



TOOLKIT

**Exploring
children's
views using
photos**

A practical guide
to running a
photovoice group

Julia Hayes

What is photovoice and where does it come from?



Photovoice is a method used in participatory action research, which aims to empower and support children or adults to not only have their say, but to identify the issues that matter to them and find locally-based solutions for the issues they face. During the process, group members take photos based on a theme (*e.g. exclusion, mental health, loneliness*), discuss and share their photos and, finally, plan their own solutions for the issues they have in common.

Created by community-researchers *Wang and Burris (1997)*, it aims to provide a more equal platform for the voices of people who are least heard (such as parents and children living with a range of challenges).

Photovoice aims to be a tool for change, through helping group members better understand their issues and take action to address them, together.

What does it involve?

The process runs over **four to six weeks** and includes **three** simple phases:



Phase 1: **Introduction to photovoice**

Session 1: Introduction to photovoice

- Group comes together and discusses topic or question of focus
- Group members learn about taking photos and how photovoice works

Session 2: Individual photo-taking

- Group members meet to discuss theme
- Group members go off and take individual photos based on theme

Phase 2: **Photo review and individual story telling**

Session 3: Individual interviews about photos

- Group members meets individually with facilitator to discuss their photos

Phase 3: **Identifying common issues and planning local solutions**

Sessions 4-5: Finding common themes and local solutions

- Group share their photos and identify common themes, together
- Brainstorm solutions and ways of sharing their new insight
- Get involved in sharing insight and/or making changes

Why not just make a questionnaire?



If you want to find out what people think about an issue, you need to choose the right method for the right purpose. Questionnaires are great if your purpose is to find out facts (e.g. age, gender), attitudes and beliefs (e.g. on mental health, cost of living), behaviours or experiences (e.g. likes/dislikes in parks, how often children exercise) or to evaluate a programme (e.g. how much did children enjoy our session?).

What questionnaires do not give is an in-depth understanding of why people think as they do, or the very local barriers they face. Also, the views of people who aren't confident, or interested, in written or online questionnaires will be under-represented. Finally, asking questions based on your assumptions and priorities misses the opportunity to co-produce sustainable solutions with the real experts who get it - the people that live and breathe the issue, in their local area, every day.

Questions to ask yourself before you start





Who should lead the group?

The **Photovoice** process can lead to in-depth conversations on sensitive issues, so you need to consider very carefully who will run the group.

The group should be led by someone who is **experienced** at managing groups and who is able to keep the group sessions emotionally safe for all involved.

It is important that what people say is kept confidential, so you want to choose someone who can be trusted.

It is also important that the person knows the safeguarding procedures to follow, in the (*unlikely*) event that someone discloses information which suggests they, or others, are at risk of harm.



Where should we hold sessions?

To help the group feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings, it will be important to arrange a **quiet space** which will not be interrupted by non-group members. Ideally it would be the same space each week.

Try and choose a highly accessible venue (*e.g. think about transport options; inclusive spaces: toileting, step-free, welcoming of the diversity of people*) and offer support for those who might need it to attend (*e.g. childcare, transport buddy, check best timings for individuals*).

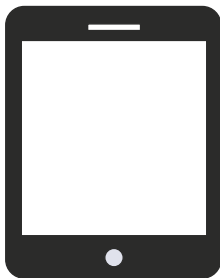
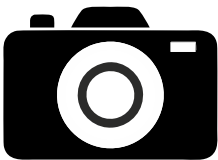




What technology can people use to take photos?

Options include people's personal phones, iPads or cheap digital cameras (*available on eBay or Facebook Marketplace*).

Our project used school iPads, as children were not allowed to use their phones in school. They used their own phones to take photos in the community.





What level of consent do I need?

It is extremely important that all participants can give their informed consent to take part. This means they need to know:

Their participation is **VOLUNTARY** and they can **WITHDRAW AT ANY STAGE** without consequence. They also need to know that what they say is **CONFIDENTIAL**, with a description of what that means for your project (e.g. *who will know what the group or individuals have said? How will this be shared and with whom?*) Children aged under 18 years will need parental permission to take part in a group.

You are welcome to adapt the parental permission and child recruitment letters given in this toolkit as appendices.



Session plans

What follows are adaptable session plans for group facilitators. You are welcome to adapt them as necessary.





