

2024 General Election: How to campaign in a child-friendly way

You're running for election, and your number one priority is undoubtedly connecting with prospective voters. But if you're elected, you will be responsible for representing all your constituents – even those not old enough to vote.

“Children see things differently to adults and unless we tell the adults how we feel then they aren't going to know or understand our perspective.”

Chan, 14

The benefits of engaging with children and young people in your campaign

Get a clearer picture of local issues

Young people offer a unique perspective and can be open and honest about the challenges they face.

Connect with future voters

By building a positive relationship with future voters they're more likely to be active and interested in voting when they turn 18.

Fight disinformation

Play your part in providing information about the election that young people can trust, to counter unreliable social media coverage.

Empower the next generation

All parties should consider how they can inspire a passion for politics and political debate. If young party members are helping you canvas, take time to hear their views too.

Why it's crucial that children have a voice

1 in 5 people in the UK are under-18, but they often aren't in focus when parties decide on their top campaign priorities.

This has real consequences:

- Families with children have been hardest hit by the cost-of-living crisis.
- Children are more likely to live in households in poverty than any other age group. 4.3 million children are growing up in poverty right now.
- NHS waiting lists for many services are even longer for children than adults, with child mental health services particularly failing to meet rising demand.
- As a result of reduced funding from national government many local areas have lost preventative services supporting children and families, this is linked to record numbers of children entering the care system.
- Cases of adults neglecting, mistreating or assaulting children in England have doubled in five years. *(See Appendices for references)*

Here are some tips for campaigning in a way which meaningfully involves children and young people

1. Communicate clearly and accessibly

- Speaking to your potential constituents in a way that is straightforward, clearly explained and avoids jargon will benefit everyone, not just children and young people.
- Keep in mind that both adults and children may have a limited knowledge of politics, speak English as a second language, or have additional needs which affect how they communicate.

2. When you're door knocking, actively engage children and young people.

- If a child comes to the door while you are speaking to their parent or carer, treat them as a member of the conversation. If their parent is happy for you to, explain to them who you are and what you're doing. Welcome questions and take time to answer them. If you're talking about policies which affect young people, be prepared to discuss them directly with young people.
- If you're not talking to children themselves, ask parents specifically about what challenges they're experiencing as a family, or issues that are impacting their children.

3. If you're running events or visits, make sure you're adding child-friendly, accessible spaces to your calendar.

- Arrange a visit to a school, college or youth activity space. Many teenagers will feel they've narrowly missed the chance to vote and are likely to wait five years for the next general election. Take time to hear their concerns.
- Plan visits or drop-ins in community spaces or businesses catering to families with babies and young children (e.g. parent's groups, libraries). Ask parents and carers what their priorities for their children are.
- When setting up visits to child-friendly spaces, liaise with venues in advance to ensure they're accessible and you're following their processes around keeping children safe. This might include not taking photographs.
- If you're attending a hustings, see if it's possible to invite questions from children and young people.



4. Communicate what your party is offering to do if they get into Government, and what your offer is to children in your constituency.

- Be clear about you'd commit to do for children in your constituency. This might be connected to your party's main goals, to local issues, or your personal values.
- Share what you'd do. Post it on your social media channels or on your website. Make it clear that you value children and young people as constituents.
- Don't fall into easy stereotypes. Avoid the temptation of talking down young people, and challenge these prejudices if you encounter them.

5. If you come across anything that worries you, act.

- If any interactions with children leave you concerned for their safety, or you are worried that they have been harmed or are at risk of harm: speak to your local authority child protection team; follow your party's Safeguarding policy; and contact [the NSPCC helpline](#) for additional advice.
- If you meet a family who are facing challenges and you are concerned for their wellbeing, you can signpost to appropriate services (see *Appendices*), or suggest they contact local authority children's services.



6. Don't forget children whose voices are most often overlooked.

- Many children and young people can face additional barriers to sharing their views and engaging with local politics. Have this in mind when campaigning and be prepared to be accessible and flexible.
- Consider whether you've engaged with the experiences of: children in care, children growing up in poverty, LGBT+ young people, disabled children and young people, young carers, or young refugees and asylum seekers.
- Be aware that different children may have different communication needs and styles, including non-verbal communication. (See *Appendices for further tips*.)
- Many of these children are more likely to rely on and interact with state systems (e.g. the NHS, social security, social care, immigration) and so their lives are highly influenced by political choices.

Appendices

Children at the Table is a campaign by the Children's Charities Coalition: Action for Children, Barnardo's, National Children's Bureau, NSPCC and The Children's Society.

We're campaigning for the next government to be champions for children, and commit to improving the lives of babies, children and young people.

To find out more, go to childrenatthetable.org.uk, [read our report](#), or [watch our campaign film](#).

Services to signpost children and families to:

- [Childline](#): Children and young people under-19 can contact Childline any time of day or night for support from a counsellor.
- [Parent Talk](#): a digital parenting support service from Action for Children, offering a range of online advice and confidential 1:1 chat with parenting experts.
- [Citizens Advice](#): can provide advice on a range of legal and financial issues.
- [Mind](#): can offer support, information and advice on mental health.
- [Samaritans](#): 24-hour helpline available to adults who need someone to listen.

References from 'Why it's crucial for children to have a voice':

1. Population under 18, [GOV.UK](https://gov.uk)
2. Children and cost-of-living crisis, [Action For Children](#)
3. Child poverty, [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)
4. NHS waiting lists, [NHS Confederation](#)
5. Mental health waiting lists, [Children's Commissioner for England](#)
6. Spending on children's services, [Action For Children](#)
7. Increase in offences, [NSPCC](#)

Further tips on welcoming different communication needs and styles:

- Be aware of specific speech and language access needs (such as Makaton, BSL, Talking Mats, PECS or technological resources). These communication methods may take more time than conventional speech.
- Non-verbal communication (body language, facial expressions). For some young people, this is their primary form of communication. Ensure they are supported by someone who knows them well
- Even seemingly confident young people may not say exactly what they are thinking because of pressure, confusion or embarrassment. If they seem hesitant or withdrawn, find other ways of explaining an issue or expressing thoughts.
- [See here for more tips and advice on engaging with disabled children.](#)