

Barnardo's Statement of Ethical Research Practice

About this statement

This statement sets out the ethical guidelines that should guide the conduct of all research undertaken by, or on behalf of, Barnardo's. The values and purpose of the organisation provide the overall framework within which ethical research practice is defined. These values are:

- Respecting the unique worth of every individual
- Encouraging people to fulfil their potential
- Working with hope
- Exercising responsible stewardship

Barnardo's purpose is:

- To provide services to children and young people in greatest need
- To demonstrate effective good practice and to promote developments in practice widely
- To influence social policy for the benefit of children
- To promote good childhood experiences for all children

Barnardo's acknowledges that ethical practice is necessarily rooted in ongoing reflection and discussion. The statement does not, therefore, provide a set of rules, adherence to which will avoid ethical choices or dilemmas, but recognises that it is often necessary to make such choices on the basis of principles and values, and the - sometimes conflicting - interests of those involved (see Alderson, 1996 for a comprehensive discussion of relevant ethical issues).

Core Principles

Barnardo's researchers and those undertaking research on behalf of Barnardo's will:

- safeguard the interests of those involved in or affected by their work
- report their findings accurately and truthfully
- consider the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties
- acknowledge the boundaries of their competence

- ensure that the research they undertake is worthwhile and that the methods of investigation are appropriate.

Responsibilities towards research participants

Researchers undertaking work for, or on behalf of, Barnardo's are responsible for ensuring that the physical, social and psychological well-being of research participants is not adversely affected by the research.

Research undertaken by, and on behalf of, Barnardo's is frequently characterised by disparities of power and status between researchers and participants. It is expected that such disparities should be addressed in relation to research design, methods and dissemination and that researchers should strive to develop relationships with research participants on a basis of equality, trust and partnership.

Research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied. This involves providing full explanations of research projects: including information on what the research is about, who is undertaking and financing it, why it is being undertaken, and how it is to be promoted. Such explanations should be provided in terms and language which are accessible and meaningful to participants.

- Research participants should be made aware of their right to refuse participation whenever and for whatever reason they wish.
- Research participants should understand how far they will be afforded anonymity and confidentiality and should be able to reject the use of data-gathering devices such as tape recorders and video cameras.
- Where there is a likelihood that data may be shared with other researchers, the potential uses to which the data might be put may need to be discussed with research participants.
- When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, researchers should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated.
- In situations where access to a research setting is gained via 'gatekeepers' (e.g. Project Leaders and their managers) researchers should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the research participants to whom access is required, while at the same time taking account of the gatekeepers' interests.

Since the relationship between the research participant and a gatekeeper may continue long after the researcher has left the research setting, care should be taken not to disturb that relationship unnecessarily.

The **anonymity and privacy** of those who participate in research should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate even to record certain kinds of sensitive

information. Where possible, threats to the confidentiality and anonymity of research data should be anticipated by researchers.

Appropriate measures should be taken to store research data in a secure manner. Researchers should have regard to their obligations under the Data Protection Act. Wherever appropriate methods for preserving the privacy of data should be used. These will include the removal of identifiers and the use of pseudonyms. Researchers should particularly guard against data being published or released in a form which would permit the actual or potential identification of research participants.

Guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity given to research participants must be honoured, unless there are clear and overriding reasons to do otherwise. However, research data given in confidence do not enjoy legal privilege and may be liable to subpoena by a court. In relevant circumstances research participants should be made aware of this fact.

Barnardo's is committed to providing feedback on research findings to participants. In addition to making copies of full reports readily available, summaries, presentations and young people's reports should be produced as appropriate.

Research involving children and young people

The majority of research conducted by, and on behalf of, Barnardo's involves children and young people. The responsibilities detailed above apply equally to children and young people, however, there are specific issues arising from children and young people's legal status, their knowledge and experience of the world and their relative lack of independence/autonomy that require specific attention in order to ensure appropriate and ethical research practice. Research conducted by, and on behalf of, Barnardo's is committed to addressing these issues in the context of an organisational commitment to maximising the participation of children and young people at all levels of planning, evaluation and influencing.

Research intending to involve children and young people as respondents should begin with a consideration of the **potential costs and hoped-for benefits** of such participation.

