

A guide to the
**Child Safe
Standards**



Office of the
Children's Guardian

The Child Safe Standards



STANDARD 1

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture



STANDARD 3

Families and communities are informed and involved



STANDARD 4

Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account



STANDARD 5

People working with children are suitable and supported



STANDARD 6

Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused



STANDARD 7

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training



STANDARD 8

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur



STANDARD 9

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved



STANDARD 10

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

Contents

Introduction	4	Standard 6 Complaint handling	31
Standard 1 Leadership and culture	11	Standard 7 Knowledge and skills	35
Standard 2 Children's participation	15	Standard 8 Physical and online environments	39
Standard 3 Families and communities	19	Standard 9 Continuous improvement	43
Standard 4 Equity and diversity	23	Standard 10 Policies and procedures	47
Standard 5 Suitability of workers	27		



Introduction



Child Safe Standards to drive cultural change

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) shone a spotlight on thousands of cases where organisations in Australia failed to protect children in their care from abuse. It highlighted that abuse that occurs within an organisational context is not just a problem of the past, it continues today. Many victims and survivors were motivated to tell their stories to the inquiry, to prevent harm to children now and into the future.

The Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission provide a framework for making organisations safer for children. They have been accepted by the NSW government. Based on extensive research and consultation, the Standards provide tangible guidance for organisations to create cultures, adopt strategies and act to put the interests of children first, to keep them safe from harm.

The Standards have been designed to:

- help drive cultural change in organisations
- be principle-based and outcome-focused
- be flexible enough that they can be adapted by organisations of varying sizes and characteristics
- avoid placing undue burden on organisations
- help organisations address multiple risks
- balance caution and caring
- be a benchmark against which organisations can assess their child safe capability and set performance targets
- be of equal importance and interrelated.

A child safe culture is a set of values and practices that guide the attitudes and behaviour of all staff. Good leaders champion these values and embed them in organisational governance. The following values should be at the heart of any approach that prioritises children's safety:

- The best interests of children and their protection from harm is paramount.
- Child abuse is not tolerated and must not happen.
- Children's rights are understood and respected.
- Concerns about child safety raised by children and their parents and carers are acted on.
- Reporting abuse is not obstructed or prevented.



Everyone working
with children
in NSW shares
responsibility
for their care.



Definition of a child safe organisation

Child safe organisations create cultures, adopt strategies and act to prevent harm to children, including sexual abuse. The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians define a child safe organisation as one that systematically:

- creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed
- creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm
- responds appropriately to disclosures, allegations and suspicions of harm.

How organisations can improve the safety of children

The NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG) is committed to making organisations safer for children. We work to protect children by promoting and regulating quality, child safe organisations and services. We want to support organisations working with children to implement child safe practice, guided by the Standards.

This Guide has been designed to help all people working with children understand how their roles and responsibilities can make their organisation safer. It explains the rationale for each Standard and provides guidance on what organisations can do to implement the Child Safe Standards and measure success. Information in this Guide comes from the OCG’s long history of regulating and educating child-related organisations, the findings of the Royal Commission and selected research documents.

The Child Safe Standards are not meant to be a set of rules or checkboxes that can be ‘ticked and flicked’ with no real change in work practices. Instead, they encourage organisations to think about their current practices and find areas where they can improve. The Guide prompts people to think about their unique work environment and their contribution to creating and maintaining cultures where children’s interests and rights are prioritised. Users are encouraged to answer reflective questions. By responding honestly, they will be able to assess what changes, if any, they need to make. This helps with future-proofing by encouraging organisations to respond to new issues as they arise.

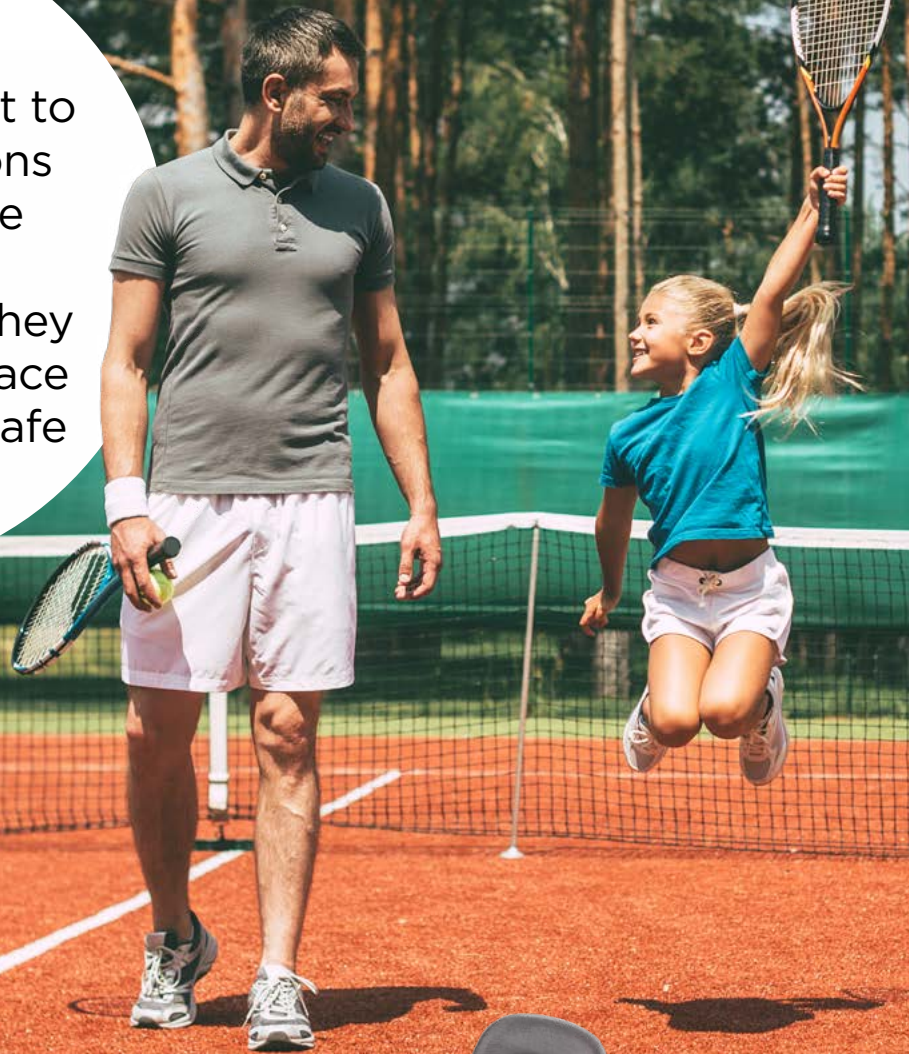
Policies and procedures are not enough on their own to protect children from harm

Creating and maintaining a child safe organisation requires strong leadership. It is an ongoing process where all staff need to learn, monitor and review. While not all risks to children can be eliminated, following the advice in this Guide will reduce opportunities for harm to occur. The Guide supports leaders by providing practical advice and resources to help them align their organisation’s child safe practices with the Child Safe Standards.

The vast majority of staff in organisations place children first and are motivated to do what is best for them. Implementing the Standards should therefore not be an additional burden, but rather an effective way to embed child safety in the attitudes, behaviours and practices of those working at every level of an organisation.



This Guide is a working document to assist organisations to build from the ground up or strengthen what they already have in place to keep children safe



Keeping children safe is everyone's business

Australia is one of 194 countries that have committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UN has agreed that everyone is entitled to 'all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status'. Beyond this, however, it also recognises that 'childhood is entitled to special care and assistance'. You can read the UN convention at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Organisations and people working with children in NSW share responsibility for keeping children safe. Applying the Standards makes it easier for children, parents, carers and staff to share their understanding of child safety across different settings. The Standards promote consistency across care environments.



The Child Safe Standards complement the National Principles

The National Office for Child Safety has released the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. These are derived from the Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission which relate specifically to child sexual abuse. This guide addresses other forms of abuse (psychological, emotional and physical) as well as neglect.

Both the NSW Child Safe Standards and the National Principles describe the necessary elements for child safe practices. The OCG considers organisations in NSW that are implementing the National Principles will be simultaneously implementing the Child Safe Standards.



The Standards are based on extensive research and consultation.

