



How to foster participation of children and young people in safeguarding activities in youth-serving organisations

ISSN 2209-3397

2018



Child safeguarding activities in youth serving organisations are successful when these “organisations place a high priority on the promotion of participation and empowerment of young people” (Commission for Children and Young People 2018). To foster participation of children it is necessary to provide them with opportunities to participate, while also openly acknowledging that their views will be valued. If this is done, children are more likely to speak out (Commission for Children and Young People 2018). It is important for children to be always aware of what the organisation is doing to keep them safe. Even if organisations have processes in place to keep children safe, children still may not feel safe if they don't know what organisations are actively doing. So communication and participation are essential.

What is meant by participation and empowerment?

The Commission for Children and Young People (2018) outline three principles that underpin the participation of children and young people. These are:

- *Empowerment, which encompasses children and young people having greater control or say over their lives through participation*
- *Purposeful engagement, which encompasses children and young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes*
- *Inclusiveness, which encompasses ensuring that all children and young people are able to participate.*

Incorporating the above principles in youth serving organizations can help ensure that children *feel safe* and *be safe*. Although there is a growing body of literature focusing on the needs of children and young people in youth serving organisations, research about safety in youth serving organisations that includes children's perspectives is limited. Research in Australia that has included the perspectives of children has focused on residential care. This is a service provided to any child or young person aged 0-17 as an alternative place of residence if they are unable to live with their primary care giver. Residential care is one of a variety of options within the current Australian out of home care model.

Residential care services that nurture a positive culture are the safest for children and young people. At these services residents:

- *empathise with each other*
- *take responsibility for each other's safety*
- *stand up for each other when they experience violence and assault; and*
- *assist each other to access support when required* (Moore, et al 2016: 78)



During the Institute of Child Protection Studies' *Safe and Sound* (2017) consultations young people identified seven elements which they felt had helped them to feel and to be safe in residential care. These included:

1. Feeling safe
2. Being homelike
3. Positive relationships and strong connections
4. Positive relationships outside of residential care
5. Stability and predictability
6. Routine and fair rules
7. Having a say and having some control over their space

Leading the way



How can youth-serving organisations foster and sustain a culture of child safeguarding?

A child-safe culture begins with children, but is fostered and sustained by adults - child safeguarding champions - who listen to, respond to, and incorporate the views of children and young people into all areas of the organisation. This includes its services, activities, policies, procedures, culture, leadership, and overarching philosophy.

The Institute of Child Protection Studies is developing online learning modules to support Program Leaders in youth-serving organisations to build a culture of child safety and lead their organisation in improving responses to children's wellbeing.

- <https://safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au>
- <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/institute-of-child-protection-studies/our-research>

Child safeguarding refers to the implementation of policies, procedures and practices that are child-centred and that ensure children are safe. That is, the safety and wellbeing of children is prioritised above all else. While most organisations would agree that they intend to be both child-safe and child-centered, implementing this requires a planned approach and a commitment of resources. It needs a sustained effort and commitment from Program Leaders including the organisations board, CEO, executives, and team leaders, as well as support from Practitioners.

Tips for child safeguarding success

1. Organisational commitment, investment and support
2. A committed multidisciplinary team led by qualified dedicated child-safeguarding Project Manager
3. Ensure your organization is a role model for violence prevention
4. Visibility and communication
5. Realistic work plan
6. Implement a Children Champion's model
7. Be aware of the changing practice environment
8. Don't reinvent the wheel

Listening and responding

An essential part of creating a child safeguarding culture is listening to and responding to children if they talk about their experiences of harm, abuse and neglect. While confronting for anyone, it is fundamental that people respond in a way that is compassionate, supportive and enhances safety and meet legal and ethical obligations.

Child safeguarding culture involves:

- Identifying children and young people at risk
- Creating a safe space for a parent to disclose domestic and family violence
- Noticing the signs in a child or young person
- Creating a safe environment for children and young people to disclose
- Initiating a discussion about violence, abuse or neglect
- Giving kids sense of control
- Responding to disclosures of abuse or neglect
- Assessing child safety and risk
- Awareness that a young person may be at risk of self-harm or suicide
- Acting on safety concerns
- Talking to children about safety



Engagement Framework: consulting and talking to children (CFCYP 2018: 63)

Establish what safety means to children

Practical suggestion

Ask children when they feel safe and when they feel unsafe.

Ensure the physical environment is safe, warm and friendly towards children.

Good outcomes

Development of the Child Safe Policy, Code of Conduct and complaints management process, which are informed by children's insight and responses.

Being alerted to any physical danger in the environment.

Educate children about their rights

Practical suggestion

Run informal education sessions on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Teach children that with every right they enjoy, they need to meet its corresponding responsibility.

Undertake activities on 'rights' versus 'wants'.

Good outcomes

Children understand their basic human rights.

Children understand that they need to meet their responsibilities.

Children know the difference between a 'right' and a 'want'.

Include children in policy development

Practical suggestion

Explain what the organisation is attempting to do and ask children for their ideas, opinions and suggestions.

Run small discussion groups, and provide refreshments and activities. Give regular breaks.

Good outcomes

A Child Safe Policy that children understand and that represents their suggestions.

