



# **ACT Child Safe**

## **Standards**

### **A Practical Guide for Staff and Volunteers**





## **Content Warning**

This guide contains content about keeping children and young people safe from harm

The content may be distressing or triggering for some readers. The Children and Young People Commissioner recognises that staff working closely with children and young people may be personally or professionally impacted by this material.

We encourage you to prioritise your wellbeing and to engage with the content at your own pace. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, please take a break, seek support or discuss your response with a trusted colleague or supervisor.

Managers and team leaders are encouraged to be mindful of staff reactions and to foster a safe, supportive environment for reflection.

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# ACT Child Safe Standards

## Facilitating Culturally Safe and Inclusive Practice

Organisations must apply the Child Safe Standards in a manner that is culturally safe and inclusive for all children and young people, including by respecting and valuing the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

1

Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

2

Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them, and are taken seriously.

3

Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

4

Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

5

People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

6

Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.

7

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

8

Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

9

Implementation of the child safe standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

10

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.



# Colour reference key

The Standards will be implemented progressively over 4 years. As the Standards are principle based and aim to deliver positive outcomes beyond baseline compliance, they have been grouped into focus areas. These focus areas will guide organisations to build on their efforts and adapt their strategies based on their size, capacity, and workforce, and are aligned with the Introductory Self Assessment Tool and Small Business Checklist.

The colours used throughout this resource are matched to the focus areas used in the [Introductory Self-Assessment Tool](#).

<b>Focus Area 1</b> <b>Standards</b> <b>1, 8, and 10</b>	<b>Focus Area 2</b> <b>Standards</b> <b>2, 3, and 4</b>	<b>Focus Area 3</b> <b>Standards</b> <b>5, 6, and 7</b>	<b>Focus Area 4</b> <b>Standard 9</b>
<p><b>Leadership, Culture, Governance, and Environment</b></p> <p><b>1</b> Child rights, safety and wellbeing are embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture.</p> <p><b>8</b> Physical and online environments promote rights, safety, and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.</p> <p><b>10</b> Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.</p>	<p><b>Involvement Engagement, and Embracing Diversity</b></p> <p><b>2</b> Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them, and are taken seriously.</p> <p><b>3</b> Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child rights, safety, and wellbeing.</p> <p><b>4</b> Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.</p>	<p><b>Staff Training, Capability Development, and Complaints</b></p> <p><b>5</b> People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child rights, safety, and wellbeing values in practice.</p> <p><b>6</b> Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness through ongoing education and training to keep children and young people safe.</p> <p><b>7</b> Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.</p>	<p><b>Review and Improve</b></p> <p><b>9</b> Implementation of the ACT Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.</p>

# Introduction

## Who is this resource for?

This guide is for all staff and volunteers in organisations delivering services for children and young people. It aims to break down each of the Standards to help staff and volunteers understand what they are and why they are important. Without the right checks and balances to make sure everyone knows how they contribute to creating safety for children and young people, there are very real risks and harms that can have lifelong negative consequences. The Child Safe Standards seek to create conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm occurring, increase the likelihood of identifying risk/harm and respond more effectively to concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions.

## What are the ACT Child Safe Standards?

The ACT Child Safe Standards (Standards) are a set of guiding principles to assist organisations to review and improve policies and practices to better protect and promote the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people.

## Learning from the Royal Commission

The Standards are part of a national effort to make organisations safer for children and young people following the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission). The Royal Commission's extensive inquiry identified widespread systemic failings by organisations to protect children and young people from harm and take appropriate actions to stop further abuse from occurring. Following the Royal Commission, the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations were endorsed by all state and territory governments to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating child safe environments.



## Legislation and mandatory implementation

The ACT Government has since legislated the Child Safe Standards, which mirror the National Principles, through amendments to the *ACT Human Rights Commission Act 2005*.

From 1 August 2024, the Standards became mandatory for all organisations providing services for children and young people in the ACT.

This means that all providers of services for children and young people (including schools, community groups, private providers and government services) need to apply these Standards to uphold the rights, safety and wellbeing of children and young people who access their services.

It is important to note that the rights of children and young people to be safe and to have their views/concerns heard and taken seriously are at the core of these Standards.



# Your Role

As staff and volunteers, you are required to understand your responsibilities under the Standards, even if Working With Vulnerable People (WWVP) registration is not required for your specific role. Implementing the Standards is not about paperwork or checklists; it is about how you contribute to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation – through your actions, your attitudes, and how you listen to and treat children and young people in all aspects of your work.