Terminology used in this guide

- ‘Children’ refers to all children and young people under the age of 18.
- ‘Children with vulnerabilities’ refers to children who may be exposed to greater risk due to their experience, ability, location or background. They may include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds; children with disability; the very young; those who have experienced prior trauma; those who have gender differences, or who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or questioning; and those who live in remote locations. Not every child in these categories should be considered ‘vulnerable’. Like all children, they have the capacity for strength and resilience.
- ‘Complaint’ means any suggestion of abuse or harm that is disclosed, witnessed or demonstrated by a child. Typically, three categories of behaviour are the subject of a complaint:
 - concerning conduct – behaviours or patterns of behaviour that are a risk to the safety of children. This also refers to ambiguous behaviours that are potentially inappropriate for children to be exposed to but may not necessarily be indicators of abuse occurring. The sharing of inappropriate jokes may be an example of this
 - misconduct – behaviours that constitute a breach of the institution’s Code of Conduct
 - criminal conduct – conduct that, if proven, would constitute a criminal offence.
- ‘Equity’ and ‘equality’. Equity encourages people to live to their full potential. Equality is treating everyone the same. If someone is disadvantaged they may not achieve the same outcome as a non-disadvantaged person if they are treated ‘equally’ because they may need more support.
- ‘Grooming’ occurs when an adult person engages in conduct that exposes a child to indecent material or provides a child with an intoxicating substance or with any financial or other material benefit with the intention of making it easier to procure the child for unlawful sexual activity.¹ It means gaining or increasing access to a child, parents or co-workers in order to facilitate abuse. The process involves building trust, obtaining compliance and maintaining secrecy to protect the abuser from being caught. Grooming is commonly an incremental process and can involve stages of increasing intensity. It may consist of many separate actions that, in isolation, are not necessarily criminal or abusive. Grooming behaviour may not be obvious to the victim or to a bystander and can co-exist with behaviour that occurs in normal relationships between adults and children. Children do not need to be alone to be groomed. They are usually sexually abused by someone they know. Online communication and pornography can be used as tools for grooming.
- ‘Leader’ means anyone in a position of authority in a child-related organisation, including board members, managers and supervisors. One of the findings of the Royal Commission, however, was that all adults have a responsibility for child safety, so leadership is a shared responsibility in this context.
- ‘Organisational culture’ means the organisation’s values as demonstrated on a day-to-day basis by its leaders and staff, and as experienced by the children they care for. It is founded on the organisation’s values and supported by leadership and governance.
- ‘Root cause analysis’ is where the circumstances of an incident are reviewed to identify factors that may have contributed to its occurrence. It is a process of identifying the root causes of problems or events and finding approaches for responding to them. Underpinning root cause analysis is the basic idea that effective management requires more than merely ‘putting out fires’ for problems that develop, but rather finding a way to prevent them reoccurring.
- ‘Staff’ refers to all employees, volunteers and contractors.

Other notes

- While the Royal Commission primarily focused on child sexual abuse, the Child Safe Standards can be broadly applied to prevent and respond to all forms of harm, including psychological, physical and emotional abuse as well as neglect. This is reflected in the language used in the Guide.
- The Guide refers to ‘institutions’ (as identified by the Royal Commission) as ‘organisations’.
- Where we have said ‘What would we expect children to say’, these are not the actual words of children, nor are they expected to be understood by young people as this is not a resource for children. They stem from research findings on children’s empowerment.
- Details on where to find resources to support your organisation to become more child safe are found at the end of the Guide.

1. See s21 of the Children’s Guardian Act 2019.



I feel safe when I'm here. I know they take my safety seriously.



Standard 1

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

A child safe organisation is committed to child safety. This is demonstrated in its leadership, in the way the organisation is managed and by the day-to-day activities it carries out. A child safe organisational culture drives the way things are done and how issues and risks are managed.



Poor leadership increases the chances that things can go wrong. In these cases, systems meant to protect children can fail. Where child safety is not prioritised and monitored, the likelihood of abuse increases. This can happen when:

- allegations of harm are not reported
- adults are automatically believed over children
- leaders prefer to protect the reputation of their organisation or their colleagues
- leaders personally assess a person and deny the allegation could have happened because of preconceived ideas about their character.

Some people seek out child-related employment because it gives them opportunities to abuse children. They will try to find weaknesses in protective practices. Strong leadership, with a culture of transparency and accountability, can deter people who want harm children.

Leaders play a vital role in creating and maintaining a culture where children's rights and safety are prioritised. They ensure all staff understand that keeping children safe is everyone's responsibility. They convey this message openly.

Good leaders make sure there are clear rules and procedures. They make sure staff know what is expected of them. They identify and mitigate risk. They listen to children and parents, and consider diverse needs. They continually find things to improve. Good leaders act as role models in prioritising child safety, and make sure that this commitment is reinforced at every level of their organisation. This can be reflected in the kind of people they hire; the behaviour they reward, support and punish; the matters they focus their attention on; and the way they respond to challenging events.

Standard 1

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture



Aim

Organisations prioritise child safety in what they say and do.



Why is this Standard important?

Having a leadership team that is committed to providing safe environments means children are less likely to be exposed to harm and abuse. A child safe culture is a set of values and practices that guide the attitudes and behaviour of all staff. Good leaders champion these values and embed them in organisational governance.

Leadership that keeps children safe is demonstrated by personal behaviour, having child safe practices, putting children first, prioritising training and education, and having a culture of continuous improvement.

Leadership extends to all staff as they share the responsibility for keeping children safe.



What should we be doing?

- The organisation makes a public commitment to child safety, and leaders champion a child safe culture both inside and outside the organisation.
- Child safety is a shared responsibility at all levels of the organisation.
- Risk management plans focus on identifying, preventing and lowering risks to children.
- Staff understand and comply with Codes of Conduct that sets clear behavioural standards when interacting with children.
- Staff understand their obligations in reporting, sharing information and keeping records.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do leaders champion a child safe culture in our organisation?
- How do leaders ensure we have effective child safe risk management strategies?
- How do leaders set expectations of how our staff behave towards children?
- How do our workers share the responsibility for keeping children safe?
- What activities exist to reinforce a child safe culture in our organisation?





What would we expect children to say?

Adults in this organisation ask my opinion and listen to what I say.

I feel safe here.

I feel respected and trust the adults looking after me.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Leaders and staff champion a set of core values that inform the organisation's approach to child safety.
- Leaders demonstrate attitudes and behaviours that prioritise the safety of children through the behaviours and practices they reward and challenge.
- Leaders incorporate risk management of child abuse into decision-making and actively monitor risks to child safety.
- Leaders encourage day-to-day practices that prioritise child safety.
- Leaders set clear expectations around child safety and ensure they are followed by staff.
- Leaders promote a culture of reporting.

Documenting the Standard

- Child safe policy
- Organisational statement of commitment to child safety.
- Code of Conduct signed by all staff and steps taken to ensure that it has been understood.
- Risk management strategies.
- Complaint handling, information sharing and reporting policy.
- Awards, posters and other material promoting child safety.
- Meeting agendas and minutes show child safety is a standing agenda item.

Indicators of success

- Child safety is embedded in day-to-day practices.
- Staff follow the Code of Conduct and child safe procedures.
- Decision-making prioritises children.
- Organisational culture creates an environment where it is difficult for abuse to occur.
- Staff appropriately respond to and report child abuse.
- Children feel safer knowing they have input into the organisation.



Child safe organisations have strategies in place so all children are heard and are encouraged to let staff know if they feel unsafe.





Standard 2

Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously



Children are safer when organisations teach them about their rights to be heard, listened to and believed. A child safe organisation actively seeks the opinions of children and when doing so considers their age, development, maturity, understanding, abilities and how they communicate. Children are encouraged and supported to regularly contribute to decisions that affect them.

Children feel safe in organisations where adults value them. They know they will be taken seriously, be involved in decision-making and have their concerns responded to. Having interactions with adults they trust, feeling included in groups and maintaining strong connections with their community and culture also helps keep them safe. An age-appropriate understanding of what constitutes personal safety and harmful sexual behaviour is also protective.

There is an inherent power imbalance between adults and children by nature of the relationship adults have to children as parents and carers. This relationship can be exploited by adults seeking to harm them. Where children are not listened to it can create an environment where they do not feel able to disclose abuse or discuss their personal safety. Adults need to recognise this power relationship and work proactively to empower children.

Some children may be adversely affected because of the ways that their families and communities are treated, how they are perceived or their lack of access to physical or financial resources. Some children may find it more difficult to communicate than others, especially if they are very young, if they live with a disability, or if they come from an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or CALD background.

Children can be disempowered because of attitudes or behaviours of adults that are reinforced by organisational cultures and practices. Child safe organisations have strategies in place so all children are heard and encouraged to speak up if they feel unsafe. Children are aware that staff have a responsibility to protect them.

Standard 2

Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously



Aim

Children are encouraged to speak up and are believed.



Why is this Standard important?

A child safe organisation values children and identifies opportunities for them to participate in decisions that affect them.

Empowering children by supporting them to take part in discussions about their safety is a reliable indicator that your organisation is child safe.

This 'protection through participation'² gives children the confidence and ability to speak up if they're being harmed or abused, or feel unsafe.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- What opportunities do we offer children so they can give their views?
- How does our organisation act on feedback given by children?
- How do our staff demonstrate they understand the importance of children's rights?
- How do we actively support children to develop and sustain friendships?
- How do we include children of all ages, abilities and cultural backgrounds?
- How are children given the skills to understand their feelings so they can describe them to adults?
- Does our organisation discourage children from raising particular subjects?



What should we be doing?

