SAFE book series protective behaviours program
A guide for carers and educators

July 2018
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Introducing the SAFE series

The Office of the Children’s Guardian (OCG) has developed a series of four children’s books known as the SAFE series.

The series has been developed as a tool for child-related workers who want to introduce the concept of personal safety in a non-confrontational way to children under the age of six.

Each book includes a theme that works in conjunction with the other books in the series and can be used as a way of teaching children about what is referred to as Protective Behaviours, that is, behaviours that will help keep them safe from harm or abuse.

The SAFE series intends to reduce incidents of abuse by removing the secrecy abusers rely upon as a tool to offend against children. It also helps children understand their emotions, particularly when they feel sad, scared or upset. By using the SAFE series adults can help children develop the ability to communicate when they feel safe or unsafe.

The SAFE series supports a situational prevention approach to protecting children by attempting to make it more difficult for abusers to engage in inappropriate behaviour and increasing the chances of them getting caught.

Protecting children from harm is a shared responsibility for the family, the general community, professionals who work with children and government agencies but it is important to encourage children to think about their own safety.

Children should never be made to feel responsible for their own safety – this is the responsibility of the adults who care for them.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian promotes the safety, welfare and well-being of all children and through the SAFE series we offer educators and caregivers tools and resources to reinforce the key themes of protective behaviours, which are:

- children have a right to feel safe at all times
- nothing is so awful that you can’t talk about it
- the child should be listened to
- the child will be believed
What is the SAFE series user guide?

This guide is to be used in conjunction with the four books and other learning resources. It will assist carers and educators to deliver the SAFE series protective behaviours program in a way that is safe for children.

*Sam* the safe explorer looks at how children recognise safe and unsafe spaces. Its purpose is to help children recognise how they feel in places - if they are scared or upset, even in familiar places.

*Andy* learns the undies rule is a non-confrontational way of explaining to children how the parts of their bodies covered by their underwear are private. The book reinforces the rights of children to say ‘no’ if they feel uncomfortable.

*Fiona* finds five heroes promotes the concept of children having a support network of five people they can turn to if they are feeling sad, scared or upset. It aims to undermine the use of secrecy that many abusers rely upon and also helps children understand there are always people they can turn to for help.

*Eve* listens to her feelings and teaches children to recognise when they are feeling sad, scared or upset and shows them that it is fine to communicate these feelings. The book helps children build confidence so that they have a voice and a sense of empowerment.
The SAFE series user guide will provide:

- further information and learning outcomes which link to the child safe personal safety messages
- practical hints, tips and tools to make the personal safety messages resonate with children
- points of discussion for engaging children
- ready-made activities for children so they can better understand how the content of the books relates to them

The benefits of following the SAFE series user guide:

- builds skills and confidence to discuss personal safety with children
- minimises the risk of children feeling confronted or uncomfortable when talking about personal safety
- allows troubleshooting of sensitive situations or issues, including potential disclosures from children that may arise out of discussing personal safety
- promotes positive discussions about meaningful personal safety and learning experiences for children

Further resources provided by the Office of the Children’s Guardian

The Office of the Children’s Guardian has developed further resources to support your organisation in delivering the SAFE series. Please visit our website at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/SAFE.

You can register to attend An introduction to the SAFE series workshop or download the supporting material referred to in this guide, including electronic versions of the SAFE series books and other resources.

Step 1 - Developing an understanding of protective behaviours

Before you start

The OCG has developed this guide to help your organisation deliver the SAFE series program to children under six. In developing the guide we consulted professionals working in protective behaviours as well as experienced pre-school workers. You should familiarise yourself with this guide before beginning the program.

An important requirement of the program is that you deliver the stories from the perspective of the characters. Instead of using phrases like ‘What would you do if someone asked to see your private parts?’ ask children how they think the character would feel if someone asked them. ‘How do you think Sam is feeling?’, ‘Who could Andy speak to if he was scared?’, ‘What should Eve do?’, ‘Do you think Fiona did the right thing?’