## Being a safe and trusted adult

Although your senior leaders have a legal responsibility to be a child safe organisation, they cannot do this alone. They need you, and everyone in the organisation, to know what the Standards are, why they are important, and what you can do to show children and young people (and their families/carers) that you are committed to being part of an organisation that has a zero tolerance approach to the abuse, discrimination, and exclusion of children and young people.

**Your commitment to being a safe adult will help children and young people *feel safer and be safer.***

## Commitment to continuous learning

Being child safe is not about a single task or being given a prescriptive list of actions to take. It is about understanding the risks to children and young people in your organisation and taking actions that reflect your evolving understanding of child safety. Your goal is to continue learning and improving your practices. Your commitment to being a safe adult will help children and young people feel safer and be safer, which is not only essential for their emotional and psychological wellbeing but is also critical in seeking to prevent harm occurring.

This guide will help you understand the Standards and provide you with some ideas about how you can apply them practically in your day-to-day interactions with children and young people. It will explain why the Standards are important and what it means when you contribute to creating and maintaining a child safe organisation.

# A rights-based approach

## Four guiding principles

The ACT Child Safe Standards are grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>[1]</sup> (UNCRC). The UNCRC sets out a comprehensive framework of rights and has four guiding principles:

- The best interests of the child
- The right to survival and development
- The right of children and young people to express their views on matters that affect them
- The right of all children and young people to enjoy their rights without discrimination.

## Safety as justice and dignity

A rights-based approach ensures that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is understood as a matter of justice and dignity, not just duty of care. It requires organisations and individuals to consider how policies, environments, and relationships uphold the rights of every child and young person.

## Children and young people as active agents

Additionally, a rights-based approach recognises children and young people as active agents in their own lives. When organisations genuinely listen to children and young people and act on their insights, it builds trust, strengthens safety, and affirms their value.

For more information about human rights and the Child Safe Standards, see the [Understanding Children and Young People's Rights](#).

<sup>1</sup> Please note, the UNCRC defines a 'child', as anyone up to the age of 18 years.



# The Child Safe Standards Preamble

## The preamble

The preamble to the ACT Child Safe Standards states:

*Organisations must apply the Standards in a manner that is culturally safe and inclusive for all children and young people, including by respecting and valuing the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families.*

## Purpose of the preamble

This guiding statement underpins how each of the 10 Child Safe Standards should be interpreted and applied. For staff and volunteers, this means your interactions, decisions, and practices must contribute to creating an environment where children and young people are respected, protected, and can participate. This includes confronting your own values and attitudes that can contribute to bias or discrimination, and taking active steps to make sure racism, bullying, and exclusion are challenged and addressed in your organisation.



### **The Standards seek to affirm the identities and experiences of:**

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including recognising the impact of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and disadvantage, and systemic racism, while supporting cultural identity and pride.
- Children and young people with disability, including recognising their right to inclusion, communication, safety, and reasonable adjustments.
- LGBTIQ+ children and young people, so they can be themselves and openly express their identity without fear.
- Neurodivergent children and young people, including making adjustments that recognise and respond to 'mainstream' neurotypical biases, and support communication, regulation, and participation.
- Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including by providing culturally appropriate support and information in preferred languages.

# Standard 1

## Leadership, Governance, and Culture

### Introduction

Standard 1 is about creating an organisational culture where upholding the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people is a shared responsibility and a visible priority. When organisations take steps to become child safe, they put the best interests of children and young people at the forefront and consider their day-to-day business in the context of harm prevention and continuous improvement.

### What is a child safe culture?

A child safe culture is one where every child and young person knows adults in the organisation:

- Have put practices in place to reduce risks to their rights, safety, and wellbeing
- Care about their views and opinions
- Will listen and take proactive steps to address their concerns.

When services care deeply about children and young people's rights, safety, and wellbeing, and back that up with clear systems and visible everyday actions, children and young people develop trust in adults, and are more likely to speak up or seek help if they have concerns.

**Upholding the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people is a shared responsibility.**

### What do you need to know?

Whether you work directly with children and young people, or provide back-of-house support functions, the way you speak, act, and make decisions communicates to children and young people (and their families/carers) how committed you are to being a safe adult. When this commitment to child safety is visible in what you do (and not just what you say), children and young people (and their families/carers) can see that you and your organisation is genuinely invested in preventing harm.

## Creating inclusive and equitable environments

Every person has a role in creating a culture where child safety is embedded in the organisation, not just written into policy. When that culture is strong, children and young people are more likely to trust the adults around them and to reach out when they need support.

Importantly, when children and young people feel valued, know their rights, and are empowered to communicate their views, they learn to trust their own judgment and make good choices, even when adults are not there to protect them.

Creating culturally safe, inclusive, and equitable environments is not only the responsibility of leadership. Your actions help shape the culture around you. By modelling anti-discriminatory, inclusive behaviour and speaking up when something does not feel right, you are helping to embed the Standards from the ground up.



