

Łódź Declaration

Responsible Science Communication with Children and Young People

Children and young people have many reasons for engaging with Science and science-based activities, such as enjoying an exciting moment, solving a mystery, learning about possible careers, or creating ideas for the future.

Science communication and awareness programs for them can be built around “science is fun” activities but should also engage them in discussions about difficult and challenging ideas. Children and young people deserve the opportunity to understand the differences between the reality of science and idealized images, such as often portrayed in the media, and to learn and talk about uncomfortable or controversial issues in a safe, respectful and supportive environment.

Through responsible and reflective communication programs children and young people will be able to develop a deeper understanding of ways in which science can benefit society, but can also sometimes be used for harm. They will learn how science can be influenced by social bias and ignorance and that intense competition between scientists can potentially lead to poor practice and skewed outcomes. They can come to understand that scientific processes and practices are shaped by humans and thus subject to human weaknesses and flaws so that, for instance, institutions such as schools and children’s universities tend to perpetuate rather than challenge existing power structures and even ideas.

They can also come to understand the importance of co-operation and persistence: That scientific progress owes more to collective work rather than lonely genius and to long, hard slog rather than sudden brilliant ideas.

To achieve a responsible and reflective approach, those who organize and deliver science in society programs for children and young people require specific skills in discussing controversial and difficult topics effectively. They need targeted training to ensure they are able to empower young participants to engage with challenging ideas, to listen to the views of others and share their own in a safe, respectful and supportive environment.

They also need to be aware of the importance of presenting a diversity of backgrounds and views in discussions, for it is imperative that children and young people do not come to see science as the sole preserve of a single or elite group.

Ultimately, by developing a fuller understanding of Science and science-based activities in a responsible, reflective, safe and supportive environment, children and young people will be rewarded by greater enjoyment and will become even more engaged.