- Children are able to express their views and are provided opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives.
- The importance of friendships is recognised and support from peers is encouraged, helping children feel safe and be less isolated.
- Children can access abuse prevention programs and information.
- Staff are attuned to signs of harm and facilitate child-friendly ways for children to communicate and raise their concerns.

2. T Moore, *Protection through participation: Involving children in child-safe organisations*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017, www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/protection_through_participation.pdf (viewed 26 June 2017) cited in *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Final Report, Volume 6*, p 161.



What would we expect children to say?

Adults in my organisation listen to me and ask my opinion about things that affect me.

I can talk to adults if I feel unsafe, even if it is a difficult conversation.

I have friends I can talk to here.

I know that staff sometimes need to tell someone else if I need extra support.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

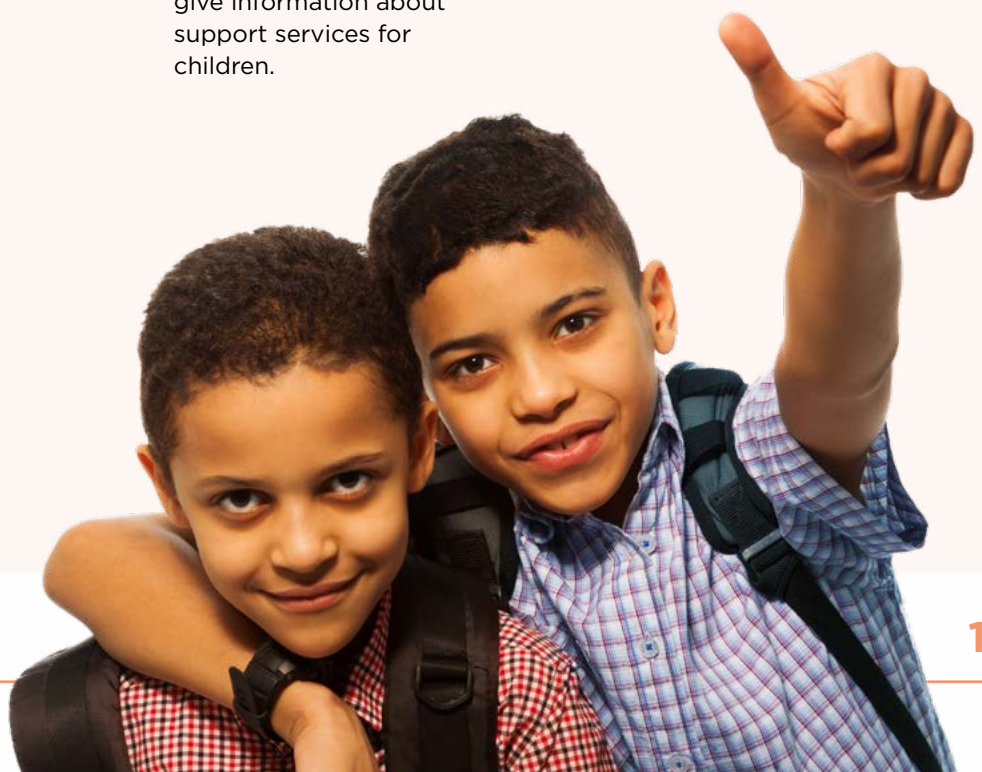
- Children's participation is embedded in organisational practice through feedback mechanisms.
- Opportunities are created for children to be included in organisational decision-making.
- Children are given information on internal and external support services.
- Staff are provided with knowledge and skills to support children's participation.
- Staff encourage peer support for children.
- Adults understand what safety means to children.
- Age-appropriate information that describes how adults should behave is provided to children and consistently reinforced.

Documenting the Standard

- Child safe policies promote children's empowerment and participation.
- Risk management strategies identify practices that disempower children and describe how to respond to them.
- Posters and brochures give information about support services for children.

Indicators of success

- Children know how adults should behave.
- Children understand that they are listened to and respected.
- Children speak up about their safety and the safety of their friends.
- Children are aware they can access support services when needed.





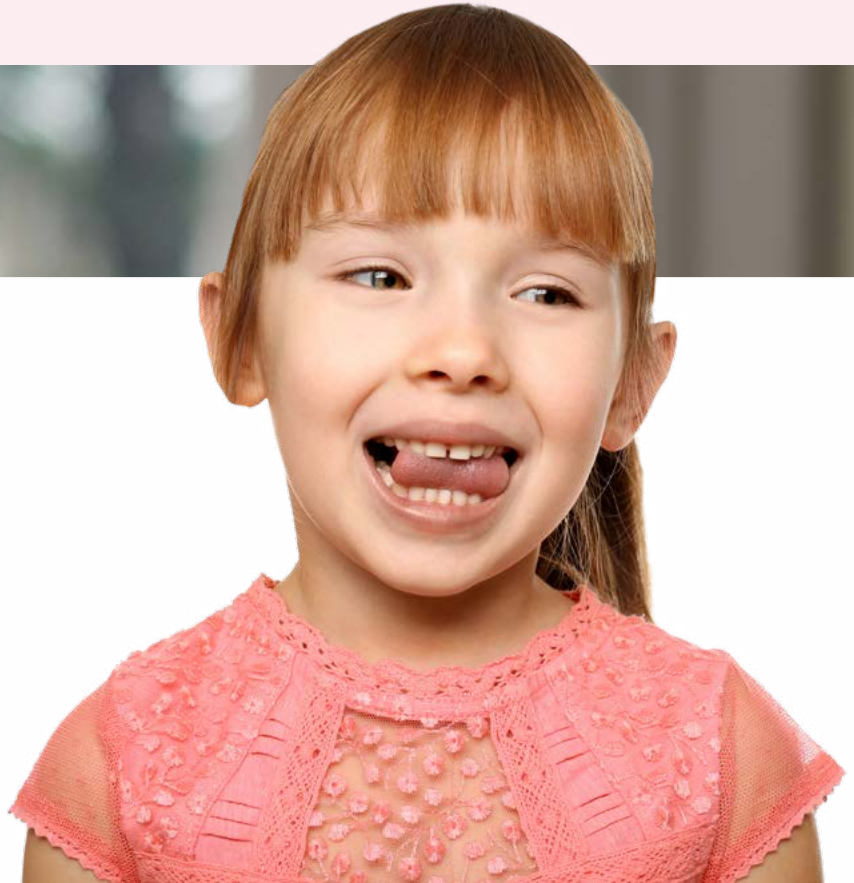
The special days of my community are celebrated.



Standard 3

Families and communities are informed and involved

Staff in child safe organisations understand that parents, carers and other important people in a child's life have the primary responsibility for raising their children. A child safe organisation talks to, consults with and invites the participation of families, caregivers and the broader community to promote the rights of children.



The risk of abuse can increase when organisations are 'closed' or are not transparent with parents, carers and families about their processes, governance and behavioural expectations. This is particularly the case in situations where families and the community have an unquestioning respect for the authority of that organisation. Children are safer when organisations include parents, carers and families in their activities and consult them on children's development.

Child safe organisations actively engage families to better understand what will keep their children safe, healthy and happy. They make sure that all parents and carers, regardless of their background and abilities, know where to find organisational policies and procedures. Families are also able to have a say in the organisation's practices.

Child safe organisations ensure that families know how, when and to whom complaints can be made. If an incident occurs, they provide families with relevant and appropriate information. Although they may be limited in what they can say at various stages of the complaint process, child safe organisations provide regular updates to parents and carers, and children where appropriate. Children may benefit from seeing that the people who are important to them are involved in the complaint process and are able to check that the organisation is doing the right thing.

Child safe organisations facilitate open, two-way communication with families and communities. Organisations are more likely to foster a child safe culture if the surrounding community values children, and respects and upholds their rights.



Aim

Organisations actively engage with families and communities to support children.



Why is this Standard important?

Parents or carers have primary responsibility for raising their children.³ Child safe organisations involve families and community members in decisions that affect the children in their care.

Children feel more valued when this happens, and when organisations are more accountable for their child safe practices.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do we actively involve families and communities in our organisation?
- How do families and communities know who our leadership team is?
- Are Codes of Conduct and child safe policies and procedures accessible to families and community members?
- How does our workforce reflect the diversity within our community?
- How would we include families when responding to a complaint of child abuse?



What should we be doing?

- Families have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of their child and participate in decisions affecting the child.
- The organisation engages in open, two-way communication with families and communities about its child safety approach, and relevant information is accessible.
- Families and communities have a say in the organisation's policies and practices.
- Families and communities are informed about the organisation's operations and governance.



3. UNCRC Article 18 states that parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. Parents or legal guardians have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child. The best interests of the child will be their basic concern. For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.



What would we expect children to say?

My family is welcome here.

The people here talk to my family about me.