Session 1:

Introduction to photovoice

Overview

- Group comes together and discusses topic or question of focus
- Group members learn about taking photos and how photovoice works
- Group members are given 'homework' of taking photos on theme

Time: 30 minutes

Preparation

Materials

- Photo-taking tech, enough for one between two (e.g. iPads, phones, digital cameras)
- Printed photos based upon your theme (around 12-15)
- Print off free pictures from:
www.unsplash.com
www.pixabay.com
www.pexels.com

Be creative – search for funny/quirky photos on the theme e.g. dog wearing sunglasses and smiling for happy emotion. Print pairs of the same photo – children usually like it when someone else chooses the same photo.

- Spare consent forms if working with adults and not all have signed up

Room set up

- Put seats in a circle. Children may prefer sitting around a table
- Spread photos across table/floor, facing the circle of chairs

Session 1 plan



1. Introduction to the project

1a) Introduce project

Notes for facilitator- *Example for children's session*

- The aim of this group is to look at the theme of (X), and we are going to do this using photos.
- I know a little about (theme X) but I wanted to talk to the real experts - who are they? I think you're the real experts – you are here everyday and you know what helps and does not help you with X
- You will have the opportunity to take photos on the theme, talk about them with me and each other
- We will have a chance to plan what we might do about the issues that we all share

1b) Ask people to take a photo that they LIKE or that tells us something about the theme X

2. Explain consent

Notes for facilitator- *It is important that all participants **can give their informed consent** to take part. This means they need to know:*

- Your participation is **VOLUNTARY** - You only have to take part if you want to take part. No-one has to stay, if they don't want to, and if you decide later on that you don't want to take part you won't be in trouble.
- You can **WITHDRAW AT ANY STAGE** without questions being asked, or being in trouble
- What you say is **CONFIDENTIAL**

Ask: What do participants think 'confidential' means?

Give a description of what that means for our project. e.g.

Who will know what the group or individuals have said?

How will this be shared and with whom?

Who will see their photos and in what forum? (e.g exhibition?

Your presentation? Council report?)

What if a group member says something that makes the facilitator think the person, or people around them, are at risk of harm?

3. Warm up activity

3a) Warm up activity

Notes for facilitator- *Children may be more comfortable if your warm ups give them 'sentence starters', where they only have to add a few words e.g. My name is (X) and my favourite TV show is (X), My favourite music is (X)*



3b) Why I chose the photo

Ask participants why they chose the photo - remind them it might have been because it was something they LIKE or has something to say about theme X. Model: I chose this photo because...

4. Photovoice practice: taking photos

4a) How to use the tech

Ask them who has used the tech before

Ask group to show others how to take photo, how to review it, how to delete – have a practice in pairs.

4b) RULES for taking photos of people

Role play two ways of taking photos: with permission, without permission: how does it make subject feel?

People: If taking picture of a person, or their things, you MUST ask them if it's okay to take a photo first. If they say no, find something else.

4c) Practice photo taking in area

Children choose to be alone or in pairs, asked to go off and take pictures of two things/places they like about (school, service, building) and two things they wish could be better.

4d) Share photos and think about what it has taught us about taking photos

Group members return with their photos.

- Each person chooses one and says why they took it
- Discuss what was easy or hard to decide what to take photo of?
- What did they learn about each other?

OPTION: If you have more time, you could potentially combine Session 1 and Session 2.

Remember that the more the group meets the more comfortable they will feel with each other. However, if it is difficult to bring everyone together then it might be preferable to have a longer session and add in the session 2 steps (*theme discussion and homework setting*).

5. Close session

Ask: Give me one word that describes how you felt about the session today?

Session 2

Theme discussion and taking photos

Can be added to session 1

Overview

- Group members meet to discuss theme
- Group members take individual photos based on theme

Time: 20 minutes in group

Preparation

Materials

- Photo-taking tech, enough for one between two (e.g. iPads, phones, digital cameras)
- Printed photos based upon your theme (around 12-15)
- Flip chart and pens

Room set up

- Put seats in a circle. Children may prefer sitting around a table
- Have drinks and snacks available



Session 2 plan



1. Introduction and ground rules

Notes for facilitator-

Reminder of consent and confidentiality

1a) Describe what we are doing today

1b) Generate group rules: ask the group what would help them feel safe, here. Prompts: confidential, be kind to others, okay to have different opinions, respect people and pronouns.

