Department of Psychology - Ethical Matters

The Department of Psychology at the University of York is one of the foremost, research-led departments in the UK. We pride ourselves in being able to deliver excellent teaching that is informed by research, and, critically, informed by our own research. The majority of our research involves observing and measuring human behaviour. Critically much of this research involves observing and measuring the behaviour of children.

We take very seriously the possible issues that may arise when dealing with children in a research setting. In this regard, the following information is provided so that you, as a parent/guardian, can decide whether or not you wish to allow your child to be studied.

Consent from a head teacher and parent or guardian must be obtained before a child takes part in a research study. This consent can be on an "opt-in" or "opt-out" basis. Opt-in consent is where you must provide evidence that you wish to engage with the research and allow your child to be part of the research (i.e., by filling out and returning a form). Opt-out research proceeds on the understanding that the participant or parent/guardian of the participant consents to the study but must otherwise indicate if this is not the case (i.e., by filling out a form if you do not wish to take part).

We are mindful about the demands that opt-in places on both parents/guardians and schools, and, because of these, we sometimes allow our research to be undertaken according to opt-out consent, particularly when research involves an everyday classroom activity that would otherwise be taking place.

We only undertake opt-out research if we have given you plenty of warning about the planned work and have given you ample opportunity to provide written evidence that you do not wish your child to be included.

Whenever a study is to take place under opt-out consent, we will inform you in writing well in advance. You will then be given two weeks to respond. In the interim we will then send a second ‘reminder’ letter one week later that again describes our intentions to begin the study.

As a department, our default position is that all research should be undertaken with opt-in consent and therefore the Departmental Ethics Committee pays particular attention to cases where approval for opt-out consent is being sought. To be clear, the collection of data cannot be undertaken until ethical approval has been granted by the committee.

We strive to make the best decisions about the suitability of all of our research. With respect to the majority of research with children, our decisions are informed by day-to-day experiences in working with and in schools. If the research is to be undertaken in a school setting, then the work cannot begin without the consent of the Head Teacher.

The Ethics Committee is primarily composed of members of the Department of Psychology at The University of York. Importantly, though, we currently have three lay members who serve on this committee. From time to time we call upon them to offer opinions about the kind of work we wish to undertake. Their advice has been invaluable in informing decisions about the suitability of our planned research and, in particular, our planned research involving children.

Our degree programmes are professionally accredited by the British Psychological Society and our ethical policies are informed by their guidance and advice. For further information please follow this link:

Link to BPS research guidelines

We aim to be as open and transparent as possible and if you have any concerns or questions please contact
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