Beyond Compliance: towards child-safe organisations

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• aims to
  – understand how and why sexual abuse occurred within Australian institutions
  – provide guidance as to how future abuse might be prevented
Specifically, this study explores:

- how children and young people conceptualise and perceive safety;
- children and young people’s views on what gives rise to these perceptions;
- children and young people’s perceptions of safety within institutions;
- what children and young people consider is already being done to respond to safety issues and risks in institutions;
- what children and young people consider should be done to respond to safety issues in institutions.
Why support children’s participation?

- Children & Young People discussed **why it is important** that institutions engage directly with children and young people about their safety needs and wishes.

- They said they want to be involved in **identifying and dealing with safety issues**, and believe that **in partnership with adults and institutions**, issues such as child sexual abuse can be better dealt with.

  Adults think they know what kids need to be safe, but I don’t think that they do. They base it on what they remember from when they were kids and the world is different now. So they need to talk to kids and find out what it means to them.

  The world is unsafe for most kids, well that’s how they feel anyway. So if you’re going to make it safe you’ve got to make them feel OK... You have to ask them what worries them and fix that.
Stage 1: Planning

- Literature Review
  - Targeted review of the literature to identify what is known about children’s safety and methods

- Adults Reference Group
  - Guidance given to project by adult experts

- Ethics Approval
  - Approval for study sought from ACU Human Research Ethics Committee

Stage 2: Conceptualising safety

- Children and Young People’s Reference Group
  - Children and young people work with researchers to develop research plan and shape methods

- Focus Groups
  - Children and young people help develop a definition of safety, identify what children need to be and feel safe and consider what is currently being done to make them be and feel safe

- Development of a child-led conceptualisation of safety
  - Researchers analyse focus group data and propose a set of key themes and characteristics related to children’s safety

Stage 3: Considering children’s experiences of safety and institutional responses

- Children and Young People’s Reference Group
  - Researchers’ analysis is tested with children and young people who help explore implications. Survey is developed in consultation with children and young people

- Surveys
  - Children and young people reflect on the extent to which they believe institutions demonstrate child-safe characteristics and respond to the safety needs identified in Stage 2

- Children’s safety snapshot
  - Quantitative data is analysed and emerging themes identified

- Children and Young People’s Reference Group
  - Children and young people work with researchers to identify the key findings and implications for practice
We spoke to over 120 children & young people aged 4-14 including:

- kids in early childhood centres
- students in schools,
- young carers,
- young people with disability,
- Aboriginal students, and
- young people in Out-of-Home-Care

And asked them:

1. What does it mean to be safe and unsafe and how can you tell?
2. How safe are the places where children & young people are looked after by adults outside the home?
3. How well are adults going in keeping you safe & feeling safe?
4. What else needs to be done / done better?
What does it mean to be safe?

- Being safe and feeling safe are two different things
  - Kids are more concerned about FEELING SAFE and adults are more concerned about kids BEING SAFE and often forget that to BE SAFE they need both

- Children tell whether they’re safe or not based:
  - On their bodies
  - On their behaviours
  - On other’s behaviours
  - On what they’ve seen or heard
  - On what they’ve experienced

- To be safe, kids need:
  - Familiarity, predictability and some sense of control
  - To be with those they trust
  - For adults to be adult-like, to demonstrate their respect for kids, to use their power FOR children, to take control, to do what they say they are going to do
SAFETY

Feelings

Comfortable  Happy  Protected  Loved

Relaxed  Content  Smiling  Loved  Looked after

People

Family  Friends

Pets  Teachers  Police  Doctors  Fire fighters

Bike riding  Reading  Music

Computer games  Activities

Home  Places

School  Set up for kids

Playground  Library  Tidy and ordered

Times

During the day

before adults are drinking

when with others

Things

Protect yourself

Gun  Bat  Lock on doors  Gates  Dog

Money  Phone  Internet  Gifts

Photos  Stories

UNSAFETY

People

Strangers  Child abusers

People who don't
you know & trust

People who hurt you

Bullies  Terrorists

Adults who use their power against you

Adult bullies  Favorites  Bad police  Bad teachers

People who act crazy  Too friendly

People who are calm one minute and angry the next

Clowns & magicians

Confused  Sick

Feelings

Hope someone will come and rescue me

Sad  Angry

Scared  Funny

Fearful  Scary or dangerous

Haunted houses

When you're all alone

Places

Scary or dangerous

Mental health facilities  Government flats

where adults are drinking

Times

At night time

when there's no one to protect you

when people can do things to you because no one else is there to see it

when it's dark

Activities

Things that are thrilling

Extreme sports  Dares

Adrenalin pumping

Dogs  Spiders

Animals  Sharks

Things

Ways bad people can contact you

Broken glass  Guns  Bombs
Safety and Power

Physical vulnerability

There are some things that are only dangerous for kids. Like it's highly unlikely that someone is going to pull over and grab and adult and put them in the car because they're an adult but it's much more likely if you're a kid.
Relational and intergenerational vulnerability