2. Warm-up activity

See session 1, 3a

3. Discussion about theme

3a) Discuss the theme: what makes it hard? What helps? (Record their answers on flip chart)

Note: You may already have a broad theme, but the group may have views on what aspect of this they want to focus upon.

3b) If we were taking photos of these answers, what might we take a photo of? (Remember, it can be a person, place, object or space – or something else)

4. Homework setting

4a) Tell participants they have 'homework' to take photos, which they will discuss with you next week. Ask them to take pictures of things that HELP with X and things that DO NOT HELP with X. Reminder: the photos can be of an object, a space, a person or an action.

4b) Discuss boundaries

As a group discuss and decide:

- Where can we take photos? (e.g. only your service or also in the community?)
- Is it okay to take photo of wrongdoing? Something illegal?
- How will members share the photos with you before you meet with them? (e.g. will they email you in advance? Bring their tech to show you? Print them off themselves?)

Session 3

Individual photo review

Overview

- Facilitator and participant review their individual photos
- Discuss why a person took the photo and the story behind it
- Write caption for each photo

Time: 30 - 40 minutes per person

Preparation

Materials

- Printed photos if you have already received them from the group member X 2 (one for them and one for you)
- Pens and paper

Room set up

- Table and two chairs – put chairs at 45 degrees so both can see photos
- Make room or space cosy – avoid big empty rooms and consider moving furniture to lighter spot
- Have drinks and snacks available



1. Introduction and reminder about consent and confidentiality

Remember that you need to re-seek consent during each session: how a child feels about consent can vary depending on what has been discussed. Also, children may feel they can't say no because of the power imbalance, so keep checking their body language to see if you are certain you have their ongoing assent.

2. Organise photos

Individual sees their photos first. If they are printed, then sort into two piles: what helps me with X, what does not help with X. Individual can choose to exclude photos from discussion.

3. Participant explains photo:

Notes for facilitator-

Ask: Tell me about this photo, where was it taken, why was it taken and what does it mean to you?

Tips: allow a person time to describe the photo they have taken and tell their story. Telling their story is part of the power of this process for the individual – we are not just here to find out facts or fixed 'truths' about the photo content. Focus is on thoughts and feelings about what the photo means to them.

4. Write a caption for each photo

Ask: what shall we say for this one? What do you want to tell people that it is about?

5. Choose photos they are happy to share with group

Ask: which of these photos would you be happy to share with other members of the group? *(facilitator keeps captioned photos for final session, participant keeps own copy)*

6. Close session

What have we learned about ourselves and each other today?



Session 4

Finding common themes and local solutions

Overview

- Group share their photos and identify common themes, together
- Brainstorm solutions and ways of sharing their new insight
- Get involved in sharing insight and/or making changes

Time: 1 hour

Preparation

Materials

- Printed photos from individuals with captions written on them
- Print off examples of actions other groups have taken
- Flip chart and pens
- A4 paper
- Pens for writing
- If possible: blu-tack or pins to put photos on board or wall

Room set up

- Seats around large table - make sure there is room to move around the table
- Photos on wall or table
- Drinks and snacks

Session 4 plan



1. Introduction and ground rules

Notes for facilitator-

Reminder of consent and confidentiality

Reminder of group rules: confidential, be kind to others, okay to have different opinions, respect people and pronouns.

2. Warm up activity

see session 1, 3a

3. Group review all photos

Notes for facilitator-

Put all examples of what helps photos on table or wall.

Ask group to look at, and reflect upon photos:

What strikes you about our photos? Are there any questions you have for each other?

4. Participants share stories of own photo

4a) Each participant chooses one/two of their photos

4b) Sit in circle, explain what you took, where and why

Notes for facilitator-

remind group of need to listen and be respectful of other people's experiences – people are sharing it the way they saw and felt it, and that is what makes these photos important and powerful.

5. Group identify main common themes

Notes for facilitator-

Put all photos on two large boards: one helps, one makes it difficult.

This is where you step back! You do not have a say on what the themes should be (even if you have an opinion on that). These are their stories and their ideas.

Let the group decide on their own themes and help them discuss differences, or to come to a consensus, where necessary.

5a) What topics are similar? How might you group these photos?

5b) What does this tell us about what helps and what could be better here?

6. Recap main themes

6a) Reflect on themes

- What do you notice about the themes? Anything that surprises you?
- How does it make you feel? (sad, angry, happy? Others...)

6b) Reflect on solutions

- If we wanted to do something about this, what would be your ideas?

