

The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK)
Department of Psychology (PS)
Department Ethics Guidelines

Introduction

As required by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), all research involving research participants conducted by EdUHK students, including surveys, interviews, questionnaire-type investigations and experimentation, must undergo independent review to ensure that a consistent level of ethical standards is applied to research protocols involving human participants.

The following guidelines are for **undergraduate students (BSocSc(PSY) and BEd) with PS staff as supervisors**.

- Undergraduate research ethics applications need only be approved by the student's supervisor and the Chairperson or responsible member of the Departmental Ethics Committee (DEC);
- With effect from August 2017, Taught Postgraduate research ethics applications need to be approved by the students' supervisors, and the supervisors should submit the applications to the Faculty Human Research Ethics Committee (FHREC) at fhrec@eduhk.hk **directly**, they are no longer required to go through DEC.
- For taught postgraduate (e.g. MAPPE, MSocScP(SCS), MEd) students with PS staff as supervisors, please visit https://www.eduhk.hk/fehd/en/research.php?s=doctoral_resources for details.

Please download the updated guidelines and forms from
<https://www.eduhk.hk/ps/en/information.php?s=guideline&id=1689>

Similar to staff research, ethics approval for each application normally takes at least 4 weeks from submission of the form, including a first review, amendments completed by the student, and a second review. For pedagogical reasons it is recommended that all students fill out the form and the supervisors only sign it after confirming that it is filled out correctly. Both supervisor and student must sign on the ethics application form. Scanned or electronic signatures on the soft copy of the application form are acceptable, but signature in typewritten format on the application form is not accepted. **Students are strongly advised to submit their ethics applications more than a month before they wish to begin the research.**

Ethics approval must be obtained BEFORE research begins. Please **do not start to collect data** until you obtain approval from the relevant Ethics Committee.

Please note that these guidelines are subject to change.

General Instructions:

First, go to the Department's website <https://www.eduhk.hk/ps/en/information.php?s=guideline&id=1689> to download the Application Form and appropriate Consent Form and Information Sheet for Ethical Review. Fill in the form and attach documents as instructed (e.g. Part V, Attachments). The Department's website also contains reference documents, including FAQs, PowerPoint slides (in pdf form), etc.

Common Mistakes: When filling out the ethics application, make sure that the following information is included:

1. *In the application form's Part II 8. "Methodology of Research" section and/or "Part III(s)" if applicable:*

***Provide clear information about the methodology and procedure participants will experience. Include information on the period of participation (i.e. how much time the student/teacher will actively spend doing the study, and over what time period if applicable), what they will be asked to do for your research, when and where will be research take place. Be consistent with the project title and number and ages of the subjects you included when describing these in the application form, proposal, consent forms and information sheets.

2. *In the application form's Part II 11. "Details about the direct participants of the proposed research project" section:*

***For 11.1, Provide clear information about the participants (in groups) involved in your research project including number of participants, backgrounds of groups (e.g. any special recruitment criteria) and estimated age ranges (especially if below the age of 18 and any information relevant to whether they are vulnerable populations or competent to give informed consent (e.g. SEN, etc.)).

a. Note: **"children" refers to any person below the age of 18. If any of your participants will be below the age of 18, check "yes" in the box, Part III (a), and state the number and ages of participants in Part III(s).** See below guidelines for information about under what circumstances consent from parents/guardians or school officials is needed, and what kind of consent is needed from children of different ages.

***For 11.2, 3, and 4 respectively, provide clear information on incentive for participation if applicable, method of advertisement/recruitment procedure, and how you will obtain the participants' contact information **before recruitment** (if required). **(If contact information or other personally identifiable information is collected after recruitment/during the study itself, please describe in Part III, c and s)**

3. *In the application form's Part IV 1. "State Potential Risks" section:*

***Reminder: If participants' teacher is also the researcher, what steps will you take to reduce the pressure that students feel to participate if their teacher is the researcher, such as informing them that their class performance and treatment will not be affected by whether or not they choose to participate? [Remember that this information, if applicable, should also be described in the Information Sheet(s). If there are no risks, please state explicitly that the study involves no potential risk both here and in the Information Sheet.]

4. *In the application form's Part IV 2. "Methods for Ensuring Confidentiality of Research Data" section:*

***Remember to read the detailed notes under this section and provide information as required. For Bachelor-level thesis students, it is recommended that you should mention that you will delete all video/audio recordings after your final thesis mark has been received.

