



Children and Young People's Feelings of Safety Survey

2025 Report



Background and objectives

From 1 August 2024, the ACT introduced mandatory requirements under the *Human Rights Commission Act 2005* (ACT) requiring organisations providing services for children and young people to commence implementing the Child Safe Standards Scheme (**Scheme**). The ACT Child Safe Standards (**Standards**) align with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, which were developed following recommendations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (**Royal Commission**). The Standards have been developed to help make organisations safer for children and young people and better protect them from abuse or harm. In the ACT, the Scheme covers all forms of abuse (not just child sexual abuse), and centres on protecting the rights, safety, and wellbeing of children and young people.

The ACT Children and Young People Commissioner (**CYPC**) is supporting organisations and sectors in the ACT to implement the Standards. The CYPC supports organisations to embed child rights into practice, including by facilitating opportunities for the views of children and young people to inform safeguarding practices. To assist with this, the CYPC conducted a short survey to hear from children and young people about their feelings of safety. This is an important initiative, as there is a strong association for children and young people between *feeling safe* and *being safe*.

The survey provides a structured mechanism to hear from children and young people and an avenue for assessing whether current policies, practices, and safeguards in organisations are effective, responsive to the concerns of children and young people, and make a tangible difference to feelings of safety over time.

Survey development and administration

The survey was adapted from the original, which was developed for the Royal Commission by academics at the Australian Catholic University Institute of Child Protection Studies (**ICPS**) to better understand children and young people's feelings of safety when participating in activities within organisations.

The CYPC contextualised the survey for organisational environments where children and young people regularly participate and restructured it to make it shorter and easier for children and young people to understand.

Children and young people participating in activities at organisations such as schools, sports clubs, and other organisations providing services to children and young people in the ACT were given the opportunity to participate in the survey, which was promoted through social media, organisational newsletters and networks, and posters displayed at participating organisations.

The survey was anonymous and did not seek identifying information about children and young people or the organisations they were involved with. The survey was conducted in line with the CYPC Statement of Ethical Practice, participation was voluntary, no question except the consent to participate was mandatory, and respondents could exit the survey at any time. The survey was aimed at children and young people aged eight to 18 years old, with parental or guardian consent required for participants under 12 years of age. The survey opened on 2 December 2024 and closed on 14 April 2025.

The insights gathered from the survey data form an important part of the implementation approach in helping organisations improve their processes and practices to reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people.

Year-on-year administration of the survey is proposed to build an evidence base to support the Scheme's five-year review and show progress over time.

Methodology

The survey explored children's and young people's feelings of safety in the context of organisations, with a particular focus on identifying safety risks, barriers to help-seeking, and the effectiveness of current safeguarding measures.

Respondents were asked to reflect on an organisation they had participated in within the past six months and to answer some questions (based on their experiences within that setting) to gauge their sense of safety within that environment. Respondents were then asked to consider one of three scenarios where a child or a young person might find themselves in a potential grooming situation.¹ These scenarios were developed by the CYPC to reflect realistic situations in organisations where children and young people participate. The scenarios are provided at **Attachment A**.

For scenario-based questions, participants were asked:

- Their thoughts on the likelihood of a child or young person being in that situation
- Who they would turn to if they felt unsafe
- What barriers might prevent them from seeking help
- Their degree of confidence in adults to respond appropriately if a child or a young person was feeling unsafe.

The survey also asked children and young people whether they felt safe within their organisation, and whether they believed their organisation was doing enough to keep them safe.

¹ For the purposes of the CYPC survey, grooming describes a situation where an adult seeks to build trust with a young person and gradually blur professional or personal boundaries. This often involves giving special attention, initiating private contact outside formal settings (including via social media), and engaging in behaviours that may cause discomfort or increase vulnerability to exploitation.

Analysis of results

Responses that included only demographic information, without substantive survey input, were excluded prior to analysis. Following this screening process, a total of **56 valid responses** remained for inclusion.

