

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning to measure wellbeing, consider the ethical principles that govern your work. For example, it is important to get parental consent and child assent. Researchers abide by the practice of “consent trumps assent . . . refusal trumps acceptance” (Felzmann, 2009, pp.104-105). Even if a child assents to participating in research, their parent’s lack of consent prevents the child’s participation. Similarly, a child who does not want to participate does not need to, even if their parent has given permission. Thus both a parent’s and the child’s cooperation are required to include a child in research. These principles can guide you as to the importance of obtaining such clearance.

Remember that administering a survey is a type of intervention that may unearth some difficult emotions in students and staff. Rusk observed, “There needs to be appropriate channels of psychological support in place for respondents. I have seen first hand that getting adults and children to complete wellbeing questionnaires can get them thinking and raise some unpleasant emotions” (personal communication, September 4, 2019). Prepare to offer psychological support to students who face difficult emotions involved with the measure you use. School counselors, psychologists, and parents can be valuable in mediating such difficulties.

In addition to involving parents, consider engaging district level and community level stakeholders as part of your wellbeing team. Not only can they help you note additional ethical concerns, but their involvement can help the process move forward in ways that are best for the school and community. For example, community members and district level educators can help you consider relevant political and cultural factors in your area. As you carefully read through each item of the survey, their added perspective can help ensure that none of statements could be offensive to any of the cultures in your area.

Finally, be sure to comply with all FERPA and legal regulations. Be intentional about how and with whom you share wellbeing scores. As mentioned in the Wellbeing from a Growth Mindset section, wellbeing scores should never be treated as academic scores: they should not be used to compare schools or rank students. Share scores only when doing so is in the child’s best interest, complies with regulations, and has the potential to help inform future wellbeing interventions.

Section Summary

- Gather and value parental and child consent.
- As administering a survey is a type of intervention, be prepared to offer emotional support.
- Engage community and district leaders as part of your wellbeing team. Ensure there are no items on your survey(s) that could be offensive to groups or cultures in your community.
- Comply with all FERPA and legal regulations. Be intentional and thoughtful about how you use wellbeing scores. Incorrect use can damage wellbeing and break trust.

Suggestions for Further Research

Felzmann, H. (2009). Ethical issues in school-based research. *Research Ethics*, 5(3), 104–109.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/174701610900500304>

SRCD. (2007). Ethical standards for research with children. *Society for Research in Child Development*.
<https://edtechbooks.org/-Dpx>

US Department of Education. (2018). Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). <https://edtechbooks.org/-rzDE>.



This content is provided to you freely by BYU Open Textbook Network.

Access it online or download it at https://open.byu.edu/wellbeing/ethical_considerations.