**When children and young people feel valued, know their rights, and are empowered to communicate their views, they learn to trust their own judgment and make good choices, even when adults are not there to protect them.**

There is no single set of prescriptive actions that mean you are being child safe. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to *creating and maintaining a child safe culture*.



### What staff and volunteers can do

- Read, understand and follow your organisation's policies on child safe practices and code of conduct.
- Ensure you understand your organisation's commitment statement and what this means in practice.
- Seek clarification if you are not sure what the expectations are.
- Raise concerns with your supervisor if you are not sure that what you are seeing or hearing aligns with the organisation's child safe practices.
- Talk about child safety in team meetings to keep it visible as a priority.

## Standard 2

# Children's rights and participation

### Introduction

Children and young people thrive when they are empowered through meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them, have inclusive and supportive peer relationships, and have adults who take their views seriously and uphold their rights.

### Risks when voices are silenced

Risk of harm increases when children and young people are not listened to or believed. Harm can occur and continue in environments where secrets are encouraged, views are silenced, or the opinions of adults are given preference over the views of children and young people.

Risk is also increased for children and young people with additional vulnerabilities due to their age, stage of development, physical, cognitive and emotional capabilities, processing skills, language capacity, and level of dependence on adults.

### Practical actions to promote participation

Participation and empowerment are not just asking children and young people what they think.

To help empower children and young people and encourage their participation, it is important to:

- Ensure information is provided in ways that are easily understood by children and young people
- Communicate in age-appropriate ways
- Show children and young people that you will be a safe and trusted adult.

Remember, there is no single set of prescriptive actions that mean you are being child safe. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to *empowering children and young people to participate fully*.



## What staff and volunteers can do

- Use simple, clear language, graphics or audio bites that children and young people can understand. This can be done for any document (for example, policies, complaints processes, and information on child rights).
- Make printed information visually appealing and in a variety of different formats.
- Ask children and young people to tell you what they think about how information is provided to them, and how this can be improved.
- Use pictures or symbols to help those with limited communication skills to understand what you are communicating.



## The role of peers and social connections

Peer relationships are important for helping children and young people thrive. They will often trust their peers with their concerns before they turn to an adult, so it is important that your organisation encourages and supports inclusion and healthy social connections.

However, children and young people can also be at risk from the actions of their peers or older/younger children through bullying, discrimination, racism and abuse. Peer abuse can become all-encompassing when it occurs in settings where children and young people spend much of their time (such as school) and then continues outside those settings via digital media.

**Get to know the children and young people in your service and notice if there are changes in their emotions, behaviour, or appearance.**



**It is important that safe adults challenge their assumptions about who causes harm to children and young people, remain alert to signs that children and young people are at risk, and create opportunities to encourage help seeking.**



### What staff and volunteers can do

- Have buddy systems for children and young people who may need extra support to join in
- Have clear verbal and visual messages that promote respect, teamwork, and caring for one another
- Know your organisation's simple messages about bullying and exclusion and the clear actions you can take when you see this happening
- Know your own biases and assumptions about the nature of harm
- Get to know the children and young people in your service and notice if there are changes in their emotions, behaviour, or appearance
- Raise issues with your supervisor if you are not sure how you should respond to a situation

## Standard 3

### Families & communities are informed and involved

#### Introduction

Children and young people feel safer when the people who care for them are welcomed, included, and informed. Families and communities play a vital role in building and maintaining child safe environments, and their involvement helps create strong, trusted partnerships that support children and young people to thrive.

#### Families as partners in safety

When services take the time to build respectful, reciprocal relationships with families, it strengthens the protective environment around children and young people. Engaging families also helps ensure practices are relevant, inclusive, and aligned with the needs and experiences of the children and young people who use the service.

**Whether you work directly with children and young people, or in a back-of-house support role, the way you communicate with families, carers, kin, and community members can help create a culture of openness and shared responsibility for safety and wellbeing.**

#### Recognising the value of community

Families and carers have deep knowledge of their children's strengths, needs, communication styles, and vulnerabilities. When families and carers are informed and involved, they are better able to recognise when something is not right, raise concerns, and act early. This standard also acknowledges the value of community, whether that is extended family, cultural groups, faith communities, or neighbourhood networks. Strong relationships with community can help children and young people feel safe, connected, and supported.

Children and young people are more likely to feel confident and secure in environments where the adults around them are working together to promote their rights, safety, and wellbeing. When families and carers see that your service is transparent, respectful, and responsive, they are more likely to trust your organisation and actively contribute to your child safe culture.

