



Risk Management and the Child Safe Standards

Part 2: Identifying risk

A resource for child-related organisations

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We advise this resource may contain images of deceased persons.

Recognition of Survivors

We would also like to recognise the experiences of those who have survived child sexual abuse. The effects of abuse are long lasting and serious. We want this training to help prevent future abuse and encourage everyone in sport to champion child safety. We owe it to survivors to prevent future abuse, whether it's sexual, physical, emotional or neglect.

Note: The information contained in this handbook is for guidance purposes only. Always refer to the legislation to fully inform yourself of your legal obligations.

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Introduction

Risk Management and the Child Safe Standards - Part 1: Responding to Risk describes why it's important to manage risk and breaks down the steps needed to reduce the likelihood of it occurring. It explains why your organisation should have a Child Safe Risk Management Plan and takes you through the process of creating one.

This handbook, part 2, describes the types of risk that a CSRMP can help child safe organisations manage, including abuse and grooming. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that if adults were able to recognise abuse and grooming, they were more likely to prevent it occurring, or to report it if it was seen or suspected.

Part 2 also describes different kinds of offenders and motivations for offending.

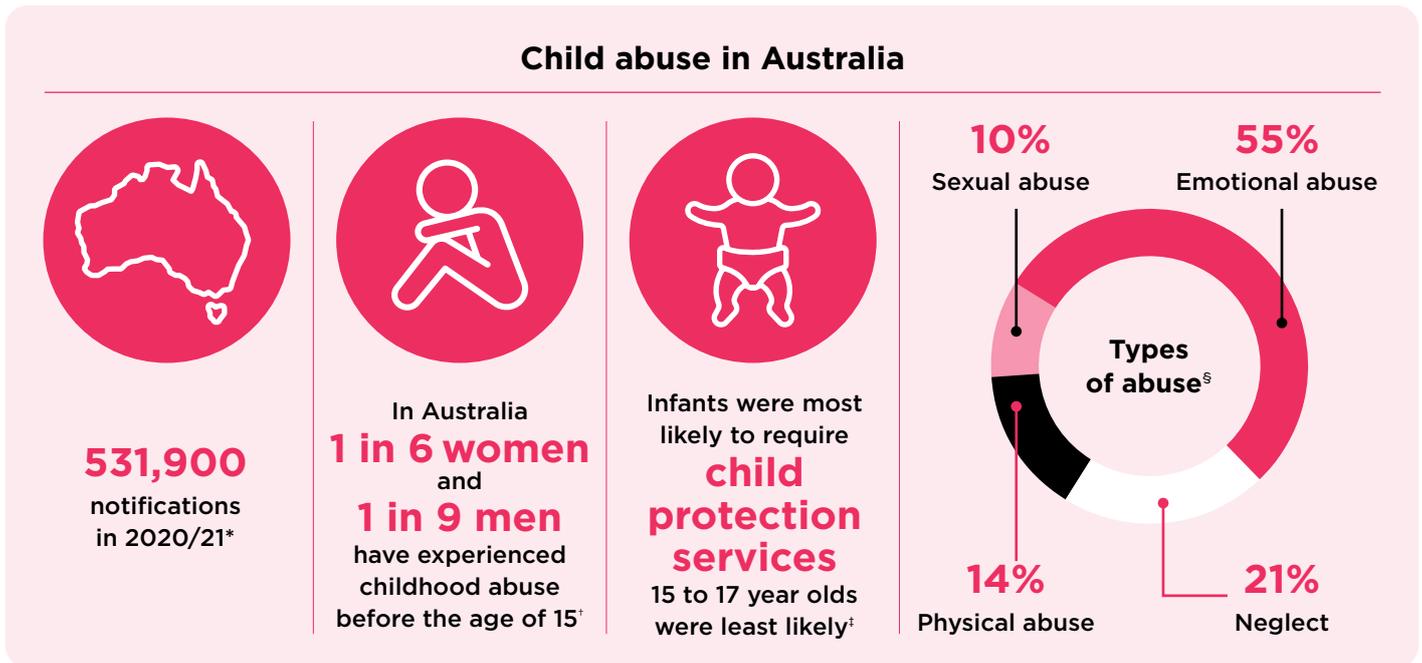
The risk management handbooks have been written for anyone in an organisation who has a role in reducing the risk of harm or abuse to children. They been written so part 2 can be used as a companion guide to part 1, to help child safe organisations create a robust Child Safe Risk Management Plan.

Visit the [OCG website](#) for more resources, including videos and eLearning, to help your organisation implement the Child Safe Standards and help prevent or reduce the likelihood of child harm and abuse occurring.



Prevalence of abuse

Not all abuse occurs in organisations and adults aren't the only perpetrators. Child protection agencies in Australia receive reports daily about child-on-child abuse and abuse in the home. Implementation of the Child Safe Standards will help reduce the risk of child harm and abuse occurring in organisations. When reporting abuse, different agencies have different thresholds and standards. These are described in detail in the OCG's [Reporting Obligations and Processes](#) handbook.



*Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) [Child protection Australia 2020-21 web report](#), Australian Government, accessed 17 April 2023.

†Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021-22) [Personal safety, Australia](#), accessed 17 April 2023.

‡Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) [Child protection Australia 2020-21 web report](#), Australian Government, accessed 17 April 2023.

§Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) [Child protection Australia 2020-21 web report](#), Australian Government, accessed 17 April 2023.