7. Discuss possible actions

7a) Discuss action plan

- What could WE do about this, with the skills we have as a group?

Facilitator show examples of what other groups have done

- Who might you want to share this information with, to see how they could help?

Facilitator records people's ideas on what they, as a group, could do to address these issues, on flip chart

7b) Prioritise ideas for action and choose first steps

- Write a small first step for each idea that you want to take forward.

Notes for facilitator-

For actions that all agree on ask participants for a small first step that could start that process off. Remind them that if we say we will do (big plan X), we might leave this place and nothing changes. For that reason we start with very, very small doable steps. Something VERY SMALL that can be done in the next 2-3 days (e.g. send an email, arrange a date)

8. Close group

What have we enjoyed about the process?

What have we learned about ourselves and each other?

What will we do next?



Session 5

Taking action and disseminating insight

Overview

- Group review actions so far
- Engage in planned actions

Time: 1 hour

Keep the action planning going!
If your group have decided that they want to take this further, you should meet regularly to keep on track with whatever is planned..

Consider:

- Who else could help us make this happen? Who would be interested in this topic?
- Who can we ask for help? (Financial, logistics, actions groups within community)

Make sure participants are thanked and informed about what has changed

How will you thank participants?

How can you ensure they know what has changed?



Do you want to take part in a creative photo-taking project?

Have your say on what support children and young people need to support their mental health and wellbeing

(Organisation) and others who work with children are looking at how they can better help young people with (theme). They want to hear from young people about what they need and help them find answers to the problem.

We are running a creative photo-based project for 6-8 young people, which will look at what they think helps and does not help (the problem). Do you want to take part?

When will we meet?

The group will meet (once a week for the next X weeks, venue). You will have the opportunity to talk about what you think children need, take photos in school and in the community, talk about the photos with an adult and have your say on how big bosses should make it better for young people.

Will people know what I have said?

No! We will never give your name and people will not be able to know who, individually, said what. After we have finished, you might decide to share your photos and what you had to say about them, but only if you choose to.

Please state how adults will share info and with whom e.g. The adults will summarise what has been said, overall and e.g. present to the leadership team, put photos in a report/school website, future exhibition

You decide if you want to take part!

We have to get permission from your parent or carer first, but if you are interested then we would love you to be part of it. Taking part is completely up to you and you can drop out at any time if you don't like it, without being in trouble.

Who will be in the group?

(Adult) will be leading the group and there will be 6/7 other students from (school/club/service). We want it to be fun and will make sure you feel comfortable to be in the group. It will be a safe space and what you say will be confidential.

Resource 2: Parental permission letter

Dear Parent/Carer,

(Our organisation) are running a creative photo-based project on *(theme area e.g. mental health)* in *(area/school/club)*. We would like your child to take part and have their chance to have their say about what they think schools and the community need to provide for all children and families. Their views will be put together to inform future support for *(theme area)*.

What will they do?

Your child will take part in a creative photo-taking group, using a popular method called Photovoice. In this, they take photos of things they think (e.g. do and don't support children's mental health and wellbeing). They will then discuss the photos with staff before sharing them with the group members. The group will come up with main messages for leaders and decision makers on what children need. We hope it will help them to feel more confident about sharing their views, and help make changes for themselves and other children.

Which adults are running the group?

The group will be run by *(people and role)*. Both have experience of working with young people who are facing a range of issues, and handling difficult topics with sensitivity.

Who will know what my child has said?

Children's contributions will be kept anonymous, and what they said will contribute to *(state what and who will see this e.g. a wider report on supporting children, which will be read by council bosses and local decision makers like charities that support young people, local NHS leaders, education providers)*. Their photos may be used in reports or presentations, but we will not use those that have faces or anything that might identify the children, their schools or their families.

What will you do if my child is upset or decides not to take part?

(The adults, use names) are experienced at handling children's emotions and stories, and ensuring they leave each session on a positive note. In the unlikely event that children are upset, we will use the usual *(organisation)* processes of support to help them. Children will be reminded that taking part is their choice, and that if they decide to drop out (at any point) they won't be in trouble.

Would you give your permission for your child to take part?

Name of your child: _____

1. Yes I give permission for my child to take part in the group:

2. Yes I give permission for my child to share their anonymised photos within presentations and reports (no faces):

For more info please contact:

Adult, email, 01234 56789



For more information contact
Julia Hayes
(Inclusion & Participation consultant)
julia@inclusioncreativa.com