not involve others
- the parents may get angry with the person the child trusts
- it may become unsafe at home for the child after the person has left

The contact person asks the child if there is another adult the child trusts (a safety advocate), whom the child would like to go to the parents alone, after they have talked to the child

36% answered that this could have been safe for them

- then the child does not have to be involved if they do not want to
- it may feel safe if the parents have a good relationship with the adult

64% answered that this could not have been safe for them

- the child protection should take responsibility
- the parents may get angry and blame the child

The contact person talks to the child and helps the child tell their parents themselves

14% answered that this could have been safe for them

86% answered that this could not have been safe for them

- parents may get angry or violent towards the child
- the child protection should not give the child the responsibility of telling the parents
- the child may be blamed
- parents may influence or pressure the child to change their opinion



EXPERIENCES
FROM 50 CHILDREN

INFORMATION

Children often were not told enough when child protection started talking about relocation. They were often not told what child protection was thinking or who they could tell what the child had said to, if the child told child protection something. This made many children feel angry, disappointed, sad or scared.

Children often were not told enough about what child protection was thinking

76% **did not** know enough about what child protection had thought

18% were told **a little** about what child protection had thought

2% were told **enough** about what child protection had thought

4% did **not remember** how much they were told about what child protection had thought

Summarised experiences from children who were not told enough:

- children were not told why they were going to relocate
- children were not told how long they would live somewhere else
- children were not told anything before it was decided that they were going to relocate
- children were suddenly picked up by child protection at school, without being informed that this was going to happen
- children were only told that they were relocating, nothing more
- children were not told what it was like to live in an institution

QUOTES

I said I wanted to move, so I knew it was going to happen, but I didn't know anything about the emergency foster care or anything more about where I was going. It was reassuring to know I wasn't going to live with mom and dad, but scary not knowing where I was going.

I was scared. When you're nine years old and suddenly you're told that you're going to live with another family, you get scared, and a thousand thoughts went through my head. Will I ever see mom and dad again? What will happen to my little brother? Will I have to change schools? How long will I live there? What will Dad say about this? But I didn't dare to ask any of it.

I've now been living in an institution for over a year, I still don't really know why they relocated me.

It would have been nice to know how long I would be gone, maybe. I was told to pack my things for two weeks, but then I was relocated and never came home again, and now it has been three years.

I didn't get much information. I was only told that I was going to an institution. I wasn't told how long I would be there or who would be there.

Children often did not know who child protection shared information with

86% **were not** told by child protection who could get to know what the child had told them

8% **were told** by child protection who could get to know what the child told them

6% could **not remember** if child protection had explained who could get to know what the child had told them

Summarised experiences from children who did not know who child protection told:

- child protection did not give any information about who could get to know what the child told them
- children lost trust in child protection
- children did not dare to tell child protection as much
- children became angry, disappointed, upset or scared

QUOTES

I didn't know any better. I didn't understand what child protection was, what they could do, anything like that.

I get so fucking anxious. I walk out of there thinking, "What have I said? What have I done? What's going to happen with it? Am I going to be hated by my family now?"

I didn't really talk much with them because I didn't know who was going to find out about the things I said, so I didn't tell them much.

I had a lot of shame inside me, and I just felt like it was really uncomfortable, that I didn't want to be there, that I didn't trust the employees, or anyone really. There was a lot of breach of trust.

It's not the kind of thing you can understand. They say, for example, "Now we have to tell BUP" or, for example, the school, but that's after I've said it.

TELL

It has varied whether children have been able to tell child protection honestly about how they were doing where they lived or not. It has also varied whether the reason children told them honestly was about what the adult did, or about the child needing to get out of the situation. If children did not tell honestly, this was most often because adults had not made it safe enough for them to tell.

52% **did not tell** child protection honestly about how they were doing where they lived

42% **told** child protection honestly how they were doing where they lived

6% **could not remember** if they told child protection honestly how they were doing where they lived

Children told honestly when they felt safe

Summarised reasons why children told honestly:

- the adult from child protection showed that the child could trust them by being kind, keeping confidentiality and not using anything the child had said against them
- the adult showed that they cared about the child by being understanding, kind, and showing that they were on the child's side
- the adult showed that they wanted to understand by asking questions, being curious and listening to the child

QUOTES

They asked me straight out, and I need straight out. I said I need a break from dad at home.

I had a contact person who actually listened to me, she made it so I didn't have to have contact sessions with dad. I could talk to her from day one because she promised that she wouldn't ignore what I said.