Embedding this Standard means recognising and valuing the strengths, knowledge, and perspectives of all families and communities, including those with lived experience of colonisation, disability, neurodivergence, migration, and marginalisation.

It includes demonstrating your commitment by taking active steps to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities in culturally safe and meaningful ways. This may involve seeking guidance from local Elders or community leaders and being open to learning how to create a service that reflects and respects children and young people's culture, language, and identity.

When organisations include families and communities as genuine partners, it builds trust, increases accountability, and strengthens the safety and support systems around children and young people. No matter your role, your efforts to keep families and communities informed and involved contribute to a safer, more inclusive environment for everyone.

Being child safe isn't about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions *you* can take within *your* organisation that contribute to supporting *safe and meaningful engagement with families and communities*.



### **What staff and volunteers can do**

- Provide families and carers with clear, accessible information about your organisation's child safe policies, including what to expect if they raise a concern.
- Display your code of conduct and complaints process in shared spaces and offer translated or visual versions where appropriate.
- Invite families and carers to give feedback on how your service communicates with them and act on their suggestions where possible.
- Listen respectfully when families and carers share concerns, ideas, or feedback, take these seriously, and act on them.
- Welcome families and carers into your service in ways that reflect their diverse cultures, backgrounds, and identities.
- Connect with community groups, local leaders, or Elders to strengthen trust and culturally safe practices.

## Standard 4

### Equity is promoted, and diverse needs respected

#### Introduction

All children and young people have the right to feel safe, respected, and included regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. Upholding this right means taking active steps to promote equity and inclusion so that every child and young person can participate fully and safely in your service.

#### Recognising diverse identities and experiences

Children and young people thrive in environments where their identities are affirmed, their experiences are valued, and their needs are considered and met. Feeling seen, heard, and understood builds trust and connection, which are critical elements for supporting their rights, safety, and wellbeing.

**Your actions, words, and decisions all contribute to creating a place where diversity is celebrated, and every child or young person feels they are valued and belong.**

#### Everyone's right to inclusion

Children and young people experience the world differently due to a range of factors, including their age, culture, disability, gender, sexuality, language, and life experiences. Some face barriers to inclusion or are more likely to experience discrimination, exclusion, or harm. Others may need adjustments or support to participate fully and safely. Some children and young people face multiple barriers, so it is important that we genuinely see, hear, and respect them, holistically.

When organisations promote equity and inclusion, and respect diverse needs, they help to reduce harm and increase children and young people's sense of safety and self-worth.

Being inclusive is not just about accommodating difference, it is about embracing it as a strength and making sure your service is safe for everyone, not just for some.



## Everyday actions to promote equity

It is important to remember there is no single set of prescriptive actions that mean you are being child safe. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to *respecting diverse needs and promoting equity and inclusion*.

Small, everyday actions can make a big difference to how safe and supported children and young people feel. From the words you choose to the way you design programs; every decision is a chance to reinforce belonging.



**No matter your role, your commitment to equity and respect can help each child and young person to feel like they belong, and that their identity is a source of strength.**



### What staff and volunteers can do

- Challenge discriminatory language or behaviour when you see or hear it.
- Reflect on your own biases and seek out opportunities to learn more about cultures, identities, or experiences you are less familiar with.
- Ensure your daily practice affirms the identity of each child or young person you interact with.
- Advocate for accessible spaces, materials, and programs, and talk about any barriers you identify with your team.
- Learn about the histories, strengths, and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
- Check that signage, posters, and displays in your environment reflect the diversity of your community.



## Affirming Identities and Experiences

This Standard directly reflects the commitment in the preamble statement to uphold the rights of all children and young people and ensure they are safe, respected, and included no matter who they are or where they come from.

The preamble statement seeks to affirm the identities and experiences of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including recognising the impact of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and disadvantage, and systemic racism, while supporting cultural identity and pride.
- Children and young people with disability, including recognising their right to inclusion, communication, safety, and reasonable adjustments.
- LGBTIQ+ children and young people, so they can be themselves and openly express their identity without fear.
- Neurodivergent children and young people, including making adjustments that recognise and respond to 'mainstream' neurotypical biases, and support communication, regulation, and participation.
- Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including by providing culturally appropriate support and information in preferred languages.

Creating equitable, inclusive, and culturally safe environments requires more than just policies or training. It involves self-reflection, listening, and building trusting relationships with children and young people (and their families/carers).

When organisations genuinely value and respond to the diverse needs of children and young people, it leads to safer, stronger services. Children and young people learn to trust adults who see them for who they are, and they feel more confident seeking help when something does not feel right.

No matter your role, your commitment to equity and respect can help each child and young person to feel like they belong, and that their identity is a source of strength.



