

2. Why Listen to Children?

There is a litany of positive reasons as to why children should be encouraged to contribute to decision-making processes affecting them. One of the basic reasons is that children often think of things that adults do not, particularly when the decision being made concerns their world. Listening to children leads to the increased fulfilment of other rights and it enhances child growth and development more generally. For example, through contributing to decisions, which affect them, children learn to interact with adults and others, thus gaining confidence and learning critical skills. Giving children space to have a voice enables them to protect themselves, it enables their needs to be met and it allows them to develop to their full potential intellectually, socially and emotionally. Indeed, it is well accepted that listening to children and young people's experiences and views contributes to better decision-making based on the reality of their lives and not untested adults assumptions. Lansdown has noted that by not allowing children to be involved in decision-making processes affecting them, they are being denied their fundamental right to have their views considered in decision-making processes affecting them¹. In the long term, society also stands to benefit from effective child participation in school. Indeed, the encouragement of critical thought, the promotion of democratic principles and contributions to policy development actively contribute to a more widespread understanding of children's rights. However, as acknowledged by Marshall, adults cannot deny children the fundamental right of participation on the basis that it may prove damaging to the child².

¹ Lansdown, G. *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-making* (UNICEF, 2001) 7.

² Marshall, K., *Children's Rights in the Balance: The Participation-Protection Debate* (Edinburgh, The Stationary Office, 1997) 130.