People who groom children for the purpose of sexual abuse often seek to test boundaries through incidental or accidental touching in an attempt to gauge a child’s reaction.
If a child is compliant with being touched in a general way a person may then progress their behaviour and try to normalise inappropriate touching. If children feel empowered to alert their caregivers to all forms of inappropriate behaviour, they are more likely to speak up about it. It will also contribute to increasing the likelihood of abusers being caught. Having an organisational culture that actively listens to children will promote the idea that their voice will be heard and makes them more likely to speak up.

As a result of delivering this program a child may disclose harm or abuse. As an organisation you need to prepare and support your workers for the possibility of this occurring, so that they are able to support the child appropriately, Step 5 includes information to help you should this occur.

The SAFE series is not meant to be delivered as a one off program – protective behaviours should form part of the day-to-day interactions with the children in your care. Step 4 includes some ideas about how to integrate this program into daily activities. Templates, training and resources are available at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/SAFE.

Situational prevention

The SAFE series contains four different child safe messages – one in each book. For each message we have identified a specific learning outcome. We’ve also provided a set of suggested questions to be used as conversation starters and to help reinforce the message.

One important aspect of the books relates to situational prevention in a child-related setting. Situational prevention is a crime prevention theory that considers what environmental cues contribute to, or discourages – an offence from occurring.

Situational prevention in a child-related setting aims to reduce the likelihood of inappropriate behaviour by making systematic and permanent changes to social and physical environments. Situational prevention techniques increase the level of effort needed for a person to offend, while also increasing the likelihood that they’ll be caught.

Introducing even small changes which make it more difficult and more risky for abusers to engage in inappropriate behaviour may make it less likely that a child will be harmed. Assisting and increasing natural surveillance is a cornerstone of situational prevention, particularly when protecting children from abuse.

Different spaces have different associated risks. For example, spaces that are out of a natural line of sight, secluded, enclosed or lacking the oversight and scrutiny of others are thought to carry more risks as they create opportunities for an abuser to act undetected.

When discussing safe spaces with children you should keep in mind that a particular building may be a safe place for a child, but an area within the building could still create anxiety. For example, a school may be a safe place, but the equipment cupboard may make them feel anxious.

Giving children a voice

In most instances, abusers work to silence children. Children need to understand that their body belongs to them and that if someone is to touch their private parts, such as to provide medical treatment, they should first explain what is involved and ask their permission and that they have a right to say no.

Encouraging children to recognise their emotions and to speak up when they feel scared or upset may reduce the chance of the child being exposed to offending behaviour.

Support network for children

It is also important for children to know they have people who are there to help them if they encounter an abuser. Providing a child with a network of people who will support them is an important aspect of protective behaviours.
Step 2 - Informing relevant stakeholders

The SAFE series protective behaviours program promotes a child safe environment by empowering children to speak up if they feel scared or upset.

The program requires the support of relevant caregivers (parents, teachers, guardians and other significant adults) in a child’s life. For the SAFE series to be successful, effective communication and reinforcement of the program is required.

Relevant caregivers in the child’s life should be consulted and informed about the topics covered in the SAFE series, particularly in relation to the concept of children having heroes because of the possibility they will ask for help in finding them.

A parent fact sheet is available on our website and has been included in this pack.

The factsheet encourages organisations to provide information sessions for parents to explain:

- their child may ask them to be one of their heroes
- the importance of being a hero and the responsibilities it carries
- the benefits of introducing a protective behaviours program
- what should happen if you receive a disclosure of harm from a child

Another important aspect of the program is the undies rule. Although it is presented in an age appropriate and non-confrontational way, it is useful to discuss it with parents and guardians first so they know about it if their child refers to it at home.

Parents should be encouraged to speak with their child about the program but it is important they do not refer to ‘stranger danger’ or ‘rude parts’ etc. Its important children are not scared in to feeling safe or left feeling afraid or disempowered. Instead the child should have an awareness of their own safety and be able to identify strategies they can adopt if they feel unsafe. You may wish to refer parents and guardians to extra resources such as the Council of Europe’s website which further explains the underwear rule: http://www.underwearrule.org/

Putting up the posters that accompany the program is a good way to demonstrate your organisation’s commitment to delivering the SAFE series and will promote open and transparent discussions with your various stakeholders.

