

“How does a physical space affect children and young people during their child interview”

By Lily

**YOUTH LED PARTICIPATION
RESEARCH PROJECT 2026**

BAIRNS HOOSE AYRSHIRE



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MEET THE RESEARCHER

Hi, I'm Lily. I'm 16 and live in Ayrshire.

You will often see me wearing something pink, including my hair! I like to spend time outdoors, especially when I'm walking Lottie, my golden retriever.

I love doing lots of different projects and trying out different things, including starting my own nails business. When the opportunity came about to work on some research for Children First, it was the perfect thing for me as I could bring my experience into it.

My child interview happened a couple of years ago when I was 14 and I believe there are lots of things we can learn from it and improve. Some of them are really simple and will make such a big difference to others having to go through the same thing.

I am passionate about creating a space for Bairns Hoose in our community. Somewhere safe that is created by listening to what children need.

There are four things that are really important to me:

Children have a right to express themselves.

[Nobody] should have to go through an interview that makes their experience worse.

Children should feel safe.

Children should have a choice.

I hope you enjoy reading my research and our collective voices are heard.

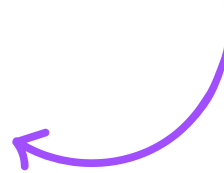
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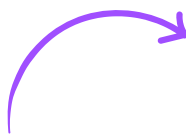
SUMMARY FINDINGS



The setup as it currently exists is daunting, particularly the cameras which children find frightening. It would be better if the child was told about them in advance and if they were less visible.



How the space feels to a child starts from the moment they arrive. Having a trusted adult or familiar face there helps them feel at ease.



Children feel more safe in a space when the adults there take interest in them, for example asking if they have any allergies and offering drinks and snacks. The more that the space feels like a home, the better.



INTRODUCTION

CURRENT RESEARCH ABOUT ENVIRONMENTS

Spaces that remove choice for children or feel unpredictable can be triggering so it's important to reduce these. Spaces are important and can impact children and young people.

"Spaces can impact a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development." (Singh, 2023)

Every child responds to trauma differently and this can depend on their age, what they have seen, heard or witnessed and sometimes they find it hard to speak or communicate this. This is why it's important to create safe spaces for children with these experiences.

"Safe spaces will help children feel less anxious or stressed to talk and help them remember." (Harvard University, 2024)

WHAT IS BAIRNS HOOSE?

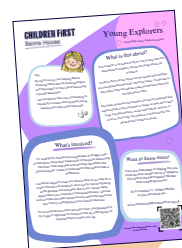
A Bairns Hoose should be a space where children can be heard, respected and supported all in the one place, so they don't need to go to police stations, social work offices, visit doctors or attend court. Children First have listened to many voices of children, young people and families who have experience of the care, justice and protection system and what needs to change. It's important to continue to listen and learn from children, young people and families to try to get it right!

Bairns Hoose rights, advocacy and trauma recovery workers support children and young people when they have been hurt, harmed or been a witness in a crime, this could mean they have been scared or frightened by an adult or peer. Children, young people and their families can be supported by a worker to help them understand things better or make sense of what's happened.

METHODOLOGY

To complete my research, I created a welcome letter to introduce myself and tell everyone about my project. This helped everyone understand exactly what I was doing and why. I offered face to face connections as well as emails and electronic surveys with children, young people and the child interview team. My methods were approved by Children First head of information governance & data protection officer. I also sought out data from the Ayrshire child interview team about numbers of interviews completed where there were disclosures made.

I even rewarded and recognised the young people that took part in the project by gifting them a goodie bag.



WHY CHILDREN'S VOICES MATTER

I asked children and young people in Ayrshire to answer questions based on their experience of their child interview and how the space might have impacted them. Out of the nine voices, my learning is that:

Every child has a right to express their voice and themselves.

They say professionals are experienced, but children feel that they are the [most important people] in any decision because they are the ones with lived experience.

They said:

“We are the ones with the experience and will be the ones remembering.”

Child, 9

“We know what feels right for other children.”

