Message from the Children’s Guardian

Child-related organisations play an important role in meeting children’s health, educational, social, religious and cultural needs. These organisations rely on the commitment of skilled and caring adults to keep children safe.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian works with organisations to help them build their capacity to be safe for children. The Principles for Child-Safe Organisations have been developed to assist organisations to think about what it means to be ‘child safe’ and to identify strategies that can help create safe environments for our children.

These principles are informed by the findings of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse regarding the characteristics of child-safe organisations. Research tells us that an organisation that listens to children, demonstrates strong leadership and promotes an open culture encourages the early detection and reporting of concerns so they can be safer places for children.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian provides a range of training programs and resources to help organisations identify and manage their risks and to implement effective strategies that support them to be more ‘child safe’.

A simple but comprehensive eLearning program is also available on the Office of the Children’s Guardian’s website to help organisations to think about practical ways they can put child-safe principles into action in their day-to-day work.

I encourage all organisations to make use of these resources and look forward to working with them as they put these principles into practise as part of their commitment to keeping children safe.

Janet Schorer, NSW Children’s Guardian
Contents

Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................1
About these principles .................................................................................................................................... 2
Why is children’s participation so important? ...................................................................................... 3
A note on how to read these principles ................................................................................................. 4

Principle 1: The organisation focuses on what is best for children
Aim: That children know their rights, they are listened to
and their concerns are taken seriously ................................................................................................... 5

Principle 2: All children are respected and treated fairly
Aim: That all children are treated fairly, regardless of
ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality and abilities ................................................................................ 8

Principle 3: Children’s families and communities are welcome
and encouraged to participate in the organisation
Aim: Families support children to participate and take an interest
in the organisation ......................................................................................................................................... 11

Principle 4: Children receive services from skilled and caring adults
Aim: Staff and volunteers are supervised and supported and know how they should
behave towards children ..................................................................................................................................... 14
Introduction
Introduction

About these principles

These principles have been developed to help organisations to think about strategies that can help keep children safe. While the Working With Children Check is important, it is only one way to keep children safe. Organisations need to think about other things they can do to reduce the risk of harm to children.

Case studies and research undertaken by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse have highlighted the limitations of the Working With Children Check in terms of protecting children, and there has been a lot research and discussion about what makes organisations child safe. The Royal Commission has identified ten elements of child-safe organisations:

1. child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture
2. children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
3. families and communities are informed and involved
4. equity is promoted and diversity respected
5. people working with children are suitable and supported
6. processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused
7. staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. implementation of Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

The Principles for Child-Safe Organisations have been developed to help organisations to think about how they can implement these child-safe elements in their day-to-day work.

There are many practical strategies that organisations can put in place to reduce the risk of harm to children, such as screening and recruitment processes, child protection policies and
codes of conduct. These things are important, but they will only be effective if they sit within an organisational culture that genuinely values and respects children and places child safety and wellbeing at the centre of everything that it does.

The Office of the Children’s Guardian encourages all child-related organisations to become ‘high reliability organisations’. These are organisations that provide services where the impact of risk, such as child abuse, is serious but they have strong risk management processes to reduce that chance that children will be harmed. High reliability organisations learn from their mistakes and are constantly thinking about ways to improve safety; they encourage all people within the organisation to report concerns without fear of blame; and they address concerns that may seem minor or trivial but could indicate that there is a problem.

For an organisation to be a safe place for children, it must have a genuine commitment to supporting the meaningful participation of children in decisions that affect them. Organisations need to listen to children and act on their concerns. Organisations need to be proactive and creative in seeking children’s views, believe that children have valuable things to say and act on children’s ideas about what makes them safe. Child-safe organisations do not underestimate children’s capacity to understand the world around them and believe that they should have a say in what happens to them. Child-safe organisations see children as individuals with rights, and take responsibility for upholding these rights.

Why is children’s participation so important?

Children can experience safety differently to adults. Research with children about their experiences in organisations tells us that feeling safe is as important to children as being safe. In the desire to take action to protect children, it is easy to overlook the fact that children have their own ideas about what makes an organisation safe.

Children give us a unique perspective on how an organisation is functioning and often identify problems before adults do. By asking children about their experiences, organisations can identify and manage risks early and improve the services they provide.