## Standard 5

# People working with children and young people are suitable and supported

### Introduction

The risk of harm to children and young people reduces when the adults around them are safe, skilled, and supported in their work. This Standard is about making sure that anyone involved in providing or facilitating services for children and young people are not only suitable, but also have the support, supervision, and knowledge they need to create inclusive, respectful, and protective environments.

### Safe, skilled, and supported adults

Suitability is not just about background checks, it is about knowing how to build safe relationships, being aware of your responsibilities, and being confident in how to respond when you have concerns about a child's or young person's rights, safety, or wellbeing.

**Regardless of your role, when you understand your obligations, feel well-supported, and are connected to others in your organisation, you are better equipped to speak up about practices**

### The importance of supervision and training

Building a child safe organisation means going beyond recruitment. It requires active support, supervision, and training so that staff and volunteers feel ready and able to do their work in a way that keeps children and young people at the centre of decision-making. This includes developing skills in trauma-informed practice, equity, cultural safety, disability inclusion, and LGBTIQ+ awareness.

Being child safe is an ongoing responsibility. It involves staying up to date with policies, being open to feedback, and being honest about what you do and do not know. No one is expected to have all the answers, but everyone has a responsibility to ask questions and seek advice and support when they need it



## Everyday actions to promote equity

This Standard reflects the commitment in the Preamble to ensure that all children and young people are supported by adults who are both suitable and equipped to promote their rights, safety, and wellbeing. This means recognising that the workforce itself is diverse, and that staff and volunteers bring different strengths, learning needs, and lived experiences to their roles.

Support should be responsive and inclusive, with training and development that reflects the realities of working with children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, children and young people with disability, those who are neurodivergent, LGBTIQ+ children and young people, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Cultural safety, inclusion, and respectful communication are not just topics for specialist training, they are essential parts of being a safe adult in any organisation.

Creating safe environments starts with the adults who are part of them. When people are well-supported, clear on their responsibilities, and confident in their roles, they are more likely to build the kind of culture where children and young people feel safe, valued, and heard.



**No matter what your role, your actions help shape how children and young people experience your service. Being safe, skilled, and supported allows you to show up as the kind of adult every child and young person deserves.**



It is important to remember that being child safe isn't about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to being *accountable, suitable and open to seeking support in your role*.



## What staff and volunteers can do

- Keep your Working With Vulnerable People (WWVP) registration current and understand what it means for your role.
- Participate in training, supervision, and reflective practice offered by your organisation.
- Read and understand your organisation's policies, including the code of conduct and complaint-handling procedures.
- Ask questions if you are unsure how to apply child safe policies and practices in your day-to-day work.
- Raise concerns with your supervisor or another manager/team member you trust when something does not seem right or feels unsafe.
- Take responsibility for your own wellbeing and development so you can be present, engaged, and aware in your role.



**When organisations invest in their people, they send a strong message to children and young people (and their families/carers) that child safety is taken seriously.**



## Standard 6

# Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child-focused

### Introduction

Organisations improve their child safety practices when children and young people, and the people who care for them, feel confident to speak up. Child safe organisations listen to concerns, especially those raised by children and young people, and respond in a way that is respectful, inclusive, and timely.

This Standard is about creating a culture where concerns are welcomed, taken seriously, and are used to improve the organisation's day to day practices. It is also about having processes in place that are clear, well-communicated, and designed with the needs of children and young people in mind.

### Creating a culture of openness

When complaints and concerns are handled well, it builds trust. When they are ignored or minimised, it creates environments where harm can go unnoticed or unchallenged. When children and young people raise seemingly minor issues that are taken seriously, it lays the foundations for raising bigger issues, such as how they feel about things happening in their lives or about experiences that may constitute abuse and/or misconduct.

Children and young people generally do not raise concerns unless they feel safe to do so. There is an inherent power imbalance that exists between children and young people and adults, especially those that work within systems that children and young people may rely on for support.

**Organisations that welcome feedback are more likely to identify risks early and respond before harm occurs.**



## Handling concerns well builds trust

Children and young people may worry about not being believed, getting someone in trouble, or there being unanticipated consequences for them. They may not know how to raise a concern, or whether their experience is something they should be concerned about. When staff and volunteers create an environment of openness and respond supportively to concerns (no matter how small) they send a clear message that what children and young people have to say matters.

Families, carers, staff, and volunteers also need to feel confident that their concerns will be taken seriously. Complaints processes should be accessible to everyone, with no fear of retribution for speaking up.

Organisations that welcome feedback are more likely to identify risks early and respond before harm occurs, or to contain the extent of harm. Complaints are not a sign that something has gone wrong, they are an opportunity to improve safety, culture, and practice.