You should also consider if further training and support for workers who have responsibility for children in your organisation is required. Staff need to be able to reinforce the SAFE series key messages and be able to respond appropriately if they suspect a child is at risk or if a child makes a disclosure.
Step 3 - Child safe messages and learning outcomes

Sam the safe explorer

This book introduces the concept of safe and unsafe spaces. In the story Sam wanders off alone, to demonstrate that he feels vulnerable in a strange place. The book aims to start a discussion about why Sam feels that way, not as a discussion point for stranger danger, as it may not be a stranger that makes Sam feel unsafe.

The scenario aims to prompt children to think about how Sam knows that he’s in a place that makes him feel scared, upset or alone.

It is important to recognise that a child may be harmed in a secluded area of a building or residence that is in general, a familiar or happy place for them, like change rooms, a private office etc. It may also be someone Sam knows or loves that makes him feel scared or upset.

Having children understand the emotions associated with feeling alone, scared or vulnerable helps them recognise spaces that make them feel unsafe. Encouraging children to speak up about their feelings may reduce opportunities for offences against them to occur. We want children to:

- describe how Sam might be feeling when he finds himself alone
- recognise why they felt scared or alone – is it because it’s a strange place, an unfamiliar noise, because of conflict or harmful behaviour etc?
- understand why Sam should stay with his friends (or in his mum’s line of sight)
- understand the strategies Sam uses in the story to stay safe
- identify other spaces which might make Sam scared or uncomfortable
- describe what Sam can do if he found himself in one of these spaces
- talk about the places where Sam might feel safe and why
- link the protective behaviours in the other books to Sam’s situation such as finding a network and understanding emotions

Sometimes feeling scared is OK, for example, at the dentist we can all feel a little scared, but Sam should still let adults know how he feels.
Sam’s safety messages

Why would Sam feel like that?

How do you think Sam feels when he's alone?

How do you think Sam is feeling as he chases the dragonfly?

Do you think Sam should leave the play area?

Who should Sam talk to about how he felt when he was scared?

What might be happening to Sam’s body that lets him know he doesn’t feel safe?

What other things might make Sam scared or upset?

Examples include:
- Being lost in a store
- Bullies
- Late being picked up
- Hearing a noise in bed at night
- Being asked to go somewhere by a stranger
Andy learns the undies rule

This book and its supporting resources have been developed to provide children with a clear and simple understanding of the parts of their body that people should not ask to touch or look at. It also reinforces the rights of the child: that it’s OK to say ‘no’.

It is important that children understand they can also say ‘no’ if someone asks them to look at or touch their (the adult’s) private parts, even if it is an adult they love or who cares for them.

Refrain from using language which may result in ‘shaming’ behaviour when discussing the undies rule.

Deter children from using words like ‘rude’ or ‘dirty’ when discussing private parts. Instead reinforce the premise that the rule is there because their body belongs to them and that no one should do anything to hurt them or make them feel scared. We want children to:

- identify which parts of their body are private
- understand that no one should ask to see or touch the private areas of their body, unless it is a doctor or parent or guardian asking for medical reasons (or for example toileting)
- demonstrate growing awareness that their body belongs to them
- feel OK to say ‘no’ to anyone who asks to look at or touch their private parts, even if it is someone they love
- feel OK to say ‘no’ when asked to look at or touch someone else’s private parts
- link the protective behaviour messages in the other books to Andy’s situation such as finding a network, understanding their emotions and thinking about safe spaces. A child could currently be subject to abuse and telling them they should or must say ‘no’ may make them feel responsible for the abuse or disempower them from speaking up.

Be careful with your use of language. Do not tell children they should or must say ‘no’ – just that it’s OK to say ‘no’.

A child could currently be subject to abuse and telling them they should or must say ‘no’ may make them feel responsible for the abuse or disempower them from speaking up.
Andy’s safety messages

Who would Andy tell if someone asked to touch his private parts?

Why should Andy learn the undies rule?