Encouraging the participation of children should be a priority for all child-related organisations. To encourage children to speak up, organisations need to treat all children fairly, engage skilled and caring adults to work or volunteer with children, and encourage children’s families and communities to take an interest in the organisation.
A note on how to read these principles

These principles have been developed to help organisations think about the strategies they have in place to protect children and other things they can do to help keep children safe. The principles are divided into individual principles; however, no one principle is more important than another, and the principles should be read as a whole. The principles refer throughout to children and this includes children and young people aged 0-18 years.

The principles are not prescriptive and are designed not to tell organisations how to do their work, but rather to help organisations think about the characteristics of child-safe organisations and what it means to be child safe. Each principle includes a list of signs of a child-safe organisation. These lists are not exhaustive and organisations may have other strategies to improve safety for children. The Office of the Children’s Guardian will provide training and resources to help organisations implement these strategies and will look for these signs when working with child-related organisations.

Organisations provide services to children in a range of contexts and organisations need to think about strategies that are practical for them to implement. A good place to start is to ask children about their experiences within the organisation and things that make them feel safe or unsafe.

Links to additional resources are included throughout these principles. The Office of the Children’s Guardian also provides training and has a range of resources to assist organisations to implement child-safe strategies. I encourage you to visit the Office of the Children’s Guardian’s website at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation for more information.


3 T. Moore et al., Taking Us Seriously: children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, 2015.
Principle 1
The organisation focuses on what is best for children
Aim

That children know their rights, they are listened to and their concerns are taken seriously.

Key messages

All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.
(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3)

Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.
(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12)

- Keeping children safe is the primary obligation of all organisations that provide services to them.
- Children have a right to have a say in what happens to them.
- Asking children about their experiences in the organisation provides opportunities to identify and manage potential risks.
- Children are more likely to speak up when they feel unsafe if they know the organisation will believe them.
- Leadership is essential in creating an organisational culture where everyone takes responsibility for the safety of children and places the rights of children at the centre of their operations.
Signs of a child-safe organisation – what we are looking for

- Children's views matter and the organisation asks children about what would make them feel safe
- The organisation acts on children’s views and addresses their concerns
- The organisation has a child-friendly complaints process for children and makes it easy for children to raise concerns and provide feedback
- Children are consulted before important decisions are made and informed about how the information they provide will be used
- Leaders within the organisation make sure that children are given information about their rights and about how adults should behave towards them
- The organisation has a policy about what to do if a child has been harmed and staff and volunteers know what to do when there are concerns about a child's safety
- When a child makes a complaint or an allegation the organisation explains what will happen next

What we hope to hear from children

- The adults who work here know who I am, what I’m good at and what I need help with, what I like and what I don’t like.
- I get to have a say in what happens to me.
- I know how I should be treated and how adults should behave towards me.
- If I tell the adults who work here that I feel unsafe they will believe me and do something about it.

More information


For more information and resources to help your organisation encourage participation, visit the Advocate for Children and Young People’s website at: www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/info


For more information and resources regarding organisational responsibilities regarding complaints management, visit the NSW Ombudsman’s website at: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/complaints

For more information regarding reporting child protection concerns, visit the NSW Department of Family and Community Services website at: www.community.nsw.gov.au/preventing-child-abuse-and-neglect/reporting-suspected-abuse-or-neglect
Principle 2

The organisation respects and values children
Principle 2 - The organisation respects and values children

Children have the right to meet with other children and young people and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.
(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 15)

Children who have any kind of disability should receive special care and support so that they can live a full and independent life.
(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23)

- Children communicate and participate in organisations in different ways
- For all children to feel safe, organisations must value and respect people from different cultural backgrounds and with different abilities
- Child-safe organisations treat all children fairly and with respect.
Signs of a child-safe organisation – what we are looking for

- The organisation demonstrates through the language it uses and the way in which people behave that it respects and welcomes children from diverse backgrounds
- Leaders within the organisation set a good example for staff and volunteers about how to behave respectfully towards children
- All children are treated fairly
- The organisation has zero tolerance for bullying and discrimination
- Information about child safety is provided in a range of languages and in ways that children can understand
- Children with disabilities are given the help they need to participate in the organisation.