Allegations reported to the OCG*

The Reportable Conduct Scheme requires relevant entities from both government and non-government sectors to notify us of reportable allegations and reportable convictions against their employees.

Under the scheme 'employee' is defined broadly to include contractors, volunteers and people otherwise engaged by the relevant entity to provide services to children.

Number of notifications received by primary allegation type

Primary allegation	2020-21	2021-22
Assault	585	512
Ill-treatment	148	146
Neglect	241	207
Offence under section 43B or 316A of the <i>Crimes Act 1900</i> [†]	6	9
Behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm	29	26
Reportable conviction	3	1
Sexual misconduct	180	143
Sexual offence	329	292
Not in jurisdiction	387	195
Total	1908	1531

[†]Failure to reduce or remove risk of child becoming victim of child abuse, or concealing child abuse.

Number of notifications received by relevant entity type

Type of relevant entity	2020-21	2021-22
Agency providing substitute residential care to children	47	34
Approved education and care service	263	210
Department of Communities and Justice	341	298
Department of Education	424	228
Non-government designated agency	596	515
Health organisations [‡]	32	34
Non-government school	126	103
Other public authorities	17	56
Religious body	56 [§]	47
TAFE	3	6
Agency not in jurisdiction	3	0
Total	1908	1531

*Office of the Children's Guardian, [Annual Report 2021-21](#), pp 32 and 34, accessed 17 April 2023.

[‡]Includes Ministry of Health, local health districts, statutory health corporations, affiliated health services and Ambulance Service of NSW.

[§]Only in jurisdiction from 1 March 2020.

TYPES OF ABUSE

Identifying the types of abuse children can be exposed to

When child safe organisations better understand the types of abuse and the associated risks they pose to children, they can better manage the risks. This section describes physical, sexual and psychological abuse, as well as a lack of appropriate care, and looks at risks in physical and online environments.

What is abuse?

Children and young people can be exposed to different types of harm and abuse. The definitions of harm and abuse discussed here are general and relate specifically to a child safe context. In addition to these, there are the definitions in the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* under reportable conduct, including a sexual offence, sexual misconduct, ill-treatment, neglect, assault, an offence under sections 43B or 316A of the *Crimes Act 1900*, and behaviour that causes significant emotional and psychological harm to a child. For more information about reportable conduct and the Reportable Conduct Scheme, see the [Reporting Obligations and Processes](#) handbook.

Risks to children that can cause harm or leave them vulnerable to harm

Physical abuse

- Physical punishment
- Pushing, shoving, punching, slapping and kicking resulting in injury, burns, choking or bruising

Lack of appropriate care

- Lack of supervision
- Not providing adequate nourishment
- Not providing adequate medical care, clothing or shelter
- Lack of education

Psychological abuse

- Bullying
- Threatening and abusive language
- Intimidation
- Shaming and name calling
- Ignoring and isolating a child
- Exposure to domestic and family violence



Sexual abuse

- Sexual touching of a child
- Grooming
- Production, distribution or possession of child abuse material

Misconduct

- Inappropriate behaviour that may not be as severe as abuse, although could indicate that abuse is occurring and would often be in breach of an organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct
- Comments to a child that express a desire to act in a sexual manner towards them or another child



General definitions

Psychological abuse

The OCG’s Reportable Conduct Directorate considers psychological abuse (also known as emotional abuse) to be: ‘Behaviour that causes significant psychological or emotional harm that is intentional or reckless (without reasonable excuse), obviously or very clearly unreasonable and that results in significant emotional harm or trauma to a child.’ Psychological abuse comprised over half of all abuse notifications in Australia in 2018-19.¹ It can be defined as a repeated and inappropriate exposure of a child to emotional responses and situations that do not match their emotional and intellectual development. Although it’s possible for one-off incidents to cause serious harm, in general it’s

ongoing incidents that cause the greatest impact. All types of harm and abuse affect children psychologically but the term psychological (or emotional) abuse applies to behaviour that damages the confidence and self-esteem of a child or young person, resulting in serious emotional deprivation, trauma or disturbance. It is a pattern of intentional verbal or behavioural acts, or lack of, that convey to a child the message they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value to meet someone else’s needs. It also includes the witnessing of domestic abuse and substance abuse. The table below shows different kinds of psychological harm.

Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring (risk controls)
Persistent undermining of a child or young person’s confidence	The organisation values winning over other measures of success. The organisation pushes children and young people to try harder to achieve victory, reinforcing a culture that contributes to lowering self-esteem.	A Statement of Commitment to Child Safety that upholds the rights of children and demonstrates your organisation’s respect for them. Having policies and procedures that describe how your organisation engages and empowers the children and young people it works with.
Using inflammatory or derogatory language with children	The adult believes they can do whatever is needed to push the child to succeed. When bystander adults don’t correct or pull-up offensive language and remarks directed at children and young people during activities, they foster an inflammatory environment.	Having a Child Safe Code of Conduct that describes acceptable behaviour, and also makes clear the kind of language or descriptions that are acceptable and unacceptable. Organisations provide policies and training to ensure adults are clear about what is and isn’t acceptable behaviour so children and young people feel empowered, supported and encouraged.
Letting children know they are not at the adult’s standard	The adult’s personal values and beliefs lead them to believe that belittling or manipulating children is an acceptable way to interact.	Leaders promote a culture where children are valued. They encourage reporting, including of all policy breaches, and challenge poor child safe practices. Adults receive regular information about how to treat and speak to children and unacceptable behaviour is addressed in a way that is appropriate for their age and intellectual development. The organisation has a culture of reporting poor child safe practices.

Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring (risk controls)
<p>Excluding certain children who are seen as weaker or less likeable than other children</p>	<p>Having a culture where children’s voices are not listened to.</p> <p>Having a belief that some children are just not able to participate.</p> <p>When winning is considered more important than equitable participation.</p>	<p>The organisation’s culture is child-focused. It is inclusive and welcoming, and this is seen in how all staff choose to interact with children and young people.</p> <p>The leadership team ensures all children have equitable access to services, activities and events. Equity is prioritised over equality.</p> <p>Recognising that defining some children and young people as weak or unlikeable can be a grooming technique to isolate them socially from their peers, making them more vulnerable to abuse.</p>
<p>Encouraging children to use defamatory or belittling language towards others</p>	<p>Having a culture that allows abuse between children to occur. Allowing young people to bully and intimidate each other.</p> <p>Having staff who are overly authoritarian so children and young people mimic their attitudes.</p>	<p>The organisation has a strategy in place to appropriately respond to complaints or allegations of abuse or harm by other children. Everyone in the organisation understands the process and children are aware of who to speak to if they have a concern.</p> <p>Children and young people are given information, appropriate for their age and intellectual ability, that allows them to recognise bullying, actions that disempower them and other forms of psychological abuse.</p> <p>Adults have a child-centred approach when supervising children and use initiatives to support positive outcomes.</p>
<p>Noticing a child might be a victim of psychological abuse by a parent, carer or spectator</p>	<p>Derogatory and intimidating language can escalate to threats of violence. It may occur when young people officiate at sporting events, for example, and is sometimes directed towards players as well. This kind of behaviour can easily cause distress for children and young people.</p>	<p>Having an organisational culture and a Statement of Commitment to Child Safety that supports treating children with respect. All adults engaged with the organisation should demonstrate they value and respect children and model their behaviour accordingly.</p> <p>Having a Child Safe Code of Conduct that is upheld and promoted, including at events outside your organisation’s usual physical environment, such as at sporting events or overnight camps. This should include what other spectators can do to respond appropriately to instances of abuse by other adults.</p>
<p>Ignoring cultural safety obligations</p>	<p>Organisations that do not consider cultural safety risk children being exposed to criticism of their language, nationality or other features of their cultural heritage.</p>	<p>Ensuring all children and young people, and their families, are treated with respect.</p> <p>Applying Child Safe Standards 3 and 4.</p>



Reflective questions

1. Does your organisation value children and their opinions?
3. Does your organisation prioritise the psychological safety of children over winning?
4. How does your organisation train its workers to recognise psychological abuse? Does it identify the settings it can occur in?
5. How does your organisation respond to instances of psychological harm? For example, if an adult was to shout out inappropriate comments from the sideline at a sports match or become abusive to a child who had wet themselves in a child-care setting, how would it respond?
6. How does your [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) describe how psychological harm is unacceptable?

Indicators of psychological abuse

Children

- Constantly feeling worthless about life and themselves
- Unable to value others
- Lack of trust in people
- Lack of people skills necessary for daily functioning
- Extreme attention-seeking behaviour
- Obsessively eager to please or obey adults
- Takes extreme risks, or is markedly disruptive, bullying or aggressive
- Highly self critical, depressed or anxious
- Suicide threats or attempts
- Persistently runs away from home

Parents or caregivers

- Constantly criticises, belittles or teases a child or young person, or ignores or withholds praise and attention
- Excessive or unreasonable demands
- Persistent hostility and severe verbal abuse, rejection and scapegoating
- Belief that a particular child or young person in their care is bad or 'evil'
- Using inappropriate physical or social isolation as punishment
- Domestic violence

Remember, these indicators are only possible signs of harm and abuse. They don't necessarily mean harm or abuse is occurring, and they are not the only signs of harm or abuse.



Case study



High Point Dance School is a well-respected academy of dance. Children who attend the school appear in local productions and often win eisteddfods. The teachers there, Miss Grace and Mr Andre, have high expectations of the children who attend and train them hard. Students who fail to meet their expectations aren't offered positions at the school the following term. As part of the tough regime students are expected to complete a food diary that Mr Andre inspects each week. If they admit to having eaten fast food or sugary snacks they're made to stand up and explain themselves to the group. They're also weighed in each week in front of the whole class. Students who don't gain weight are given preferential treatment.

Factors leading to psychological harm (risk factors)

Constant and persistent pressure placed on children to look and act a certain way

Placing strong emphasis on children's appearance and body weight, and publicly shaming them among their peers and other adults if they do not conform

Parents appearing to accept the behaviour

Ways to prevent this type of abuse from occurring (risk controls)

By encouraging inclusivity and acceptance through its actions, an organisation's leadership team demonstrates that it values children.

Having an organisation that is well informed about how to provide a safe and happy environment for children and young people.

Minimising peer competitiveness so children develop strong relationships with their peers, which helps to provide some protection from abuse.

Having a publicly available [Statement of Commitment to Child Safety](#) that explains to children, parents and carers how the organisation values and respects children, along with a [Child Safe Reporting Policy](#) that explains who they can speak to if they have concerns. Having a [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) that describes which comments are acceptable and unacceptable.

