

# 10 National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

## A guide for psychologists

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## Introduction

The [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#) provide a national approach to embedding a child-safe culture across all sectors of Australian society where children gather. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse uncovered shocking abuse of children. The national principles were developed by the Australian Human Rights Commission in response to recommendations by the Royal Commission, and have been endorsed by the Prime Minister, state Premiers and territory Chief Ministers.

The National Principles aim for an outcome that is universally desired – safe, happy and engaged children.

Psychologists are in a fortunate position of working with children and young people in a variety of workplaces: private practice, schools, hospitals, allied health clinics, and other community organisations. As well as contributing to the treatment and management of the impact of child sexual abuse, and you can also contribute to fostering conditions that prevent abuse from occurring.

This resource offers suggestions on how to promote child safety by working with the professional and support staff in your organisation and in your professional network. Read about how you can apply each principle to your practice and strengthen processes to improve safety for children and young people.

A nationally consistent approach to embedding child safe cultures within organisations that engage with children ensures better protection for Australia's children.

**Professor Daryl Higgins**, Director, Institute of Child Protection Studies, August 2021



## Principle 1: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

**Leadership, governance, and the culture of an organisation can impact children's safety and wellbeing. A culture of openness encourages and supports all staff to safely disclose risks of harm to children.**

The leadership team in any organisation needs to be aware of any risks to child safety, be sensitive to children's needs, and promote ways to maintain their safety and wellbeing. As mental health professionals, you can draw on your skills and knowledge of child development to help organisations you work with create a safeguarding culture. You can offer guidance on how to respond to concerns about a child's safety and how to escalate any report of abuse.

### Ideas on strengthening leadership, governance and culture in organisations

- Create a Code of Conduct to offer guidelines for staff on expected behavioural standards and responsibilities.
- Create information sheets and fact sheets that outline risks to child safety within your practice.
- Create an organisational chart that shows lines of authority, reporting and accountability in relation to safeguarding.
- Create opportunities to discuss with parents how certain issues may affect their family environment.
- When making critical decisions within your clinic or practice about budgets, staffing and training, consider the wellbeing and safety of children, e.g. "Will this affect the way we maintain child safety?", "Will this perpetuate an unsafe situation?"



### Example of principle in action

Staff, volunteers, children and young people have a sound knowledge of children's rights, including their rights to feel safe and be heard, and the accountabilities that accompany these rights.

