Chapter One: Why the right information matters

- Children and young people have a right to seek information and speak up about all matters that affect them, including their own health and wellbeing.

- They also need information that is given in a way they can understand, so they can participate in decisions about care, as appropriate to their age and maturity. This is vital because young people, rather than their parents, may be the ones to give consent for examinations, tests and treatments.

- There is a huge body of health information for children and young people but it varies in terms of quality and accessibility. The evidence base is patchy and some topics have been researched more than others.

- Accessibility is vital, so take into account the diversity of your audience. Consider language, culture, social needs, disability, sexual orientation, gender and literacy, as well as age and level of development.

- Golden rules when writing for children:
  1. Keep sentences short and order them logically.
  2. Use simple vocabulary and explain new words. Avoid jargon.
  3. Numbers can be confusing: use graphics to illustrate.
  4. Avoid big chunks of text - break them up.
  5. Present facts in a short and punchy way, such as ‘Did you Know?’
  6. Provide ways to recap and check understanding.

- Look at books, websites, comics and magazines that are popular with your target audience, to learn what works.

- Writing about subjects that may be delicate, frightening, or potentially upsetting takes particular sensitivity.
Listening to patients is good professional practice, a strong theme in UK health policy and a key goal for the NHS. The same philosophy applies to developing health information.

Consultation from the outset means your information will be relevant and well targeted.

The consultation experience also benefits children, because they gain confidence and learn. They also feel valued and learn that their opinions matter.

Consulting children and young people is essential if you are Information Standard certified.

Children and young people should be involved at all stages, from initial development to evaluation.

From the start, seek to understand your audience broadly and take steps to make involvement as representative and inclusive as you can.

Take special care to involve children and young people who might be harder to identify and engage, so their voices are heard too.

Everyone who has contact with children has a duty of care, so your organisation must have a clear safeguarding policy.

Activities for small groups work well, but not for everyone. Consider different preferences, and try to offer more than one format.

Make activities fun. Art, music and drama encourage expression. Provide refreshments and offer a chance to socialise.

An independent facilitator is recommended. Children and young people are also good facilitators.

Cover expenses so everyone can afford to take part.

Thank your participants with a letter, prize or certificate, and share the end result.
Chapter Three: Communicating health information

- Information is just one part of the communication process, which may also involve interaction with health professionals, parents and family, peers and teachers.

- When communicating with children and young people, establish what they want and need to know; listen to them and respect their views; provide information that is appropriate to their age and maturity; use language they can understand; consider the impact of surroundings and non-verbal communication.

- Involve parents, carers and other family members who are important to the child or young person. This might mean offering information they can share and discuss together, or parallel resources with consistent messages and facts.

- Other young people can also impart health information, and peer-to-peer communication is a growing area of work.

- Teachers are another group of obvious influencers: they have the skills, they know their pupils well, and they are trusted as a reliable source of information.

- Although they may be heavy users of digital media, young people do not consistently use the internet when seeking health information. Online information aimed at young people is also variable in terms of quality and accessibility. Children may not have the skills to assess the reliability of information they find.

- Because it is such a new format, there is little evidence about the effectiveness of mobile apps. Some research shows that young adults value accuracy, security and ease of use.

- Whatever format you choose, when children or young people are likely to be using the resource independently, make sure to include clear signposting to more information, advice and support.
Chapter Four: Creating high quality health information

- The first step is to assess the need for new information. Make sure the purpose is clear. Ask whether you can update or build on existing resources, and check that you are not duplicating information that is already available from other good sources.

- Run through a planning checklist to cover: funding and your budget; how you will involve children or young people; safeguarding; expert input and other quality controls; format; creative input; promotion; dissemination; evaluation.

- Consider age groups. Young children under five learn through play; try dolls, teddies, drawing activities or storybooks. They already have a high rate of new media use, but there is debate about how effective or desirable this is. If you choose digital media, create a resource that can be shared by parent and child.

- For children aged five to seven, use short bursts of information and a storytelling approach. By this age, nearly six in ten children access the internet at home on a computer. For digital media, consider material that is designed for sharing with peers, teachers or parents.

- Children aged eight to 11 like the question and answer format. Look at popular books, games, websites and apps to see what works well. Children are still building their confidence as internet users.

- Don’t forget more traditional media, because one in 14 children aged 5 to 15 do not access the internet anywhere. Not all families have internet access at home. Some children prefer traditional formats.

- By secondary school, digital formats like videos, games and smartphone apps are familiar and popular. Most teenagers use social networking, but strict controls are needed to protect them. For young people with a long-term condition, the chance to meet peers ‘in real life’ is also highly valued.

- Remember the need to make your material accessible to individuals with hearing loss, visual impairment, and special communication needs.

- Many children have a first language other than English. Use plain language, consider accessible formats, and plan for translation if needed.

- Take cultural factors into account. This is about more than ethnicity or language, which are only two facets of an individual’s perspective. Consider parents and families in this context,
Chapter Four: Creating high quality health information

- Your choice of format will depend on the needs of your audience, the topic, your budget and the skills available. You may choose to use more than one format, if your audience is segmented into different groups, or if you want to accommodate a wider range of learning styles.
- Young people can be carers, too. They need information about what is happening to their loved one, and how to look after their own health. These young people need a lot of support and the best way to reach them is through professionals who can provide it.
- Some options include leaflets, comics, picture books or storybooks, audio recordings, videos, websites, social networking, games, apps and help lines.

Chapter Five: Where to learn more

- Refer to this section if you want to explore any of the topics from the guide in more detail.
- There are links to more sources on health and education policy.
- You will also find resources about involving children and young people, and examples of best practice.
- There are links to more resources on disabilities, equality and diversity, using digital media, and social care best practice.
- When you’re ready to create your health information, there are contacts to help you find suppliers and resources for: children’s, health and medical writing; graphic design; medical illustration; translation; website and games design.
- In addition to the case studies in this guide, there are more examples showing how successful health information can work for children and young people.