Because they’re adults and we’re kids we’re always going to be in a worse off position. Everyone thinks that adults can treat kids how they want, that kids should be respectful of adults no matter what and that children should just do what adults say because their kids and adults are adults (YP-3)

They stand over you and make you feel really small. They want to remind you that you are weak and you have to do exactly what they say. There’s nothing you can do because you’re just a kid and you can’t fight back.... That’s why kids are unsafe because they can’t stand up and protect themselves. If no one is around anything could happen.
Safety & Power

Organisational powerlessness

- Adults protect each other and the institution

‘Adults won’t usually stand up against an adult bully. Maybe it’s because they don’t see it as a problem or maybe because they don’t want to get caught in the middle of it. I think people think it’s OK to intimidate a kid, particularly if it’s so they do something that people think is good for the kid. But that doesn’t mean that it’s OK.’ (MX-1)

Lack of knowledge and skills

‘Knowledge – knowing what is being done if something dangerous has happened. Like if there are strangers in the area knowing what your teachers and adults are doing makes you feel more safe rather than just knowing something bad is happening and worrying that you’re in danger.’ ‘But adults don’t always understand this.’ ‘They think they should hide that stuff from kids to keep them safe but you feel more scared if you don’t know what’s happening.’ (YP-2)
What makes an institution safe?

The organisation's purpose is about helping children and young people.

The organisation takes children and young people's safety seriously.

The organisation knows who and what things might hurt children and young people and how to best keep them safe.

Staff are available when children and young people need them.

The organisation values children and young people's feedback - even when it's bad. They have things in place to make giving feedback easy and respond when they can.

The organisation is happy to have someone come in to check that they are doing a good job in keeping kids safe.

Staff talk honestly to children and young people about unsafe people, places and situations and what they are doing to keep kids safe.

When they're unsafe children are given a say on what should happen - adults act on their needs & wishes and let them know if they can't.
Not every child-focused institution is or feels safe

‘Yeah pools are supposed to be for families and kids but youth always get hassled out there.’ ‘We’re seen as being bad … No one gives a shit about us and would probably prefer that we left … If we weren’t paying to be there [they wouldn’t want us there at all] … If something goes down the pool will always take the adults’ side because they automatically think that we’re doing the wrong thing. So if we were like bashed or something I doubt that they’d do anything and as if someone’s going to go and ask for help if the lifeguards have just been hassling you out. Nah, pools aren’t there for us even though that’s where we go.’ (YP-4)

‘From a child’s perspective a hospital is not a safe place. It’s not somewhere they feel good or that’s kid friendly’, ‘plus they watch TV that always has hospitals as a bad place; they’re made out to be bad.’ ‘Kids don’t understand what’s happening and they think the worst, get worried about things that won’t happen because they just don’t know what to expect’, ‘plus it’s cold and smells weird and they don’t let kids play or laugh or make any noise so kids don’t like it.’ (YP-3)
You told us that adults can keep children and young people safe by:

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<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Respecting</td>
<td>children and young people: their abilities, observations, needs and wishes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking</td>
<td>children and young people what they’re thinking, feeling and seeing and what they need</td>
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<td>Watching</td>
<td>what other adults are doing and how children are behaving</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
<td>to what children and young people are really saying</td>
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<td>Standing up and speaking out</td>
<td>when children and young people are being hurt, bullied or treated badly</td>
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<td>Doing</td>
<td>what they’re supposed to do, what they say they’ll do and what children and young people need them to do</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informing</td>
<td>children and young people about the dangers, what’s being done and how they’ll do what kids have asked them to do</td>
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Not all child-safe practice meets children’s (perceived) safety needs

- When they fail to recognise children’s vulnerability and lack of power
- When they take control or power away from children
- When they make children feel more afraid and do not reduce their fears and concerns
- When they create barriers between children and trusted adults (ie fear)
- When they are contradictory or don’t make sense to kids
- When they are not communicated to children
- When they are adult-initiated, focused, driven and accountable only to adults
- When children are not directly involved in the process and when the strategies are not accountable to children
Compliance needs to be about improving safety

“There’s too many pressures on them to do other things than just listen to us or to care about things that happen outside of their job...

If they have to choose between writing a report or asking us how we’re going and what we need they’ll always have to choose doing office work – because there’ll be consequences for them if they don’t... Like their boss will get angry...

They’re not accountable to us so it doesn’t matter if they don’t do what we ask them to do, what we need.” (FG-7)
• ‘Those checks should be for us too. So that we know that an adult is safe. Because we’re the ones who have to trust them.’ ‘But why would they show them to us? It’s because they think we don’t care or that we don’t need to know.’ ‘We’re the ones who need to know.’ (MX-2)
• ‘Lots of adults don’t care enough about kids and this stuff is going to keep happening. Until they see us as having good ideas and believe us [when things go wrong] nothing will change.’ (MX-2)
Find out more

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