



UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

**[NB! Delete this part after adapting the template to your project! Use Ctrl+F to find all the square brackets containing instructions and address them if appropriate or delete if not.**

Please note:

1. While persons younger than 18 years cannot legally consent to participate in research, it is considered an appropriate recognition of their human rights to ask them to assent to research. Children who can understand the basic concepts of research should be allowed to assent to a research study.
2. Generally, children aged 7 to 17 should assent to research in writing. This is not a fixed rule, and some children younger than seven may well have sufficient insight and understanding to give assent for a study, though in a more limited and verbal format.
3. Even after receiving ethical clearance, continued respect for the participants demands that the researcher assess whether the child in front of them is capable of assenting to participate in research.
4. If any child refuses assent, this refusal should be accepted, even if the parents/guardians have consented. There may be exceptional cases where this rule may not apply. The REC should be consulted.
5. All children are considered vulnerable, but some will be more vulnerable than others, and the assent should be drafted with this in mind.
6. All language used should address the child directly and be appropriate for their age and reading level. There are various online tools to assess reading levels and adjust the complexity of language (for example, generative AI can adjust your writing to suit the children's ages, though it should be used with care and reviewed). If you do not have experience interacting with the ages of the proposed population, it would be good to consult with someone who does (for example, a teacher).
7. This template is particularly for pre-adolescent 7-12-year-olds and can be adapted to suit adolescent 13-17-year-olds.
8. In adapting the assent for adolescents, there should be continued respect for the child's age and dignity. Adolescents are more capable of understanding research concepts and may require more age-appropriate information to provide enough context to give informed assent. Generally, it would also be appropriate to remove markers of early childhood (such as the childlike line drawings used to appeal to younger children) or replace them with other forms.
9. If you include a wide range of children in your project, you will need two or more versions of the assent form that match the children's ages and abilities. If a narrower range of ages straddles the pre-adolescent/adolescent divide, the form should be adapted to reflect this.
10. You can adapt the template to suit the needs of your specific project, including deleting sections that are seen as not applicable/appropriate.
11. The assent documents must be presented to children in a language they are comfortable with. This is most likely not English, so translated versions should also be available.
12. The final form should be professionally presented and language edited. The UFS provides all postgraduate students with access to Grammarly.
13. This assent document **MUST** be used in conjunction with a parental information leaflet and informed consent form, which should cover the project in more depth and detail.]

## Participant information leaflet and assent form



Title of the research project: [Insert the title of your project. Simplify it if necessary.]

Researchers' names:

Address:

Contact number:

### *What is **Research**?*

[Explain to children what research is and why it is important; then connect this explanation to your specific topic. Make sure that your explanation is appropriate for their age and reading level. When in doubt, take the route that uses simpler, but still accurate, language.]

Research is something we do to find new knowledge about the way things (and people) work. We use research projects or studies to help us find out more about disease or illness. Research also helps us to find better ways of helping sick children.

### *What is this research project all about?*

[Explain your project in simple, child-friendly language. Adapt the information to the age of the children you plan to include.]

This project is about learning more about [topic]. We want to find out how things work or how people feel about [topic] so that we can help make things better for everyone, such as [insert specific outcome of the research].

*Why have I been invited to take part in this research project?*

[Use simple language and speak directly to the children to explain why they or their class were chosen.

Example:]

You are invited to participate in this research project because your thoughts and experiences can help us better understand [insert topic, e.g., how children feel about school]. Your answers will help us learn more and may help to improve things for other children in the future.

*Who is doing the research?*

[Identify yourself and explain who you work for and why you are doing the project.

The researcher should identify themselves by writing their full name. They should also explain who they are working for – for example, whether they are conducting the research as part of their job (staff research) or as part of their studies (e.g., for a university degree). This information should be clearly stated so that participants understand who is doing the research and why. The information should be understandable to them, given their limited experience.

Example:] Just like you, I also go to school, but my school is called a university. University teaches me how to find new knowledge about how things (and people) work, and I must practise it with such activities.

*What will happen to me in this study?*

[Describe what the participant will be expected to do. Describe all procedures using simple terms and explain any technical or medical terms.

Clearly explain to the children what they will be doing, how long it will take, whether they will have to do it more than once, and whether their participation will be recorded using video or audio.

For example: **Interview:]** You are invited to take part in an interview about [topic]. The interview will last about 30 to 40 minutes. We will audio-record our discussion to make sure we do not miss anything you say.

**[Questionnaire:]**

You are invited to answer some questions about [topic]. It will take about [insert time] to finish.

**[Observations:]**

You are invited to take part in an observation where we will watch you do [activity/topic]. The observation will last about one hour. We will either video record or take notes, but we will only watch things related to [topic].

*Can anything bad happen to me?*

[Explain any possible risks to the child using simple terms. If something might be painful or embarrassing, state this in the assent. Explain that the child should inform his/her parents/guardians or teacher (if appropriate) if they are sick or in pain as a result of being in the study. Remember that children who are too young to process emotions often express emotional discomfort in physical forms such as tummy aches.

The risks identified in the risk section of the application form should be clearly reflected and discussed in this section to ensure consistency; mitigations should be provided.

Example (only applicable if the risk-benefit section has highlighted the loss of study time and emotional distress):] Taking part in the interview/observation/questionnaire may take up some of your study time, but we will make sure that it happens at a time that is good for you. If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you can stop whenever you want. If you feel upset or sad, a counsellor will be there to help you [provide instructions of who to ask for help].

*Can anything good happen to me?*

[Describe only known benefits to the subject. You may include any possible future benefits for others. If there are no known benefits, state so.]

By taking part in this study, you will help us learn more about [topic]. This could help us find better ways to [mention specific outcome related to the study, e.g., support children, improve health, or make schools better] in the future.

*Will anyone know that I am in the study?*

[Explain in simple terms that the subject's participation in the study will be kept confidential, but information about him/her will be given to the study sponsor. (NOTE: This information may not be applicable to assent forms for very young children).

Example:] Your participation in this study will be kept private. Only the researcher and the supervisor will see your information. Sometimes, the Ethics Committee (the group that checks whether the study is safe and fair) may look at the information, but all your details will be hidden, so no one can tell it is about you.



*Who can I talk to about the study?*

[List those individuals the subject can contact if he/she has any questions or problems related to the study. Remember that children may not have access to phones or emails, so the path to talking to someone should be clear and immediate.

Example:] You can talk to me if you have any questions or worries about the study. You may also talk to your parents or teacher [if appropriate]. They are there to help you.

*What if I do not want to do this?*

[Explain to the participant that he/she can refuse to take part even if their parents have agreed to their participation. Explain that they can stop being in the study at any time without getting into trouble. If participation is in group format, the child may have concerns about taking part or refusing. Be clear about what they can still do if they refuse to participate.

For example:] You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to, even if your parents say it is okay. You can still join the group activities if you decide not to participate. If you start and then feel like stopping, that is okay too; you can stop at any time without getting in trouble or upsetting anyone. Your choice is very important, and no one will be angry if you decide not to take part or to stop.

*Do you understand this research study, and are you willing to take part in it?*

YES

NO

*Have I, the researcher, answered all your questions?*

YES

NO

*Do you understand that you can stop taking part in the study at any time?*

YES

NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of child [their handwriting]

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date