Someone who understands and listens and doesn't always say they'll give feedback and follow-up questions, but someone who just listens and then moves on.

Children told honestly to get out of the situation at home

Summarised reasons why children told honestly:

- children told honestly because they were hurting and needed help
- children had had enough of the situations they were living in
- children who were used to speaking openly, spoke openly about how they were doing

QUOTES

I think there comes a point for every child where keeping your mouth shut, sitting with all that, and people-pleasing everyone else, it becomes too much. That's what made me start talking.

Then you've had enough, and maybe you've realised how serious it actually is. Or maybe it's because you think you can trust child protection. Very often at school and stuff like that, you're told that "child protection is here to help you", but ninety per cent of the time, that's absolutely not what they end up doing.

When you're pushed into a corner, that's the only solution. It didn't help until the very end. I lived in a private institution, so they just wanted money.

I had to, otherwise I wouldn't have been heard at all. I felt I had to tell them about my parents, because they only ever told them shit I had done.

Children told nothing, or only a little, when they did not feel safe

Summarised reasons why children did not tell honestly:

Did not trust the child protection

- children had heard a lot of bad things about child protection
- children had given up trying to explain because they did not feel that child protection was listening to them

Did not get enough information from child protection

- children did not know what child protection was going to tell their parents or other family members
- children did not understand what child protection was asking and did not know what child protection was going to do next

Adults in child protection did not make it safe

- child protection did not listen
- child protection pressured or influenced the child
- child protection did not ask the child directly
- the child tried to tell them, but child protection did not listen
- the child did not feel safe with, or did not trust the adult
- the child felt unsafe when it was a stranger asking the questions

Were afraid of what might happen next

- children were afraid of consequences, that something bad or dangerous would happen at home
- children were afraid of what was going to happen at home afterwards

Were afraid of disappointing or hurting the family

- children were afraid of disappointing others or making others upset
- children were fond of their parents

QUOTES

I have a lot of friends who have told child protection something, and then taken it back because of the consequences they got afterwards, so they say they lied. But it's actually true. If child protection starts talking to parents, it can make things a lot worse for the child.

They say they come from child protection, but I didn't know that much about child protection. I knew they had taken children away from their parents, but not what they really were. So it was a bit strange talking to them.

I had an episode when I was younger where I told child protection that my dad drank a lot of alcohol, so child protection had a meeting with my mum and dad and told them that I had said it. Guess what, I got a phone call from my dad, who was pissed.

You don't want to disappoint your parents, that's the last thing you want, and in situations where children are, for example, being hit at home, they're afraid of being beaten when they get home.

It's so that you don't get relocated away for good, or lose contact with your parents.

If you live at home with your actual parents, it can be difficult. No matter how much shit your parents do, you're still fond of them.

Children told what others thought or had said when they did not feel safe

Summarised reasons why children did not tell honestly:

Adults at home made it feel unsafe
- children felt pressure and influence from their parents
- children were afraid of being told off or of consequences from adults at home
- children were afraid that their parents or family would be disappointed, upset or angry with them
- parents or adults at home had told the child certain things they were not supposed to say

Adults in child protection made it feel unsafe
- children did not receive enough information from child protection, they only knew things because their parents or adults at home had told them
- children did not trust child protection and did not feel safe with them
- children were afraid of being relocated to someone they did not know
- children were unsure themselves about what was best, especially when adults said "this is good for you"

QUOTES

My father threatened me that he was going to end up in prison if I told. Mom threatened me too, they knew they were doing things that weren't allowed.

I think children say it to please their parents and family, and they're scared of getting told off for not listening to their family, or because the family might have to move.

To disappoint others, if you don't say what other people say, then you're not good enough for them anymore.

Because you don't know what's going to happen with what you tell them if they share it further.

Children don't feel safe with child protection because it is not easy to speak honestly.

It becomes hurtful, I get hurt. I have no trust in them, I don't trust them at all.

DECIDE

Children have often had an opinion about whether they wanted to continue living at home or relocate, but child protection often did not ask them for their opinion before deciding whether they thought the child should be relocated or not. Children then felt that their opinion was not important. This could make children feel frustrated, trapped or that they had lost control over their own lives.

Children often had an opinion

90% **had** an opinion on whether they wanted to continue living at home or relocate

6% **did not** have an opinion about whether they wanted to continue living at home or relocate

4% **did not remember** whether they had an opinion about whether they wanted to continue living at home or relocate

QUOTES

I know what's good for me. Child protection thinks nothing is good for me because of traumas, and I don't have that many traumas anymore. But they think absolutely everything is trauma.