Being child-focused means taking concerns seriously and recognising that children and young people interpret situations through their own lens, shaped by age, experience, and identity.

Adults have a responsibility to listen openly, validate their feelings, and respond with clarity and care, even if the situation appears different from their own perception as an adult.



It is important to remember that being child safe isn't about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions *you* can take within *your* organisation that contribute to having *safe, inclusive, and child-focused complaints processes*.



### **What staff and volunteers can do**

- Know the formal and informal pathways for raising concerns within your organisation.
- Have more than one way for children and young people (and their families/carers) to raise issues.
- Reassure children and young people that they will be listened to and supported if they raise a complaint.
- Recognise that complaints and concerns may be presented in many forms, not just through words, but also through behaviour, art, silence, or changes in mood.
- Help create an environment where children and young people feel safe to speak up, by being approachable and taking small concerns seriously.
- Encourage and model respectful ways to give feedback, ask questions, or express discomfort.
- Check that guidance on making complaints is displayed in common areas, explained in child-friendly language, and include ways for children and young people to contribute.

### **Barriers in raising concerns**

It is important to remember that one child's safe space may not feel safe to another. Some children and young people may prefer talking to someone they trust. Others may find it easier to draw, write, or use digital or anonymous feedback tools. When you offer multiple ways to express a concern, you increase the chances that children and young people will feel comfortable reaching out.

## Being responsive and inclusive

This Standard aligns with the preamble statement by recognising that safety practices must be inclusive, culturally safe, and trauma informed. That means acknowledging that some children and young people (and their families/carers) may be reluctant to raise concerns due to past experiences of disbelief, consequences, or discrimination. It is important to remain cognisant of past organisational failings to protect children and young people from harm, such as colonisation, assimilation policies, institutional practices, and community attitudes.

Child-focused complaints processes are not just about systems, they are about relationships, trust, and respect. Children and young people are more likely to raise concerns in environments where staff and volunteers:

- Explain clearly what to do if something feels wrong.
- Show they value feedback by acting on it.
- Maintain confidentiality, are clear about the limits to confidentiality when information needs to be passed on to others, and share what steps will be taken to address the concern.
- Follow through on what they say they will do, and provide updates to children, young people, or families involved, wherever possible.



**When organisations are responsive, inclusive, and consistent in how they handle concerns, children and young people learn to trust that adults are listening and care about what they think and feel.**



## Standard 7

# Staff and volunteers are equipped with knowledge, skills, and awareness

### Introduction

Organisations reduce the potential for harm to children and young people when staff and volunteers know what to look for, how to respond, and where to go for help. This Standard is about ensuring staff and volunteers have the knowledge, confidence, and awareness to act when needed, and to create environments where rights, safety, and wellbeing are visible priorities.

Being child safe is not about knowing everything. It is about being open to learning, recognising when something does not feel right, and knowing how to respond in a calm and informed way.

**Child safe organisations support every person to develop their knowledge and skills.**

### The role of training and awareness

Everyone who works or volunteers in an organisation that provides services for children and young people has a role to play in keeping them safe. That responsibility is easier to uphold when people are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to do so. When you understand your role, know what signs to look for, and feel confident to act, you are more likely to respond early and effectively.

Developing capability is not as simple as attending a training opportunity then ticking a box to say it has been done. Effective training and development helps to build shared understanding across a team and strengthens the culture of safety within your organisation. It should be practical, ongoing, and tailored to your context. It also needs to reflect the complexity of children and young people's experiences, including trauma, discrimination, disability, culture, and identity.



## Building confidence through learning

Learning does not stop at induction. When staff and volunteers keep building their skills, they help create an organisation that actively protects and empowers the children and young people it serves.

Not every staff member or volunteer will have the same starting point, but child safe organisations support every person to develop their knowledge and skills. When training and supervision are regular, inclusive, and reflective of the realities children and young people face, it helps ensure safer and more responsive practice.

Being equipped also means staff and volunteers recognise their own strengths and limitations. It is okay not to have all the answers. What matters is your willingness to learn, your commitment to keeping children and young people safe, and your ability to speak up and seek help when something doesn't feel right, especially if you are not sure what to do.

It is important to remember that being child safe is not about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to *strengthening your understanding and continuously improving in your role*.



### What staff and volunteers can do

- Attend child safety and wellbeing training, and refresher courses, when offered.
- Practice talking with children and young people about their rights and what safety means to them.
- Learn the signs that a child or young person may not feel safe, even when they have not said anything directly.
- Reflect on how racism, ableism, gender bias, and exclusion can impact a child or young person's experience of safety.
- Ask questions if you are unsure how to apply child safe principles in your day-to-day work.
- Connect with your supervisor and team and seek feedback on what else you can do to build your child safe knowledge for your role.

