

Doll¹²⁴

Summary

In this process we use a doll to help the child communicate consent and dissent or answers to our research question/s.

There is no one right way to do this process, you can be creative. Dolls have been used in research with young children with disability in a range of different ways.

Making a Doll

1. Dolls should be locally sourced and resemble dolls that children will be familiar with.
2. Dolls could be made of cloth with soft stuffing and be gender-neutral. Or dolls can be gendered (i.e. boy or girl dolls) to suit the child's preference.

Process

Here's some ways that a doll could assist children in the research:

1. To gain and re-gain consent. For example, the researcher might ask:
 - 'What if this doll wanted to talk to the researcher, could she decide 'yes' or 'no'? Well, that's the same with you, it's up to you if you decide to talk to us'.
2. To promote play. Dolls can be used in role-plays and other forms of play. Play activities are a good way for the researcher and child to get to know each other and to break down shyness of the child.
3. The researcher and the child can both use dolls to 'talk' to each other about the research topic through the dolls. Alternatively, two researchers can demonstrate how to play with the doll by interacting their dolls with each other.
4. To help children feel comfortable. Some children may be shy or wish to talk about sensitive issues. It may help to refer to the doll instead of themselves. This way, the attention is on the doll rather than them. Dolls may also help if the child wishes to share something that is difficult.
5. Ask the research question and ask for the doll to respond. The doll could be used for describing a child's day, starting with the doll being asleep and waking up. For example:
 - 'Imagine this doll is you, tell me what the doll does after breakfast'.
 - 'Imagine this doll is moving into your family and she is like you ... what do you think the doll will like about being in your family/village/house?'
 - 'If this doll had a disability like you, what do you think he would wish for to make his life better?'
6. At the end of the visit, leave the doll with the child.

Considerations

1. Dolls may not suit all genders and contexts. Researchers need to be sensitive about whether a doll would be appropriate for the child. Researchers can offer 'girl', 'boy' or gender neutral dolls.
2. Dolls may not be suitable for older children who are past the age of playing with dolls.

Skill of the researcher

1. Ability to play with child, or in front of child, without embarrassment.

Practice example

Grace is 14 years old. She does not go to school and spends her days at home with her parents, helping them with domestic chores. Her impairment affects her walking, talking and ability to understand things. The use of the doll worked well as a prompt with Grace. At times she became preoccupied with toy cars and was not interested in answering questions. The researcher then tried using the doll by asking the questions to the doll. Grace was intrigued, joined in and began answering the questions for the doll.