What if someone asked Andy to touch their private parts?

What are the parts of the body covered by Andy's undies called? (Answer: private parts)

If somebody Andy loves asks to see or touch his private parts, should he still tell his five heroes?

Would Andy get into trouble if he told on someone who asked to see his private parts?

If Andy has a sore bottom should he show his parent or a doctor?

What if the person told Andy that he’d get in trouble?
Fiona finds her five heroes

People who groom children for the purpose of sexual abuse often seek to establish a ‘special’ relationship with the child and tell them to keep this relationship secret in order to avoid detection or interference from others.

As part of grooming behaviour, abusers may also isolate children from their peers and other trusted networks, to reinforce that the child can only turn to and rely on them (the abuser).

Teaching children to identify a network of five people to talk to when they feel unsafe, and reinforcing the importance of ‘telling their network of five all of the time’ may assist children to come forward if they feel unsafe or have been experiencing abuse. It can also contribute to abusers being detected.

It is important to emphasise that children tell all five of their hero network all of the time, because it is possible one person in the network may not respond appropriately to a disclosure of harm.

If children tell all five heroes about even minor or trivial matters it can prevent further harm from occurring. We want children to:

- discuss Fiona’s network of five and identify why she might have chosen those people
- identify the personal qualities Fiona looked for when choosing her heroes
- verbalise the type of incidents and scenarios that Fiona should tell her network
- understand Fiona must tell all five people all of the time
- discuss and explain what Fiona should do if no one listens to her or isn’t available
- think about their own network and who might be special enough to make their list
- be able to explain to members of their network the responsibilities of being a hero
- link to the behaviours in the other books, like understanding feelings, knowing which parts of their bodies are private and recognising where they feel unsafe

This is also a useful tool to prevent bullying and could be used to promote discussions about why Fiona feels happy, sad etc.

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1 Special relationship refers to the grooming habits a person may demonstrate in order to build trust with the child.
Fiona’s safety messages

Why does Fiona need five heroes?
Why should she tell all five all of the time? (Answer: some people might be busy and forget to help Fiona.)
Is there anything else Fiona should tell her heroes?
Is it just dragons, cranky sheep and bees that sting that Fiona should tell her heroes about?
How will she know she has something to tell them? (Answer: things like ‘bubbles’ in her tummy)
Can Fiona tell her heroes about happy things?
Do you think Fiona’s five heroes were a good choice?
Would you like five heroes to help you if you feel scared or upset?
Who would you pick as your heroes?
Could Fiona tell her heroes if somebody is being mean to her?
Eve listens to her feelings

In the book Eve bottles up her emotions until she explodes. A bottle with a storm inside represents Eve’s feelings and children can see the lightning and thunder increase as she becomes more upset.

While the book depicts Eve’s frustration with other children, the book is not focussed on bullying. Through Eve’s story children should understand that Eve should speak up whenever she’s feeling sad or upset because she will be listened to.

A key message is that even if it is an adult who is upsetting Eve, all children still have the right to feel safe at all times.

We all have internal messages that our bodies send to our brain. By helping children understand what their emotions are telling them, we empower them to speak up.

Children sometimes describe emotions in ways that adults don’t recognise as concerning, such as ‘I have a bubble or butterflies in my tummy’. Children should be encouraged to link the ‘bubble’ to happy or sad emotions. We want children to:

- identify how Eve might feel when she bottles up her feelings
- recognise the difference between positive (happy) and negative (sad) emotions
- describe things that would make Eve feel happy, excited, calm, sad, scared and angry etc.
- identify the types of things that would make Eve feel ‘bubbles or butterflies’ in her tummy
- begin to understand that, sometimes, we feel sad for no particular reason and that this is OK but some expressions of feelings are not ok
- understand that if Eve had told her Mum earlier about how sad she was feeling then her Mum may have been able to help sooner
- think about how Eve might feel once she has told all five heroes
- link to the protective behaviours in the other books, such as knowing which parts of her body are private, where she might feel unsafe and who her network of five are.

Ask if Eve should feel bad because the other children got into trouble – and explain that she shouldn’t, as it is not her fault they did the wrong thing.
Eve's safety messages

Why did Eve get upset?