The special days of my community are celebrated.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

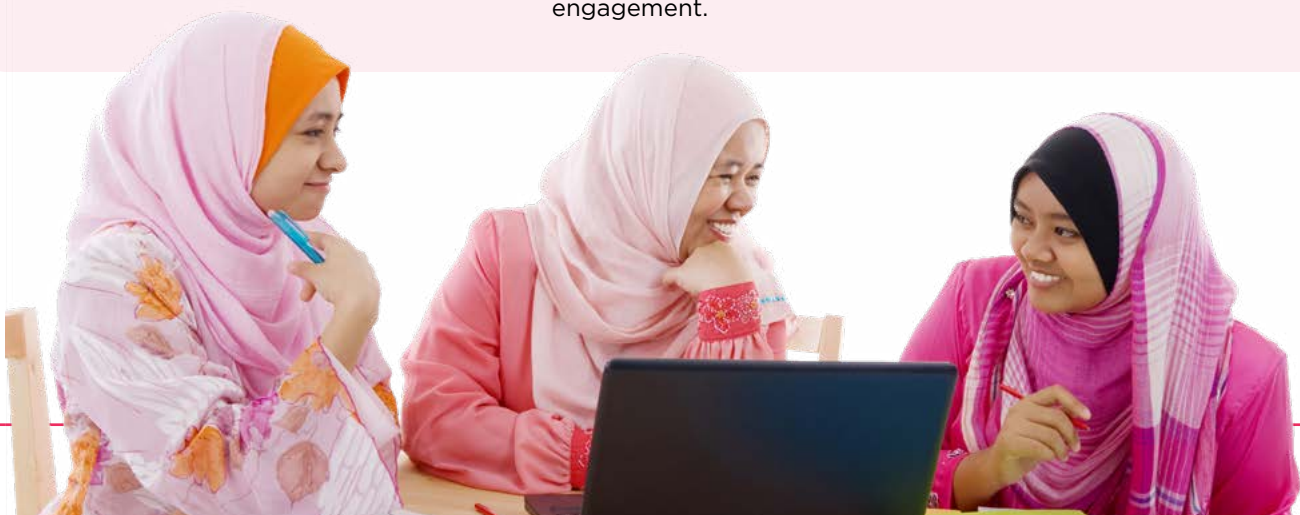
- Leaders and staff encourage families to take an active role in keeping children safe.
- Policies and procedures (including Codes of Conduct) are clearly communicated to parents and carers.
- Families and community members are encouraged to provide feedback on how the organisation keeps children safe, and this information is acted upon where necessary.

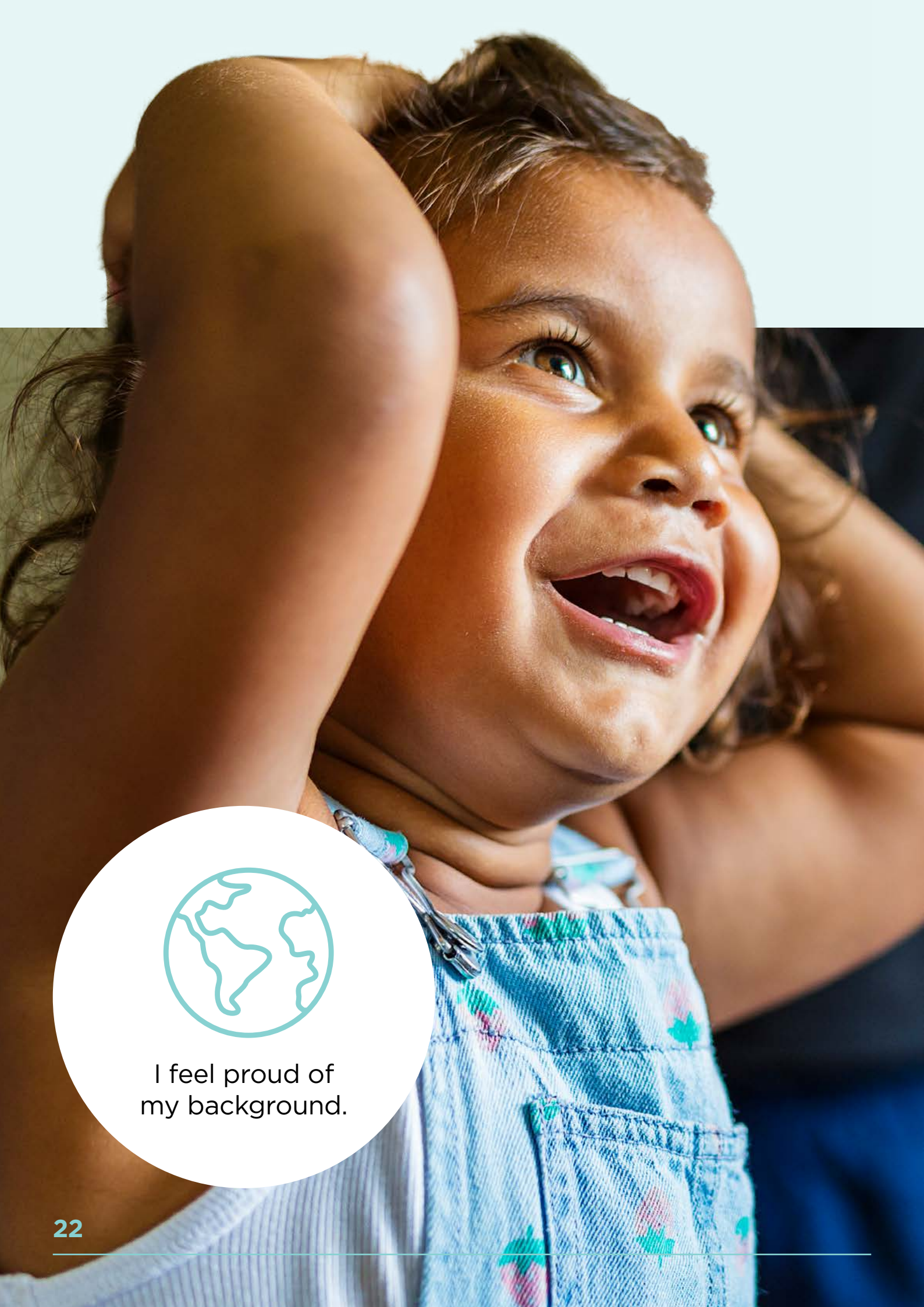
Documenting the Standard

- Child safe policies reflect the importance of family and community involvement, and describe ways this can take place.
- Complaint handling policies include procedures for keeping family and community members informed, in accordance with the law.
- Child safe information in various formats such as brochures, posters, websites and on social media.
- Surveys that gauge the effectiveness of family and community engagement.

Indicators of success

- Families feel welcome.
- Families and the community support the organisation to be safer for children.
- Families and the community are comfortable asking questions on how the organisation prioritises child safety.





I feel proud of
my background.



Standard 4

Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

A child safe organisation provides culturally safe and child-friendly services. It pays attention to equity by taking into account children's diverse circumstances. It recognises that some children are more vulnerable to abuse than others, or find it harder to speak up and be heard. Organisations should try to protect and support all children equitably.⁴ It recognises that all children are vulnerable but that some are more vulnerable to abuse than others, or find it difficult to reveal or be understood when communicating that they have been abused.



When an organisation does not respect diversity and promote equality it can create additional risks for children who may already be vulnerable to harm and abuse. Failures to address racism or prejudice create particular risks for some children.

Children who appear to be vulnerable are at higher risk of being harmed as they may have fewer connections to trusted adults and less confidence or ability to speak out. Children who are questioning their sexuality or gender; those with prior trauma, such as many refugee children; and those currently going through an adverse life event may be at particular risk.

Children have diverse needs, abilities and backgrounds and may be particularly vulnerable if they:

- are living with disability
- come from specific religious or cultural backgrounds
- are very young
- have been exposed to trauma
- feel vulnerable because of their gender identity or sexuality
- come from diverse family backgrounds
- live remotely.

Organisations need to adapt and respond to children's individual learning and communication styles as well as their life experiences.

Children with disability, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and from CALD backgrounds are over-represented in high-risk environments such as out-of-home care. Some children may not disclose harm due to a lack of trust in authorities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and those from some refugee communities in particular may have concerns about the intrusion of authorities into their families and communities. Organisations understand how children with vulnerabilities may be at a disadvantage. They use this knowledge to create equity in the services they provide.

All children and their families and carers, should feel welcome. Responding appropriately to culture and ensuring inclusivity cuts across all the Standards. Where possible, an organisation's staff should reflect the cultural diversity of the communities it serves.

4. Equity is giving opportunities appropriate to abilities; equality is treating everyone the same way.



Aim

Children are provided opportunities to participate to their full potential.



Why is this Standard important?

Children need to build relationships, skills and knowledge, and have access to resources that keep them safe.

Organisations need to adapt to the diverse needs of children, so they have equal opportunities to feel welcome and participate in activities and programs.

This can help organisations prevent abuse and empower children to speak up. This fosters an inclusive, open and transparent culture.⁵



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How does our organisation identify children with vulnerabilities and establish their needs?
- Does our workforce understand the link between a child's vulnerability and their increased risk of being harmed?
- How are our children given skills and tools to communicate their views and needs?
- How does our organisation adapt and respond to the diverse needs of children?
- How does our organisation encourage children to have positive discussions about diversity?
- How are children provided equitable opportunities to participate in our organisation?