They asked me if I wanted to, and I said yes.

I know where I want to live, sort of.

In the foster home, I kept saying I wanted to go to my mom. I only got to see her four times a year. I wanted to go home all the time. I kept saying that until I was about twelve or thirteen years old.

Children were often not asked what they wanted

82% were **not asked** by child protection about what they wanted before it was decided whether the child should be relocated or not

12% **were asked** by child protection about what they wanted before it was decided whether the child should be relocated or not

6% **did not remember** whether child protection asked them what they wanted before it was decided whether the child should be relocated or not

Summarised experiences from children who were not asked:

- children felt hurt and were stressed when a relocation was decided without them being asked
- children felt that they lost control of their own lives and felt trapped because they were not asked
- children became angry and frustrated because they were not asked

QUOTES

They don't live my life. They don't know how I'm doing. It was very possible to resolve the case from home, but they were the ones who didn't do anything.

I was really upset because I didn't know when I was going to be relocated next.

I was picked up from school and taken to the child protection office and then to emergency foster care. They didn't ask my opinion for shit.

I cried. I feel controlled and trapped, really.

I didn't think much of it, but now I think I felt a bit used and a bit relocated around, like I was a little toy.

It's like I've said to child protection, right to their faces, "you're taking my power away from me. I have no control over my own life, because you've taken it."

Children's opinions were often not considered important

84% felt their opinions were **not considered important** when it was decided whether they should relocate

10% did **not remember** whether they felt their opinions were considered important when it was decided whether they should relocate

6% felt their opinions **were considered important** when it was decided whether they should relocate

Summarised experiences from children who did not feel that their opinions were considered important:

- children expressed their opinions, but felt they were not taken seriously
- the decision to relocate was made without knowing the child's opinions
- child protection did not ask the child's opinions before deciding that the child should relocate
- it created hurtful feelings for children when their opinions were not considered important

QUOTES

You feel a bit worthless. When they don't bother to listen to you, when it's about your own family and your own life. This isn't child protection's world, it's mine. In the evenings, they're not there, then I'm alone.

They (child protection) never really took my opinion into account. The people I lived with were helpful, they took it forward, but they (child protection) just kind of swept it under the carpet.

They didn't listen, it was just like, "we've decided that you're going to relocate".





KNOWLEDGE FROM 50
CHILDREN ABOUT

REUNIFICATION

ADVICE
FROM 50 CHILDREN

REUNIFICATION CANNOT ALWAYS BE THE GOAL

For child protection or the Tribunal to find out whether the goal of relocation should be reunification or not, they must talk to each individual child. They have to remember that reunification is not the solution for all children, and that although it may make life better for some, it may make things worse for others. Therefore, reunification cannot be a general goal for all children who are relocated.

Reunification is not the solution for all children

- remember that all children are different, and therefore reunification cannot be an idea or a goal that will suit all children
- remember that for some children, it is good for reunification to be the goal, while for other children it can make things worse

Reunification must be assessed with each child

- remember to hear what the child wants
- remember to assess with each child
- remember to do an investigation to be sure that it will be okay for the child to be reunified, if that is what the child wants

Reunification can make life worse for some children

- remember that if children do not want to go home, there is a reason for this
- remember that children cannot live in a place they do not feel safe
- remember that it can be difficult for children to speak up if something bad happens at home after they have been reunified against their will

Reunification can make life better for some children

- remember that if the child wants to and it is possible, it may be good to be reunified
- remember that it may be better for the child to be reunified than to be in child protection

DO NOT REUNIFY A CHILD IF THEY DO NOT WANT TO RETURN

For it to feel safe for a child to be reunified, children need to know that they do not have to return to their biological parents if the child does not want to. Child protection has to try to understand what the child wants and why they want it. They can encourage the child to visit, but not force them. It can make things worse for the child if they are pressured or influenced into doing something they do not want to. When children know that they will not be pressured, it can be easier to answer honestly about whether they want to be reunified or not, and why.