Child, 8



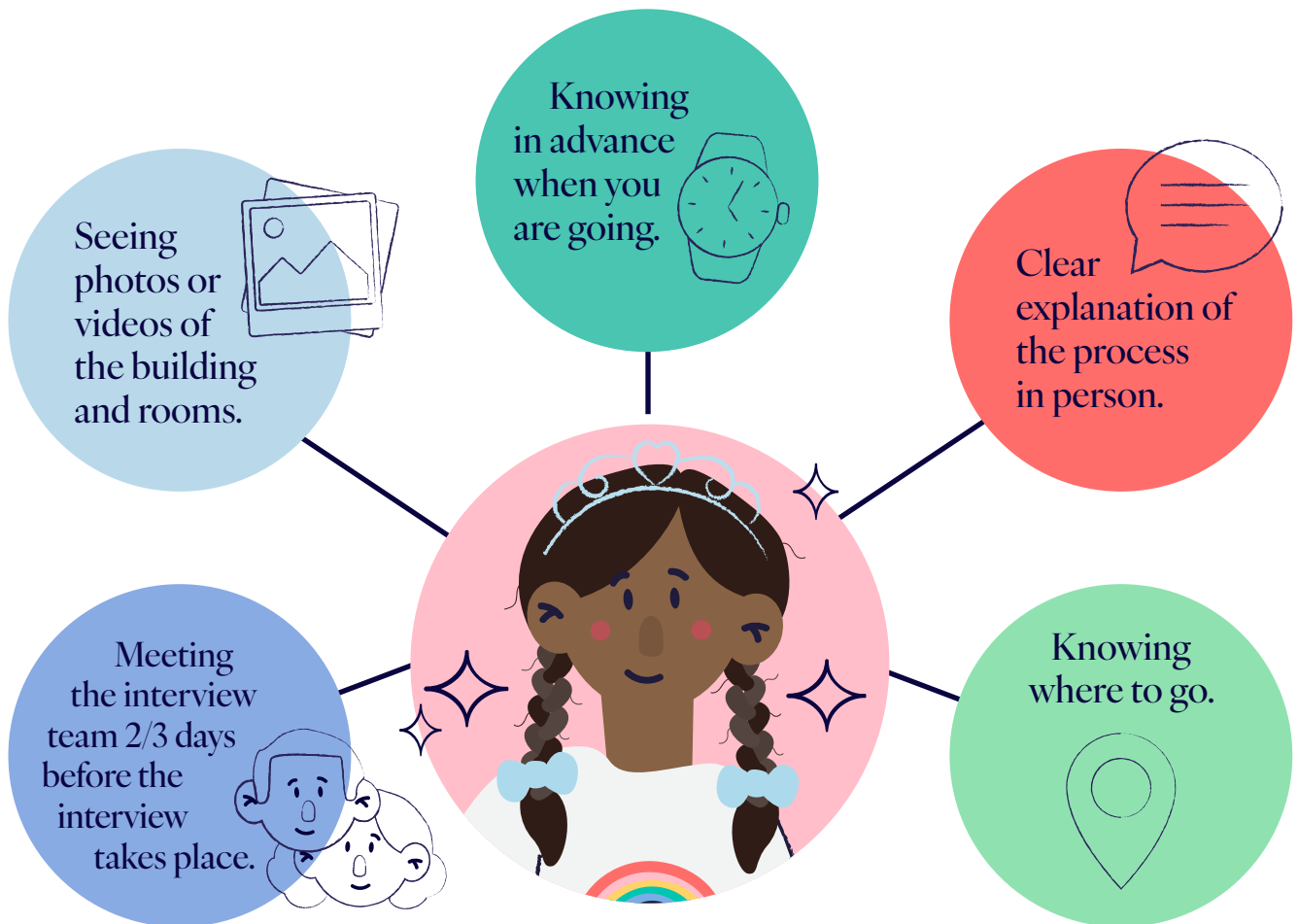
I wanted to get through my child interview as quickly as possible. I was offered breaks, but I was bringing up traumatic, repressed memories and I just wanted it to be over. The team were compassionate but it was the space that really let it down.

WHAT TO CONSIDER BEFORE THE INTERVIEW



Eight out of nine children did not know what the space looked like before going for their interview and said it would have been better to know.

From their feedback they have suggested what would have helped:



They said:

“It would be good to have a map or leaflet.” - Child, 8

“A leaflet, letter or flyer to tell and show you what the space looks like. Something to see or collect before you go.” - Young person, 10

WHAT MADE CHILDREN FEEL LESS SAFE IN A SPACE

I learned that children feel scared of the cameras within the room.

Children want to be told about them before the interview and not on the day or would prefer them to be less visible.

It would be helpful to have colour and character within the space, this would make it less boring.

One child said it was scary knowing they were being 'interviewed' by a police officer, it made it formal.

Others felt like they were being watched and seen by others because they knew that there were other people within the building at the same time.

