



**Sport  
Empowers  
Disabled  
Youth**

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# SEDY2 project

## Inclusive (Online) Focus Group Guidance 2021

Vera Dekkers, Afke Kerkstra & Jasmijn Holla  
Inholland University of Applied Sciences, 2021



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## **SEDY2 project – Inclusive (Online) Focus Group Guidance 2021**

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# Introduction

This is a revised Inclusive Focus Group Guidance. The original guidance of the Focus on Me project, based on Great Britain pilot-phase experiences, was written in 2017 by Niamh-Elizabeth Reilly, Guin Batten, Sarah Jenkins and Rachael Batters. This revised (2021) guidance contains updated materials and lessons learned by the Sport Empowers Disabled Youth 2 (SEDY2) project partners during 2020 and 2021. Special thanks to Dr. Janine Coated and Dr. Lesley Sharpe for their contribution in developing this method.

*The Focus on Me* pilot was led by the Youth Sport Trust, as part of the first Sport Empowers Disabled Youth (SEDY) project (2015-2017). Focus on Me aimed to develop and pilot a cross-cultural, easy-to-use guidance document on how to deliver inclusive focus groups to attain the authentic views, wishes and feelings of a child or young person with Special Education Needs or Disabilities (SEND) about the demand and supply of sport and physical activity in their local area.

The updated (online) inclusive focus group method was led by Inholland University of Applied Sciences, as part of the Sport Empowers Disabled Youth 2 (SEDY2) project (2020-2022). The updated method aimed to develop an easy-to-use guidance document on how to deliver inclusive focus groups to attain the authentic views, wishes and feelings of children and youth with a disability about inclusion in sport in practice. This guidance document was produced in order to support other practitioners in conducting inclusive focus groups. The focus group guidance can easily be adapted to cover other topics and can also be used effectively with (young) people without disabilities.



# 1. About the SEDY project

## a. SEDY project (2015-2017)

The SEDY project was a three-year project (2015-2017) funded through the European Union (Erasmus+). The goal of the project was to better match the demand and the supply of sport in order to contribute to an increase in physical activity among children with SEND. The SEDY project was coordinated by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, School of Sports & Nutrition, and had nine partners from across seven countries (the Netherlands, Finland, Great Britain, Italy, France, Lithuania and Portugal). The Youth Sport Trust was one of the partners from Great Britain.

For more information visit the [project website](#)

## b. SEDY2 project (2020-2022)

The SEDY2 project is a three-year follow-up project (2020-2022) also funded through the European Union (Erasmus+). The goal of the project is to encourage inclusion and equal opportunities in sport for children and youth with a disability. The SEDY2 project is coordinated by Inholland University of Applied Sciences and has eight partners from across four countries (Finland, Lithuania, Portugal, the Netherlands) and one European umbrella organization (European Network of Sport Education).

For more information visit the [project website](#)

## 2. About the focus group method

In the inclusive focus group study, a focus group guidance has been tested and developed to deliver inclusive (online) focus groups in order to attain the authentic views, wishes and feelings of a child or young person with a disability about inclusion in sport in practice. The study involved 16 children and young people with a disability across Finland, Lithuania, Portugal and the Netherlands.

### About the online focus group method

Due to COVID-19, all focus groups during the SEDY2 project had to be conducted online. Whereas conducting focus group interviews online has several limitations (harder to read body language, digital skills required, etc.), it also had some advantages (no travel time, children can feel more comfortable when there is a screen in between, etc.). Additional information about conducting online focus groups is provided in the text boxes later in this document.

### a. Rationale

#### The limitations of surveys versus the opportunities of focus groups

To attain the views of people, survey research is prevalent, especially in studies of health services and this method remains most used in applied social research. The term 'survey' is used in a variety of ways, but generally refers to the selection of a relatively large sample of people from a pre-determined population (the 'population of interest'), followed by the collection of a relatively small amount of data from those individuals. The researcher, therefore, uses information from a sample of individuals to make some inference about the wider population (Kelley, Clark, Brown & Sitzia, 2003). Survey research is sometimes regarded as a straightforward research approach, however, for people with SEND, issues have been found with the use of written surveys (paper or online). A vast amount of these surveys use verbose language and a Likert scale (a numerical scale used to measure people's

attitudes/responses to a topic) and this is not always accessible or understood due to potential literacy, numeracy and cognitive processing delays in young people with SEND.