Practical suggestions that contribute to a physically safe environment.

Encourage children to develop their own Code of Conduct

Practical suggestion

Ask children what is acceptable behaviour and unacceptable behaviour. This includes behaviour of adults towards children, of children towards adults and of children towards children.

Formulate a Code of Conduct using 'DO' and 'DO NOT' or 'WE WILL' and 'WE WILL NOT'.

Good outcomes

A child-friendly Code of Conduct for an organisation, written by children for children.

Guidelines for an organisation's staff and volunteers that cover their interactions, expected behaviour and relationships with children.

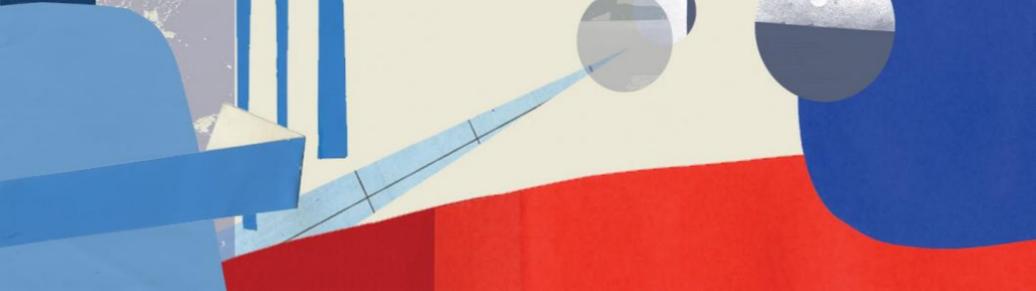
Action Plan Tool: fostering participation

- In what ways does your organisation publicly commit to child safeguarding?
- What is already in place within the organisation?
- How does a chosen activity or action support your organisation in complying with child safeguarding standards?
- Identify gaps or improvements within the organisations delivery and championing of child safeguarding activities
- Identify who is responsible - timeframes and review dates



Examples of activity in action

- Statement of commitment to child safeguarding outlined in organisation's policy and operations manuals.
- As part of the induction processes, new employees are made aware of the statement of commitment to child safeguarding before they begin employment into the organisation, and regularly reminded in performance reviews, team meetings, and other corporate activities.
- Child safeguarding commitments and policies are accessible to those accessing the organisation's services.
- Allows for feedback and comments from children and families regarding the organisations child safeguarding policy.
- Child safeguarding policy is available on the organisation's website.



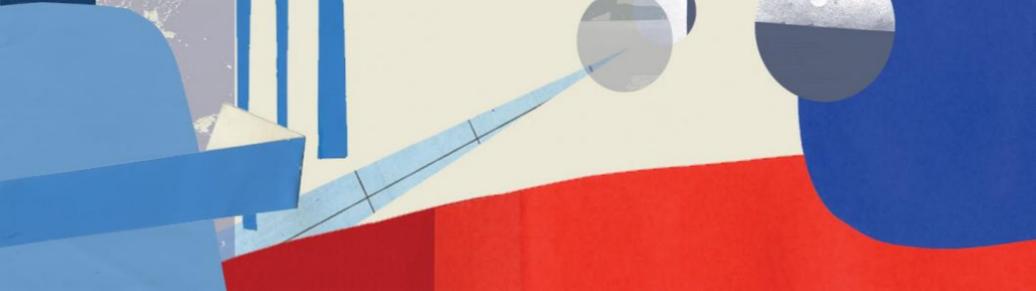
What we know: key points from research

The importance of workers and/or services providing timely and appropriate responses to children and young people who experience abuse, assault or encountered unsafe peers or adults is critical. Within residential care in Australia, children and young people believe effective responses are predicated by residents already having trustworthy relationships with workers who notice when they were being or feeling unsafe, often demonstrated through their behaviour. Young people prefer workers to take the initiative in ‘checking in’ with them rather than having to approach the workers when they have concerns or safety issues (Moore, 2017). ‘Checking in’ can involve workers actively asking children about their safety concerns; workers who teach and mentor children in self-protection skills; and workers who stand up for and beside young people (Moore, 2017).

What we don’t know: key points for future research

Although there is a growing body of literature focusing on the needs and experiences of children and young people in youth-serving organisations, including residential care in Australia, little attention has been placed on their experiences of abuse or the harm which has been perpetrated on them within these environments (Moore, McArthur, Roche, Death, Tilbury, 2016). Further research capturing the experiences of abuse and harm within youth-serving organisations can strengthen knowledge of child safeguarding principles and practices.





References

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Moore, T., McArthur, M., Roche, S., Death, J., & Tilbury, C. (2016). *Safe and Sound: Exploring the safety of young people in residential care*. Melbourne: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Accessed <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Research%20Report%20%20Safe%20and%20Sound%20Exploring%20the%20safety%20of%20young%20people%20in%20residential%20care%20-%20Causes.pdf>

To cite the report

Institute of Child Protection Studies. (2018). *How to foster participation of children and young people in safeguarding activities in youth-serving organisations*, Australian Catholic University.

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The Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University aims to enhance outcomes for children, young people and families through quality research, evaluation, training and community education.

ICPS research strengths include promoting children's participation, strengthening service systems and informing practice, and supporting child-safe communities.

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