When asked to identify the type of organisation they were considering while responding to the survey, most participants (54 per cent) referred to the school sector. This was followed by 34 per cent who identified outside school hours care (**OSHC**) or holiday programs. Fewer than 10 per cent of respondents associated their responses with sporting organisations or faith-based or youth groups.

A deeper cross-analysis was undertaken to compare responses between participants identifying the school sector and those from the OSHC or holiday program sector to provide valuable insights into variations in organisational culture and confidence in reporting practices.

Given the low number of responses, analysis was undertaken through a close review of individual responses and the identification of key themes. This approach yielded relevant insights, which aligned with existing evidence in the field.

Although the overall number of respondents was small, the responses provide a window into the organisational environment and provide useful insights for leaders, staff and volunteers to consider their risks to child safety and evaluate their practices. Findings presented in the report and accompanying infographic at **Attachment B** are considered reliable as they validate the findings of the original survey administered by the ICPS study.²

² Russell, D.H., & Higgins, D. J. (2021). Children and young people's safety: 2018-2020 Report. Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University. <https://doi.org/10.26199/sjap-kn57>

Key findings

The findings from the survey provide valuable early insights into how children and young people in the ACT experience safety within organisations, and how well current practices align with the intent of the Standards.

While the survey sample was modest (n=56), responses highlight consistent themes in respect of organisational practices, alongside children and young people's general sense of safety, their confidence in adults, and barriers to help-seeking. These results reinforce the importance of embedding a child rights culture and proactive safeguarding practices across all organisations engaging with children and young people.

Overall sense of safety

Most children and young people reported generally feeling safe in their organisation, with 65 per cent stating they feel safe *most of the time*. However, almost one-third (28 per cent) indicated they only feel safe *some of the time*, and a small but significant 7 per cent said they never feel safe. These figures suggest important variations in safety experiences across settings and signal that while developing child safety cultures, there is a need to focus on more robust, consistent, and visible reinforcement of organisational child-safe values and behaviours.

When asked whether their organisation was doing enough to keep them safe, 60 per cent of respondents agreed, while 29 per cent felt their organisation was doing some things but not enough. A further 7 per cent reported that nothing was being done to make them feel safe. Concerns were particularly pronounced in the OSHC and holiday program sector, where respondents were twice as likely to indicate safety concerns compared to those from school and other organisational contexts.

These findings suggest that while many organisations have existing child safety frameworks in place, children and young people's experiences of safety vary, with some still perceiving gaps between policy intent and day-to-day practice. The distinctions between sectors highlight the importance of contextualised support and training about the Standards to strengthen protective practices across all settings.

Help-seeking and trust in adults

The findings show that children and young people most commonly turn to their parents/carers for help when they feel unsafe. Mothers/stepmothers (82 per cent) and fathers/stepfathers (65 per cent) were the most frequently identified sources of support, followed by friends (31 per cent) and teachers (31 per cent). This pattern underscores the vital role that trusted adults play within a child or young person's safety networks, and highlights opportunities to strengthen confidence in seeking help from adults within organisations.

Notably, 22 per cent of children and young people agreed they might find themselves in a grooming situation, suggesting an awareness among a significant minority that such risks are real. Encouragingly, 95 per cent of respondents said they would talk to someone if they thought they were in an unsafe situation, and 85 per cent said they would feel worried if such a situation occurred. However, only 55 per cent felt confident that they would know what to do because their organisation had discussed these issues. This suggests that while awareness of risk is high, practical preparedness and clarity around help-seeking and reporting pathways remain inconsistent.

Confidence in organisational response

Children and young people's responses revealed mixed confidence in how adults within organisations would respond if they felt unsafe. The majority (65 per cent) indicated they thought adults would only know something was wrong if a child or young person told them with only 55 per cent believing that adults would know what to do if such a situation occurred. Moreover, one in four respondents (25 per cent) believed that adults might not believe them if they reported feeling unsafe, and one in three (33 per cent) disagreed that adults would involve them in deciding what should happen next.