Should the other children be cross with Eve if they get into trouble?

Why do you think Eve 'exploded'?

Do you think if Eve had told her Mum sooner about being sad that her Mum could have helped?

Should Eve have told on the other children when they knocked her doll to the dirt?

Can Eve tell on an adult who is making her upset?

How can Eve know that she's feeling upset?
(Answer: 'bubbles' in her tummy)

Do you think Eve should tell her five heroes about how sad she felt?
SAFE series resources

Posters

There is a set of four posters to support the books.

Activities

There are a number of activities which reinforce the program’s personal safety messages. For a full list go to www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/SAFE
Step 4 - Implement the program into your weekly schedule

The SAFE series books aim to reduce the potential for children to be harmed by helping them recognise situations where they feel scared or unsafe. It also provides them with ways to alert responsible adults and caregivers to how they are feeling, so that they are better protected.

We have discussed ways to do this throughout this guide but organisations who deliver the SAFE series should understand that it is not meant as a one-off program. Here are some suggestions of how you can introduce the program into your weekly schedule:

- consider delivering one book every week
- plan activities for that week to reinforce the book’s key child safe messages
- include activities that require children to discuss child safe messages with their parents or caregivers
- when delivering the book ‘Fiona finds her five heroes’, ask children to come dressed as their favourite hero (either a character or one of their actual heroes)
- ask children to bring in a photograph of one of their heroes or safe spaces and explain why they chose that person or space
- link the five heroes to the five fingers on a hand, and have children recite who their five heroes are
- encourage children to tell stories about how they explained to their heroes that they were scared, upset or happy:
  - make one day of the week ‘Heroes Day’ where children are asked to bring their ‘Heroes’ stories to share with other children and describe how their heroes have helped them
  - reinforce the importance of being a hero and hear how, if a hero let them down, they are no longer on their list
- encourage children to communicate their feelings using the Eve feelings charts or by drawing faces and discussing how the person in the drawing is feeling
- encourage children to discuss places where they feel happy and why
- look for opportunities to reinforce the key messages of the program in day-to-day interactions with children
- listen to children and value their contribution on all matters discussed, and ensure they know their opinion is respected

Making protective behaviours a part of everyday life will reinforce to children that their bodies belong to them and supports the concepts outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. For more information, go to: 
Step 5 - Incident management

The SAFE series aims to provide child-related workers with appropriate tools, knowledge and skills to deliver child safe protective behaviour messages in a clear, simple and non-confronting way.

While you can deliver the content appropriately, you can’t predict how children will react and you need to consider that some children may respond differently, particularly if they have been abused, are the current victims of abuse or if they have witnessed abuse. If you believe a child is at risk of harm you may need to refer to the NSW Mandatory reporter guide at www.childstory.net.au.

It is advisable that your organisation conducts a full risk assessment prior to delivering the program and considers the potential vulnerability of the children in your service and the skills of your employees to respond appropriately. In your assessment you should be mindful of all the types of harm a child may disclose. The list below is meant as a guide only.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of harm</th>
<th>Possible indicators of harm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neglect</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Lack of supervision</td>
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<td>- Inadequate nourishment or hydration</td>
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<td>- Inadequate shade or protection from the elements</td>
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<td>- Regularly attends with:</td>
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<td>- inadequate clothing which is dirty, ill-fitting or out of season</td>
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<td>- poor personal hygiene</td>
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<td>- Appears malnourished or unhealthy</td>
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<td>- Steals food regularly</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Physical</strong></td>
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<td>- Rough handling of a child</td>
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<td>- Smacking or corporal punishment</td>
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<td>- Unreasonable restraint</td>
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<td>- Throwing items</td>
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<td>- Encouraging others to hurt the child</td>
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<td>- Bruising or other marks consistent with physical harm such as burns, scalds, finger marks, bumps etc</td>
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<td>- Refuses to undress or wears unsuitable clothing like long sleeves or tights in summer</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Psychological</strong></td>
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<td>- Shaming</td>
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<td>- Name calling</td>
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<td>- Exclusion from activities or peers</td>
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<td>- Shouting, aggressive or intimidating behaviour</td>
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<td>- Low self-esteem</td>
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<td>- Appears afraid or insecure</td>
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<td>- Mimics abuse with others</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual</strong></td>
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<td>- Inappropriate touching</td>
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<td>- Sexual assault</td>
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<td>- Inappropriate discussion of sexual themes (including with other adults in the presence of children)</td>
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<td>- Pornography</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Demonstrates sexual behaviours, language or understanding that is inappropriate given their age</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Unexplained soreness in the genital area</td>
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Incidents and suggested responses

