

Participating in Research

Lesson Plan 1

Key Stages 3 and 4

This lesson for key stage 3-4 from Ipsos and NHS England explores consent in relation to how data is collected, stored and used in the context of a research study, and the factors that affect someone's decision to take part in research. While the lesson has been developed to prepare students for making decisions about whether to participate in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey for 2025, it can be also be used to explore consent in relation to research more broadly, without taking part in the survey. This lesson will be accompanied by a follow-up lesson that will respond to key themes within the survey and is informed by findings from the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey for 2023. The lesson explores positive social norms and the declining use of drugs and alcohol among young people, managing influences around vaping including peer influence, and strategies for accessing support about substance use or wellbeing.

No lesson should be taught in isolation, but should always form part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme. This lesson would work well as part of wider learning about consent in different contexts and about online safety and harms when exploring how data is collected, stored and used.

Content highlighted in blue is included for schools intending to take part in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey for 2025.

Learning objective

To learn about the benefits of young people's involvement in studies that may affect their health and wellbeing, and develop understanding of consent in relation to surveys

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- describe the rights of young people involved in research, including that they can choose whether to give their consent to participate
- explain how data is gathered for research studies, how this can be kept private and how it might be used
- evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of young people participating in research

Resources required

- Box or envelope for anonymous questions
- Flipchart/A3 paper and pens
- Resource 1: *Key questions* (1 set per class, cut up and stuck to flipchart/A3 paper)
- Resource 2: *Information sheets* (1 set per class)
- Resource 3: *Benefits and drawbacks card sort* (1 set per pair)

If this lesson is being taught prior to students participating in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey, students will also need access to the information leaflet for students prior to the survey.

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. These include guidance on ground rules, the limits of confidentiality, the survey and data collection, safeguarding and signposting support.

Key words

consent, informed consent, data, survey, research, participant, participation, public health

Lesson summary

Activity	Description	Timing
1. Introduction	Introduce the learning objective and outcomes and revisit ground rules.	5 mins
2. Baseline assessment	Students identify potential benefits of involving young people in research and how participants can be respected.	10 mins
3. Rights, data and research	Students answer key questions about young people's rights in relation to research, including about consent and data.	15 mins
4. Benefits and drawbacks card sort	Students sort effects of taking part in research into benefits and drawbacks.	15 mins
5. Reflection and endpoint assessment	Students give advice to a friend who has been asked to take part in a research study.	10 mins
6. Signpost support	Remind students how to access further advice, guidance and support related to the lesson content.	5 mins

Baseline assessment



Introduction (slide 3)

Prior to starting the lesson, ensure that Resource 2: *Information sheets* are stuck to walls around the room. Initially this should be presented facing the wall, so students don't read the information while they complete their baseline assessment.

Negotiate or revisit ground rules for the lesson. Introduce the learning objective and outcomes. Explain that today's lesson will explore consent in relation to how data is collected, stored and used in the context of a research study; how young people can have a voice in research and how this can influence decisions in communities and on a national level; and the factors that affect someone's decision to take part in research.

If this lesson is being taught prior to students participating in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey, explain to students that they will be given the opportunity to take part in the survey and when this will be. Explain that this lesson will help them to explore their decision about whether to participate and is a chance for them to ask questions prior to the survey.



Baseline assessment activity (slide 4-5)

Using **Slide 4**, explain that when making decisions that affect young people, it can be helpful to know more about their needs and experiences. Explain that people and organisations conduct research to help find out more about these needs and experiences.

Working on their own, students respond to questions on **Slide 4**.

As this is a baseline assessment, it is important to use neutral, non-guiding language and avoid giving any further information until the activity has been completed. Use the insights from this activity to gauge students' current understanding and to adapt teaching throughout the lesson.

Ask students to keep their question safe as they will return to this at the end of the lesson.

Use **Slide 5** to share a definition of informed consent. Explain that it's important that people who participate in research can give informed consent to take part, and researchers explain people's rights to them before they take part in a study.

Core activities



Rights, data and research (slide 6)

Explain to the class that in groups of 5-6 students they will be answering questions about research involving young people, the kinds of data that might be collected and young people's rights when participating in research, including in relation to consent.

Give each group one of the sheets of flipchart paper with a question from Resource 1: *Key questions*, as outlined in the resources section above. Give students two minutes to respond to one of the questions, before the groups rotate and move to the next question. Repeat until each group has had the chance to add to all six questions.

Explain to the class that for the next part of the activity, each group will focus on the last question they answered only.

Ask students to turn over Resource 2: *Information sheets* so they are stuck to the wall and can now be seen. Students should use the information from around the room to change or add to the class's response to their question.

Take feedback by asking a volunteer from each group to give a brief answer to their group's question.

1. What information might researchers collect about young people and how might they do this?

Research on young people's health, attitudes, experiences, and opinions is often conducted through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

The Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey will be conducted online.

2. Who might collect information about young people and how might this information be used?

Studies about young people might be conducted by researchers at universities, businesses, government and health bodies like the NHS, and schools. The information is used to improve policies, services, products, and to understand their needs and wellbeing.

The Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey is being carried out by Ipsos (a research organisation) on behalf of NHS England. Results can be used to understand the effects of changes to law, and to understand what substance-related services are needed.

3. If young people participate in research, how might that affect communities and society?

Research involving young people can help shape policies and services that address specific issues that affect them. It can mean young people are treated less as a single group and that decisions better reflect more diverse needs.

4. How might the topic of consent link to research?

Informed and voluntary consent is crucial in research, and individuals have the right to withdraw it. As with consent in any other context, consent should be given freely by someone with the capacity to consent. This means they should understand what they are being asked to do, and that they are not coerced or under pressure to participate. Often there are ways to withdraw from studies and this will be explained to participants before a study begins.

The Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey asks for young people's consent and allows them to withdraw their participation at any point before they submit their survey responses. Once the survey is submitted, data cannot be withdrawn as the responses are anonymous and there will be no way to tell which answers belong to a particular student.

5. What rights might young people have when taking part in research and what might be done by researchers to respect these rights?

Ethical guidelines protect young people's right to privacy, confidentiality, respect, and safety in research. Researchers must consider how risks can be reduced and managed in studies. They also have to consider how they will respect young people's rights to privacy and confidentiality when they present their findings, for example by making data anonymous or by giving fictional names for quotes.

Confidentiality is maintained in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey by using a class link instead of individual student links, and students are signposted to support services at the end of the survey if needed.

6. What can young people do if they have concerns about research they are asked to take part in?

Young people can raise concerns about research and can ask for more information, withdraw their participation, or ask questions to ensure they understand their rights.

The Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey has an accompanying information leaflet for students with details on how to find out more about the study if a student has any concerns.



Benefits and drawbacks card sort (slide 7)

Give pairs of students Resource 3: *Benefits and drawbacks card sort* and ask them to sort the cards into two piles. One pile of benefits of young people taking part in research and one pile of drawbacks. Students could also create a 'not sure' pile if there are cards they are unsure whether to classify as a benefit or drawback.

Then, in their pairs, ask students to write a response to the question on **Slide 7** "Do the benefits of young people taking part in research outweigh the drawbacks? Why?" using the benefits and drawbacks they feel are most important from the card sort. Ask volunteers to share their answers.

Key learning:

- *Young people must give their informed consent before participating in a study, they should not feel pressured to take part in a study and if this is the case then consent has not truly been given.*
- *Research studies involving young people can inform policies and spending decisions so this reflects their needs.*

- *Diverse participation in studies helps to dispel stereotypes about young people and better understand unique experiences.*
- *Being heard empowers young people and helps others to advocate for their needs.*
- *Researchers recognise the time and effort required for participation and try to minimise it.*
- *Topics may be sensitive and might cause distress; researchers should signpost appropriate support.*
- *Young people may have concerns about privacy and researchers should take appropriate steps to anonymise data collected.*

Support: Give students Resource 3: *Benefits and drawbacks card sort* and ask them to identify two benefits and two drawbacks. Of these four cards, ask students to order them from what is most important to what is least important.

Challenge: Ask students to add any additional benefits or drawbacks they can to their response to the question on **Slide 7**.

Plenary / Assessment *for and of learning*



Reflection and endpoint assessment (slides 8-9)

Ask students to imagine a friend has been asked to take part in a research study but they're not sure about it, and their friend has asked what they should do next. Ask students to write a brief response to them and share the success criteria on **Slide 8**.

Ask volunteers to read their response aloud. Use student's responses to judge progress across the lesson.

Ask young people to revisit their question from the baseline assessment and reflect on whether it has been answered. If it has not, ensure students are directed to the anonymous question box before they leave the classroom. Return to these questions during or before the next PSHE lesson.

If students are participating in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey, ensure questions are reviewed prior to taking part in case any questions are pertinent to their participation.



Signposting support (slide 10)

If students are participating in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey, ensure they have access to the information leaflet for students prior to taking part in the survey.

You can download this information for students from the [Materials section](#) of the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey website. If you would like a print version, please request this by email: SDDsurvey@ipsosresearch.com.

Remind students that if they have concerns or would like to talk to someone about any of the topics explored in the lesson, they could talk to a trusted adult such as a parent or carer, or a member of staff in the school such as a head of year or form tutor. As this topic has links to consent in relation to research, ensure that students are also aware of how they can seek support in relation to consent in broader contexts.

If taking part in the Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England survey, further support is highlighted at the end of the survey. Support is also available from:

- Visit www.NHS.uk
- Childline www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111
- Childline: Advice about vaping www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/drugs-alcohol-smoking/vaping
- Young Minds www.youngminds.org.uk

Extension activity

Research priorities

Ask students to write a list of research questions they think would help researchers and decision-makers to better understand the needs of young people. *NB: Ensure that students are reminded of the class PSHE ground rules and ask them to focus on research questions that would be uplifting for young people taking part in a study and support them.*