5. *In the application form's Part IV 3. "Feedback and debriefing procedures" section:*

*** For (a), students should at a minimum put "x" in the box "Thesis".

For (b) & (c), please "x" in the appropriate box(es).

6. *Attach:* Research proposal (or draft reviewed by your supervisor)

7. *Attach:* All applicable consent form(s) and information sheets, in **either English or Chinese, depending on which language will be presented to the participants** (see below for details on consent for school-based research on children below 18 years of age)
8. *Attach:* Data collection form, including questionnaire, interview questions and/or survey questions for all of the kinds of data you will collect. If a full final questionnaire/interview script is not yet available, please provide examples of questions that will be asked.

Other Common Mistakes

(Extracted from presentation by Dr Emma Buchtel at a HREC's workshop held in Oct 2017)

- Consent form and application form don't match: e.g. On application form, did not describe how data will be identified by codes only (but it says so on consent form)
- On consent forms, giving information about the purpose of the study, but not giving information about the procedures
 - Should have basic information for informed consent, e.g. "The participant will fill out a 10-minute survey about his/her opinions about Active Learning Activities"

(Others)

- **Consent form and information sheet** (different versions: school/data collection site, parents, participants)
 - Incorrect use of terms in the form and sheet (e.g. used "your child" in school version and used "your student" in Parents' form)
 - Incomplete or unclear sentences
 - Grammatical errors
 - Problems with translation from English to Chinese
 - Inconsistency in information (e.g. project title, number and ages of subjects, time commitment of experiment) in English and Chinese versions of Information and Consent sheet (and inconsistent with ethics application form)
 - use of abbreviations or acronyms without giving full description in the previous text
- **Data collection form** (e.g. questionnaire, checklist)
 - Problems with translation from English to Chinese
 - Typos
 - If the errors on the data collection form are such that they prevent the ethics reviewer from being able to assess the ethics of the research, they will be sent back to the student for correction

Parental and School Consent for studies involving Primary and Secondary School children

The HREC has proposed that the following age rules be used when determining what kinds of parental consent are required. If you require any exceptions, careful explanations and substitutions must be made.

- (i) For children aged below 9, only signature of their parents/guardians on consent form is required; completion of the task, after verbal explanation of its nature by the researcher, provides implied consent by the child*;
- (ii) For children aged 9 to 15, signature of both the children and their parents/guardians on consent form is required*; and
- (iii) For adolescents aged 16 to 17, signature of the adolescents on consent form is required while consent from their parents/guardians is optional for studies involving minimal risk.

* For minimal risk research, you may ask for passive consent, that is, parents/guardians return the consent forms only if they DO NOT wish their child to participate. For all other research, active consent, whereby parents/guardians indicate their child may participate, MUST be obtained.

Please follow the above guidelines to prepare the consent form required for participants of different ages.

Notes:

- All data collected should be anonymous (as far as practical; non-identifiable after stored), minimal risk, and confidential. Links between identifiable information and stored data should be done by codes and the links should be known by the researcher only.
- After ethics approval is obtained, approval/consent from school officials, usually the school principal and/or mentor teacher, is required in all cases of research in schools, even if the method is observation only.

Definition of Minimal Risk:

BEd studies, in particular, should be minimal-risk for participants.

No undergraduate research on children should be more than **minimal risk**. In other words, the ethics proposal must not have any of the following elements [adopted from CUHK Survey Ethics Guidelines (expedited review section)]:

1. No excessive **inducements** to participate
 - a) If student-teacher relationship exists, teachers should take special care to emphasize to their own students that they are free to decline to participate, with no adverse consequences
2. No **deception**
 - a) e.g. Purpose of study should be fully disclosed at beginning of the study
3. No “**undue psychological stress**” or “**discomfort** higher than a reasonable level”
 - a) Questions should be asked in a way that will avoid discomfort for participants
 - b) e.g. Participants should not be grouped in any way that might cause distress.
4. No questions asked about “**sensitive** aspects of the participant’s own behaviour such as **illegal conduct, drug or alcohol use, and sexual conduct**”

To avoid problems if data were disclosed, fully anonymous surveys are advisable whenever possible; or at least, “identifiable by codes known only to the researcher” (as stated in HREC’s model consent form). That means: every participant will be given a Subject Number, and in the stored data files, participants will be identified by Subject Number only. Links between the Subject Number and identifiable information (such as name of participant) can be known by the researcher, but if stored in a file, should be stored separately from the data files to prevent accidental disclosure.