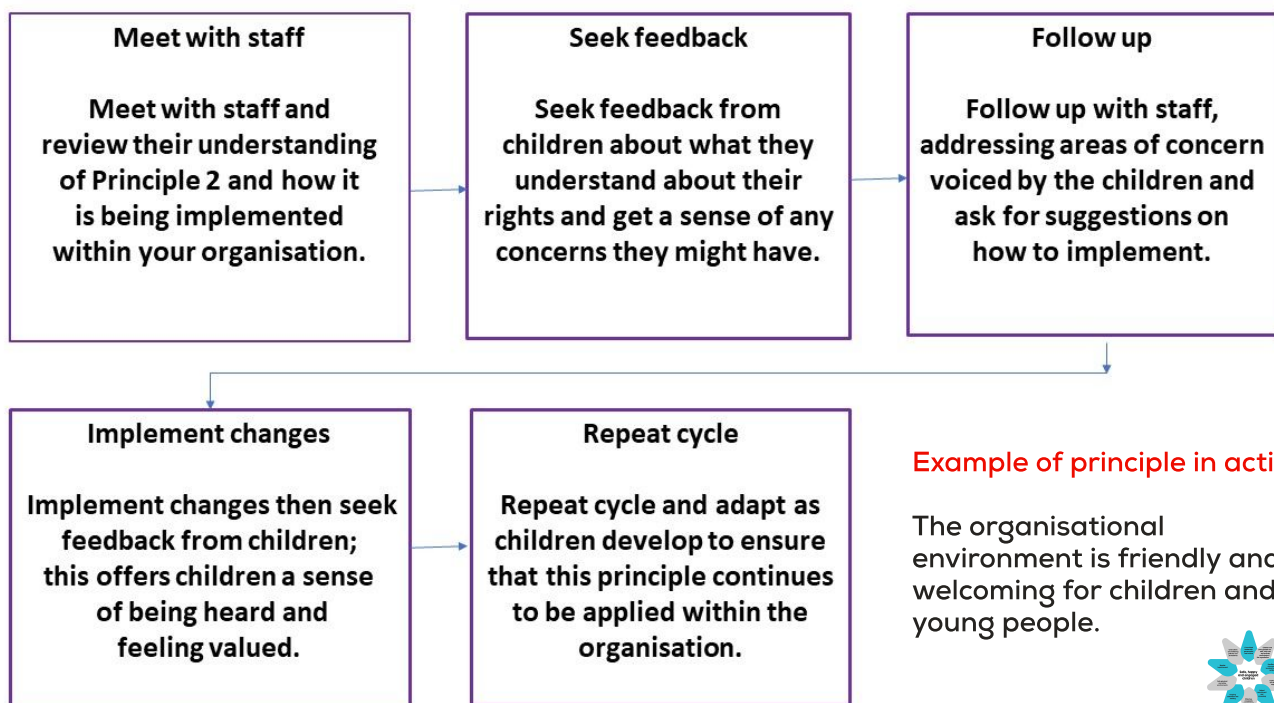


## Principle 2: Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

A fundamental aspect of safeguarding children within an organisation involves informing children about their rights. Sometimes adults exclude children from conversations in an attempt to protect them. But all children have a right to voice their concerns and to be taken seriously.

Encourage a collaborative process when working with members of your clinic or practice, or with other organisations and children. Using a child-centred and age-appropriate approach enables children to be part of the conversation. Arming children with knowledge can help them recognise signs of harm where adults may have missed the signs. Here are some ideas:

- Inform children about who they can go to if they need to talk to someone across all the different settings you work with them in.
- Use play therapy to help a child speak more openly about their feelings; this technique can lead to further discussions about their safety.
- Build trust through communication, respect and compassion.
- Ask open-ended questions in conversations with children about whether they feel safe and heard at your workplace.
- Treat children as equals, and support and guide their decisions.
- Talk with a child rather than at them and invite them into conversation.
- Give children and young people information that is appropriate for their age and stage of development about safe and respectful peer relationships (for both in-person and social media conversations).
- Establish a continual improvement plan to evaluate how effectively your clinic or practice is implementing this principle and to address any underlying issues. Review your process from multiple perspectives using individual or group discussions.



### Principle 3: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing

**As a psychologist, you can draw on your knowledge of child behaviour, emotions and cognition to promote child safety. Your experience can help you identify and address the links between a child's disruptive behaviour and their problems at home, feelings of being unsafe and uncomfortable, or experiences of abuse.**

Psychologists are uniquely equipped to support organisational change strategies to build child-focused safety strategies, and help manage expectations from staff, management, boards of governance, families and communities. Sharing this knowledge with the community, parents, teachers and coaches can help them understand concerning child behaviour that may be linked to unsafe environments, or threatening or harmful experiences.

Engagement with parents and other professionals or community groups is a two-way process. Having those channels of communication allows sharing of knowledge. For example, parents know their children, their mannerisms and their interests really well. Those working directly with children, such as early childhood educators, teachers and coaches, know the developmental level of their students and how they communicate with their peers. Pooling this information can help your assessment of a child's behaviour, cognition and emotional wellbeing.

Inviting parents, staff or other people to share their thoughts, ideas and reflections on your service can be an integral part of your service. It can help reduce the stigma of submitting a complaint or feedback and encourage more open communication.

#### Engaging parents

- Ask a few questions about their experience with the services offered at your clinic or practice, allowing as much anonymity as possible depending on the format of the feedback: pen and paper, online or by email. When privacy is maintained, participation increases because people have less fear of stigma or repercussions.
- Offer all parents and groups receiving services in your practice setting the opportunity to give constructive feedback and outline specific complaints. Use this feedback to improve the quality of your service.

#### Engaging community groups

- Offer information sessions to community services that work with children.
- Promote child safe practices by basing community engagement on your knowledge on child behaviour, emotional wellbeing and cognition.
- Share your professional experiences, skills and knowledge about situational crime prevention strategies (see Resources for more information on these strategies) and child safe practices with other professionals.
- Work collaboratively with other professionals (with other specialist knowledge and skills) to create materials on child safety for organisations. This level of engagement provides informed guidance and promotes opportunities to share knowledge and improve practice.