These findings suggest a perception among some children and young people that adults are reactive rather than proactive in identifying and responding to safety concerns, and that children's voices are not always central to decision-making when issues arise.

When asked whether grown-ups in their organisation care about the views and opinions of children and young people, only 41 per cent said *all of the time*, half (50 per cent) said *only some of the time*, and 6 per cent said *never*.

These results indicate that many children and young people still feel their perspectives are only partly valued, suggesting that embedding genuine participation and consistent listening practices is essential to building trust and strengthening organisational safety cultures.

Barriers to seeking help

Several factors were identified that may prevent children and young people from seeking help. Approximately half of respondents said that grown-ups in their organisation care about their views and opinions only some of the time, while 7 per cent said grown-ups never care about their views and opinions.

Children and young people expressed clear expectations about how adults should respond when told that a child or young person feels unsafe. Over half (55 per cent) said it was most important that adults *believe them* when they say they feel uncomfortable. Around one in two respondents wanted adults to *notice signs of discomfort* and *step in or check in with them*, highlighting a desire for adults to be observant, proactive, and responsive to non-verbal cues. Additionally, 40 per cent said they would want clarity about whether an adult's behaviour was appropriate, indicating a need for transparent communication and education about boundaries and respectful conduct.

Summary

Collectively, these findings suggest that while most children and young people in the ACT feel safe within organisations, there are critical areas where implementation of the Standards can be strengthened. Children and young people continue to rely heavily on family/carers for support, and there appears to be limited confidence in organisational mechanisms. Concerns about not being believed, discomfort in raising issues, and a perception that adults may only act once told, all highlight the importance of fostering a more *proactive and participatory* safety culture.

Embedding regular conversations about safety, ensuring visible adult accountability, and creating authentic opportunities for children and young people to have a say in how safety is managed will be key to realising the intent of the Scheme and ensuring that children and young people both **are** safe and **feel** safe in organisational settings.

Companion report and comparative findings

This report is complemented by the *Children and Young People's Feelings of Safety 2025 Report: Dance Schools ACT*, prepared in partnership with Ausdance ACT. This companion report focuses specifically on dance environments, offering a sector-based comparison that deepens insights drawn from the broad organisational survey presented here.

Across both reports, several consistent findings emerge. In both samples, approximately one in four children and young people feared that *things would get worse* if they told an adult about an unsafe situation – highlighting a concern about potential repercussions for speaking up. The shared finding signals a need for clearer communication and stronger reassurance about how reports of unsafe behaviour of adults are managed.

Perceptions of grooming risk were also broadly aligned. In the ACT-wide survey, 22 per cent of children and young people believed they might find themselves in a grooming situation, while in the dance sector, 28 per cent expressed the same concern. This pattern signals the continued importance of explicit education and prevention measures across organisational contexts, particularly those where close adult-child interactions are routine.

Children and young people in both groups expressed a strong desire for proactive adult responsibility. In the broader survey, more than half of participants said it was most important that adults notice discomfort and step in when something feels wrong, while two-thirds of respondents in the dance sector expected adults to recognise and act on signs of unease without waiting for disclosure. This alignment reinforces the need for adults in all sectors to demonstrate vigilance and proactive safeguarding rather than relying solely on children to initiate help-seeking.

Sector-specific risks were also identified in the Dance Schools ACT Report. Notably, 70 per cent of dance students believed they might experience body shaming in that environment—a finding that, while sector-specific, reflects broader concerns about respect, wellbeing, and inclusivity. The prominence of this risk within the dance sector demonstrates the value of sector-based engagement under the Scheme, to enable targeted strategies to address the unique contextual factors while promoting universal child safety principles.