Do not reunify the child if they do not want to

- remember that there is always a reason why a child does not want to return
- remember that the child may end up having to relocate again
- remember that it is not certain that the child will be able to tell child protection if things get bad after the reunification

Try to understand why the child does not want to be reunified

- talk to the child about why they do not want to be reunified, there is often a good reason that adults do not know about
- be patient if the child does not want to answer right away

Encourage the child to visit, but do not force them

- encourage the child to go on visits, but do not rush or pressure
- suggest that the child and the parents meet somewhere the child wants to go first, not at home
- ask the child why if they do not want to visit their parents
- never force the child to visit their parents if they do not want to

Remember that things can get worse for the child if you do not listen to them

- remember that the child's life can get worse
- remember that the child may stop trusting child protection or other important people in their lives
- remember that it can make the child's relationship with their parents worse, and the child may end up having to relocate again

Remember that children may start doing bad or dangerous things to themselves or others

- remember that the child may be subjected to serious things at home
- remember that the child may run away to avoid being at home and to show that things are not good at home
- remember that the child may hurt themselves or do other bad things to themselves
- remember that the child may start using drugs

MAKE SURE THAT IT IS SAFE FOR THE CHILD TO BE REUNIFIED

For a child to be able to return their biological parents, child protection and the Tribunal must first be sure that it is safe. They must check what is important to check for each individual child. If child protection and the Tribunal make sure that the child feels safe and wants to reunfiy with their biological parents, this can make it safer for the child.

What child protection must check before they can reunify a child

Children must want to be reunified

- child protection and the Tribunal have to be sure that it is okay for the child to be reunified before they suggest that the child should return
- the child has to be allowed to express their opinion on whether they want to be reunified, and whether it is safe enough to do so or not. This has to be taken seriously by child protection and the Tribunal

Parents must not do harmful things to themselves or the child

- parents have to take care of themselves
- parents cannot drink a lot of alcohol
- parents cannot use drugs
- parents cannot subject the child to mental or physical violence or abuse

Things at home must have improved

- parents have to have received help with what they are struggling with
- parents have to prove that it is safe for the child to be reunified

It has to feel safe for the child to be at home

- parents have to show love and care
- parents have to be kind
- parents have to be stable
- parents must not yell, raise their voices or get angry quickly for no reason
- the child has to be able to trust the parents
- the child must not be afraid to go home

There has to be a good financial situation at home

- parents have to have enough money to take care of the child
- parents have to give the child enough food
- parents have to give the child enough clothes
- parents have to let the children go to leisure activities

How child protection must check before a child can be reunified

Go on an unannounced visit to the parents

- go to the parents' home without telling them beforehand, so that the parents do not have time to prepare and clean the house
- go to the parents' home several times before the child can be reunified
- check that the home is clean, that there are no drugs, and how the parents look after themselves

Supervise contact sessions

- go to contact sessions to observe the contact between the adults and the child
- talk to the child afterwards about how the contact session felt and what the child thinks afterwards

Have a trial period

- give the child the opportunity to have a trial period at home for a few weeks, to test what it is like to live there for a longer period
- talk to the child about how the trial period has felt and what the child thinks afterwards



MAKE SURE THE CHILD'S OPINION IS IMPORTANT

For a decision about reunification to be made correctly, the Tribunal and child protection must give the child's opinion sufficient weight. The Tribunal and child protection have to remember that it can have very serious consequences if they make decisions over the child's head. The child may lose trust in child protection. If the child feels that child protection and Tribunal care about their opinion and take it into account in the decision, it may be easier for the child to express their opinion honestly.

The children in this study were each given a set of weighing scales and 4 pieces. They were asked how much the child's and the child protection's opinion should weigh when deciding whether or not a child should be reunified. The children could distribute the pieces themselves, according to how much "weight" they thought the child's and the child protection's opinion should have in such a decision.

50% gave the child 4 pieces and child protection 0 pieces

42% gave the child 3 pieces and child protection 1 piece

6% gave the child 2 pieces and child protection 2 pieces

2% gave the child 1 piece and child protection 3 pieces

0% gave the child 0 pieces and child protection 4 pieces

The child's opinion must weigh more than the child protection's opinion

- the child knows what it is like at home and what their parents are like
- even if the situation is similar to another child's situation, it may feel different for this particular child
- the child's opinion has to be heard and taken seriously because it is the child's life that is at stake
- the child knows a lot about what is best for them
- the child may lose trust in child protection if the child's opinion is not given enough weight
- the child may resist, life may get worse, and the child may start to use drugs, run away or do other serious things if child protection does not listen to the child's opinions

Adults can give information and express their opinion, but the child's opinion has to outweigh the adults' opinions

- child protection can tell the child something that the child may not know or remember
- child protection can give their opinion
- child protection can help if the child wants them to



EXPERIENCES

FROM 20 CHILDREN

Of the 50 children who participated in this study, 20 children have experienced reunification.