A substantial prevalence of 'proxy' reporting has been found in relation to the use of surveys for young people with SEND (Batters & Reilly, 2015). Proxy reporting is when survey responses are provided by a respondent about another person (Tucker and Miller, 1993). Ison (2009) state that proxies are regarded as more accurate for gaining objective information about the person whose views are being sought but may be less accurate for subjective ideas and opinions or sensitive information (Hendershot, 2004; Kroll, 2011; Parsons et al., 2001; Watson, 2012).

People with SEND, who have difficulty answering survey questions, need to be allowed an assisted response 'in which the person responds with help from a self-selected family member or caregiver'. Although this is a preferred method to proxy as it relies on direct answers from the respondent (Kaye, 2007), caution must be taken as, in an effort to provide more detailed responses, some well-meaning people who are supporting assisted responses can convert to proxy responding for that person.

Surveys also assume that people know how they feel, but that is not always true. Sometimes listening to the opinions of others in a small and safe group setting is needed to help form thoughts and ideas.

Focus groups offer an opportunity for children and young people with SEND to take part in the research. A focus group is simply a method of research involving a small group of people (usually six to eight participants) who are guided through a discussion by a moderator. Focus groups can be used to explore a variety of different issues, to test solutions, to explore the group's perspective of a problem and to generate ideas. Although surveys are typically quicker to administer and seen as



a more uniformed way to conduct qualitative research, focus groups enable more complicated, nuanced, and diverse responses compared to surveys which do not permit as much interaction from participants (Berkowitz, 2016). Focus groups have many advantages as they do not discriminate against people who cannot read or write and can encourage participation from people reluctant to be interviewed on their own or who feel they have nothing to say (Kitzinger, 1995).

Having SEND does not define that individual and their experiences. People with SEND have something to say that is worth hearing and experiences that are worth understanding (Nind, 2009). To date, many focus groups with participants with SEND have focused on participants at the upper end of the intellectual spectrum (Rackensperger et al., 2005; Prior, Waller & Kroll, 2011). Hence, it was particularly important that practical and functional methods to obtain meaningful information on the views, opinions and experiences of all young people with SEND were developed.

### **Overcoming the barriers of the format and presentation of research**

There are many studies which look at the barriers to inclusion in research for people with SEND (Wilson et al; 2013). Barriers frequently reported are “limited literacy and vocabulary, lack of a concrete frame of reference, difficulty with abstract concepts, difficulty with temporal concepts, communication barriers including unresponsiveness and inarticulateness, limited attention span, and fatigue (Booth & Booth, 1996; Paterson & Scott- Findlay, 2002; Whitehurst, 2007; Carlsson et al., 2007, Wilson et al., 2013)”. Additionally, the format and presentation of research questions and information can act as barriers to the meaningful participation of people with cognitive impairments (Rodgers & Namaganda, 2005).

Wilson et al. (2013) stated that a practical strategy to overcome these barriers is to utilize various

enhancement tools such as visual aids, symbols, tapes/videos, simple words and clear questions, and story techniques (Owens, 2007; Kroll, 2011; Parsons et al., 2001). Meaningfully incorporating these tools into a focus group session can enable all participants to communicate effectively as they can utilise their preferred communicative modes and it can foster an optimal communication environment for all respondents (Whitehurst, 2007; Owens, 2007; Wilson et al., 2013). Garstka (2010) affirms that there are many advantages to using photographs, images, text, symbols and props in focus groups. They can stimulate interest; engage participants; trigger responses; keep participants on task (non-verbal cues); be used as exploratory tools; provide different ways to communicate and participate; give participants some security; help to re-shape the dynamic between researcher and participants by empowering subjects; and they are seen as fun to use.

### **b. Aim of the SEDY2 inclusive focus groups**

The aim of the (online) inclusive focus groups was to ensure that the authentic views, wishes and feelings of children and youth with a disability about inclusion in sport in practice were attained.

### **c. Outcomes of the SEDY2 inclusive focus groups**

The inclusive focus groups aimed to elicit the following outcomes:

- **MEANING OF INCLUSION:** Supported by the moderator, the young people explore what inclusion in sport means to them in practice. They also identify whether they can participate and feel welcome in their choice's sport/physical activity. Finally, they define situations in which they felt included or excluded and explain why.
- **SPORT POSSIBILITIES:** the young people discuss and explore which sports and physical activity options are available to them and whether these suit their needs and wishes (what they like). They also identify whether they are satisfied with the sports opportunities they are given and what

they like or dislike about certain sports/physical activities. Finally, they discuss and explore why participation in sports and physical activity activities is important to them.