These two reports provide a broader understanding of how children and young people across organisational settings experience safety, trust, and adult responsiveness. The integrated findings from both reports indicate shared strengths, recurring risks, and opportunities for coordinated sector improvement. This analysis can inform organisational efforts to improve safety, as well as areas for tailored guidance and training to support consistent application of the Standards.

Together, these reports provide a comprehensive foundation for evidence-based policy development, ensuring that children and young people across all organisational settings are safe, empowered, and confident that adults will act in their best interests.

Limitations

While the findings provide valuable preliminary insights into children and young people's feelings of safety within organisational contexts in the ACT, several limitations should be noted when interpreting the results.

Sample size

The total number of valid responses (n=56) represents a modest sample of the ACT's population of children and young people. With participation in the survey being voluntary and distribution occurring primarily through organisational networks and social media, the results may reflect the perspectives of children and young people already engaged with more proactive or child-aware organisations. Consequently, the findings should not be considered statistically representative of all children and young people in the ACT, particularly those who may be disengaged, marginalised, or less connected to structured activities and support networks.

Self-selection and response bias

Participation relied on self-selection, which may have influenced the type of respondents who completed the survey. Children and young people who feel strongly about their sense of safety (whether positively or negatively) may have been more likely to participate. Additionally, given the sensitivity of the topic, some respondents may have felt uncomfortable disclosing negative experiences, particularly if they were unsure about the confidentiality or anonymity of their responses.

Consent-related bias in responses from younger children

The requirement for parental or guardian consent may have influenced participation rates and potential moderation or framing of responses. For example, this might indicate a child's concerns about disclosing safety concerns in the presence of their parent/carer. It could also reflect a filtering of responses by the consenting adult in response to concerns being raised by their child. Further, parents/carers may have influenced responses when helping their child complete the survey, such that the views may not reflect those that might have been independently expressed by the child.

Trust in the survey process

As this was a new approach to evidence gathering by the CYPC, some respondents may have been reluctant to speak openly due to concerns about anonymity or potential consequences. It is anticipated, however, that trust, and engagement will increase with future iterations as the process becomes more familiar and embedded.

Importance of Child Safe Standards

These surveys highlight both positive perceptions and areas of vulnerability within the ACT services sector. While most children and young people reported generally feeling safe, they expressed concern about risk of harm, lack of confidence in adults, and lack of knowledge of their rights in unsafe situations, which underscores the critical role of the Standards. The Standards provide a framework for organisations to actively foster cultures where children's rights, safety, and wellbeing is prioritised.

Building a child safe culture

Less than half of respondents were confident they would know what to do in an unsafe situation, and around 40 per cent wanted clarity about whether an adult's behaviour was appropriate. This reflects the important role adults play in ensuring their organisation speaks openly about risks and the behaviours expected of adults. When everyone understands and maintains appropriate boundaries, children and young people are more likely to ask adults what they should do if they feel unsafe. The Standards provide a vehicle for shifting culture towards adults taking responsibility for child safety through proactive conversations about how to keep children and young people safe.

Building trust and responsiveness

Slightly more than half of respondents believed adults would know what to do if a child or young person said they were feeling unsafe. This reflects a lack of confidence in adults to anticipate situations that give rise to risk for children and young people and establish appropriate actions to mitigate concerns or respond appropriately when harm occurs.

Embedding the Standards requires adults to build their knowledge and skills to ensure children and young people are never left to manage unsafe situations on their own or face repercussions for speaking up. Child safe organisations believe children and young people when they speak up, talk openly about safety, and provide clear guidance to staff about how to address concerns.

Strengthening respect for children and young people's rights

Half of respondents said adults cared about their views and opinions *only some of the time* with only 41 per cent believing adults cared about their views and opinions *all the time*. When organisations create a culture of safety where children and young people are empowered and their rights and wellbeing are at the centre, they are more likely to trust their own judgement and make good choices, even when adults are not there to protect them.