They said:



“The walls were very bare. Some photos or paintings would have been good because then I would have had something to stare at when I was bored or didn't know what to say.”

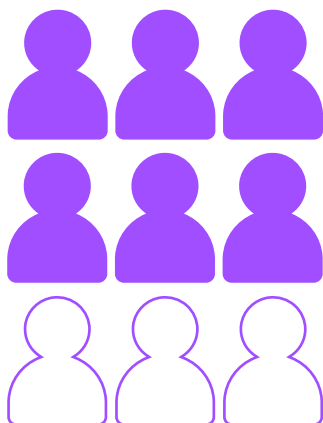
Young person, 17

“It was noisy and when I walked in there was lots of people walking about, they didn't speak to me either so I didn't know who they were.”

Child, 7

“All the cameras being visible I would prefer if they were more hidden.”

Young person, 10



Visible cameras make children feel uncomfortable and not being asked about their needs can impact the overall interview experience.

Six out of the nine young people mentioned the cameras being part of their reason for not feeling safe because they were 'big and scary'.

When I went for my child interview, I was really intimidated by the cameras. They were so obvious. I would have preferred if they were less visible.



HOW TO MAKE A CHILD FEEL SAFE IN A SPACE

I learned a lot from children about how you can make them feel safe in a space. One thing that a lot of the young people told me, was it's important to have trusted adults nearby, who are kind, friendly and explain things. This will reassure and help children feel better.

Adults can show interest in the children by asking them questions about themselves or if they have any allergies. They will feel less worried if you offer drinks, snacks or sensory resources like fidgets.

However, make sure the safe spaces are designed for children and young people of all ages, because a four year old won't like the same as a teenager. This is important because when anyone is surrounded by comfort and given choice you automatically feel safe.



They said:

“Having my support worker made me feel safe in my first interview, she was outside waiting for me. The police officer made me reassured and safe in all the three interviews I have done.”

Young person, 17

“The people were very kind and I knew I could take breaks. It was a bit like my house which was nice and comfy.”

Young person, 10

“The weighted Teddy helped me to feel safe in my second interview.”

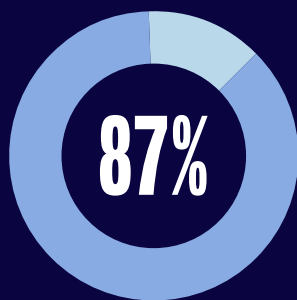
Young person, 17



When I went for my child interview, I wasn't very well because I had tonsillitis. I was absolutely starving, and although the interview team were nice I wasn't offered any food. Plus, there was a McDonald's outside - I could smell the food which made me more hungry and distracted!

THE AYRSHIRE INTERVIEW SPACES

I asked the interview team for an overview of data on child interviews, I was given statistics about interviews and where and when disclosures were made, between **April 2024 and March 2025** and my key take aways and learning are...

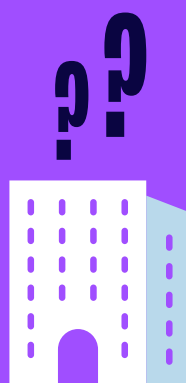


Child interviews with the interview team following the Scottish Child Interview model works well, **207** referrals were made and **180** children made a disclosure (**27** children perhaps couldn't talk, didn't feel safe, or had the choice to not go ahead).

Meadowcroft in Irvine is the most used space.



Out of all the interviews there were still a high number done in spaces being used that are not an interview location. For example, 27 were done within school, 18 in 'other venues' and two unconfirmed.



East Ayrshire young people have the most referrals for child interviews but the only East Ayrshire location (Netherthird) is the least used space out of them all.

I wasn't told where I was going before my child interview, which made the whole experience more daunting for me. Me and my mum were picked up in a taxi by someone I didn't recognise, the car was dusty and smelly and it felt like the journey lasted forever.

I was taken to a building that felt like an old school office which had this long, never-ending corridor to get to my interview space. It felt cold, and there was a noisy primary school nearby which I found distracting. It would have helped me a lot if I could have seen the space beforehand, or had known what to expect.



FEEDBACK FROM THE CHILD INTERVIEW TEAM

What I have learned from the Child Interview team and their feedback about the spaces in Ayrshire that they use for interviews:

- None of the sites are good enough and there are still lots of challenges.
- Wills Road is the least favourite space. Meadowcroft was the most used but still has challenges.
- Netherthird's interview space is within Netherthird community centre, it works but there are still barriers like noise.
- Children First's space has only been used a small amount of times, but this is a new space they have been using.
- Mobile camera equipment is a challenge.
- Privacy matters for the interview team and shared spaces lack privacy.
- Irvine or Kilmarnock are the best location wise for a bigger and better space.
- Appearance matters to the child interview team too, nice homely spaces are needed for them to do the interviews.