What should we be doing?

- The organisation actively anticipates children's diverse circumstances and responds effectively to those with additional vulnerabilities.
- All children have access to information, support and complaint processes.
- The organisation pays particular attention to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disability and children from CALD backgrounds.



What would we expect children to say?

I feel proud of my background.

I am treated fairly.

I feel included.

I feel safe to talk about my differences.

5. UNHCR Article 2 emphasises non-discrimination and a commitment to fulfil children's rights 'irrespective of ... [their] race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status'.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Leaders and staff understand barriers that prevent children from disclosing abuse or adults from recognising children's disclosure.
- Leaders and staff identify and respect the diverse needs, abilities and backgrounds of children, and understand the value of treating them fairly.
- All staff are given information about the factors that increase a child's vulnerability to harm.
- Leaders ensure that the workforce reflects the diversity of the children it provides services to, where possible.
- Leaders and staff adapt activities and services to ensure all children feel included.

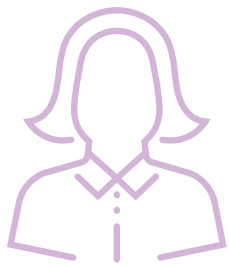
Documenting the Standard

- Child safe policy describes how children should have their individual needs recognised and describe how the organisation considers its response to children with vulnerabilities.
- Risk management plan identifies factors that may increase the risk of abuse for children with vulnerabilities and describes how these should be managed.
- Diversity and inclusion plan.
- Records of events that demonstrate diversity and inclusion.

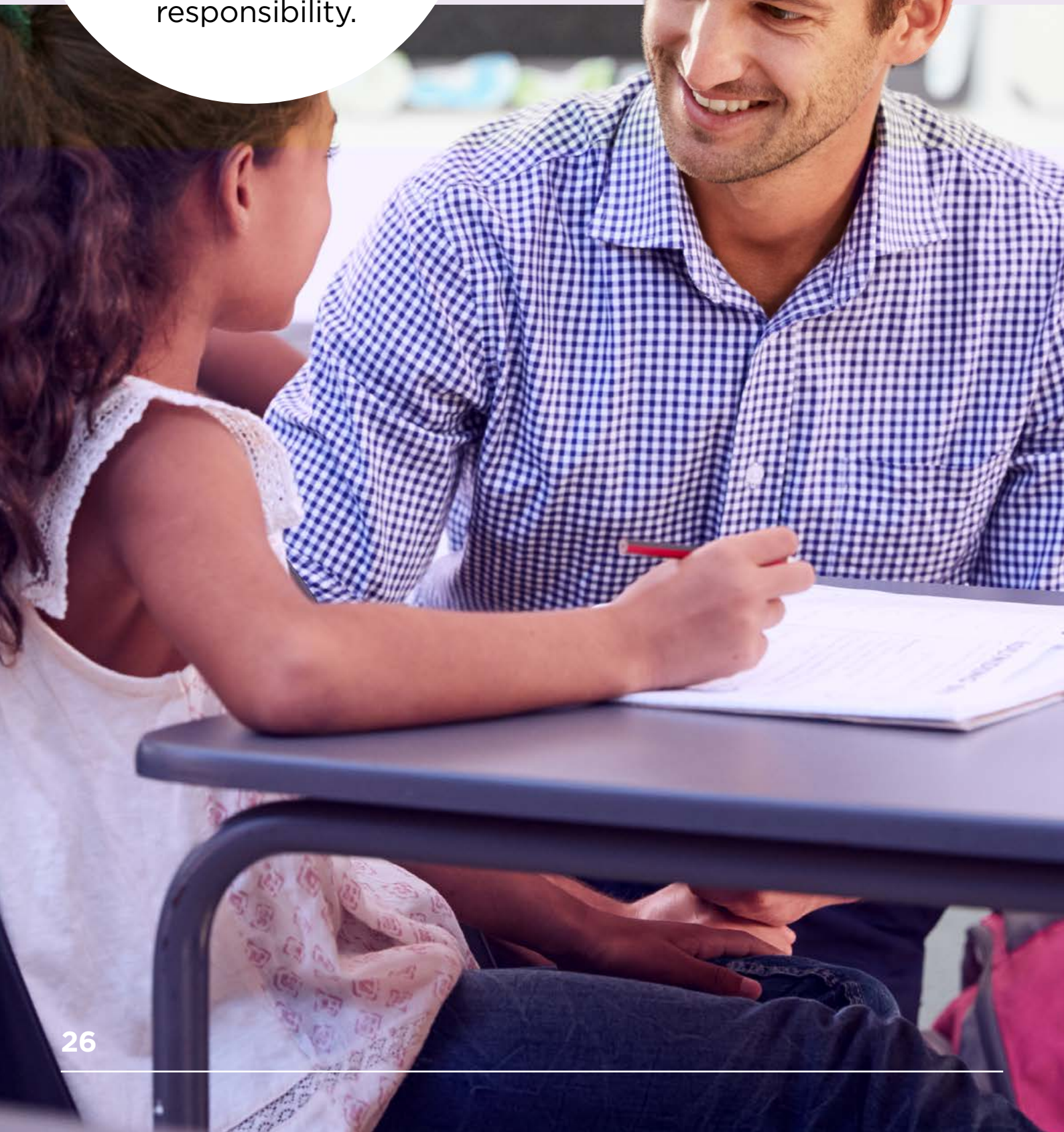
Indicators of success

- Children with diverse needs speak up about concerns around their safety and the safety of their friends, and adults take them seriously.
- Children are not disadvantaged by programs and activities.
- Organisational culture allows children with diverse needs to feel valued.
- Adults recognise the value of diversity and inclusivity.
- Staff feel confident in working with diverse groups.
- Increased participation of children with disabilities in the mainstream community.





Child safety
is everyone's
responsibility.





Standard 5

People working with children are suitable and supported



Human resource management - including screening, recruitment and performance reviews - plays a vital role in protecting children from harm. Child safe organisations make sure child safety is prioritised when they are selecting and managing staff. They recognise that a verified Working With Children Check (WWCC) is an important step, but that other screening practices must also be used.

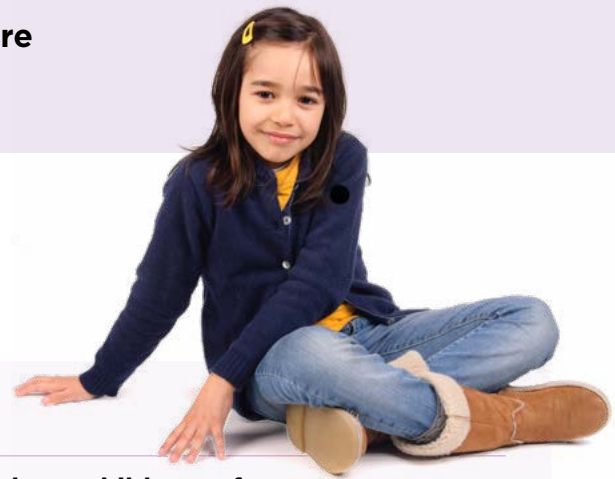
Children are placed at risk when organisations have inadequate recruitment, induction and ongoing training and performance management practices. Child safe organisations have policies and procedures that describe how they recruit and support staff to keep children safe. These are championed by leaders and followed consistently by all staff.

Child focused human resource practices can:

- discourage or screen out people who are unsuitable to work with children
- help ensure that only the most suitable applicants who have a positive attitude to child safety are employed
- support hiring managers to understand child safe recruitment practices
- demonstrate the organisation's culture and expectations when staff work with children
- commit the organisation to child safe inductions, training and ongoing performance reviews.

Standard 5

People working with children are suitable and supported



Aim

Organisations attract, recruit, supervise and support staff to keep children safe.



Why is this Standard important?

The WWCC is only one tool of many to support organisations in screening potential staff. Screening processes help prevent unsuitable people from being recruited and can discourage them from applying.

Ongoing supervision encourages people to follow policies that can reduce the risk of harm to children. Robust human resource management practices ensure that all staff receive ongoing training to effectively perform their role.



What should we be doing?

- Recruitment, including advertising and screening, emphasises child safety.
- Relevant staff have probity checks.
- All staff receive an appropriate induction and are aware of their child safety responsibilities, including reporting obligations.
- Supervision and people management have a child safety focus.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do our recruitment processes focus on child safety?
- Do all relevant staff have WWCC and reference checks?
- Do we have probationary periods for all staff?
- How does our induction process explain our organisation's commitment to child safety?
- How does our induction process help our staff understand their obligations to keep children safe?
- How do we supervise and support our staff to encourage child safe practices?
- Do all relevant staff have verified WWCCs, criminal history and reference checks?





What would we expect children to say?

I feel safe with the adults here.

Adults show concern for me.

I'm asked about what kind of staff the organisation should have in it.