#### Example of principle in action

The organisation seeks feedback from families and communities on issues of child safety and wellbeing and incorporates this into their policies and practices.



## Principle 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice

**Organisations need to safeguard children who are culturally and linguistically diverse, have a disability, identify as part of LGBTQIA+ community, are from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds and who are unable to live at home.**

Children within these groups are particularly vulnerable to harm, so protecting and supporting them needs to be at the forefront of your organisational culture. When a child or young person enters a setting, they need to feel welcomed in the space, whatever their background. If a child feels that their identity is not recognised within an organisation, there are things a workplace can do to ensure the child is not isolated and left at greater risk of harm.

No child should feel like an outsider or feel that they have to change in order to fit in. Recognising everyone's individuality and ensuring that your workplace is accessible for everyone can help children feel at ease, understood and comfortable with their identity. Children communicate in individual ways depending on their personal preferences, developmental age and cultural experiences. If a child feels like they aren't heard they may choose to not speak up.

Have open conversations to emphasise the importance of acknowledging and celebrating everyone's differences. Ensure that your workplace is attuned to culturally appropriate behaviour and customs. Children will notice these measures and will feel safer with you and your clinic or practice. The goal should be to strive for diversity in language, representation and behaviour.

### Practical ways to acknowledge diversity

- Give the child and young person your full attention and allow them to speak openly about their feelings. Be mindful of how your body language, tone of voice and responses contribute to creating a trusting and safe environment that help a child feel more understood and valued.
- Use toys and pictures that are diverse and relatable to children and young people.
- Offer information in different languages to overcome barriers, allowing for more effective communication.
- Acknowledge country, and the continued connection of Indigenous elders past, present and emerging to the land on which you work.
- Display the rainbow pride flag, and Indigenous artwork and posters representing different cultures and abilities to help children feel safe within your organisation.
- Create charts, posters and diagrams to highlight behaviours and attitudes that are developmentally appropriate, desirable and are inclusive.
- Give children access to complaint and feedback systems so they can share any experiences related to your clinic's practice or services, such as behaviours or practices that need attention.



### Example of principle in action

The organisation produces child-friendly material in accessible language and formats that promotes inclusion and informs all children and young people of the support and complaints processes available to them.



## Principle 5: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice

**Any professional working in child-related employment (as defined in their state or territory) needs to have the appropriate clearance.**

Ensure that your organisation implements background checks on staff members or volunteers who are working directly with children. This might also apply to staff who have some peripheral contact with children and young people such as reception and administrative staff.

Share information with all staff about child development that covers typical behaviour of children in different age groups, as well as warning signs of child disorders or learning disabilities. Such resources and information can be helpful to staff members who do not have training in psychology but who interact with children and young people.

### Tips on human resource management

- Ensure that recruitment, advertising, interview questions, referee checks and pre-employment screening processes emphasise child safeguarding.
- Conduct current working with children checks or equivalent background checks at the start of employment and regularly throughout continued employment.
- Offer appropriate induction and ensure that staff members are aware of their child safeguarding responsibilities, including reporting obligations.



### Example of principle in action

The organisation emphasises its commitment to child safety and wellbeing when advertising positions, recruiting, and screening staff and volunteers.



## Principle 6: Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused

**Ensure that your clinic or practice has guidelines to follow when parents or children or young people have a complaint or concern regarding personal safety or process.**

An effective Complaints Handling Policy needs to be child-focused and able to be understood by children, families, carers and all staff.

If a child or young person has disclosed abuse or neglect to you, it is important to stay calm and reassure them that you will help them to be safe. If a child discloses that they have been abused, staff members need to know who to contact to report the abuse. Anyone concerned about abuse or harm to a child, or concerned about the actions of an adult in a youth-serving organisation can contact the statutory child protection service in their state or territory.