They said:

"Meadowcroft has the best break out space but can be noisy."

Social worker, child interview team



(Wills Road)
"The corridor is dark and smells."

Social worker, child interview team

"I don't believe any of the current interview sites are particularly fit for purpose as they are working offices."

Police officer, child interview team



(Irvine) "Most central for children in Ayrshire and central East Ayrshire."

Police officer, child interview team



(Meadowcroft) "The interview room is calming, and children do well within this space"

Social worker, child interview team

"Out of all of them Netherthird community centre is the best one as it provides more privacy... and the staff onsite are friendly, supportive and accommodating."

Police officer, child interview team

OVERALL THOUGHTS AND MY RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERALL THOUGHTS

Child interviews work, that being said physical space affects children more. It's important to think about this when welcoming children into **any** space but most importantly when they are coming to speak about something upsetting or challenging.

MY RECOMMENDATIONS

Comfort items like sensory toys (for all ages), snacks and drinks should be available for every child and every interview.

Children should be given choice and control always.

Privacy from the start in everything about their interview experience.

Children should be welcomed on arrival by someone they know.

Make cameras less visible.

Children should get the opportunity to pick their space for interview.

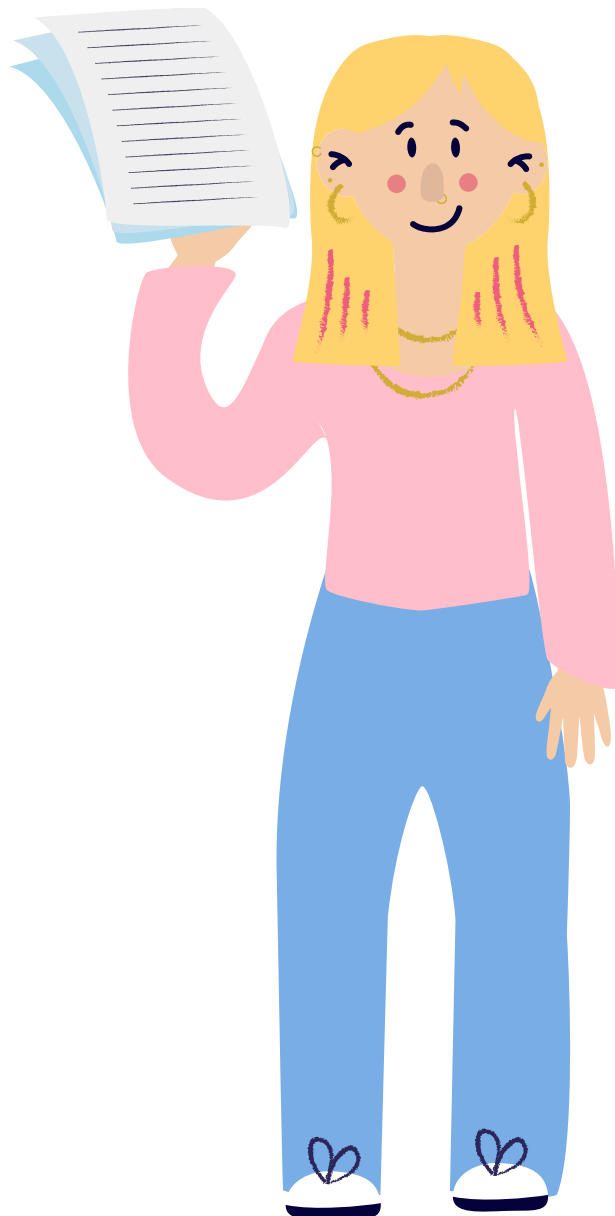
Children and the interview team should create a whole new space for interviews in a Bairns Hoose.



REFERENCES

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2024). *The environments where children live affect their development, health, and well-being*. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>

Singh, A. (2023). *The influences of environmental factors on child development: A comprehensive review*. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Behaviour*, 11(10).



To the children, young people and two staff members from the child Interview team. Thanks so much for taking part in my researcher project. I really appreciate you taking the time to share your views. Your feedback has been helpful and will hopefully contribute to making things better for us young people in the future.

Love Lily x