Lack of appropriate care (neglect)*

Neglect was the second most commonly occurring form of child abuse in Australia in 2015-16.² Neglect is not confined to the home and may occur in organisational settings. It happens when a child is not provided with adequate and proper supervision, nourishment, clothing, shelter, education or medical care.

It may even be fatal such as in cases where children are left unattended on play equipment, or abscond and make their way to bushland or a roadside.

Types of harm

What can increase the likelihood of it occurring (risk factors)

What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring (risk controls)

Lack of supervision

Lack of supervision in an organisational setting can occur when the organisation does not have appropriate procedures in place to ensure all children are appropriately supervised so interventions can occur if necessary. Examples include:

- a child not being adequately supervised on a camp and absconding, coming into danger, harming another child or taking drugs
- a child leaving a day care unattended or being left behind at a day care after closing
- holding a special event and not having enough adults to supervise to ensure children are kept safe
- failing to prevent a child being harmed by an adult or another child.

Having appropriate supervision procedures in place that minimise the opportunity for children to be left unsupervised.

Having procedures that include sign in/out sheets, supervision rosters and detailed notes on how many adults have oversight of a given number of children, where necessary.

Ensuring there are a sufficient number of adult workers to supervise the number of children at an event.

Explaining to children in an age-appropriate way the expected behaviour of them. For example, overnight camps should provide children with rules around their expected behaviour as well as the behaviour they can expect from the adults who are running the camp.



*Lack of appropriate care is the general definition for neglect in a child safe context. This is to distinguish it from the explicit definition it is given in the *Children's Guardian Act 2019* under reportable conduct.



Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring (risk controls)
Failure to provide reasonable medical attention	<p>Sometimes a child may be hurt but an organisation's staff or volunteers do not appropriately attend to their injuries. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ situations where carers have little regard for the safety and wellbeing of children▪ cases where staff don't believe it is their responsibility to provide medical assistance▪ not believing a child is injured even when they are in distress (a child with disability may not be able to communicate their needs and may indicate abuse using non-verbal cues)▪ making a child play or train while injured▪ not being trained to recognise or respond to injuries (such as staff not having first aid training).	<p>Conducting a risk assessment of the services provided to better understand the circumstances where medical treatment may be required, including when an ambulance should be called.</p> <p>Ensuring staff that require a first aid certificate have one.</p> <p>Ensuring staff working with children with disability are trained to recognise the ways they may show distress and pain.</p> <p>Supporting mandatory reporters to make reports concerning the health and welfare of children. (For information on mandatory reporting see the reporting handbook.)</p>

Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring (risk controls)
<p>Lack of adequate nourishment</p> 	<p>Some organisations provide food or have breaks where food is eaten or drinks are available. Lack of appropriate care can occur when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ an organisation does not offer a variety of healthy food options or the meals are of poor quality and fail to meet accepted nutritional requirements ▪ adults have not factored in sufficient drink or food breaks ▪ changes in weather or levels of activity do not allow for extra water breaks ▪ children's allergies are not addressed, including anaphylaxis from the foods of others ▪ there is a lack of resources available to provide nutritional meals ▪ an organisation employs under-skilled staff who are unaware of nutritional requirements. 	<p>Conducting a risk assessment of the services your organisation provides and making sure there are effective strategies in place so children have access to adequate nourishment and hydration.</p> <p>Having procedures that clearly describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ when food and drink breaks should occur ▪ what types of food specific children should or shouldn't eat ▪ what types of food should be banned within your organisation (including known allergens such as peanuts as well as discretionary options such as junk food) ▪ choking hazards. <p>Ensuring staff are trained to understand the nutritional requirements of children and young people. If your organisation does provide meals, make sure an adequate budget is set aside to provide nutritional meals. You can ask the children you care for to choose the healthy foods they like to eat.</p> <p>Procedures should be flexible enough to allow for changes in temperature and activity levels so children and young people (and their carers) take more drink breaks in warmer weather or during sporting events, dance competitions and so on.</p>
<p>Lack of shelter, appropriate clothing or sunscreen</p>	<p>All children should be protected from the elements. Lack of appropriate care can occur when children are not protected from the sun, heat, cold, rain or hail.</p> <p>There are no procedures in place that describe the weather extremes that children should not be exposed to.</p>	<p>Conducting a risk assessment of the services you provide and putting protective strategies in place to reduce the likelihood of children being exposed to inclement weather.</p> <p>Having a blanket rule that prevents certain activities taking place in extreme weather.</p> <p>Providing adequate shelter in response to various weather conditions.</p> <p>Making sure sunscreen is available and a 'no hat, no play' policy is in place, if applicable.</p>

Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring (risk controls)
Noticing a child may be experiencing lack of appropriate care in the home	<p>Sometimes workers in organisations become aware that a child is not being appropriately cared for at home. If that happens, there are steps they should take to protect the child, including reporting the matter to the Department of Communities and Justice. Signs to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ child is always hungry and looks malnourished▪ child steals food▪ child generally presents as unclean▪ child has medical needs that do not appear to be met.	<p>Keeping children safe is everybody's responsibility. Organisations that value children explain to staff and volunteers their obligations to identify and report abuse.</p> 



Reflective questions

1. Does your organisation have procedures in place that ensure children are supervised appropriately?
2. When planning excursions or special events do you consider dietary requirements and drink breaks?
3. Does your organisation provide adequate shelter from extreme weather conditions? For example, would you expect children to participate in outdoor sports on extremely hot days without regular breaks and adequate shelter from the sun?
4. Does your organisation provide training on how to identify children that may be being abused in the home?
5. Do staff who should hold a first aid certificate have one?

