# Frequently Asked Questions

## Do I need to get ethics approval to do this project?

Ethics review is required for all work, involving human participants that will be made public - for example, undergraduate dissertations, theses for higher degrees, externally funded research and 'unfunded' research (including undergraduate and postgraduate research) which produces reports or other publications.

## Research interviews and questionnaires can raise issues which participants find distressing to talk or think about. Does this mean I can't use interviews or questionnaires to do my study?

The possibility that your participants could become upset in the course of your interviews or questionnaires does not mean you cannot use these data collection methods. What you will need to do, however, is to make sure you have the support, knowledge and skills to help someone if they become distressed. This may include both listening skills and written information on services which are available locally to provide longer term support for individuals. In your application for ethics approval, set out your plans for what you will do if a participant becomes upset.

## Do I need to ask my participants to sign a consent form? Some people are put off if you ask them to sign something.

You must obtain formal, written consent from participants. There may be exceptions with certain kinds of anonymous questionnaires, where completion of the questionnaire is taken to indicate consent. This may be the case where questionnaires are accessed via a web link (e.g. Survey Monkey) or with postal questionnaires the respondent signifies their consent when they return the questionnaire to you.

## Can I give potential research participants information and ask them to consent at the same time?

Potential participants are usually give 7-14 days to consider agreeing to be part of a research project. To avoid possible coercion (or perceived coercion) it is considered best practice for potential participants to be approached in the first instance by a person not directly involved in the research study. E.g. a lecturer (not involved in the study) hands out information letters to students and the researcher arranges to meet those interested in participating at a later time.

## I want to use focus groups to collect data, what are “ground rules” that people refer to?

The ground rules refer to a series of recommendations that participants agree to before the focus group begins. The rules ensure that all participants have an opportunity to interact within a group discussion which is also safe and productive for all concerned. Some ground rules include:

* One person speak at a time
* Speak for yourself, using “I” statements
* Participate in both talking and listening
* Be critical of ideas but respect different points of view and different perspectives
* Stay on the topic and don’t digress too much
* Maintain the confidentiality of opinions expressed in this discussion
* Focus on issues that need to be discussed and not individuals
* Wait for one person to finish speaking and don’t interrupt others

## Important points to remember:

* No research should cause unnecessary harm and preferably it should benefit participants.
* Potential participants have the right to receive clearly communicated information from the researcher in advance.
* Participants should be free from coercion of any kind and should not be pressured to participate in a study.
* The consent of vulnerable participants or their representatives' assent should be actively sought by researchers.
* Honesty should be central to the relationship between researcher, participant and institutional representatives.