## Standard 8

# Physical and online environments are safe and monitored

### Introduction

Children and young people spend time in many environments, such as classrooms, sports fields, foyers, dance studios, scout halls, youth groups, bathrooms, websites, and online chats. Every space they are part of must be designed and maintained with safety in mind. This Standard is about taking proactive steps to make both physical and digital environments safe and inclusive.

It is about organisations setting expectations for appropriate engagement between staff/volunteers and children and young people online or via digital devices. It is also important to have the right processes to identify and mitigate risks early.

It is also about mitigating opportunities for harm to occur in physical environments.

**When staff and volunteers remain alert to the interactions between children and young people and peers or other adults, the opportunity for harm to occur in secluded areas, closed rooms, and blind spots is reduced.**

### Balancing safety and privacy

Children and young people have the right to privacy, which must be balanced against their right to safety – how this is balanced is dependent on a range of factors. Children and young people who depend on adults for their physical care are at particular risk in the physical environment if the organisation does not have good child safe practices in place.

Empowering children and young people to have a say over their own bodies, coupled with robust staff/volunteer screening, clear guidance on boundary setting, procedures that are understood and followed, and supervision all help to create a safer physical environment.

## Recognising Developing Independence

As children and young people's capabilities increase, their right to and need for privacy often overtake their need for assistance. It is important for staff and volunteers to recognise and respect signs of increased independence and be alert to other adults who may not maintain appropriate boundaries or respect for children and young people's boundaries.

## The importance of inclusion in physical and online spaces

Safe environments are also inclusive environments. Children and young people are more likely to feel safe when they can see themselves reflected in the space, through language, images, symbols, and the attitudes of the adults around them.

Knowing and implementing your organisation's anti-discrimination policies, as well as procedures for addressing bullying or racism by peers, adults, or other staff and volunteers, all help to create a safer physical environment.

The same applies online. Technology brings new opportunities, but also new risks including breaches of privacy, unsafe messaging, grooming, and bullying.

When organisations keep pace with how children and young people are interacting with the digital environment and staff and volunteers understand how to support children and young people in digital spaces, they are better able to manage those risks and model respectful behaviour.

## Managing photos, videos, and digital content

A child safe organisation supports staff and volunteers to set and maintain professional boundaries in their interactions with children and young people and has policies and procedures for how digital images (photos, videos, etc) are created, stored, used, accessed, and disposed of.



**Creating safe environments takes ongoing effort and awareness, but it is also one of the clearest ways to show children and young people that their safety matters.**

It is important to remember that being child safe isn't about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions *you* can take within *your* organisation that contribute to creating and maintaining *safe physical and online environments*.



## What staff and volunteers can do

- Conduct regular checks of physical spaces and address risks.
- Supervise children and young people during activities and transitions between spaces.
- Understand your organisation's policy on photography, social media, and online communication.
- Consider the psychological safety of the environment, not just whether it is physically secure.
- Involve children and young people in shaping spaces so they reflect their identities and preferences.
- Look out for children and young people who may be left out or feel uncomfortable and take steps to be inclusive.

This Standard reflects the preamble statement by acknowledging that physical and digital environments are experienced differently by different children and young people. A room may feel safe to one child but overwhelming or unwelcoming to another. By seeking input and paying attention to how children and young people interact with a space, staff and volunteers can adapt their practice and help shape spaces that promote belonging.

### Designing for inclusion

Designing for inclusion means thinking about mobility access, quiet zones, visual cues, culturally inclusive materials, and trusted adults being nearby. It also means being proactive about online safety and making sure policies are understood and followed.



## Standard 9

# Implementation is regularly reviewed and improved

### Introduction

Keeping children and young people safe is not something that happens once. It is about having processes in place for the organisation's safety framework to be revisited, refined, and improved over time. This Standard is about making space for feedback, reflection, and ongoing learning.

An organisation that reviews and improves its child safe practices is more likely to respond effectively to risk, address gaps early, and adapt to the evolving needs of the children and young people it serves.

### Adapting to change and emerging risks

Children and young people change. Communities change. Risks change. This is why it is important for organisations to regularly review policies and procedures, including by responding to emerging challenges.

When organisations create safe ways for staff, volunteers, families, and children and young people to provide input, they are more likely to hear about issues early and identify opportunities to improve. This does not just strengthen child safety; it builds trust and accountability.

### Continuous improvement in child safety

Continuous improvement is not about being perfect. It is about being honest, curious, and willing to learn.