When delivering the SAFE series it is possible that a child may disclose they have been abused or harmed. Having policies in place that support your children and workers if this occurs is recommended. Your policies should encourage the participation of children.

You may also be required by law, as mandatory reporter, to report a risk of harm to a child.

**What should you do if a child makes a disclosure of abuse during delivery of the SAFE series to a group of children?**

- acknowledge their disclosure and assess whether it is reasonable to (sensitively) remove them from the room to discuss the issue
- tell them that what they said is very important and let them know you would like to speak to them after you have finished with the group
- do not shame them or discount what they are saying when discussing their comments
- reassure them that they've done the right thing by speaking up and that they are not in trouble
- after you finish talking to them make detailed notes of what they said
- if you are satisfied or need help to determine the child has made a disclosure of serious harm go to [www.childstory.net.au](http://www.childstory.net.au) and use the Mandatory Reporter Guide (MRG). The interactive online MRG (decision tree) has been developed to assist mandatory reporters to determine whether a case meets the **risk of significant harm** threshold for reporting children and young people at risk in NSW
- not a mandatory reporter, you contact the Child Protection Helpline 132 111 and NSW Police Assistance Line (PAL) 131 444 if not urgent – or 000 if an emergency
- follow your organisation’s reporting and investigations policy as you may have further reporting obligations

**What should you do if a child becomes noticeably upset during delivery of the SAFE series, but then insists that they are OK after you speak to them?**

- if you feel the child’s behaviour is an indicator that they may be at risk, ask them if they’d like to make you one of their heroes
- reinforce to the child the role of a hero is to support and listen to them
- discuss with colleagues and peers whether you should speak to the child’s parent or guardian, or if you should call the Child Protection Helpline 132 111 for further advice
- consider reading or reinforcing the book ‘Eve listens to her feelings’ to the group of children as a whole as it encourages them to talk about their emotions

**What should you do if a child initiates a discussion which suggests inappropriate knowledge of sexual themes during delivery of the SAFE series?**

- without appearing to discipline the child you may wish to explain that you would prefer to discuss the matter with them after story time
- reassure them that they are not in trouble but that you’d just like to talk some more about their comments
- when discussing the child’s comments do not shame them or discount anything they’ve said
- after you finish talking to them, make notes to accurately record what they’ve said
- for further support, discuss the incident with your supervisor and consider what you need to do to assist the child and the class as a whole
- follow your organisation’s reporting and investigations policy
- use the decision tree in the MRG
- refer to the Child Protection Helpline 132 111 for advice regarding the comments made by the child
What should you do if a child makes a disclosure about a member of staff during delivery of the SAFE series?

- consider if it is appropriate to remove the child from the room
- without appearing to blame or shame the child, ask them to explain the nature of their disclosure in more detail
- support the child in making their disclosure and keep accurate records of the discussion
- if the incident breaches your organisation’s code of conduct (such as a staff member sitting a child on their lap) but doesn’t require intervention from NSW Police, inform management so that they can discuss the event with the relevant staff member and follow your organisation’s disciplinary policy
- if this is a risk of significant harm, do not interrogate the child – once you believe you have sufficient information that indicates a member of staff may have harmed the child contact the Child Protection Helpline 132 111
- you may also have responsibilities as a mandatory reporter www.keepthemsafe.nsw.gov.au
- contact the child’s parent or guardian to inform them of the disclosure
- follow your organisation’s reporting and investigations policy as you may have further reporting obligations