I trust adults here and can talk to them about things that upset me.

All the adults tell us the same things about how we should behave and how they should behave.



Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Leaders expect that recruitment does not rely only on the WWCC, and support ongoing training opportunities for all staff.
- Hiring managers are trained in child safe recruitment practices.
- Staff recruitment includes job ads that identify your organisation as valuing child safety.
- Recruitment processes involve a range of interview questions to establish staff suitability.
- Background and reference checks are carried out and recorded.
- Supervision includes regular reviews to check whether staff are following Codes of Conduct and other child safe policies.
- Staff, families and the community are aware of recruitment and other child safe human resource practices.

Documenting the Standard

- Employment advertising includes the organisation's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.
- Induction packages include Codes of Conduct, Child Safe Policies and Complaint Handling Policies.
- Job descriptions and duty statements set clear expectations about child safety and describe the organisation's commitment to child safety.
- Child Safe Policy describes ways that recruitment occurs.
- Documentation that indicates Working With Children Checks have been verified.
- Records of staff interview results, reference checks and inductions.
- Performance development plans for staff.
- Supervision contracts that describe how staff performance will be managed.

Indicators of success

- Staff recruitment and supervision practices prioritise child safety.
- Children are safe around staff.
- Staff have, or are working towards having, suitable skills and experience to work with children.
- Staff attitudes and behaviours create and maintain a child safe culture.
- Staff values align with the organisation's commitment to child safety.



I will be believed if I speak up about something that is concerning me, and action will be taken because of it.



Standard 6

Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse (or other concerns) are child-focused.

A child focused complaint process supports children who are exposed to the risk of harm and encourages them to speak up. Children, families and staff know who to tell if they want to make a complaint of child abuse. Child safe organisations respond by immediately protecting children at risk. Complaints are addressed promptly, thoroughly and fairly. All adults understand their reporting obligations, including to external authorities.⁶ Child safe cultures create environments where staff can identify and report suspected harm of children.



A child safe culture encourages the reporting of child abuse and ensures the effective handling of all complaints and investigations. A poor culture can do the opposite.

Barriers that discourage children from speaking up about being harmed include:

- fear they will not be believed
- not feeling comfortable to talk to adults
- having no trusted adult to speak to
- feeling intimidated, including by the perpetrator
- their vulnerabilities and experiences
- reporting processes that are inaccessible to children.

These barriers can exist in organisations that have poor complaint processes or where processes are undermined by leadership that prioritises the interests of the organisation over the interests of children. Ineffective handling of complaints, inadequate investigations and slow responses can allow abuse to continue.

Organisations that rely on internal processes or that lack transparency when responding to complaints may also fail to report to the police or other external authorities.

When deciding whether to speak up about safety concerns, children consider their past interactions with the organisation, whether good or bad. A child safe organisation implements complaint processes that are child focused and equips staff with the knowledge and skills to respond appropriately to complaints.

Complaints about a child being deliberately harmed should not be responded to in the same way as accidents or oversights. For example, a complaint framework that brings parties together to attempt to achieve a resolution is not appropriate when responding to an allegation that a child has been abused. Child safe organisations should have policies and procedures that allow an appropriate response to complaints about abuse.

⁶ Organisational leaders are responsible for knowing what and who to report to, and what legislation underpins these obligations.

Standard 6

Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse (or other concerns) are child-focused.



Aim

Children are the priority when responding to complaints of abuse.



Why is this Standard important?

Implementing a child focused complaint handling procedure means people know how to make a complaint and staff know what steps to take to respond.

Children are safer when complaints are addressed quickly, thoroughly and transparently, and where the family and community are supported. When the complaint process is child focused, children feel more comfortable and empowered to make a complaint.

Child safe organisations use complaints as opportunities to reflect on their child safe practices. Children are at greater risk when organisations prioritise their own reputations over the safety of children.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do we prioritise the safety of all children in our organisation after a complaint is received?
- How do we make our complaint handling process publicly available and accessible?
- How do we make our staff aware of their internal and external reporting obligations, including reportable conduct?
- How do we record complaints about child abuse?
- How do we embed a culture of reporting?
- How do we support families after a complaint is received?
- What mechanisms ensure the confidentiality of complaints and the investigative process?
- Do adults understand the process and possible outcomes for complaints that are made against them?



What should we be doing?

- The organisation has a child focused complaint handling system that is understood by children, staff, volunteers and families.
- The organisation has an effective complaint handling policy that clearly outlines roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with different types of complaints, and obligations to act and report.
- Complaints are taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly.
- The organisation meets reporting, privacy and employment obligations.





What would we expect children to say?

I know who to talk to if I feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unhappy.

I know who to talk to if someone asks me to do something I don't want to do.

I will be believed if I speak up about something that is concerning me, and action will be taken because of it.

I will not get in trouble if I speak up.



Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Leaders create a culture where complaints are taken seriously and all adults take responsibility for the safety of children.
- Leaders clearly explain that breaches of Codes of Conduct will result in disciplinary action.
- Staff are given support and information on what and how to report, including to external bodies.
- Accessible processes are provided to enable children, staff and others to make complaints.
- Procedures describe likely time frames, review processes and potential outcomes of complaints.
- Complaints are handled confidentially.
- Processes are reviewed at regular intervals and after complaints are made.
- Complaint handling procedures are publicly available.
- Staff are offered a variety of learning strategies.
- Documents are confidential where required.

Documenting the Standard

- Child focused complaint handling policy and procedure that includes information on how to make a complaint, respond to a complaint, investigate a complaint, and provide support and assistance for those making a complaint.
- Code of Conduct that clearly describes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour.
- Disciplinary policy.
- Records of complaints made to the organisation, ranging from concerns to disclosures.
- Records of reports about child safety that have been made to government agencies, in keeping with legislative obligations.
- Accessible complaint handling information available online and in print, including in the form of a website, social media, brochures, fact sheets or posters.
- Records of complaint handling and Code of Conduct training.

Indicators of success

- Organisational culture where complaints are taken seriously and acted on.
- Staff feel supported to raise concerns about child safety.
- Children feel safe to raise concerns about themselves or their friends.



When an organisation has a culture of learning, staff are provided with ongoing education and training in how to keep children safe.



Standard 7

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe, through continual education and training

A child safe organisation promotes continuous learning and provides regular ongoing education and training. Staff continually build their abilities to keep children safe.

Understanding how children are at risk of harm is essential to keeping them safe. Staff can prevent abuse and maltreatment when they know how to identify it.

Despite commonly held misconceptions and persistent stereotypes, there is no typical profile of a perpetrator. They use a wide range of tactics and strategies - including grooming. Perpetrators can groom children, families and other adults, including their work colleagues. This is often difficult to identify as the behaviour is not necessarily explicitly sexual or directly abusive. Leaders should provide staff with training and resources so they can identify conduct that, on its own, does not constitute grooming or abuse. However, repeated instances of this conduct may reveal a pattern of behaviour that indicates there is a risk to children. Examples can include:

- being alone with a child when there is no professional reason for doing so
- spending time with a child outside an organisation
- sharing stories of sexual experiences with a child
- sharing inappropriate images
- offering children gifts, benefits and favouritism.

Additionally, leaders should ensure staff know how to identify and respond to all forms of child abuse: physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse and neglect.

Leaders and staff should be aware that abuse can take place in physical and online environments. They should also be aware that children may harm other children. Often these children have experienced trauma themselves and need protection, support and treatment.

New knowledge and practices to prevent harm and abuse are continually emerging. Child safe organisations should consider themselves 'learning organisations' with a culture of continuous improvement.

In-house training can assist staff to understand what child safe policies and procedures exist within the organisation. Where necessary, organisations should also consider external training.

Comprehensive training means staff have the skills, abilities and confidence to keep children safe.

Standard 7

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe, through continual education and training



Aim

Organisations invest in building staff skills, abilities and confidence.



What should we be doing?

- Staff receive training on the nature and indicators of child maltreatment, particularly abuse that occurs in organisations.
- Staff receive training on the organisation's child safe practices and child protection efforts.
- Staff are supported to develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures.



Why is this Standard important?

When an organisation has a culture of learning, staff are provided with ongoing education and training in how to keep children safe.

Training also supports staff in understanding what abuse looks like, how the environment can enable or deter abuse and what behaviours indicate abuse may be occurring.

Training gives staff confidence to respond to abuse if it is detected. It reinforces the importance of child safety and that it is everyone's responsibility. Child safe training should extend from front-line staff to managers and boards of directors.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How are staff made aware of the indicators of abuse and neglect?
- How are staff trained in child safe practices?
- How do we record staff participation in training?
- How do we provide training for staff working in higher-risk roles and situations, including working with children with vulnerabilities?
- How do we know our staff are confident to ask for help with reporting abuse and inappropriate conduct?
- How do we ensure that short-term casual, agency or contract staff are properly inducted and know the expectations of our organisation?





What would we expect children to say?

Adults understand how to keep me safe.

I understand that adults are taught how to behave around me.