The Standards can help to reduce the likelihood of harm and create environments where children and young people are confident to express concerns and where adults are equipped to respond with care and accountability.

Strengthening participation

Children and young people reported most frequently turning to their parents/ carers or peers for support, rather than organisational staff or formal helping services. This builds on previous points that highlight gaps in organisational trust and reinforces the need for child-inclusive strategies where children and young people feel safe to seek help from adults within organisations.

Considerations for Organisations

The survey findings suggest several priority areas for organisations as they work towards embedding the Standards in practice.

Strengthening adult responsibility and vigilance

Leaders, staff, and volunteers need to understand their responsibility for noticing when children and young people are uncomfortable, distressed, or unsafe, rather than relying on them to initiate disclosure.

Creating safe reporting pathways

Children and young people need to have multiple, trusted avenues to raise concerns, including confidential and age-appropriate mechanisms that do not depend solely on parents/carers. Organisations should reinforce that no child or young person will face negative consequences for speaking up and ensure that reports are always taken seriously and acted upon.

Prioritising the participation of children and young people

Regular engagement of children and young people about their feelings of safety by leaders, staff, and volunteers helps keep safeguarding measures relevant and effective. Risk of harm increases when children and young people are not listened to or believed. Environments where secrets are discouraged, diverse views are encouraged, and children and young people's rights and wellbeing is at the centre of action reduces risk and increases the likelihood of harm being detected and responded to.

Engaging families and carers constructively

Families and carers have deep knowledge of their children and young people's strengths, needs, 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 is particularly important as children and young people indicated they would turn to a parent/carer before seeking support from an adult in an organisation.

Focus areas for sector-wide improvement

To support lasting change, the following areas warrant sector-wide attention.

Workforce development

A structured program of ongoing training for leaders, staff, and volunteers is required to build confidence in identifying, responding to, and preventing harm.

Consistent policies and practices

Establishing minimum child safe policy and code of conduct requirements will promote consistency and clarity for staff and volunteers. Additionally, having these in simple language will ensure children, young people, and families will know how organisations are improving their child safety practices.

Monitoring and accountability

Clear systems for tracking progress, supported by a survey process and data collection, will provide evidence of improvement and highlight areas needing additional focus.

Cultural change

Embedding the Standards is not a one-off compliance exercise. It requires sustained leadership commitment and modelling of safe and respectful behaviour across all levels in organisations.

Conclusion

The findings in this report provide an important foundation for understanding how children and young people in the ACT perceive their safety within organisational settings, and the extent to which current practices align with the Standards. While the survey sample was limited, the results highlight clear and consistent messages from children and young people about what safety means to them, what they need from adults and organisations, and where improvements are necessary to ensure that safety is assured and an embedded organisational value.

The results reaffirm that while most children and young people feel safe within their organisations, challenges related to communication, trust, and proactive safeguarding still exist. The reliance on parents/carers as primary sources of help is affirming but also reflects a need for organisations to strengthen internal cultures of safety, ensuring that children and young people have confidence in staff and systems within the environments where they learn, play, and participate. Moreover, the expressed concerns about not being believed, fear of repercussions, and limited adult awareness highlight the critical importance of implementing child-centred and participatory approaches that empower children and young people to speak up, knowing they will be believed.

Future efforts should focus on strengthening organisational responses to increase children and young people's confidence that adults will be safe, responsive, and visibly accountable in their duty of care.

Organisational leadership should embed regular dialogue about safety, maintain transparency in safeguarding processes, and create visible avenues for feedback. Doing so is critical for creating safer environments for children and young people and subsequently achieving the intent of the Standards.

In summary, this report provides a meaningful early learning about how to build a culture in which every child and young person in the ACT can *be* safe, and *feel* safe, as well as respected and valued in every organisational setting.

Continued leadership, collaboration, and commitment across sectors will be vital to ensuring that the views of children and young people remain at the heart of the ACT's child safety framework and that the Standards deliver enduring and measurable improvements in practice.