- In order to ensure that such issues are central to the research design young people should be involved/consulted in the planning and piloting of research whenever possible.
- Safeguards to minimise any inconvenience, intrusion, embarrassment, coercion or distress should be written into the research protocol.
- Attention should be paid to ensuring that participation in research is a positive and rewarding experience. Where there is no direct benefit likely to ensue from the time and expertise contributed by young people consideration should be given to appropriate gratuities.
- Feedback on research findings should be routinely provided to children and young people as part of acknowledging their contribution and seeking their views on outputs and dissemination.

The **informed** consent of children and young people to participation in research should be actively and explicitly sought.

- Information about the proposed research and the optional nature of participation should be provided in both oral and written form and presented in accessible language.
- Attention should be paid to minimising possible coercion from parents, teachers and other adults, and to minimising the influence of peer pressure.
- Young people should be encouraged to question researchers about the aims and methods of the research.
- Written, or explicit, recorded consent should be obtained from research participants whenever possible. (For children aged 5-12 the recommended procedure to be followed is as follows:

Hi [child's name]
My name is [your name], and I am trying to learn about [describe project briefly in appropriate language].
I would like you to [describe what you would ask the child to do. Don't use words like "help" or "cooperate", which can imply a subtle form of coercion].
Do you want to do this? [If the child does not give clear affirmative agreement to participate, you may not continue with this child.]
Do you have any questions before we start? [Answer questions clearly.]
If you want to stop at any time, just tell me. [If the child says to stop, you must stop.]
Sieber, 1992ⁱ

- The option of withdrawing from the research at any stage should be clearly communicated and reviewed at intervals in the research process.

The **consent of parents**, or guardians should be routinely sought except:

- where it is clear that participation in the research involves minimal risk (i.e. risks no greater than those in everyday life) and will not infringe the rights or impact on the welfare of participants
- where parental/carer permission is impossible or would not protect the child or young person (i.e. where relations have broken down)
- where the young people concerned are resistant to parental/carer consent being sought on the grounds of their right to privacy and confidentiality, **and** where the emotional and social maturity and particular vulnerabilities of the young people have been evaluated and the risks of participation are considered to be low.

At risk and particularly vulnerable children and young people

Barnardo's recognises that young people involved in risky or illegal activities (under-age sex for example), who are incarcerated or have run away from home or care will have heightened concerns over privacy and may be mistrustful of the confidentiality of their participation. In this context:

- Ethical dilemmas should be anticipated and advice sought from those working with the relevant population of young people.
- Where possible young people from the relevant population should be involved in research design and piloting consent procedures.
- Special precautions - such as the collection of anonymous data - may be used to protect confidentiality.
- Researchers should be cognisant of services relevant to the possible support needs of research participants. A fact sheet detailing services should be prepared.
- Where participation in research is liable to be stressful young people should be asked if they would like to have a friend or advocate with them.
- Arrangements for optional de-briefing after interview/focus group participation should be considered.
- The limits to confidentiality should be explicitly communicated as follows: "Whatever you have to say in this interview/focus group/questionnaire is confidential unless you disclose that you, or someone else, is in immediate danger of serious harm. In such a case I would need to report that to someone who might be able to help."

Responsibilities towards sponsors and/or funders

Research that is unlikely to contribute to Barnardo's purpose, or is in contradiction with the organisations values, will not be undertaken or commissioned. Research will be undertaken with a view to providing information or explanation rather than being constrained to reach particular conclusions or prescribe particular courses of action.

When Barnardo's is commissioning research, or being funded to undertake research on behalf of a third party there should be a written contract detailing the central research questions, methods, time-frame, outputs and dissemination plans.

- Researchers have a responsibility to notify the sponsor and/or funder of any proposed departure from the terms of reference of the proposed change in the nature of the contracted research.
- Researchers must make every reasonable effort to complete the proposed research on schedule, including reports to funders.

References

- Alderson, P. (1996) 'Ethics and research directed towards effective outcomes' in A. Oakley and H. Roberts (eds) *Evaluating Social Interventions* Barking: Barnardo's
- Sieber, J.E. (1992) *Planning Ethically Responsible Research* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Stanley, B and Sieber, J.E. (1991) *Social Research on Children and Adolescents: Ethical Issues*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Charity Commission Guidelines

We are also subject to the guidelines on conducting research of the Charity Commission. Available on:

www.charity-commission.gov.uk/supportingcharities/researchweb.asp
