

Guidance on cases of ethics approval involving participants under 18 years old

1. High Risk Cases

High risk cases are defined as those where the research is taking place with children (under 18 years old) in an institutional setting (e.g. school, young offender institution, hospital, 'looked after' children in local authority care). Parental or official carer consent is required.

High-risk cases involving participants under 18 years old should always be verified by the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research (CUHSR), and will usually be referred to the Research Ethics Committee of the Universitat Ramon Llull for approval.

Researchers must ensure:

- Parental/official carer consent is obtained;
- Appropriate measures are in place for informed consent/involvement of participants where competent;
- Researcher has been trained in dealing with non-adult participants;
- Survey design is appropriate to the age group, and use of non-adult participants is warranted. This is particularly relevant to student projects;
- Protocols for use of e.g. school or similar settings have been observed
- Researcher has considered differential potential for distress/adverse effects among non-adult participants, e.g. embarrassment, non-understanding, fear of authority etc.

2. Very High Risk Cases

Very high-risk, sensitive or complex cases involving participants under 18 will require full review by the Research Ethics Committee of the Universitat Ramon Llull for approval.

Very high risk cases are defined as those where the research is taking place in a non-institutional setting. In these cases, codes of ethical practice normally suggest that parental consent should be obtained and researchers are required to conduct interviews in an externally observable space (for example, a room with a glass window open to view from the outside) – or at home, with an appropriate adult in an adjacent room.

Researchers must ensure:

- Written informed consent is obtained;
- Parental/official carer knowledge has been obtained, including formal consent from these parties;
- Participant information and participant consent documentation is appropriately drafted;
- Researcher has been trained in dealing with non-adult participants;
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- Survey design is appropriate to the age group, and use of non-adult participants is warranted. This is particularly relevant to student projects;

Sufficient information must be provided by the Principal Researcher so that members of the Research Ethics Committee can satisfy themselves of the following:

- That use of under-18 participants is vital to the project;
- That all necessary measures and sufficient training have been undertaken or will be undertaken by the researcher to ensure the safety and comfort of all participants;
- That the researcher has sufficiently considered the design of the project and of any forms/documentation to take account of the age of the participants.

If you have any questions please contact us at ethics@esade.edu