

Consultation methods

What is this tool?

This tool provides an overview of the types of consultation and engagement methods your school can use to find out the health and wellbeing needs of the school community. It can help in deciding who to consult with, what you want to find out, and the best method for doing this.

Who is this for?

It is for the health and wellbeing team.

When can it be used?

This tool is useful to consider at Step 2 of the Achievement Program cycle, and then to put into action at Step 3. The tool can also be used at Step 7 to help your school to reflect on what has been achieved.

Deciding which consultation methods to use

To decide on which consultation methods to use, it is helpful to clarify:

- what you want to know
- who you need to consult
- what information is already available
- what other information is needed
- how this information is best obtained
- what valid information can be obtained within the budget and other constraints

Staff notes from Family Planning Victoria (FPV):

This document is from the Healthy Together Victoria's Achievement Program. Steps 2, 3 and 7 referred to on this page relate to the Achievement program, not FPV's Whole School Approach to Relationships & Sexuality Education.

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<http://www.achievementprogram.healthytogether.vic.gov.au/>

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Method	Description	Benefits	Considerations	How to use method
Circle time	A group that comes together regularly to discuss specific topics or issues at a set time. Ground rules are agreed by group members and discussion is usually facilitated by the teacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying problems and engaging participants in suggesting solutions Can build confidence and resilience strategies Provides a formal opportunity to discuss issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should be a voluntary, regular meeting Needs to be facilitated, usually by a teacher Can only involve a small number of people directly (5–30) Ideal number for a circle time is between five and twelve 	Can be facilitated by teachers with their students. It is most effective when circle time is already established as a regular consultation and discussion method in the school.
Photo voice	Cameras are provided to people so that photos, along with a narrative, can capture what they think is good and what they think needs to be improved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables people to record and reflect on strengths and issues Promotes dialogue about important issues through group discussion and photographs Can be used to engage policymakers Helps to demonstrate that the views can be different (e.g. those of students can be quite different from those of the leadership team) Enables issues to be prioritised and promotes discussion about problems and solutions Can be used across a range of language and literacy levels Engages technology (e.g. use of smart phones) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equipment for capturing photos – do students have access to cameras or camera phones or are they happy to use their own? How will the photos be reviewed? (N.B. printing costs) Ethics 	Can be used with staff, students, families and the wider community.

Method	Description	Benefits	Considerations	How to use method
Graffiti or comment walls	A question is put on a board, wall or paper in a prominent place for a certain period of time (one to two weeks). The school community can add their thoughts and comments to the wall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be placed at multiple locations and sites • Enables time to consider feedback and add to over a period of time • Anonymous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to ensure school community is aware of the location and purpose • Participants may be influenced by prior comments made by others • How to ensure appropriate use and comments 	Can be used with staff, students, families and visitors to the school (e.g. services and agencies).
Surveys	A tool used to collect quantitative or qualitative information. A survey may focus on opinions, factual information or involve asking individuals questions. Survey questions are usually structured and standardised. Surveys can also be conducted in an interview style.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An efficient way of collecting information from a large number of respondents • Can be anonymous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will people complete a survey? • If surveying large numbers, who will collate the results of the survey? • The way the questions are written may limit or influence responses 	Can be used with staff, students, families, wider community and agencies and services.

Method	Description	Benefits	Considerations	How to use method
Focus groups	A focus group is a facilitated small group discussion, used to gather people's views about a specific topic. Participants can offer their own views and respond to the views of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies problems and engages participants in suggesting solutions Encourages different perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ideal number is seven to ten people Need representatives from a range of perspectives and work areas Needs to be facilitated Group discussion is conducted several times with similar types of participants to identify trends and common themes 	Can be used with staff, students, families, wider community and agencies and services.