It's important to remember that maltreatment can make children more vulnerable to sexual abuse.³ Its impacts include:

- low self-esteem or a sense of powerlessness
- poor relationships that can lead to social isolation, including their peers ostracising them
- heightened need for affection and attention
- poor interpersonal relationships with family or carers
- developmental disorders or cognitive impairments resulting directly from prior trauma.

Case study

The Summer Soccer Cup was a new round robin outdoor soccer tournament. More than 20 teams signed up to participate, comprising nearly 200 children. Committee members put a lot of work into making sure the children had sufficient adult supervision and the matches fit within a tight schedule. On the day of the competition the temperature reached 42 degrees Celsius. Despite their other good work, the organisers had failed to consider and plan for the risk of extreme weather conditions and the need to provide sunscreen and shelter. As a result children were left in the sun for an hour per game. There were no extra drink breaks scheduled, although the officials called for them after some children complained of dizziness and symptoms of heat stroke. This delayed the schedule so by mid-afternoon some volunteers had to leave, which meant some children were left unsupervised.

Although the organisers sent volunteers to purchase water and sunscreen, none of the children or spectators had enough cover or shade. Parents and spectators complained to the organisers, and one parent went to the media as their child had suffered significant sunburn and heat exhaustion.



Factors leading to harm (risk factors)

The leadership team did not consider all the risks children could be exposed to, including any outside their control like the weather - and not only the impact of the heat but flow-on effects such as volunteers leaving children unattended

There were no pre-existing procedures in place that described the conditions under which children should be prevented from playing or would need increased breaks, water, shade and sunscreen

Ways to prevent this type of harm from occurring (risk controls)

By conducting a thorough risk management assessment that includes all possible contingencies and flow-on effects, strategies can be considered and put into place. Having a Child Safe Risk Management Plan means the organised schedule can continue while also keeping players - and spectators and volunteers - safe.

Procedures or protective strategies should describe what needs to occur in extreme weather events to prevent harm to children.

While this is an example of a one-off event, lack of appropriate care is often chronic and ongoing. Protective strategies should describe how to prevent these kinds of situations so an isolated incident does not become an ongoing concern.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is the third most common kind of child maltreatment in Australia.⁴ Physical abuse includes physical punishment, such as pushing, shoving, punching, slapping and kicking, resulting in injury, burns, choking or bruising, and is never acceptable when working with children. An adult or another child should not be allowed inflict physical harm on a child. The table below shows different kinds of physical harm that may occur in organisational settings.

Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring? (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring? (risk controls)
<p>An adult losing their temper and hitting a child</p>	<p>If adults do not have the skills to manage a child's challenging behaviour and believe a physical response is acceptable they may physically abuse a child.</p>	<p>A Child Safe Code of Conduct makes it clear to workers that physical violence is never acceptable. Workers should be trained and encouraged to understand and adhere to the code of conduct and to identify and report any breaches. Disciplinary action should be in place to handle any breaches. Training can include inductions, mentoring, on-the-job instruction or education on recognising physical abuse and knowing how to handle challenging behaviours. Adults working with children and young people who have challenging behaviours should be offered extra support.</p>
<p>Children and young people displaying violent behaviour towards each other</p>	<p>In some sectors, like sport, there may be an emphasis on winning at all costs or aggression being an acceptable part of the organisation's culture. This can lead to children being subjected to physical abuse for failure or in the name of victory.</p>	<p>An organisational culture that upholds the right of children to be safe is essential. This can be expressed in your organisation's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety.</p>
<p>Adults displaying violent or physical behaviours towards children and young people to 'toughen them up'</p>	<p>A person's cultural or personal beliefs may lead them to believe that a physical response to challenging behaviour is appropriate. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a good smack never did anyone harm ▪ if a child bites, bite them back, they'll soon learn ▪ kids these days are too soft. 	<p>It is reasonable for staff members to have their own personal beliefs or cultural traditions, but as employees they should know they are subject to the organisation's values, which they should uphold to protect the rights of children. Having child safe policies, and providing workers with training and information on how to keep children safe in your organisation, encourages a child safe culture.</p>

Types of harm	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring? (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring? (risk controls)
Bullying	If an organisation's leadership team fails to value children and turns a blind eye to aggression and violence, children are at greater risk.	Leaders should model a zero tolerance approach towards physical violence and aggression so all children feel safe and are empowered to voice their opinion if need be. Having a culture of reporting and well-developed child safe policies are also essential, to ensure all instances of suspected harm and abuse are reported.
Peer-on-peer violence, fights	If adults in the organisation display violence and aggression in the way they work with children or each other, then children in the organisation may come to believe a physical response is acceptable with their peers.	A culture of non-violence supports children to keep them safe. Staff training, protective behaviour programs and leaders modelling appropriate behaviour all support a child's right to feel and be safe. Having people in your organisation that children know they can speak to if they have a concern can also help.
If you think a child may be subject to physical abuse, either in your organisation or at home, you may have mandatory obligations to report it to the appropriate authorities	<p>A child may be at risk of physical abuse at home. Some signs to consider that may indicate physical abuse include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ bruises, scratches, scars, bites or burn marks ▪ a child refusing to undress or wearing inappropriate clothing such as long sleeves in summer ▪ observing an adult harming a child. 	Organisations should have a reporting policy that explains to workers their obligations as mandatory reporters. It should also reinforce that keeping children safe is everybody's responsibility.