**When staff and volunteers feel safe to make suggestions, trying new ways of working, asking questions and raising concerns, the whole organisation benefits.**

It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to creating a culture of continuous improvement.



## Creating space for feedback and reflection

It is important to remember that being child safe is not about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities.

It is therefore important for you to consider actions *you* can take within *your* organisation that contribute to creating a *culture of continuous improvement*.



### What staff and volunteers can do

- Participate in team reflections, evaluations, or audits of child safe practices.
- Raise suggestions with your supervisor based on what you are seeing in your day-to-day work.
- Listen to children, young people, and their families/carers and invite feedback on what could be improved.
- Reflect on whether practices are culturally safe, inclusive, and responsive to diverse needs.
- Take part in consultation or review processes and encourage others to do the same.



**Reviewing how safe and included children and young people feel helps ensure your organisation is not leaving anyone behind. This work is most effective when it is regular, embedded into practice, and supported by leadership.**

### Reflecting the preamble

This Standard reflects the preamble statement to the Standards by acknowledging that safety and inclusion are ongoing commitments. It is not enough for policies to exist; they must work in practice for all children and young people. That means checking whether your practices are inclusive, and that there is an openness to addressing biases, challenging past failures, and learning from others.



## Standard 10

### Policies and procedure document child safety

#### Introduction

A strong policy framework is a foundation for keeping children and young people safe. Policies and procedures that are clear, inclusive, and well-communicated help everyone understand what is expected and what to do when things do not go as planned.

This Standard is about ensuring that child safety is written into the everyday operations of your organisation and documented in a way that is practical, consistent, and anyone can understand it.

#### Policies as foundations for safety

Policies and procedures are there to guide practice, support decision-making, and reduce uncertainty. Risk increases and accountability diminishes when expectations are not well communicated and understood, or where they are inconsistently applied.

**Strong policies do not just sit on a shelf; they guide actions.**

#### Clear expectations and accountability

Good policies set a clear expectation for behaviour, outline steps for raising and responding to concerns, and describe how the organisation supports the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people. They also provide important reassurance to families, carers, and community members.

Strong policies do not just sit on a shelf; they guide actions. This only happens when people know them, understand them, and feel supported to use them.

Policies should reflect the diversity of all children and young people. These commitments need to be visible in what is written, and how it is put into action.

## Reflecting the preamble

This Standard reflects the preamble statement by ensuring that child safety policies are grounded in rights, inclusion, and cultural safety. This includes:

- Using accessible language and formats.
- Offering translations or visual versions where needed.
- Making cultural safety and equity central to how policies are developed, not added on afterward.

## Actions to make policies practical

When staff and volunteers can see themselves reflected in how they should operationalise policies and see how this supports them to keep children and young people safe, they are more likely to follow it, share it, and uphold it.

It is important to remember that being child safe is not about following a single set of prescriptive actions. Every organisation is different, and staff and volunteers have varied roles and responsibilities. It is therefore important for you to consider actions you can take within your organisation that contribute to the *embedding of policies and procedures that help keep children and young people safe.*



### What staff and volunteers can do

- Know where to find your organisation's child safety policies and read them.
- Refer to policies in your day-to-day work, not just in emergencies.
- Ask your manager or supervisor if you are ever unsure how a policy applies to your situation.
- Talk about policies during team meetings or supervision to help make them part of everyday practice.
- Help identify when a policy needs updating or clarification.



# Summary

The ACT Child Safe Standards provide a clear and practical framework for organisations to promote and protect the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people. They are designed to bring together the conditions that help children and young people be safe and feel safe, while also establishing the conditions that prevent, respond to, and reduce harm.

As staff and volunteers working directly with children and young people, your role in putting the Standards into practice is essential. Whether you are delivering programs, coaching, teaching, supervising, or providing care, you contribute directly to creating environments where children and young people are respected, listened to, and supported.

The Standards help people in organisations take deliberate actions to be child safe, child friendly, and child aware. This includes supporting children and young people to understand their rights, encouraging them to express their views, and ensuring their views are taken seriously. When children and young people are empowered in this way, they are more likely to develop trust in themselves, make safe choices, and raise concerns when something does not feel right.

Safety is not just about preventing harm. It is also about helping children and young people feel valued, included, and heard. Feeling safe is just as important as being safe and achieving this means being attuned to the unique needs of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those who have disability, children and young people from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTIQ+ children and young people, those who are neurodivergent, and/or those who experience exclusion in other ways. Your daily interactions help build trust, strengthen your organisation's culture of safety, and demonstrate respect for the rights of each and every child and young person.

By understanding and implementing the Standards, engaging with families and communities, recognising and responding to risks, and promoting participation, you can help create a place where all children and young people can feel safe, welcomed, and respected.



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