Children are often asked for their opinion about reunification in ways that make it difficult for them to answer honestly. Children also often experience that child protection and the Tribunal do not check well enough whether it is safe for the child to be reunified. Whether or not a child should be reunified is often decided without collaborating with the child. This has caused children to be provoked, feel that their opinion does not matter, and become upset or scared.

Children were often not asked for their opinion

56% **were not asked** for their opinion

44% **were** asked for their opinion, but in a way that **made it difficult for them to answer honestly**

Summarised experiences from children who were not asked for their opinion:

- children were reunified with biological parents without being asked for their opinion first
- children felt their opinion did not matter
- children became provoked
- children lost trust
- children felt child protection failed them

QUOTES

It was more me screaming at them that I wanted to return home, and that I didn't care what they said.

It just felt like they were deciding what was going to happen in my life, what was going to happen and that I didn't have, I had no say in my own life. My opinion didn't matter. They know best.

I wasn't involved in the discussion about whether I should live somewhere. I had no choice, no one asked me, and no one was interested in my opinion.

Summarised experiences from children who were asked their opinion, but in a way that made it difficult for them to answer honestly:

- children were asked while their parents were in the room
- children did not feel that child protection was listening to them

QUOTES

I thought, "Is this a joke?". They can't expect anything other than you answering "yes" when they ask you in front of your parents.

I just wanted to be done with them. They asked, but they didn't listen. They interrupted and said "you have to live in an institution". I was furious, I get angry just thinking about it. I was furious with child protection and their opinion, and I should have been listened to.

Children's opinions were often not taken seriously

89% felt that their opinions were **not taken seriously**

11% felt that their opinions **were taken seriously**

Summarised experiences from children who did not feel their opinions were taken seriously:

- children felt hurt
- children became upset, scared and felt alone
- children gave up on child protection

QUOTES

I felt my heart was broken then. It's a bad feeling, I hate that feeling. It's like when I found out that I had to live longer in an institution, when I wanted to live by myself.

I said I didn't know what I wanted. They asked me in the same conversation as mom and dad so I didn't dare to say my opinion honestly.

It was awful. I didn't want to go back and I was scared, but I thought I had no other options. I gave up on child protection a bit. I thought they wouldn't help, just ruin my life.

It's scary because you don't know where you can end up and when. I felt a lot that I didn't know where I had child protection, what they would do or how they would react if I said things.

Child protection often did not check well enough whether it was safe for the child to be reunified

100% felt that child protection **did not** check well enough whether it was safe for the child to be reunified

Summarised experiences from children who did not feel that child protection checked well enough:

- children felt that child protection did not know enough about what it was really like at home with their parents, either because the parents had hidden it or because the child had not told them
- children felt that things became difficult when they were reunified, and started drinking, going to school less or using drugs
- children received little or no follow-up from child protection after the reunification

QUOTES

We had a meeting when I returned home, after that child protection didn't call. I complained to my dad because no one called me. I had no contact with them for several months, then they only called after I complained. It's strange that no one asked how I was doing.

They were in constant contact with my mother, so I didn't get to say much about it, but when I returned home, I started drinking, drank and was becoming an alcoholic, then that wasn't enough, so I started using drugs. I didn't want to feel unsafe, and it wasn't good.

I think I only had two contact sessions with my mother, and then they reunified me. I think that's how they checked.



CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Here, project workers and young people in ChangeFactory together have looked at challenges related to current frameworks and practices, and how the knowledge from children from this study can contribute to better national solutions.

NATIONAL CHALLENGES

Norway was given an overarching goal of reunification

When Norway was convicted in a number of cases in the ECHR from 2017 to 2023 for violating parents' right to family life under ECHR Art. 8, this was largely due to the authorities' failure to maintain the reunification goal through, among other things, a standardisation of the number of visits after care orders for children.

Following the ECHR judgments, the Supreme Court emphasised that the overarching goal of care orders for children is to achieve the reunification of children and parents (HR-2021- 474-A). The Supreme Court stated that this objective is abandoned if the biological parents are particularly unfit, if the child's health and development could be harmed, or if a significant amount of time has passed since the child was taken into care and the child's need for stability carries greater weight.

As a result of developments in case law, the child protection circular, guidelines and training were changed. The changes that were made have affected practice. Bufdir's statistics show that the number of care transfers has decreased from 10,169 in 2017 to 7,772 in 2023. The number of reunifications has increased: In previous years, the majority of cases ended with the child not being reunified, but in recent years the opposite has been the case, retrieved 30.10.25: https://www.bufdir.no/statistikk-og-analyse/barnevern/Omsorgsovertakselser.