The YOUNG PEOPLE taking part in the inclusive focus groups will have a better understanding of what inclusion in sport means to them and why. In addition, they may be able to communicate this back to parents/carers, teachers and sports coaches in order to obtain a more inclusive sports environment.

In this focus group study, to get a complete overview of inclusion in sport in practice for children and youth with a disability, also PARENTS and SPORT PROFESSIONALS took part. They will have a better understanding of what inclusion in sport means to (their) children with a disability and they may be able to communicate this back to teachers, coaches, other sports professionals, sports organisations and policymakers to obtain a more inclusive sports environment.

The RESEARCHERS will understand inclusion in sport in practice regarding children and youth with a disability and their particular needs to enhance inclusion and equal opportunities in sport.





### 3. Inclusive focus group logistics

#### a. Participants

Based on our experience, the recommended number of young people with SEND to take part in each focus groups is three to six children/youngsters.

#### b. Consent

When running focus groups with young people it is essential that written informed consent is given by the child and/or their parents/guardians (when the child is under 18 years old). Easy Read<sup>1</sup> or Makaton<sup>2</sup> formats can be utilised to assist the understanding of information by them and ensure consent for the young people.

The consent form should include the following information:

- Purpose of the focus group and a break-down of what the focus group will consist of;
- Expectations of the young person;
- Confidentiality of all responses;
- How the information gathered will be kept safe (including whether names will be used);
- How the young person can leave the focus group or ask to remove their views from the research at any time;
- Space for the child and/or parent or guardian to sign.

Before conducting focus groups, it is wise to think about which participant information you need (please consider privacy legislation). See Appendix 1 for an example of the SEDY2 informed consent form for children in which graphics are used to support the meaning of the text.

#### c. Moderator/facilitator

An individual who is skillful in group discussions is required to facilitate the focus group. Assistants may also be required. It is recommended that at least one individual assisting in the focus group is someone with whom the participants feel comfortable (for example, a teacher). This will

ensure that participants feel more comfortable and confident when answering the questions in the session.

Once any assistants or other members of staff are in the room (or digital environment), they should not leave and reenter the focus group space as this can lead to participants becoming distracted and uncomfortable during the session.

#### d. Environment

If possible, an environment which is well known by the young people should be used. It should be a comfortable environment with provision for a table and circle seating (for example a quiet classroom environment).

#### Environment - Online focus group method

When the focus group takes place in an online environment, if possible, an online environment which is well known by the young people and/or their parents/carers should be used. It should be an online environment with a chat function (including the use of emoji's) and preferably a drawing function (for example Teams or Zoom).

#### e. Time

Keeping sessions short ensures that young people can fully concentrate on the whole session. This is particularly important for young people with additional support needs. It is recommended that the focus group for children/youth lasts no longer than 30 minutes in total, which would include 20 minutes for questioning and 10 minutes for off-topic and follow up questions.

1 The easy read format uses pictures to support the meaning of text and was created to help people with learning difficulties understand information easily.

2 Makaton symbols support the written word. It is a language programme using signs and symbols to help people to communicate.

Additional time is required to prepare for, and set up the focus group or when online to log in, provide the preferred setting and test if everything is working.

## f. Equipment

We would recommend that the following equipment is used in the focus group:

- At least one tablet device (to create video / photographic records)
- Dictaphone to record the focus group (essential to ensure that all young people are happy to be recorded and that consent is obtained for this)
- Name stickers
- Paper, for example flipchart paper, A4 paper, post-it notes
- Colored pens
- Adhesives (for example blu-tac to stick paper/posters to walls and sticky tape/glue to stick things to paper)

In our experience, the following equipment may help to enhance your focus group:

- Video/audio equipment
- Data projector, screen, speakers and laptop
- Polaroid camera with enough film
- Young people can be encouraged to bring their mobile phones / tablets (if allowed by the school)

### Equipment - Online focus group method

When the focus group takes place online we would recommend the following additional equipment/functions are used in the focus groups:

- Laptop
- Stable internet connection
- An online environment including: chat function (including the use of emoji's), raising hand or similar function and whiteboard/drawing function
- Separate video equipment to record the meeting

## g. Resources

We would recommend that the following resources are used in the focus group:

- **Pre-determined questions:** a set of pre-determined questions or topics will help to guide the discussion and ensure it stays focused
- **Prompt cards:** for broad questions, these can help to narrow the topic and provide examples. They also provide ideas on the area you are wishing to explore.
- **Chateez cards:** Chateez emoji cards (see below) can be used for ice breaker activities and to start conversations. This can encourage students who are nervous and can create a sense of individual ownership, within the session.