Attachment A

Scenario 1 – School Setting

Casey is in year 4 and goes to the local school. Before lunch, Casey's teacher pulls them aside and asks Casey for their help to unpack the sports storeroom. Casey asks if a friend can help too. Casey's teacher says, "no, you did a good job of helping me on your own last time." The teacher has asked Casey to help a few times this school term. Casey does not want to disappoint their teacher, so Casey agrees. When Casey has finished, the teacher asks Casey to come back after school to help with something else, even though their parent usually picks them up from school.

Scenario 2 – Sports Setting

Alex is 12 years old and goes to soccer training at a local club after school. During training, the coach pulls Alex aside and asks for help to pack up the equipment after training. Alex asks if one of their teammates can help too. Alex's coach says "no, you did a good job of helping me on your own last time." The coach has asked Alex to stay back after training and help a few times over the soccer season. Alex does not want to disappoint their coach, so Alex agrees. Once Alex is done, the coach offers Alex a ride home, instead of walking the short distance home.

Scenario 3 – Youth Group Setting

Charlie is 15 years old, part of a local community youth group, and attends weekly meetings and week-end camps. During a meeting, the youth leader pulls Charlie aside and asks for help to pack away the chairs at the end of the night. Charlie asks if another group member can help too. The youth leader says, "no, you did a good job of helping me on your own last time." The youth leader has asked Charlie to stay back after the group to help pack up a few times. Charlie does not want to disappoint their youth leader, so Charlie agrees. Once Charlie has finished, the youth leader suggests taking Charlie for coffee and then going to their house to watch a movie.

Attachment B



Children and young people's Feelings of Safety survey

Who participated?



<10% Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander

56 Children & young people



61% Female
34% Male
<10% Gender diverse

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<25% of respondents spoke languages other than English

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≥80% Children aged 8 to 12 years
≤20% Young people aged 13-18 years



Organisational context

54% School
34% OSHC/Holiday program
<10% Faith-based/Youth group
<10% Sports team or a club

1 in 4 respondents said grown-ups in their organisation would probably not believe them if they raised concerns



Do grown-ups in your organisation care about the views and opinions of kids, teens and young people

41% - All of the time

50% - Only some of the time

6% - Never

Outside school care care/holiday program sector respondents were **twice as likely** to raise concerns than those who chose school & other organisational contexts

Organisational safety

65% of respondents said they feel safe most of the time
28% of respondents said they only feel safe some of the time
7% of respondents said they never feel safe in their organisation

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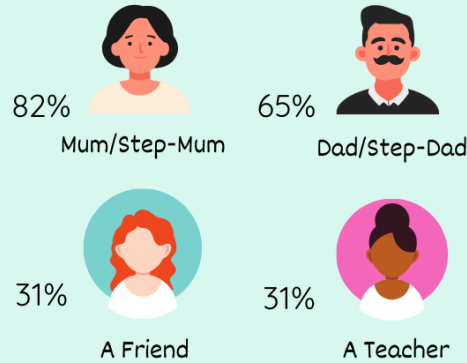
Children and young people's Feelings of Safety survey

How likely would it be...

1 in 4 agreed they might find themselves in a situation where they were singled out for special treatment

85% agreed they would feel worried if they were singled out by an adult

95% agreed they would talk to someone if they were singled out by an adult and felt uncomfortable



Who would you tell if you were in an unsafe situation?

2 in 3 respondents wanted a grown-up to notice when a child is uncomfortable and to step in and do something about it

1 in 2 respondents said being believed was what they needed most in an unsafe situation

1 in 4 respondents thought things would get worse if they told a grown-up at their organisation about the unsafe situation

55% of respondents said they would know what to do in the unsafe situation because they have discussed it at their organisation

Barriers to help-seeking

Key consideration for organisations



Implementation of Child Safe Standards