In connection with all decisions concerning children, Norwegian authorities have a duty to hear the views of groups of the children the decision affects, to assess their views and weigh them against other considerations. We have not seen such assessment and weighting related to changes that were made when reunification became the goal of care transfers.

The Child Welfare Circular does not describe §1-3 and §1-4 in practice

Sections 1-3 and 1-4 of the Child Welfare Act state that children shall be allowed to express themselves safely in all matters that concern them and that the child's opinion shall be a central element in the assessment of the child's best interests. The Supreme Court has also ruled on this. The Child Welfare Act and the Participation Regulations describe child protection's duty to facilitate the child's ability to express themselves freely, to someone they feel safe with and without influence from others.

The Child Welfare Circular was updated in 2025. It does not describe how §1-3 and §1-4 of the Child Welfare Act shall be ensured specifically in decisions on care orders and reunifications. These sections describe children's rights under Articles 3, 12 and 16 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children often have an opinion, but do not share it

45 out of 50 children in this study had an opinion about whether they wanted to continue living at home or relocate. Many of the children had not told anyone in child protection because it did not feel safe enough to tell them. Many also described how their views had not been taken into account in care orders or reunifications. When decisions about care orders or reunifications are wrong, this can have serious consequences for the children. Children who live in violence and abuse can stay at home, children who do not want to or do not need to are relocated away from their families. Children who do not want to reunify, are reunified. Findings from several of ChangeFactory's studies show that most children have an opinion, but that the children first carefully consider whether it is safe enough and whether they feel it is worth expressing it.

Reunification has become a goal for all children

Children in this study are clear that there cannot be a common goal of reunification for all those who are relocated. No child should be pressured to reunfiy, if they do not want to. A goal of reunification for all children is not in line with the principle that the best interests of the child should be determined after an individual assessment.

A legislative amendment from 2025 makes it possible to adopt a permanent stay in a foster home when the goal of reunification has been abandoned. This is an exceptional rule. A system where reunification is the default goal, and exceptions are only made in special cases, can lead to the child's best interests not being assessed concretely and individually, where the child's opinion is a central element in each individual case.

NATIONAL SOLUTIONS

National training in the Child Welfare Act §1-3 and §1-4 is developed together with children

A general reference to the Child Welfare Act §1-3 and §1-4 with the expectation that child protection workers will understand how this should be done in relation to care orders and reunification is not sufficient.

A national training has to be developed for child protection employees on how they can ensure the implementation of the Child Welfare Act §1-3 and §1-4. The content of the training has to include and emphasise the views of groups of children under 18 years of age with experience of care orders and reunification. The training has to describe when and how child protection should give information, allow children to express themselves freely, give children with information and allow them to express themselves on how information about them should be shared, and ensure that their views are a central element in the assessment of the best interests of the child in decisions relating to care orders and reunifications.

The child protection circular describes the use of the Child Welfare Act §1-3 and §1-4

The Norwegian Child Welfare Circular was updated in 2025. This is a tool used by professionals working in child protection services. The chapter on care order and reunification does not describe how and when child protection shall ensure the protection of children, §1-3 and §1-4. In order for child protection workers to know how to use children's rights in practice, the child protection circular has to specifically describe in the chapter on care orders and reunification:

- When and how the child should receive information
- When, how and about what the child should be allowed to express their opinion freely
- That the child should receive information and be allowed to express their opinion before child protection shares information about and from the child with others
- When and how the child should have the opportunity to bring a safety advocate
- How the child's opinion should be a central element in the assessment of the child's best interests

Child protection education programmes convey views from groups of children

In order for the teaching in child protection education programmes to be accurate, views from groups of children with experience from care orders and reunification has to be part of the training for child protection workers. RETHOS (the Norwegian national system of guidelines for health and social care education) states that knowledge from children should be part of the teaching. As we understand RETHOS and the UNCRC, education has to find ways to ensure that views directly from groups of children are part of the education, students have to learn this in addition to research or knowledge from practice.

In order for future child protection workers to be better able to ensure children's rights under §1-3 and §1-4, education has to ensure that child protection workers receive concrete and practical training in how to ensure these rights. This training should ensure that students receive concrete advice directly from children with experience of care order and reunification on how these rights can be ensured in ways that feel safe for them.

