

Obtaining informed consent

Evaluation resources from Wilder Research

Informed consent

Everyone who participates in evaluation should do so willingly. In general, people participating in any research project, including a program evaluation, have the right to:

- Choose whether or not they want to participate without penalties (e.g., participation in the evaluation should not be a mandatory requirement for receiving services).
- Withdraw from the project at any time, even if they previously agreed to participate.
- Refuse to complete any part of the project, including refusing to answer any questions.

The word “informed” is important – in addition to choosing whether or not to participate in the evaluation, people have the right to understand all implications of participating. To ensure that potential participants can make an informed decision regarding their involvement, be sure to provide them with information about the evaluation, including: why it is being done, what you are asking them to do, how you will use the information, how long it will take, the potential benefits of participation, and any foreseeable risks, including possible discomfort due to participation. Be sure to share this information using understandable language – avoid jargon and translate if needed. Also, it is important to allow the participant the opportunity to ask any questions about the evaluation or the consent forms.

Obtaining consent

Participants may not need to sign a consent form if they are adults capable of making decisions, have not been coerced, and will not be put at significant risk by participating in the evaluation. For example, if you want participants to fill out an optional anonymous survey asking them if they were satisfied with specific elements of a program, the fact that they complete and return the survey can be construed as providing consent. Signed consent forms may be necessary in other situations, however, especially if you plan to:

- Include children or others who cannot provide their own consent (in which case you will need to obtain consent from a legally authorized person, such as a parent or guardian).
- Collect very personal, sensitive, or identifiable information.

Gather information about participants from other third parties, such as program staff, teachers, family members, or others.

- Require significant time or effort on the part of participants, such as asking them to participate in multiple or time-consuming interviews.

When working with youth, especially youth under the age of 18, parental consent might be required, in addition to minor assent to participate. Youth over the age of 18 can provide their own consent to participate, and therefore parental consent is not necessary.

Types of consent

There are two types of consent: passive and active consent. These two kinds of consent are most often considered in research with minors, though they can be used with any group you are evaluating. Parental consent is the process of informing parents or guardians that their minor child is being asked to participate in an evaluation, giving them the opportunity to ‘opt-out’ of the survey or evaluation. *Passive parental consent* procedures assume all minors will participate in the survey, unless a parent requests that they do not participate. *Active parental consent* requires the written permission of parents before a child can be asked to participate in the evaluation. Passive consent can be used when evaluation questions are not very sensitive or personal in nature and/or when the time or effort investment on behalf of the child is minimal. When the evaluation questions are sensitive, the time required is significant, information is being obtained from a third party, or information is identifiable, active parental consent will probably be required.

In addition to parental consent for minors, *youth assent* is often also required. With youth assent, youth who have been given permission from their parents to participate in the evaluation can still decline participation. The youth assent process is similar to the consent process, and all of the same information will need to be provided, but youth assent alone is not sufficient to allow youth to participate in a study. It must be accompanied by parent or guardian consent.

EXAMPLE: Student assent form

[insert organization] provides [insert program]. They would like to know whether their program is interesting and helpful. This evaluation will help [insert organization] improve and expand its program to [insert program objectives].

You are being asked to [insert participation request]. Your participation is voluntary, meaning you do not have to participate if you do not want to. It is okay to withdraw from the study at any time; so even if you decide to participate, it is okay if you change your mind later. We hope that you will decide to participate because your thoughts and opinions are very important and will help the program appropriately teach students like you about ATOD prevention.

If you are uncomfortable with any of the aspects of what you're being asked to do, it is okay for you to skip those questions. Your responses will be confidential.

[If any aspect of the evaluation, including data collection, includes questions relevant to behaviors such as drug use or abuse, the program should make clear the potential obligation to report this information, or make it known that this information will remain confidential. Make sure you know your reporting requirements before you begin the evaluation, and make those requirements known to potential evaluation participants to increase the credibility of the evaluation process, and to protect everyone involved.]

If you would like to participate in this study, please complete and sign the section below. We appreciate your time and hope you enjoy our program. Thank you!

By signing below, I agree to participate in this study about [insert program]. I have read this form and/or have had it read to me and understand the purpose of this study. I know it is okay to stop participating in this study at any time if I change my mind later on.

Name (Please print)

Signature

Student ID #

Date

This form is an example only. Refer to the policies of your school district for more specific requirements.

EXAMPLE: Passive parent consent form

Dear Parent/Guardian:

[*inset organization*] is partnering with your child’s high school to present [*inset program*]. This program will [*inset objectives*]. For more information about [*organization*], please go to [*website*] or call [*contact person*] at [*telephone number*].

Additionally, [*organization*] is evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Your child’s participation in this evaluation is voluntary, meaning he or she does not have to participate if he or she does not want to. Students who participate in the evaluation will [*describe evaluation components*]. This information will be used to determine whether students learned about the available resources and whether they have any recommendations for improving the program.

We do not anticipate that exposure to the program or the evaluation materials will result in significant distress on the part of your child. If any aspect of the program makes your child uncomfortable, he/she is free to withdraw at any time. If your child feels uncomfortable answering any of the evaluation questions, he or she may skip those questions. If students are distressed, they are encouraged to talk to their health teacher or school counselor. Student responses to the survey will be confidential. Only research staff will have access to this any information.

[If any aspect of the evaluation, including data collection, includes questions relevant to behaviors such as drug use or abuse, the program should make clear the potential obligation to report this information, or make it known that this information will remain confidential. Make sure you know your reporting requirements before you begin the evaluation, and make those requirements known to potential evaluation participants to increase the credibility of the evaluation process, and to protect everyone involved.]

If you would prefer your child NOT receive the program and/or participate in the study, please complete and detach the form below and have your child return it to their health teacher by XX-XX-XXXX. You may also contact XXXX @ XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Child’s name: _____

Please Print

This form is an example only. Refer to the policies of your school district for more specific requirements.

Check one only.

Please exclude my child from the program and the study.

Please exclude my child ONLY from the study.

Parent Signature

Date

EXAMPLE: Active parental consent form

Dear Parent/Guardian:

[*inset organization*] is partnering with your child’s high school to present [*inset program*]. This program will [*inset objectives*]. For more information about [organization], please go to [*website*] or call [*contact person*] at [*telephone number*].

As part of this program, [organization] is assessing the impact of the program on students by asking students to complete a survey at the end of the program. The school district will NOT use the data to identify any individual student's responses to the survey questions. As a parent, you must give consent before your child can participate in the survey, as required in the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA). Information on PPRA is available from our school.

[If any aspect of the evaluation, including data collection, includes questions relevant to behaviors such as drug use or abuse, the program should make clear the potential obligation to report this information, or make it known that this information will remain confidential. Make sure you know your reporting requirements before you begin the evaluation, and make those requirements known to potential evaluation participants to increase the credibility of the evaluation process, and to protect everyone involved.]

If you would like to see a copy of the survey, it is available for your review. Please contact _____ to make arrangements to review it.

Again, please return the consent form attached before _____ if you consent to your child completing the survey. If you should have any questions, please contact _____.

_____	_____
Child/youth name (please print)	Parent/guardian name (please print)
_____	_____
Parent signature	Date signed

I acknowledge by signing this form that I/we understand that the child named above will participate in the evaluation under the school district’s standing policy.

Return this form to:

Date due to school:

This form is an example only. Refer to the policies of your school district for more specific requirements.

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For more information

To learn more about evaluation www.wilderresearch.org

AUGUST 2009