

Ground Rules for Participants

Given the personal nature of the experiences which participants may be recalling and sharing, it is possible that some people could experience discomfort or distress. In order to minimise this risk, ground rules will be established at the outset of the project for those participating in workshops.

The ground rules which form part of the consent process for participation in VOICES will include the following:

1. Personal information or experiences shared by the participants will remain confidential among the workshop participants if shared in the private workshop sessions unless explicit permission is given by the participant for it to be shared more widely.
2. Participants are asked only to share their lived experience if they feel comfortable and confident in doing so, and will be reminded that they do not have to share anything that they would prefer to keep private.
3. In speaking about their lived experience, participants agree to only speak about their own individual experiences, rather than to tell the stories of others they know. The experiences of others can and will be discussed in the workshops, but not as part of presentations on lived experience by participants.
4. All participants will be given an opportunity to speak in these sessions, and no one individual or group will be allowed to dominate the space.
5. If any participant feels that someone is dominating the space, they should indicate this with a signal that will be agreed at the beginning of the workshop, and the facilitator of the workshop will take this opportunity to introduce a quick fire round of discussion among all participants where each person gives their perspective on the topic under discussion.

6. The facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the workshop remains a safe space for all participants, and if the discussion becomes polarized at any point or if one or more individuals are dominating the discussion, all participants agree that the facilitator should intervene to steer the discussion back towards the topic.
7. All participants agree to listen respectfully to each other's experiences and not make statements which dismiss the lived experience of an individual or suggest that it is less valuable than other kinds of evidence.
8. All participants agree with the purpose of the VOICES project – which is to explore the lived experience of people with disabilities in exercising legal capacity, and to develop ideas for expanding the law and policy to achieve universal legal capacity across a wide range of legal and policy areas.

These rules may be adapted by participants based on their experiences and will be discussed and finalized in the first exploratory workshop. A distressed participants protocol has also been prepared and is available to view at www.ercvoices.com. In general, the procedure will be that if a participant becomes distressed, the research team will ensure that they are given an opportunity to take a break or to stop telling their story. Participants can always leave the workshop if they wish, and will be given a contact list of the relevant support organisations in the local area who can provide assistance. A specific member of the VOICES research team will be designated as the point person for distressed participants and will be present at every workshop and conference.