National authorities gather views from groups of children

Following recent ECtHR judgments resulting in violations of ECHR art. 8, the Norwegian authorities have taken several major decisions that affect child protection practice for children that child protection is considering care orders or has taken care of. In order to assess what is in the best interests of this group, the authorities have to gather and assess views from groups of these children and then weigh these views against other considerations.

In 2025, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child asked Norway to better ensure that children in vulnerable situations have the right to be heard. In order to ensure the obligation under the UNCRC and the requirements under the investigation instructions, routines should be put in place for national authorities to gather views from the groups of children that decisions and measures will concern, and for how to assess and weigh these views. Parliamentary politicians, ministries, directorates, the Norwegian Health Authority and state administrators have to have routines for this that ensure that they have the views of groups of children to whom the decision applies before decisions and measures concerning groups of children are implemented.



MORE ABOUT THIS STUDY

The ChangeMethod has been developed in close collaboration with children and young people. It takes very seriously that children have the right to express their opinion, in ways that feel safe for them. The methodology consists of process descriptions and tools that contribute to the participation of many different children and young people. It is closely based on a participatory methodology used in action research, called Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Questions and themes

A semi-structured session plan was designed. A group of child protection managers, employees in the child protection services and jurists gave input on themes and questions. The session plan was then created based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, input on questions and themes from professionals and politicians, and answers from children in previous studies. Professionals went through the session plan and gave input to ensure that the knowledge professionals needed was captured. The questions were tested in collaboration with children and young people. The session plan was adjusted, based on input from children and professionals, before the study began.

The researchers developed a methodology for the sessions. They linked different methodological tools to the specific questions to ensure that all children would have the opportunity to share experiences and give advice. The questions and method were again adjusted after the first sessions had been completed, based on feedback from the participants and the professor responsible for the method.

Privacy

A privacy impact assessment was prepared prior to the start of the project. The risk was assessed to be medium. In this study, consent was collected from the children and caregivers if the child was under 16, to participate, and for ChangeFactory to store contact information such as name and telephone number while the study was in progress.

The transcripts did not include the names of the participants or other information that could help to identify individuals directly or indirectly, such as names of third parties, place names or names, child protection services or residential childcare institutions. The researchers who conducted this study are well trained in this practice.

Out of concern for the privacy of the individual participant, the researchers worked throughout the sessions to ensure that the children's history, family or individual adults in child protection did not become the focus when the children gave their answers. The focus was on their experience and their advice to the Child Protection System.

Invitation and information

The participants were invited in collaboration with child protection services, residential childcare institutions, leisure clubs, through networks and social media.

Children who had been relocated by the Child Protection System were invited. The children were invited based on a desire for representation in experiences of being relocated to a foster home or institution and having been reunified with biological parents. The children were also invited based on a desire for a spread in age, gender and geographical affiliation.

Child protection services, residential childcare institutions and leisure clubs were sent information about the qualitative study, and information they were to give the children when they invited them. They were asked to ask children with this type of experience if they wanted to participate. The children who were invited through networks or social media were sent an information letter, offered to speak on the phone to get more information and were then asked if they wanted to participate in the study.

The information the children received consisted of an invitation letter and a film of the researchers and children who have previously helped to give advice to Norway through CF. Information was given about what ChangeFactory is, why this study is being conducted, that the study is anonymous, that the children choose what they want to answer and how much they want to answer and what it will be used for.

The researchers agreed with the children whether they wanted to talk in a larger or smaller group, or alone with the researchers. 9 of the participants were spoken to digitally, all of whom were given the opportunity to meet in person.

Introduction to sessions

We met with the children in smaller rooms, with as few disturbances as possible. No other adults were in the room when the sessions were conducted. This was done based on feedback from children and young people who have said that it can feel unsafe if this is not the case. The goal was to make it as safe as possible for everyone and to ensure that the answers were collected as similarly as possible in all sessions.

The researchers explained to the children that they would talk to them to ask questions, because children know better than adults what it feels like to be involved with the Child Protection System and therefore have important advice on how the Child Protection System can become safer and more helpful.

The children were informed about:

- why this study was being conducted
- what their answers would be used for
- that what they said was written down and processed anonymously
- that they could choose how much or how little they wanted to say
- that no answer was right or wrong
- that everyone's answers were equally important
- that they could withdraw if they wanted to

Based on knowledge from children about safety, the researchers spent time at the beginning of the sessions so the children and the researchers could get to know each other a little, through play and conversation. The children were also given the researchers' contact information, which they could use to ask questions or get in touch for other reasons after the session.