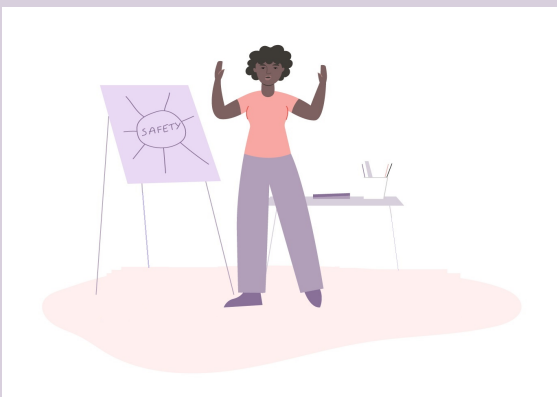
For further information about your obligations as a psychologist, see the [APS ethical guidelines for reporting abuse and neglect](#). In some jurisdictions (ACT, NSW, VIC), there is also an obligation to report conduct of adults relating to child abuse and neglect to the relevant authority (Ombudsman or Commission for Children and Young People). All complaints need to be taken seriously and responded to promptly and thoroughly.

### Checklist for your organisation

Do you have the following:

- Action plan that is sensitive and accommodating to child safety and wellbeing?
- Processes to document all complaints and concerns?
- Dedicated officer within the organisation to oversee the process?

See more resources on the [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#) website.



### Example of principle in action

Staff and volunteers are well-informed about their roles and responsibilities, reporting and privacy obligations and processes for responding to disclosures. They feel empowered and supported to draw attention to breaches of the Code of Conduct within the organisation and to challenge these behaviours.



## Principle 7: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training

All children who attend a professional service should feel safe, comfortable and welcome. If all staff have knowledge, skills and awareness of what keeps children safe, this goal can be achieved.

You can put child safety at the forefront by educating all staff – including other psychologists and support staff - on expectations of safe child practice within your service or organisation.

Ongoing and continuous education and training is available through organisations such as [Child Wise](#) and [Emerging Minds](#). Training and education about child safety are crucial to staff in clinical practice and staff engaging with children at a superficial level. Staff need to know how to respond to any situation that may arise relating to a child's safety.

### Ideas to help develop staff skills and knowledge

- Provide every staff member, professional and support staff, with training and education regarding child safety that is suitable for their level of engagement with children and young people.
- Conduct training days for every member of staff on multiple occasions throughout the year.
- Make training days interactive: get staff involved and ask them to provide actual examples of child safety within the workplace.



### Example of principle in action

The organisation provides regular opportunities to educate and train staff on child safety and wellbeing policies and procedures and evidence-based practice.





## Principle 8: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed

**You can offer a safe environment for children and young people that nurtures wellbeing, promotes growth and is supportive for the children you work with. For psychologists, this includes physical and online spaces.**

As a psychologist you can foster a safe environment when engaging with children and young people. You can also help them learn how to tell the difference between a safe environment and an unsafe environment. Harm typically occurs as a consequence of grooming behaviour. So a critical step is for you to be alert for where and how grooming could be occurring (see figure below). Teaching children about boundaries and privacy gives them skills to remove themselves from unsafe environments. You can do this without compromising a child’s right to privacy, access to information, social connections and learning opportunities.

### Physical environment

To promote safety in the physical environment, cast a critical eye over your workspace to see if you can improve safety for children. For example, ensure that consulting rooms have natural surveillance and no blind spots, such as doors with viewing windows.

Provide children with resources that show them what a safe environment is like – this will encourage them to seek help when they experience an encounter that makes them feel unsafe.

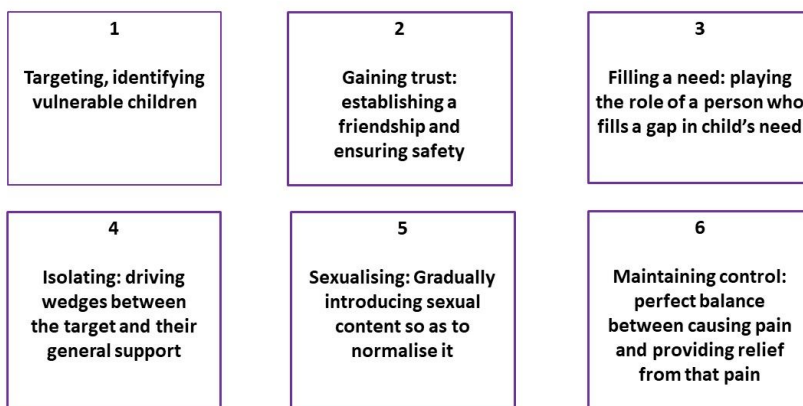
### Online safety

Professionals need to be aware of harmful and predatory online behaviour, how it presents and how to identify and help children who may be potential victims. The [eSafety Commission](#) website has a wealth of information for parents and professionals who work with children. A starting point to understanding how online predators target children is to understand the six phases of grooming.