Reflective questions

1. How does the culture of your organisation promote positive relationships and peaceful communication?
2. How do you make sure all adults in your organisation are capable of managing challenging behaviour without resorting to violence?
3. If an adult assaults a child, how would your organisation respond to it?
4. What child safe policies and procedures do you have in place that support keeping children safe from physical harm?
5. If your organisation is competitive by nature (for example, a sports club) how do you reinforce that non-aggression is more important than winning?

Case study

LazyDayz Child Services is an early childhood education provider with a good reputation in the local community. Tamara and Kate are currently studying for their Certificate III in Childcare and have been placed at LazyDayz. While working at the centre they see that Miss Pauline has seniority over the other carers on the floor. One day Tamara noticed a young boy had wet his pants. She then heard his teacher say she was going to tell Miss Pauline who then smacked the boy quite firmly. Tamara filmed Miss Pauline roughly undress the boy before screaming at him to clean up the mess he had made. He was clearly upset yet none of the other educators offered him comfort or support.

Tamara showed Kate the footage and asked for advice. Kate revealed she had once seen Miss Pauline hold a girl down and force feed her because the girl had refused to eat her lunch. Neither Kate nor Tamara wanted to raise their concerns because the director of the centre had a long-standing relationship with Miss Pauline and they felt they would not be taken seriously. They contacted their TAFE teacher to ask for advice and she contacted the Department of Education.*

Kate and Tamara were given instruction on their obligations as mandatory reporters and the reporting thresholds for risk of significant harm.

Factors leading to harm (risk factors)

Lack of leadership in the organisation meant Miss Pauline had an assumed authority and her aggressive and often violent methods of disciplining children were considered normal practice

Existing staff members accepted the aggression towards children as an acceptable form of interaction even though the organisation's Child Code of Conduct specifically said such behaviour was unacceptable

Staff members felt there was no point reporting the violent behaviour to management as it had become an acceptable method of responding to challenging behaviour

Ways to prevent this type of harm from occurring (risk controls)

A leadership team that values children would discourage Miss Pauline from acting on her aggressive disciplining methods. Instead it would emphasise the need to conform to the organisation's child safe policies and procedures when responding to and disciplining children.

Leaders should ensure all staff receive ongoing training in contemporary best practices for managing behaviour in early childhood education.

The organisation's leaders failed to ensure the Child Safe Code of Conduct was followed at all times, and that all breaches were reported. Without enforcement a Child Safe Code of Conduct is ineffective and the organisation may as well not have had one.

The leadership team did not promote a culture of reporting breaches of the Child Safe Code of Conduct. This left children susceptible to harm and abuse.

*They could also have reported directly to the OCG's Reportable Conduct Directorate, which now has provision for junior staff to voice their concerns if they feel their leaders won't respond to a complaint in a reasonable way. There's an [online complaint form](#) on the OCG website.

Sexual abuse

While sexual abuse can have long-lasting effects in and of itself, the Royal Commission found it rarely occurs in isolation from other types of harm and abuse. In Australia, nearly 60 per cent of survivors had experienced another form of abuse. Most commonly emotional abuse (80.7 per cent), physical abuse (64.4 per cent) and neglect (15.7 per cent).⁵ Child sexual abuse in organisations has occurred often in the past,

and media reports indicate it is still an all-too-common occurrence. Many offenders seek access to victims through employment, including through public positions if possible, in an effort to make themselves helpful and indispensable. In these roles they can become skilled in grooming an entire organisation, using their positions of power and authority.⁶ (See the 'Recognising Offenders' section later in this handbook for more information.)

Findings from the Royal Commission

Many complex and interconnected factors can influence the way child sexual abuse affects victims. While no single factor can accurately predict how a victim will respond, some factors appear to influence either the severity or type of impacts they experience. These factors include:

- the characteristics of the abuse (such as the type, duration and frequency)
- the relationship of the offender to the child
- the social, historical and institutional contexts of the abuse
- the victim's circumstances, experiences and characteristics (such as age, gender, disability, prior maltreatment and experiences with disclosing the abuse).⁷

Sexual abuse includes the sexual touching of a child, grooming, and production, distribution or possession of child abuse material. It's a crime in NSW for an adult to involve a child or young person in any kind of sexual activity. It's also a crime for any adult in NSW to fail to report if they know, or have reason to believe, a child is being harmed.

Adults aren't the only perpetrators of sexual abuse against children. The Royal Commission identified abuse was also perpetuated by children with harmful sexual behaviours. Child safe risk management in organisational settings should always consider the risk of peer-to-peer harm, as well as the potential harm of adults towards children and young people in any interaction they have with them.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) *Final Report: Schools*, 13:107, Commonwealth of Australia.