Conducting the knowledge acquisition

The qualitative study was conducted using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative questions aimed to map the participants and their experiences. Qualitative questions were open-ended and focused on in-depth explanations. The qualitative approach was most important to elicit a range of experiences and ensure in-depth understanding.

The sessions lasted 1-2 hours. The same questions, methodology and games were used in the sessions, both with those aged 10 and 18.

Both the researcher who led the sessions and the researcher who wrote the transcript actively participated in giving their input and asking questions. In addition to sitting around a table and talking, creative and visual tools were used to ensure that as many children as possible were able and willing to respond. The researchers and children also did icebreakers or games together in the sessions.

Tools that were used:

Red/yellow/green signs: the children were given a red, a yellow and a green sign that they could hold up as answers to yes-no-don't remember questions

Figures: the researchers used wooden figures to illustrate different scenarios that the children could answer whether they could feel safe or unsafe in

Magic wand: the children were given a magic wand when they were going to start being an advisor for Norway

Weight scale: the children were each given a weight scale and four pieces, to illustrate how much weight the children's opinions should have

Throwing ball: a soft ball that was thrown between the researcher and the children, and between the children when they answered different questions

iPad: the children ticked off answers to different questions

In the sessions that were conducted digitally, the methodology was demonstrated whenever possible.



Summary of knowledge from children

The experiences and advice that were collected were sorted thematically. The most common answers are summarised as knowledge from children. The main answers are in headlines, and in-depth explanations are summarised in paragraphs and bullet points. The percentages are calculated based on how many children have answered the question. The language used is as similar as possible to what the children have used. The knowledge from children is not tied to theory.

Conducting in-depth sessions

After the answers from the 50 children had been collected and sorted, 10 children (20%) were spoken to one more time to ensure the researchers' understanding and to collect in-depth explanations.

The in-depth sessions were conducted digitally and lasted 45 minutes. New, more detailed questions were asked, based on answers from the first round.

The photos in this report

After all the sessions were completed, some of the children who had participated were asked to be included in pictures for the report. The children and caregivers, if the children were under 16, signed a separate consent form. The children were asked again if they wanted to be in photos before the photos were taken. All of the photos in this report have been approved for use. There is no connection between the children's experiences and the placement of the photos.

CHANGE FACTORY KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

Why knowledge directly from children?

Children and young people have to feel that schools, kindergartens, support services, the police and the 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 representative groups of children and young people, when frameworks and what constitutes good practice are to be determined, locally and nationally. Therefore, it must be brought in to a much greater extent. Knowledge from children and young people, together with other knowledge, must be part of the knowledge base for research and practice, in order to develop good initiatives and measures for children and young people, and in the work of further developing schools and services.

More than 10 years of knowledge acquisition

Changefactory (CF) has for more than ten years 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. The goal was to collect knowledge from children and young people in different life situations, about the public systems created for them, in the best possible way. As far as we know, there are few knowledge centres in Europe whose main purpose is to collect and disseminate knowledge directly from children and young people, about the systems they are in. CF is now seeking collaboration with similar organisations in other countries.

Participatory and practice-oriented method

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 takes children's right to express their opinions, in ways that are felt safe for them, very seriously. The method consists of process descriptions and tools that contribute to the participation of many different children and young people. It is closely based on a participatory methodology 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 at sessions or in interviews. The sessions are organised with an emphasis on ensuring that they are experienced as engaging, important and as safe as possible for the children 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 answers from children about how adults have to be, in order for children to be able to tell honestly.

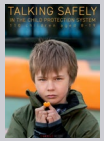
Experiences and advice are summarised

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 from children.

Children and young people present

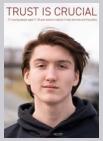
The knowledge from children is presented in reports, films, podcasts, books and online. Participants in surveys can also be invited, as Pros, in dissemination and professional development work. The Pros present knowledge directly from children to politicians, national authorities, professionals and students.

Selected publications



Talking safely in the Child Protection System

Advice from 110 on what has to be done for children to be able to talk safely



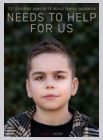
Trust is crucial

Advice from 211 young people on how adults in help services and police can make it safe for children to trust them



Safe with a safety advocate

Advice from 51 young people to the child protection system about safety advocates



Needs to help for us

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



It's about us

Advice from 100 children on how contact sessions has to be decided for it to feel safe



Understand what's most important

Advice from 110 children on what the Child Protection System has to do for children to be able to talk safely

changefactory.org