Sometimes the staff here tell me about what they have been learning and how that keeps me safe.

Adults notice when I feel sad.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

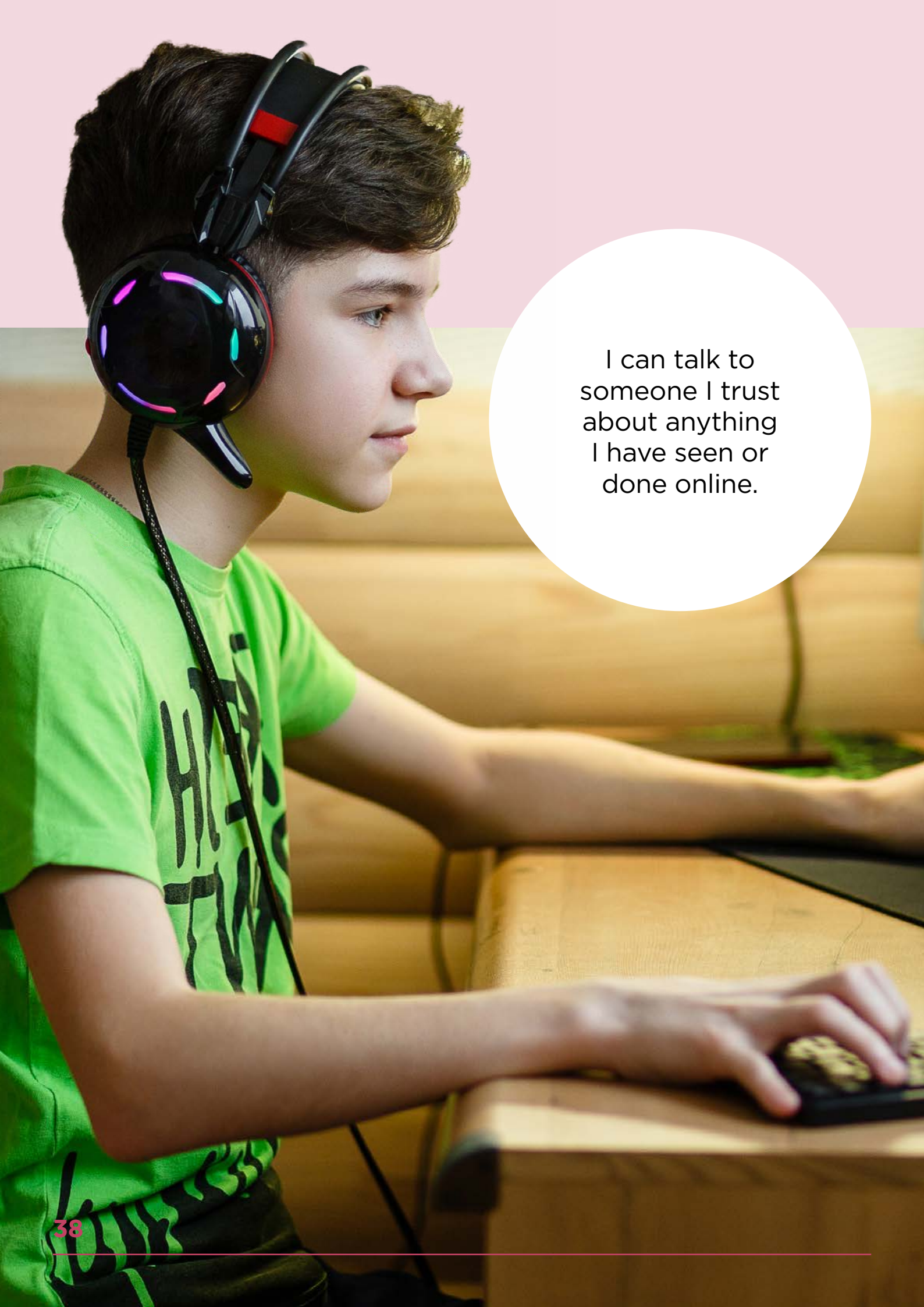
- Leaders provide ongoing education and training opportunities for all staff.
- Training provides staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent and identify abuse, and to respond to complaints.
- Staff who are involved in roles and situations with higher risk are provided more advanced training opportunities.
- Where possible, the organisation employs a child safety officer responsible for training.
- Specialised training is provided to staff working in high-risk situations or with vulnerable children.
- Training is regularly reviewed in response to emerging best practices.
- Attendance at conferences and other forums to learn about improvements in child safe practices.

Documenting the Standard

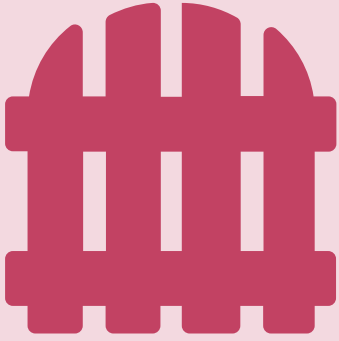
- Child safe policy reflects staff training obligations and opportunities.
- Training plan that includes a schedule of upcoming learning opportunities.
- Training records.
- Educational materials describing indicators of abuse and what to do if it is identified.
- Educational materials discuss emerging issues relating to child safety.

Indicators of success

- Staff feel confident to identify, respond to and report child abuse.
- The organisation has a culture of continual learning.
- The organisation can demonstrate it stays up to date with emerging best practices.



I can talk to
someone I trust
about anything
I have seen or
done online.



Standard 8

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse or other kinds of harm to occur.

A child safe organisation adapts its physical environments to minimise opportunities for abuse to occur. Organisations offer a balance between visibility and children's privacy, creative play and other activities. Child safe organisations also address risks in the online environment by educating children and adults about how to avoid harm and how to detect signs of online grooming.

Child abuse can occur when the physical environment creates opportunities for an adult to isolate a child without supervision or scrutiny. Opportunities can arise in secluded or unsupervised areas; situations where children live away from their parents; or times when children travel with a person in a bus or car, or on overnight trips. Perpetrators can go to some lengths to take advantage of these environments. Child safe organisations provide safe physical environments. Where possible these can be bright and cheerful, enabling children to move around, play and 'hang out' with friends and adults they trust.

Online safety is a growing area of concern in organisations and communities. It presents additional safety challenges because perpetrators can actively exploit the environment to isolate a child without oversight from organisations or parents. Children increasingly view the internet and social media as intrinsic parts of their lives, however they can have differing perceptions to adults about what is an online risk. Children may not know what to do if they feel unsafe or are being actively targeted. They should also know that they can talk to a trusted adult if they feel unsafe online, regardless of their own actions online.

Children, their parents and carers, and staff should have access to information about online risks and how to manage them. These risks include:

- grooming
- sharing of intimate images
- bullying (including cyber bullying) and other forms of psychological abuse
- meeting in person with people they have engaged with online
- exposure to inappropriate content.

It may not be possible to alter physical environments by, for example, knocking down walls or inserting windows that would improve lines of sight. It may also be difficult to remove risks that can occur in the online environment. However, organisations can manage risks to child safety by adhering to robust policies and procedures that clearly describe what is and what is not appropriate behaviour online and in the physical environment.

Standard 8

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse or other kinds of harm to occur.



Aim

Risks to children in physical and online environments are identified and minimised.



Why is this Standard important?

Safe physical environments play a significant role in reducing opportunities for abuse to occur.

Perpetrators exploit situations where they can be alone with children or use the online environment to extend their connection and influence.

An organisation that has areas without natural lines of sight by other adults, or no behavioural expectations when interacting with children in person or online, increases opportunities for harm to occur. Managing risks in physical and online environments can prevent abuse and increase the likelihood that perpetrators are stopped.



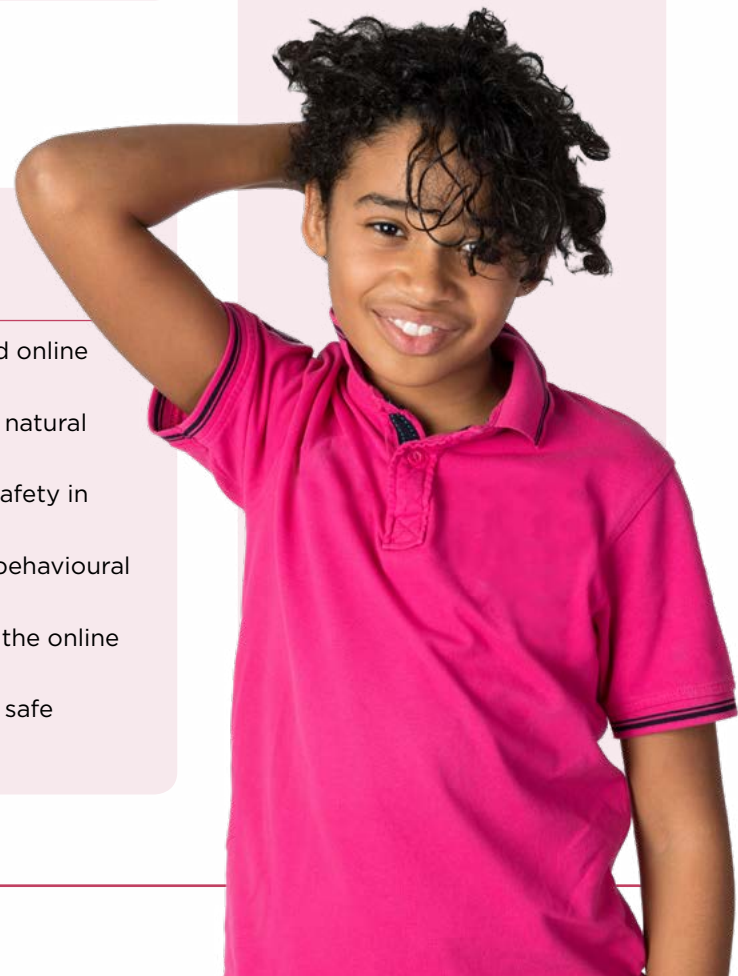
What should we be doing?