What can increase the likelihood of it occurring? (risk factors)

If an adult has joined a child-related organisation with the intent to harm children, they may conduct a deliberate strategy of manipulation against specific children and young people (often the most vulnerable)

What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring? (risk controls)

- Having a [child safe recruitment policy](#)
- Having well developed child safe policies and procedures
- Having leaders who model the expected standards of behaviour for adults and who promote the rights of children
- Having a culture of valuing children
- Having a culture where all breaches of an organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct and instances of unacceptable behaviour are reported and responded to, including to external agencies if necessary (see the OCG's [Reporting and Obligations](#) handbook for more information)

Where there are opportunities to offend against a child and the risk of being caught is low

- Developing a [Child Safe Risk Management Plan](#) that identifies the areas of risk in your organisation and puts in place protective strategies to reduce the likelihood of these risks occurring
- Having child safe policies and procedures embedded into everyday practice
- Recognising and promoting every child's right to be safe
- Promoting a culture of reporting for children whenever they feel worried, sad or angry

What can increase the likelihood of it occurring? (risk factors)

When an adult interacts with a child one-on-one, particularly when the contact is regular such as in a car or in a treatment or counselling session

What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring? (risk controls)

- Having child safe policies and procedures that clearly describe acceptable and unacceptable behaviour when adults interact with children
- Keeping a record of when adults interact with children one-on-one, describing the circumstances of the contact
- Keeping records of trips such as when an adult needs to transport a child to an event – write down who is present and the licence details to make adults more accountable
- Having treatment or counselling sessions occur in places that allow for some observation while still being mindful of the child’s privacy
- Providing children and young people with protective behaviours training (see section 3 of this handbook, under ‘Recognising grooming and offending behaviour’, for more information) so they learn to recognise unacceptable adult behaviour and that it’s OK to talk about anything they makes them feel uncomfortable

Adults who have difficulty forming intimate relationships with other adults, or who are facing external pressures or a significant traumatic event (such as a job loss or a marital breakdown) may commence an inappropriate relationship with a child (see ‘Recognising offenders’ later in this handbook for more information about situational offenders)

- Ensuring all staff and volunteers are trained and supported to understand that having an intimate relationship with a child or young person is never acceptable
- Ensuring staff are trained to recognise inappropriate relationships between adults and children or young people – and know how to [report](#) them
- Having a [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) that all adults, children and young people understand
- Having leaders who model child-centred values at all times



Effects of abuse

For many people, child sexual abuse can have profound and lasting impacts, and they may experience deep, complex trauma that can pervade all aspects of their lives and cause a range of issues. Other victims do not perceive the experience to have profoundly harmed them.

Some impacts on victims are immediate and temporary while others can last throughout adulthood. Some may emerge later in life while others may fade away only to re-emerge or manifest in response to triggers or events. As victims have new experiences or enter new stages of development over their lifetimes, the feelings about their abuse may manifest in different ways.⁸

Child sexual abuse can affect many areas of a person's life, including their:

- mental health
- interpersonal relationships
- physical health
- sexual identity, gender identity and sexual behaviour
- connection to culture
- spirituality and religious involvement
- interactions with society
- education, employment and economic security.

For some victims, child sexual abuse results in them taking their own lives.⁹



Reflective questions

1. How does your organisation's culture support adults to understand they share the responsibility for keeping children safe?
2. What training and support exists to make sure staff feel confident to report colleagues if they notice their behaviour breaches your organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct?
3. How are children supported to make reports about unacceptable adult behaviour?
4. How do you make sure your workers are confident to make a report, knowing that any matter will be investigated thoroughly and fairly and they won't be targeted for doing so?
5. What child safe policies or procedures do you have in place to support children in situations where they need to interact with adults one-on-one?

Image used on this page is commercial photography and not an actual picture of someone who has been exposed to or perpetrated abuse.

Case study

Marcus is a gymnastics coach. His wife, Kate, works with the juniors and takes responsibility for the administration of the club. Marcus takes the senior class and has a great reputation for creating winners. His students are dedicated to the sport and train well. Marcus has adult children who also train at the club. Marcus's good friend Paul works with them as well as Suzanne, a young trainer who helps with the seniors and elite athletes.

Jenna is 16 and has recently transferred from another club. She quickly demonstrates her natural talent for the sport and is soon promoted to the elite class, where she starts representing the club at regional and national competitions. Suzanne soon begins to notice a few incidents where she feels Marcus is acting inappropriately with Jenna. On one occasion

Marcus pulled Jenna into an embrace, apparently to congratulate her on perfecting a technique. On another occasion Suzanne saw Jenna and Marcus talking to each other outside the centre when she was locking up and they appeared to be very close. She also became aware that sometimes Jenna stayed at Marcus's house prior to travelling to competitions the next day.

Suzanne recognised that these actions breached the club's Child Safe Code of Conduct, although they didn't actually indicate Jenna was being harmed. She felt reluctant to come forward because she was worried Paul or Kate would not take her concerns seriously, or even fire her. She didn't know what to do or who to speak to – and she didn't want to lose her job, which she really loved.

Factors leading to sexual abuse

There does not appear to be anyone in the organisation who could remain impartial in an investigation of breaches of their Child Safe Code of Conduct

The power imbalance in the organisation could mean that the breaches of the Child Safe Code of Conduct are likely to escalate in seriousness and may place Jenna at risk of serious harm

Ways to prevent this type of abuse from occurring (risk controls)

All organisations should have a culture of reporting and responding to issues or breaches of their Child Safe Code of Conduct. They should have a Child Safe Reporting Policy that outlines the complaint process, including instances where allegations are made against senior members of staff.