Share your knowledge and resources with other professionals such as teachers to build awareness of predatory behaviour and support young people in developing skills to engage in online environments safely. This can also be shared with other professionals and support staff.

Ensure that you have guidelines for online interactions between staff and children and young people, such as using passcodes for online meetings. Work with your IT service provider to ensure all interactions are safe and follow guidelines in your organisation's Code of Conduct.

## 6 phases of grooming



### Example of principle in action

Staff and volunteers are proactive in identifying and mitigating physical and online risks.



## Principle 9: Implementation of the National Child Safe Principles is regularly reviewed and improved

**Approach child safeguarding as a team effort for all staff members including those with clinical contact with children and those who offer other kinds of support.**

Each staff member can play a role. Your workplace should appoint a dedicated child safety officer role to ensure that the National Principles are being met in a systematic manner and that they are reviewed. Your organisation can develop a mission statement that highlights child safeguarding as an essential element of the workplace.

### Benefits of a review process

- Promotes a culturally safe environment
- Places emphasis on child engagement and participation
- Puts conditions in place that minimise harm to children
- Creates a guide for identifying potential harm
- Promotes an environment where children are valued and safe

### Tips on implementation

- Conduct regular staff meetings throughout the year with all staff to review and improve the ways in which the service as a whole addresses child safety.
- Use a collaborative approach to implementing the principles across the service with adults as well as the children who attend the clinic.
- Appoint a Child Safety Officer to champion child safety across the organisation.



### Example of principle in action

The organisation regularly reviews, evaluates and improves child-safe practices.



## Principle 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

**All staff in the workplace need to understand child-safe practices within the organisation.**

Psychologists working in clinics, schools, hospitals, community services and other places with children and young people can help establish robust policies and procedures that explicitly document the specific ways in which psychologists (and other staff from your clinic or practice) strive for child safety and wellbeing.

Policies and procedures must offer clear guidelines on how to handle any disclosure of abuse and how to report disclosure. This is in addition to screening procedures required before employing new staff.

### What you can do to ensure child safety

- Create a child safe Code of Conduct.
- Review and update policies and procedures multiple times per year.
- Ensure that you have a procedure for handling complaints.
- Develop a risk assessment and management process.
- Establish policies and procedures on record keeping, external reporting and information sharing.
- Develop scripts for a variety of different situations with actionable steps and checklists that staff can follow.

Such processes need to be easily implemented and understandable for every individual in the practice.

All staff members need to understand what to do if any situation compromises a child's safety and establishing child-safe practices within the workplace. All staff members, regardless of their role within your workplace, needs to be aware of how they are expected to behave towards children and how they can ensure child safety.



### Example of principle in action

The organisation's child safety and wellbeing policy and procedures are documented in a language and format that is easily understood and accessible to staff, volunteers, families and children and young people.



## Further resources and reading

- [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations](#): description of national principles and implementation ideas
- [Australian Catholic Safeguarding](#): national Catholic safeguarding standards
- [Australian Institute of Family Studies](#): reporting child abuse and neglects
- Australian Psychological Society: [child sexual abuse](#), [ethical guidelines for reporting abuse and neglect](#)
- [Child Wise](#): training and resource
- [Child rights to online safety](#): how parents can offer support
- Commission for Children and Young People: [Australian Capital Territory](#), [NSW Office of the Children's Guardian](#), [Northern Territory](#), [Queensland](#), [South Australia](#), [Tasmania](#), [Victoria](#), [Western Australia](#)
- [Emerging Minds](#): training and resources
- [eSafety Commission](#): promoting positive online experiences
- Human Rights: [resources on child rights](#) and [child safe organisations](#)
- [Raising Children Network](#): what is child abuse?
- [Situational crime prevention for child sexual abuse](#): what services need to know
- [Stages of sexual grooming](#): Recognizing potentially predatory behaviors of child molesters

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