**Image 1.** Chateez emoji cards ([www.chateez.co.uk](http://www.chateez.co.uk))

### Use of emoji's - Online focus group method

When the focus group takes place online we would recommend to replace the Chateez cards in one of the following ways:

- Use of emoji's (chat function)
- Use of Padlet (or other digital platform) page with different emoji cards (numbered/lettered) (example can be found here).

In our experience, the following resources may help to enhance your focus group:

- Relevant video links or downloads to support your focus group (check Wi-Fi is available if using web-links).
- Printed (or when online digital) statements relevant to sport/physical activity for young people to identify the ones that they relate to.
- Picture/photo cards (or when online digital, example can be found here) of different sports/activities to help young people identify which sports they take part in or would like to take part in.
- Communication symbols/Makaton symbols to help young people communicate.

## h. Costs

When budgeting for the inclusive focus groups, we would recommend considering the following: cost of providing the elements listed above (for example, printing resources and hiring equipment); any costs associated with the facilitator's time and travel expenses; and any venue hire costs.



## 4. Inclusive focus group delivery

### a. Introducing the focus group

The beginning of your focus group and first few questions will be critical in putting your participants at ease and encouraging discussion. Before you ask any questions, welcome the group and introduce yourself and your team. Check that all participants have completed the consent forms. Cover any practical points, for example where the fire exits and toilets are or if online how to mute/unmute the microphone and turn on the camera. Then begin by recapping the purpose

of the research and the objective for the session (be careful not to give too much away as that could influence responses). Much of the success of group interviewing can be attributed to the development of this open environment (Krueger, 2002).

Below an example of an introduction that was used for the inclusive focus groups during the SEDY2 project. Visuals and communication tools can be used, where relevant, to enhance understanding.

#### Example: Introducing the SEDY inclusive focus group - children

Hello and welcome to our session. Thank you for taking the time to join us to talk about inclusion (taking part/belonging) in sport in practice. My name is [insert name] and assisting me is [insert name]. We work for an organisation called [insert organisation] which is a [insert description of organisation]. We are doing a European research project to get some information from young people about the meaning of inclusion in sport. We want to know what sports opportunities are available to you, what you like and what you don't like and what inclusion means to you. We are having discussions like this with several groups of young people in different countries. You were invited because [insert reason for invite].

During this focus group session it is about your personal opinion, wishes and feelings. There are no wrong answers; everyone has their own opinions and points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what other people have said. Keep in mind that we are just as interested in negative comments as positive comments; negative comments can even be the most helpful. Please also feel free to ask questions to other participants as this is a group discussion. You have probably noticed that this meeting is recorded. We are videoing this session because we don't want to miss any of your comments. People often say very helpful things in these discussions and we can't write fast enough to get them all down.

We will be using our first names to talk to each other today, but we won't use any of your names in our reports. Everything you say will be kept confidential. The information collected today will go towards a report on what children, parents and sport professionals think about inclusion in sport in practice. This report will be used to develop tools to encourage inclusion and equal opportunities in sport. Does everything make sense so far? Does anyone have any questions? You can leave at any time if you no longer want to take part in this focus group.

*(Adapted from 'Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews'; Krueger, 2002)*

Before you ask the first question, it is advisable to begin with an icebreaker (for which you could even use a prop) tailored to your participant group. The icebreaker needs to stimulate conversation and give everyone a chance to speak. This ice breaker time is critical for building rapport, confidence and for establishing the moderator as the leader of the group. Allow five to ten minutes for this introduction and avoid rushing it as it can prepare the group well for the later discussion.

Ice breaker example
Using your hands, pass this football around the circle. When you hold the ball, 'say your name', when it goes around the circle for the second time tell us 'what sport you like'.
'Can you describe your feeling right now using the Chateez cards?'
'Can you describe your feeling right now using the emoji's in the chat? (ice breaker question used during SEDY2 online focus groups)

## b. Focus group questions

The following table sets out a structure for your questioning:

