

Introduction

Justlife is committed to following ethical principles when carrying out research, particularly when this involves individual research participants who may or may not be vulnerable. It is imperative that all researchers actively pursue a model that does not cause harm to any individual or group of people, now or in the future, to the best of their abilities. This policy sets out to give guidance to help in this pursuit. Members of staff must familiarise themselves with this policy before carrying out research, or using material produced with the help of research participants for any other externally facing activity (particularly communications and media work).

The policy sets out the minimum ethical standards that must be adhered to at all times. When specific projects set higher standards, for example around work with particularly vulnerable people or children under 18, staff must adhere to this.

There is an area of concern for Justlife in that, as an organisation, we work directly with individuals currently or recently in temporary accommodation as well as carry out research, networking, communication, fundraising, media and policy influencing activities, locally as well as nationally, which produces a potential for cross-over that can have harmful consequences if not considered throughout and across all areas. This policy is therefore relevant in any situation where content, shared by people with lived experience, is being used. Further, staff should be able to evidence that they have followed the guidelines, for example through signed consent forms, where reasonably possible.

Ethical Principles

The policy is informed by five key ethical principles:

1. Transparency

It is essential that research participants are informed of the intention, and how they fit into it, so that they are in a position to give informed consent.

2. Respect

The researcher must recognise the capacity and rights of all individuals to make their own choices, be treated with dignity and in a trauma informed way.

3. Responsibility

The researcher is responsible for the impact the research has, even if not intended. No matter your intentions, you're responsible for your impact.

4. Safety

The safety of research participants, as well as researchers and other staff, is of primary importance and takes precedence, and may require overriding other aspects of this policy.

For example, if there is concern of threat to life or imminent serious harm, the appropriate support or emergency service should be contacted, even if this compromises confidentiality.

5. Beneficence

While negative consequences may occur, the researcher must endeavour to make sure that the benefits are greater than the risks. The primary goal must be to improve the lives of participants, directly or indirectly, and protect their physical, mental and social well-being.

Ethics in Research

1. Design stage

Consider whether your research question adds new knowledge that will help move towards Justlife's mission. How do your chosen methods help answer the research question? Is there another way to carry out the research that delivers the same insight in a less disruptive way?

2. Selecting participants

Consider participants' suitability before approaching them, with particular attention paid to how disruptive participation in research may be (emotionally, logistically, financially) for participants, and how such disruption can be mitigated.

3. Gaining informed consent

Justlife has a consent form that must be used with all research participants before embarking on research. The researcher should make sure that the research participant has understood the key areas of the consent form. This may require returning to the consent form after a research activity has been completed, to ensure that they are still happy now that they know what the research activity entailed.

4. Conducting the research

Research activities must be planned with the ethical principles of this policy in mind (transparency, respect, responsibility, safety, beneficence). Events however often unfold in ways that were not planned or foreseen. It is the responsibility of the researcher to continually check that all ethical considerations are considered and best practice, as set out in this policy, is followed throughout.

5. Disseminating findings

When disseminating findings, participants' anonymity must be respected unless they have specifically asked not to be anonymised. If so, the potential consequences must be carefully discussed with the research participant, who may not have considered long term implications. Using clients' stories across research, networking, fundraising, communication, media and policy influencing activities, care must be taken that their anonymity is not inadvertently breached through repeated use across different platforms.

6. Using photos

Images of clients and participants on Justlife's website and all other publications must only be used with a signed consent form, and in a way that does not link them to information that could compromise their anonymity. This requires awareness of how individuals feature across research, networking, communication, media and policy influencing activities. Further, as clients' circumstances may change, checks should be made with

relevant support workers as to whether it continues to be appropriate to use clients' pictures on our website on an annual basis, and in case they pass away.

When in Doubt

Situations may occur where it is not clear what the right decision is in terms of ethics. In such situations, the researcher or member of staff should seek to discuss the issue with their line manager before proceeding. If that is not possible, for example if a situation is unfolding that requires immediate decision making, the researcher or member of staff must use their judgement, guided by the principles set out in this policy. After the event, as soon as practicable, the researcher must write down what occurred, the decision taken and any reasoning behind that decision. This must be shared and discussed with their line manager, who will advise on further actions, if needed.