**JREC GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING CHILDREN**

**Children**

Children in this context are persons who have not attained the legal age for consent.

 The legal age for consent in Zimbabwe is 18 years.

**Assent**

While children may be legally incapable of giving informed consent, they nevertheless may possess the ability to assent to or dissent from participation.

Out of respect for children as developing persons, children should be asked whether or not they wish to participate in the research.

A child’s choice to participate is called **“assent**” because they cannot give consent.

The form that documents this agreement is called an **“assent form**”.

An assent means a child’s affirmative agreement to participate in research.

**GUIDELINES FOR WRITING AN ASSENT FORM**

**Children less than 5 years of age**

* A simple oral explanation of the study should be offered to the child before study-related procedures are conducted. A signed Parental Consent form is required.

**Children between the ages of 5 and 12 years**

* The language of the assent form should be geared to the cognitive level of the child being asked to participate in the research study.
* The language used in the assent form should be non-coercive.
* The assent form should be translated into the child’s mother language where appropriate.
* The form should give an explanation of the purpose of the research, the proposed research procedures and any discomforts, in language that is appropriate to the child’s age, maturity, and condition.
* This explanation should include a discussion of any discomforts and inconveniences the child may experience if he or she agrees to participate and that if they object, the research will be terminated and they will not be punished or scolded.

**Children between the ages of 12 and 18 years**

The researcher should submit an assent form for the child at about 6th grade reading level.

The assent form should be written as simply as possible and cover the following points:

* What the study is about
* Why he/she qualifies for the study
* The voluntary nature of the study
* The procedures that will be done
* Potential benefits & potential risks
* An assurance that he/she will be treated the same whether or not he/she agrees to join the study
* An invitation to ask questions
* Assurance that he/she may withdraw from the study after discussing it with his/her parents.

**PARENTAL/ GUARDIAN CONSENT**

**Parental consent must be obtained in addition to the child assent.**

**Guidelines for writing a Parental Consent form**

* It must be directed to the parent
* The parental consent form must contain the same elements as a typical consent form.
* It should be written so that it is understandable to a parent/guardian at a 6th grade reading level.
* Medical jargon or technical terms should be avoided (or be followed by a description in lay terms). Initials and/or abbreviations should be explained. Sentences should be short and concise.
* The language used in the consent form should be non-coercive
* Explanation of the purpose of the research, the proposed research procedures and any discomforts that may occur to the child must be given in language that is understandable to a parent/guardian.
* The consent form should be translated clearly in the parent/guardian’s local language to ensure understanding.