Question	Description
<b>Opening Questions</b>	<i>Simple question to encourage students to talk and feel comfortable in the session. Ice breaker activities or Chateez cards, can be used to encourage conversation. These questions are not usually analysed.</i> <i>Example: Tell me your name and what are your hobbies?</i>
<b>Transition Questions</b>	Transition questions should be simple questions which focus participants on the topic. These questions provide a greater depth in answer compared to opening question. <i>Example: Which of these cards (show Chateez cards) shows how you feel about sport?</i>
<b>Key Questions</b>	Main areas which you are exploring. You will need to spend the most time around these questions. It is important to explore the answers given by participants using prompt and follow up questions. <i>Example: What do you think about inclusion (take part/belonging) in sport?</i>
<b>Prompt/ Follow up questions</b>	To be able to gain in-depth information; it is important to prompt students to clarify the meaning behind key answers and allows students to share situations fully. Prompt questions can also be used to encourage students who struggle with communication. <i>Example: Would you be able to tell me a bit more about that?</i>
<b>Ending Questions</b>	Ask participants to summarise the key topics you have covered in the session, through using flipchart paper. Ask them to (if appropriate) rank the importance of each area to them personally. Briefly summarise what has been covered during the session to ensure participants have nothing else to share; try to end with the question below. <i>Example: Do you feel we have missed anything in our session today or is there anything else you would like to add?</i>

See Appendix 2 for an overview of the pre-determined SEDY2 focus group questions for children and youth with a disability.

### c. Additional strategies to enhance focus group

The following list provides ideas for how you could enhance your focus group:

- Fill in the blanks: I really like/dislike to play sport because.....
- Projection and fantasy: ask the young people to use their imagination to story tell around the topic of sport.
- Pictures: ask the young people to draw a picture of the sport they like doing / to show what sport means to them.
- Campaigns: ask the young people to develop a campaign using three words or pictures on why sport/ physical activity is important to them?
- Role play: ask the young people to role play a situation where they are asking a parent or teacher to help them access a sport that they want to participate in.
- Ownership: ask the young people questions that foster ownership, for example what can you do to get involved in swimming?
- Think back: use think back questions that take the young people back to an experience.

And finally, flexibility and adaptability are key. Every focus group will be different. Some questions will work with one group but will not work with another so you will need to be adaptable with your language and questioning to ensure that the discussion is appropriately tailored to each group of young people. Preparing different versions of questions in advance can help to ensure that everyone can meaningfully contribute to the session. A flexible approach to time management will also be required as some young people may need longer to respond. Don't be afraid of silence....some young people just need more time to process information.

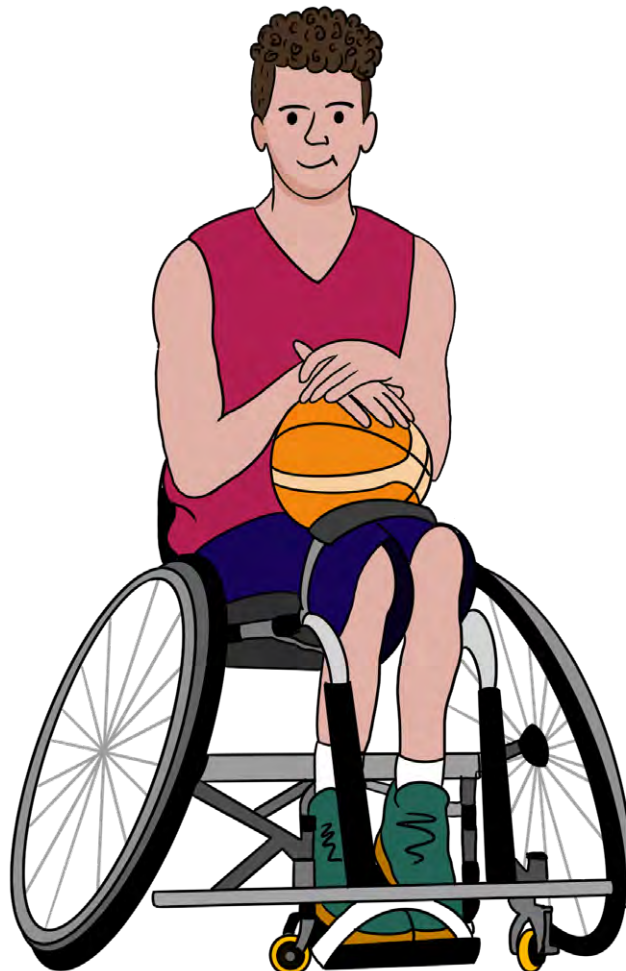




## 5. Analysing findings

A guide to analyse the findings from your inclusive focus groups using the method of thematic content analysis (a descriptive presentation of qualitative data) is provided below:

1. Record and type up all responses.
2. Transfer data to analysing software like MAXQDA (can also be done in Excel).
3. Familiarise yourself with the data.
4. Assign preliminary codes to your data in order to describe the content (preferably separately done by two different researchers).
5. Search for patterns or themes in your codes across the different focus group interviews.
6. Review themes (when with multiple researchers reach consensus about the themes).
7. Define and name themes.
8. Write a short paragraph summarizing findings for each theme.
9. Illustrate with powerful quotes.



