



Child-focused complaints and concerns processes

Child Safe Standard 6



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.



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.

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.

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 to the Standards 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.

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.

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.