What we hope to hear from children

“Adults and other children should not hurt or bully me and if they do, something will be done about it.”

“ I get the help that I need to join in with other children.”

“Adults who work here do not have favourites and I am treated fairly.”

More information

Play by the Rules has a series of anti-discrimination resources. For more information visit: www.playbytherules.net.au/toolkits/racism-in-sport-toolkit or www.playbytherules.net.au/toolkits/homophobia-in-sport-toolkit
Principle 3
The organisation welcomes children’s families and communities
Principle 3 - The organisation welcomes children’s families and communities

That families and communities get involved with the organisation.

Aim

Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights properly.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 5)

Key messages

- Parents, carers or significant others have the primary responsibility for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children, including making decisions about what organisations are appropriate for their child
- Children feel valued when the people who are important to them take an active interest in their lives
- Organisations should engage parents, carers and significant others as partners with a shared concern for the safety of children
- Leaders within the organisation make sure feedback or concerns raised by families or the community is followed-up
- Parents, carers or community members who have a relationship with the child can provide important information that helps organisations keep children safe
Principle 3 - The organisation welcomes children's families and communities

Signs of a child-safe organisation – what we are looking for

- Families feel welcome and are encouraged to participate with their child
- The organisation’s commitment to child safety and its strategies for ensuring children are safe is publicly available information
- Families are invited to provide feedback and there is an easy process for families to make a complaint or raise a concern
- Leaders within the organisation make sure feedback or concerns raised by families or the community is followed-up
- The organisation provides families and communities with up-to-date information about how it keeps children safe

What we hope to hear from children

“...The people who are important to me and know me the best can be there for me.

“...The people who care about me can check that the organisation is doing the right thing.

“...The adults around me are making sure that I am safe.

More information

Play by the Rules has a series of resources to assist sporting organisations to be welcoming and inclusive of children and their families. For more information, visit: https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources
Principle 4
The organisation has skilled and caring employees and volunteers
Aim

That staff and volunteers are supervised and supported and know how they should behave towards children.

Key messages

Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone who looks after them.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19)

- Organisations must make sure that staff and volunteers know how they should behave towards children
- Working With Children Checks are important but organisations should use other pre-employment screening processes, including interviews and reference checks
- Organisations have a responsibility to ensure that all staff and volunteers know what to do if they suspect a child is at risk of harm or abuse
- It is not necessary to have evidence of abuse before reporting; if a child reports feeling unsafe the organisation must act on this information
- Children need adults to notice when something is wrong, so problems can be addressed early
- Organisations should learn from their mistakes and continually strive to be safer for children
Principle 4 - The organisation has skilled and caring employees and volunteers

Signs of a child-safe organisation – what we are looking for

- Leaders in the organisation make sure that all staff and volunteers understand their obligations towards children and know what to do if a child reports abuse or harm
- The organisation has a code of conduct for all staff and volunteers and everyone in the organisation knows how they are expected to behave towards children, children’s families and each other
- People working or volunteering with children have a valid Working With Children Check and the organisation verifies the Working With Children Check of every person in the organisation who works or volunteers with children
- The organisation conducts other screening processes, including interviews and reference checks
- People who work or volunteer with children are supervised and supported to do their work
- Staff and volunteers are provided with information and training about indicators and dynamics of child abuse and maltreatment
- Staff and volunteers are quick to notice when there are risks and take action to keep children safe
- Staff and volunteers feel confident to report problems and concerns, without fear of blame
- If a child reports that they have been harmed or feel unsafe, staff or volunteers report this immediately, even if they have not witnessed harm occurring
- If something does go wrong, the organisation identifies what went wrong and implements strategies to prevent this from happening again
What we hope to hear from children

“Adults in the organisation do the right thing and I can trust them.

“Adults are predictable and the rules apply to everyone.

“Adults do what they say they are going to do.

“If something goes wrong, adults are confident and calm, and know what to do.”

More Information


For more information about developing a child-safe code of conduct, visit: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation/codes-of-conduct
Want more information?

Please visit the Office of the Children’s Guardian’s website at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au to check out our child-safe organisations resources and training.