



Acknowledgments

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YARN TOOLKIT

The National Youth Agency

YRNYOUNG RESEARCHER
NETWORK

Stage 6:

Research Ethics

Key Words: Ethics, Confidential, Disclosure



What are research ethics?

Research ethics cover the responsible conduct of research. They help make sure your research does no harm to other people.

Why research ethics are important to know

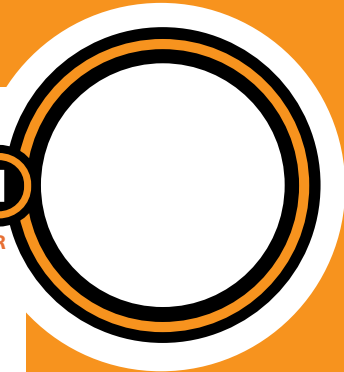
Ethics are a way of thinking about what is moral, or right. They promote good practice and a high standard of behaviour amongst those conducting research.

Think of them as a **code of conduct** for researchers.

There are a number of ethical dilemmas that can arise during the process of undertaking research. These can come about for some or all of the following reasons:

- The topic is particularly personal, sensitive, or in some way likely to cause upset. For example, you might be asking questions about bullying to someone who is being badly bullied at school, which causes them to get upset.
- Those who take part in a project (research participants) may be vulnerable or 'at risk'. For example, you might be interviewing young people who have problems with addiction.
- The researcher is not well equipped to deal with issues as they arise. For example, a young person may disclose that they are self-harming, and the interviewer doesn't know what to say or do.

This last point is particularly important. It is easy to think that your research project will result in some benefit. At the very least, it should increase your own and others' knowledge about a topic. It may help provide evidence of the need of others, or show good practice in a particular area.



Sometimes research can be harmful for reasons that are not always obvious. There are a number of types of impact to consider:

Physical impact for example, might the research cause physical harm to people?



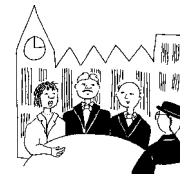
Psychological for example, might the research cause mental distress or ill health?



Social impact for example, what will the research mean for society as a whole?



Political impact for example, How does the research relate to ongoing political debates?



Religious and cultural impact for example, are the research methods sensitive to religious and cultural differences between groups?



Economic impact for example, will the research result in a financial cost to some individuals or groups?



Some of these are easier than others to answer, and not all will seem immediately relevant. However, researchers should consider all of them carefully before starting any research process.

STAGE 6

How to use ethics in your research project

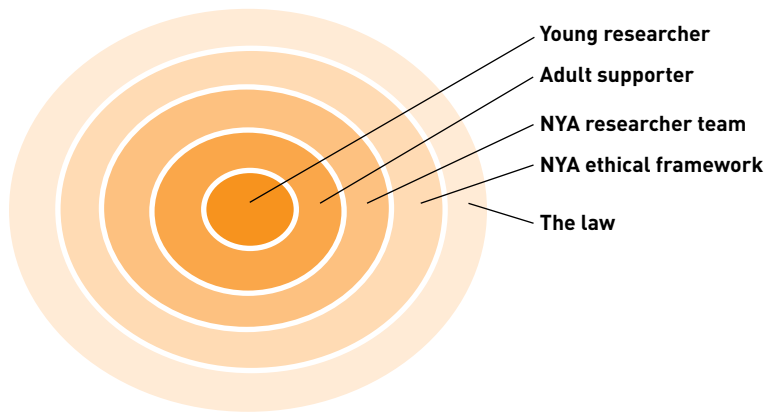
- Ethics is something that you should think about at the very start, and all the way through, your project.
- In most cases you will have to go through some sort of 'ethical clearance' before you start research. There are many ethical frameworks out there to help you.
- The Young Researcher Network has developed an ethical framework that has been simplified for use by young people.
 - **Be honest:** e.g. don't trick people into taking part.
 - **Think about how your project might affect those taking part:** e.g. are you going to be talking about subjects that might upset them?
 - **Get permission from your participants:** e.g. ask people to sign a consent form before you carry out an interview.
 - **Respect others' privacy:** e.g. Don't ask personal questions that aren't necessary for your research.
 - **Keep things confidential:** e.g. you might change people's names rather than use their real ones in your research report.
 - **Know how to handle disclosures:** e.g. If someone tells you that they are taking dangerous risks that could cause harm to themselves, you should tell an adult about this. Have details of support services: e.g. if your research is about substance abuse, it would be useful to have details of local support services for drug users that you can signpost people to if they need help.
 - **Protect your data:** e.g. keep your questionnaire returns in a safe place where only you and your team can access them.
 - **Feedback:** e.g. if you interview lots of young people, it is only polite to let them know later the results of your research.

The framework will guide you on how to do this, as well as some resources.



Remember the fourth reason that things can go wrong is that the researcher is not well equipped to deal with issues as they arise. It is very important as young researchers that you take responsibility for ethics, but that you don't do this alone and when you reach the limit of what you can deal with you share the problem or decision with others.

The diagram below shows how young researchers are inside a circle of guidance and support.



- Your youth worker, or other adult support in your organisation, is your first source of support.
- There is also the team at The NYA.
- NYA staff have an ethics committee and the ethical framework that they can call on when they need help.
- Beyond that there are other sources of guidance, including the law. Ask for help!

Top Tips:

- Good ethical practice should be at the front of your mind at the very start of your project, and remain there throughout.
- Good ethical practice is as much about doing good, and doing quality research, as it is about minimising harm.
- No-one can deal with every issue that arises alone. Ask for help!