## Final remarks

With this document we hope to have provide researchers and professionals in the field of Adapated Physical Activity (APA), aiming to conduct focus groups with children with disabilities, with useful guidance and tools. The collection of the children's views and perspectives is regarded as critical for inclusion ('My voice, my choice') and to address the children's need and preferences to aim for a more inclusion and empowerment through sports. As one of outputs of the Sport Empowers Disabled Youth 2 project, this document (and other documents/tool regarding this topic) will be available for downloading by anyone interested in this topic at [www.inholland.nl/sedy2](http://www.inholland.nl/sedy2).



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# Appendix 1: Informed consent form children



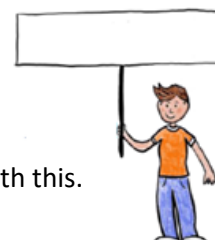
Hi! My name is [name] and I am a **researcher** at [name organisation].

I am researching **participation in sports**.



I want to know how **children and young people think about participating and belonging in sports**. I do that to better understand participating in sports.

I need **children and young people with a disability** to help me with this.



**Together with a parent or guardian** you will join an online meeting. Your parent or guardian completes a questionnaire beforehand.



**Together with you and other children** I will discuss participation and belonging during sports and exercise activities.

That will take about **30 minutes**.



You don't just have to talk, you can express yourself **as you like**.  
You can talk, draw or show how you feel with emoticons like below.  
It is **your choice**.



Graphics by @LMSharpy



Participation is voluntary. You may **choose to stop** your participation in this research **at any time**. You don't have to say why you quit.

I will **video record** this conversation to help me remember what you said.



In this video people can see who you are, but that will **only be my team and me**. Furthermore, everything is adjusted so that **your identity is protected and confidential**.

The video is elaborated on paper and then **destroyed**.

All papers are kept in a locked cupboard at Inholland University of Applied Sciences. **Only the researchers** can view this data. So nobody knows that you participated, except for the researchers.



When I've **processed what you've told me**, my team and I will write a **story** that can be made public.

This is to help people **better understand** and improve **participation in sports**. We will not mention your name in this text.

### Do you have questions?

You can always email or call with questions.  
You can always ask questions on the day of the examination.

Here are the researcher's name and contact details:

[Name researcher]

[Email address researcher]

[Telephone number researcher]





- I have read the information letter. I could also ask questions. My questions have been sufficiently answered. I had enough time to decide whether to participate.
- I know that participation is voluntary. I also know that I can decide at any time not to participate or to stop participation. I don't have to give a reason for that.
- I consent to the collection and use of my data in the manner and for the purposes stated in the information letter.
- I give permission to keep my data within Inholland University of Applied Sciences for another 5 years after this research.
- I want to participate in this research.
  
- I do / do not give permission for the collection and use of video and sound recordings. These recordings will be destroyed after transcription.
- I do / do not consent to requesting data from my family members.
- I do / do not give permission to transfer my data to the Netherlands in the context of this research. The data must be transferred encrypted and without my name.
- I do / do not consent to my sharing with the European partners within the research.

Name of subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_

Name of parent/caretaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_

Name of parent/caretaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_

I declare that I have fully informed this subject about the said study.

If information becomes known during the study that could influence the consent of the subject, I will inform him / her in good time.

Name researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_

*The subject will receive a complete information letter, together with a copy of the signed consent form.*

## Appendix 2: SEDY2 focus group questions children

Pre-determined questions:

1. Can you describe your feeling right now using the Chateez cards?
2. What do you think about 'inclusion' (take part/ belonging) in sport?
  - a. Or 'feeling included'? Did you have a choice?
  - b. When did you really feel good in a (sports) group/doing activities/physical activity?
  - c. When did you feel 'part of it'?
3. Can you describe a time when you felt included/not included?
4. Who do you think can participate in sports?
5. What do you think helps/prevents you from doing sports?



**Sport  
Empowers  
Disabled  
Youth**

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