- Risks in online and physical environments are identified and mitigated without compromising a child's right to privacy and healthy development.
- The online environment is used in accordance with the organisation's Code of Conduct and relevant policies.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do we assess and manage risks in the physical and online environments?
- How can we alter the physical environment to increase natural lines of sight?
- How do we consult with children about their views of safety in physical and online environments?
- How do we educate our workforce and parents about behavioural expectations, including online safety?
- How do we educate children about how to stay safe in the online environment?
- How do we balance privacy with the need to provide a safe environment for children?





What would we expect children to say?

I know there are some spaces in the organisation I am not allowed into.

I can talk to someone I trust about anything I have seen or done online.

I know what to do if I feel unsafe online.

I am asked about what makes me feel safe.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Leaders set expectations about behavioural standards for staff interacting with children in physical and online environments.
- Risk assessments identify areas where adults have opportunities to interact with children unsupervised, including for one-off events and overnight camps.
- Physical environments are altered to increase natural lines of sight while respecting a child's right to privacy.
- Higher-risk areas such as change rooms, cars, boarding facilities and offsite locations are managed using specific safety measures, such as spot checks and log books.
- Children are provided information about online safety and regularly encouraged to tell staff about negative experiences.
- Staff and parents are provided information about risks in the online environment, such as online grooming, cyber bullying and sexting.⁷

Documenting the Standard

- Child safe policy identifies how the organisation will keep children safe in physical and online environments, with specific reference to higher-risk activities.
- Risk management plan identifies risks to child safety in physical and online environments, and how these will be managed.
- Code of Conduct sets clear behavioural expectations about adult interactions with children.
- A Statement of Commitment to Child Safety reflects children's rights to privacy.
- Posters and brochures give information about online safety.
- Training plans, logbooks and audits of physical environments.

Indicators of success

- Opportunities to harm children are reduced or removed.
- Children engage in creative and safe activities.
- Children speak up about risks in the online environment.
- Children's privacy is balanced with the need to keep them safe.

7. Sexually explicit messages or images sent or received online.



Being a child safe organisation is an evolving process that requires ongoing efforts to keep children safe.



Standard 9

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved



Child safe organisations know it takes ongoing effort to maintain a safe environment for children. Leaders embed a culture of learning and put in place systems to monitor and evaluate how they have implemented the Child Safe Standards. Staff keep up to date with emerging knowledge and trends to continuously improve practices, and can demonstrate that policies and procedures have changed over time.

Child safe organisations learn from complaints and mistakes to continuously improve the safety of children in their care. They analyse complaints to identify the root causes of abuse and to improve child safe practices. This can include examining the underlying factors that have led to a child being harmed.

Organisations should seek advice and input from a specialist external agency to undertake an independent case review where complaints involve sexual abuse, physical assault or other serious forms of abuse. These reviews should include all staff to ensure they understand and support any recommended improvements to child safe practices. Improvements are communicated, understood and accepted at all levels of the organisation.

Standard 9

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved



Aim

Organisations continuously improve their child safe practices.



What should we be doing?

- The organisation regularly reviews and improves child safe practices.
- The organisation analyses complaints to identify causes and systemic failures and inform continuous improvement.



Why is this Standard important?

Child Safe Standards are principle-based and are more effective if their implementation is continuously reviewed and improved.

Being a child safe organisation is an evolving process that requires ongoing efforts to keep children safe.

Child safe organisations that have an open and transparent culture learn from their mistakes and put the interests of children first.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do we stay up to date with current knowledge of child safe practices?
- How do we change policies and procedures to reflect changes to child safe practices?
- Do we review our child safe policies and procedures following a complaint?
- Has an independent agency reviewed our child safe policies and practices?
- How would we conduct a root cause analysis after a critical incident?





What would we expect children to say?

Staff regularly ask my opinion.

Staff ask my opinion if something unusual happens.

Activities keep getting better.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Leaders maintain a culture of continuous improvement to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented and routinely reviewed even though staffing may change.
- Leaders know the value of continuous monitoring, open conversations and exploring new ways to keep children safe.
- Child safe policies and practices are regularly reviewed.
- Staff refer to the Standards when creating, reviewing or evaluating child safe policies and procedures.
- Leaders and staff review critical incidents to identify the root cause of the problem, identify risks to the safety of children and make improvements.
- Children are supported to provide feedback and this information is acted on.


Documenting the Standard

- Log books or version control showing when policies and procedures have been revised and updated.
- Documents (such as reports or board meeting papers and minutes) outline recommendations on how child safe practices can be improved, and they describe how these improvements have been implemented.
- Policies and procedures include a schedule for future reviews and updates.

Indicators of success

- Leaders and staff are open to change.
- Leaders and staff reflect on critical incidents.
- The organisational culture creates an environment of ongoing learning and improvement.





Implemented effectively, child safe policies and procedures provide guidance and clarity to staff, volunteers, parents and children about how to prevent and respond to child safety issues.



Standard 10

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe



Child safe organisations have policies and procedures that describe how they maintain a safe environment for children. They know that these documents are only effective if they are implemented. Policies and procedures should be relevant to all aspects of an organisation and reflect the Child Safe Standards. They are championed by leaders, understood by staff, and available to the community in accessible formats and languages.

Organisations fail to protect children when policies and procedures are absent, not applied, or not relevant to the organisation and its environment. Children can also be harmed if there is a culture of non-compliance and poor leadership. Policies and procedures should be integrated into inductions, training and supervision. Leaders should monitor whether people understand and use them.



Aim

Policies and procedures are championed by leaders, localised, understood by staff and clearly communicated.



Why is this Standard important?

Implemented effectively, child safe policies and procedures provide guidance and clarity to staff, volunteers, parents and children about how to prevent and respond to child safety issues.

Without this clarity, individual staff can be left to make their own judgements about complex issues and scenarios – sometimes with poor consequences.



What questions can we ask to reflect on what we are doing?

- How do we make our policies and procedures specific to our organisation?
- How do our leaders champion a culture of compliance with our child safe policies and procedures?
- Have we made our child safe policies and procedures publicly available and easy to understand?
- How do staff implement our child safe policies and procedures?
- How do we know staff are implementing child safe policies and procedures?
- How are Codes of Conduct, policies and procedures embedded in all operational aspects of our organisation?
- What happens if policies and procedures are not followed?



What should we be doing?

- Policies and procedures address all Child Safe Standards.
- Policies and procedures are accessible and easy to understand.
- Best practice models and stakeholder consultation inform the development of policies and procedures.
- Leaders champion and model compliance with policies and procedures.
- Staff understand and implement the policies and procedures.



What would we expect children to say?

Adults have rules to keep me safe.

My parents and I know where to find the rules that keep me safe.

I can understand what the rules mean.

Ways that we know we're meeting the Standard

Applying the Standard

- Child safe policies are specific to the organisation and its environment, and they address local risks to the safety of children.
- Child safe policies, Codes of Conduct and complaint handling procedures are publicly accessible.
- Policies and procedures are available in child-friendly and accessible formats that pay attention to children's diverse characteristics, cultural background and abilities.
- Staff follow child safe policies and procedures.
- Documents are saved in accordance to NSW record keeping requirements.

Documenting the Standard

- Child safe policy that includes a Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
- Code of Conduct
- Risk management plan
- Complaint handling policy that includes reporting obligations
- Recruitment policy
- Social media policy
- WWCC policy
- Disciplinary policy
- Inclusivity plan supporting children with diverse needs.

Indicators of success

- Staff and the community understand the organisation's approach to child safety.
- Staff and the community know that the organisation takes child safety seriously.
- Staff, parents and carers know where to find the organisation's child safe policies and procedures.
- Staff, parents, carers and the community can use policies and procedures to hold the organisation to account.



This guide to the Child Safe Standards has been created by the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian to help organisations create and maintain environments where children are safe from harm and abuse.

For free training opportunities and resources go to ocg.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/training-and-resources or phone 02 9286 7225.







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