

Checklist for Meaningfully and Safely Engaging Children in Global Conferences and Events



Mediators have an important role in supporting the participation of children in peace processes. While it is not within a mediator's mandate to define the scope of the negotiations, they may have unique opportunities to raise awareness and introduce child protection issues into the agenda. Given their position, it is important for mediators to move beyond the notion that children only need protection, towards recognizing the strength and agency of children to participate in peace building.

These guidelines come from the Dallaire Institute's *Global Conference on Advancing Children's Roles in Peace Processes and the Vancouver Principles* in Nairobi in 2025. These guidelines assist mediators, peace negotiation support teams, and peacebuilding organizations seeking to meaningfully and safely integrate children's perspectives into formal and informal peace processes,

Before the event

Hold preparatory sessions with participating children to build understanding, confidence, and ethical readiness for engaging in a high-level international space. Specifically, these preparatory sessions should:

Ensure that children understand:

- The purpose of the event
- The roles of different stakeholders
- The importance of their own voices within peace and security conversations

Support children to reflect on their personal experiences and community realities, identify issues they feel strongly about, and practice expressing their thoughts clearly and confidently.

Create a safe and supportive environment where children can ask questions, express uncertainty, and learn at their own pace.

Emphasize agency over performance and work with children to ensure they understand that there are no “right answers” and that their role is not to impress adults but to speak honestly and respectfully.



During the event

Implement a comprehensive child safeguarding and risk management approach to prioritize the safety, wellbeing, and dignity of the participating children during the event.

Involve children, where appropriate, in the development of risk assessment and safeguarding measures.

Provide child-friendly printouts outlining steps children should take if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

Ensure children are aware of their rights and available reporting and support mechanisms.

Provide a dedicated child-friendly space that children can access throughout the event for rest, emotional regulation, and safety.

Hold structured debrief sessions with children and accompanying staff to process experiences, process their emotions, and respond promptly to emerging concerns. This could be done in the morning, during lunch breaks, and in the evening.

Ensure children’s chaperones and/or designated staff are present at all times to provide supervision, guidance, and emotional support

Children must retain the right to decline participation in any activity, panel, or discussion without consequence. Engagement should not be tokenistic, pressured, or emotionally exploitative

Create platforms that allow children to speak for themselves, sharing their reflections, experiences, and lessons from their own peacebuilding journeys, rather than having adults speaking on their behalf.

Provide dedicated psychological support throughout the event to ensure children have someone to talk to whenever they require psychosocial support.

After the event

Organize guided post-event reflection sessions to support children in meaningfully processing their participation and articulating lessons learnt.

Share outcomes of the event with participating children, including how their contributions were used, referenced, or integrated into reports or policy discussions. This reinforces accountability, respect, and sustained engagement.

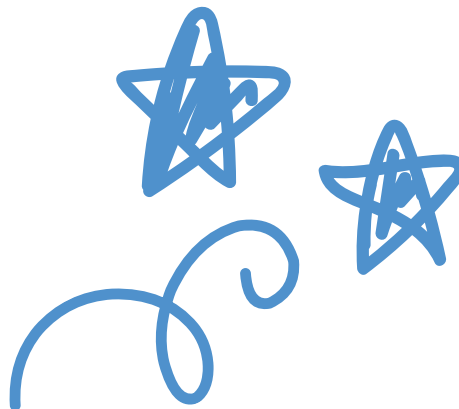


Children who participated at the Dallaire Institute's Global Conference on Advancing Children's Roles in Peace Processes and the Vancouver Principles, held in Nairobi in 2025, shared the following best practices for children's involvement in events.

Intentionally include children in event planning and panel discussions from the outset to enable meaningful, informed, and confident participation.

Secure dedicated psychosocial and mental health support professionals who are familiar with the participating children and available throughout the conference to provide timely and appropriate support.

Schedule prior meetings and bonding sessions for children with their assigned mentors or buddies to build trust, emotional safety, and confidence before the event.






The Dallaire Institute's Youth Advisory Council's Guiding Principles for Respectfully Engaging Children

The Dallaire Institute's Youth Advisory Council works to raise awareness about preventing the recruitment of children in armed violence, empowers peers to advocate for child protection, and collaborates with the Dallaire Institute on creating inclusive, culturally sensitive, and gender-responsive initiatives.

The Youth Advisory Council developed the following principles to guide engagement with children at the Dallaire Institute's Global Conference on Advancing Children's Roles in Peace Processes and the Vancouver Principles, in Nairobi in November 2025.

Let us...

- ✓ Treat every child here as a capable leader whose voice truly matters.
 - ✓ Listen with full attention and allow them to finish their thoughts without interruption.
 - ✓ Speak in a warm and friendly way that children can easily follow.
 - ✓ Be fully present so that they feel valued and seen.
 - ✓ Encourage participation from all children, including those who may be quiet or shy.
 - ✓ Acknowledge their feelings and show them that their emotions are valid.
 - ✓ Guide gently and avoid any harsh correction or judgment.
 - ✓ Respect their pace and give them the time they need to think and respond.
 - ✓ Protect their dignity by avoiding sensitive questions or pressure.
 - ✓ Give children the space to lead while we support calmly from the side.
 - ✓ Maintain healthy boundaries and ensure the environment remains safe for them.
 - ✓ Appreciate their contributions and thank them for their courage to lead us today.
 - ✓ Respect the cultural backgrounds of all children and engage with sensitivity.
 - ✓ Communicate with kindness so that trust can grow throughout this session.
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This checklist was co-developed by the Dallaire Institute and Re-Imagining New Communities. We respectfully acknowledge the contributions of young peacebuilders -Meshack Otieno (14), Juliet Ayiera (17), Abigael Wairimu (11), and Leshan Kwanzu (13).

The Dallaire Institute for Children, Peace, and Security is an international organization working to prevent the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict and violence and to transform cycles of violence.

Re-Imagining New Communities is an award winning, inclusive and values-driven peacebuilding organization where every story, voice and child shape a peaceful tomorrow.