Leaders should model appropriate behaviour around children.

The club should have a robust Child Safe Code of Conduct that is accessible and promoted regularly so all children, young people and adults in the organisation, as well as parents and carers, understand what is acceptable behaviour.



Image used on this page is commercial photography and not an actual picture of anyone who has been exposed to abuse.

Environmental and online risks

The physical environment can play a part in increasing or decreasing the risk of harm or abuse to children. Increasing the risk can include rooms without windows, places that are out of the line of sight of other adults and windows that are covered with posters and artwork, which prevent observation of the room inside. Protective strategies can be put in place to change

the environment to make it safer for children and young people. They can also be applied to the online environment. The table below shows examples of physical and online risks and what can be done to help reduce the likelihood of them occurring.

Area	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring? (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring? (risk controls)
Physical environment		
<p>Closed-off areas of a building</p>	<p>Areas that do not provide for natural lines of sight pose additional risks to children as unacceptable behaviour is more likely to be undetected.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Look at ways to improve supervision, making sure children stay within the line of sight of more than one adult ■ Make sure adults and children understand the rules around closed-off areas ■ Make sure children know who they can speak to if they feel unsafe ■ Teach children protective behaviour strategies (see section 3 of this handbook, under 'Recognising grooming and offending behaviour', for more information)
<p>Areas out of the line of sight of other adults</p>	<p>If an adult is not in the direct line of sight of other adults when delivering services, it increases the likelihood of unacceptable behaviour being undetected. This could include a child travelling alone in a car with an adult.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Child safe policies and procedures that clearly describe what behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable in these situations ■ Making sure both adults and children feel confident to report any behaviour in breach of a Child Safe Code of Conduct
<p>Closed rooms without natural lines of sight where children are one-on-one with adults</p>	<p>Areas such as treatment and counselling rooms can pose an increased risk of harm to children, especially if doors are locked and there aren't any natural lines of sight such as windows with glass panels. Lines of sight also need to allow for the privacy of children in some situations. Respecting privacy while also making sure children are safe can be difficult and may need careful consideration.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ There should be a clear reason for an adult being alone with the child; other caring adults in the child's life should be aware of the need for privacy and the reason for the interaction ■ Protective behaviour training helps children recognise if they feel unsafe in a situation and supports them to report any concerns they may have

Area	What can increase the likelihood of it occurring? (risk factors)	What can reduce the likelihood of it occurring? (risk controls)
Online environment		
Engaging with children through private messaging	<p>Private messaging is the equivalent of having a one-on-one conversation with a child. It increases the possibility of the conversation becoming personal, which may lead to the child being at risk of harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make sure adults understand your organisation's child safe practices around communicating with children and young people. Preference should be limited to group contact such as group texts or emails, or social media posts ▪ If a child needs to be messaged directly it should be via platforms established and accessible by the organisation, or via a parent's email account – not through a worker or volunteer's private social media account or email address
Connecting with children through their private social media	<p>If children are allowed to engage with workers through social media, there is a risk that they will be exposed to content that is not appropriate for their age and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children and young people should understand that it is unacceptable for them to engage with adults from organisations in private social media settings; staff and volunteers should reinforce the message ▪ The organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct should describe which, if any, social media interactions between adults and children are acceptable, and which are not
Use of images on the organisation's social media page	<p>If images or names of children are shared publicly on social media there is a risk they are exposed to other adults who may attempt to groom them with the intention to later abuse them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Parents and carers should give permission before images are shared on social media ▪ Where possible, permission to view the images should be limited to the members of the organisation or their families and friends <p>Note: Images of children under the responsibility of the Minister for Families and Communities (children and young people in out-of-home care) must not be published.</p>



Reflective questions

1. How do you make sure any private or secluded areas of the physical environment in your organisation are used according to your child safe policies, procedures and practices?
2. Do the adults in your organisation understand how they are expected to engage with children online, particularly when it comes to personal messaging?
3. Do your child safe policies include descriptions on what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour between adult and children in one-on-one interactions, including online?
4. Have resources been provided to children to support them with protective behaviours and staying safe online?
5. Do the children in your organisation's know how to identify and report unacceptable adult behaviour?

Facts about online sexual material

- Thirteen years old is the national average age for seeing online sexual material (pornography) for the first time with children as young as four years reported as having seen it
- A study of 16 to 17 year olds found 51 per cent had had a partner ask them to watch sexual material and 44 per cent were asked to do something sexual that a partner saw
- Child-on-child sexual abuse has been associated with more frequent exposure to online sexual material
- Exposure to online sexual material can make children and young people more vulnerable to grooming and can normalise sexting, exploitation and unrealistic expectations of women and sex in general, including sexual harassment and abuse
- Watching porn can expose children and young people to a range of mental health issues, including shock and trauma, distortions of a sense of self, addiction and compulsive behaviours, impacting their ability to learn and focus. It can also lead to anxiety, depression and self-harm

What protective strategies does your organisation have in place to make sure children aren't accessing online sexual material while in your care?

Are all your staff and volunteers aware that producing, disseminating or possessing child abuse material is a criminal offence that must be reported to NSW Police?

Are all your staff and volunteers aware of the [special care provisions](#) of the *Crimes Act 1900*, which increases the age of consent from 16 to 18 in some circumstances?



Case study

An after-school service operates out of an old building with heritage listing. Children are separated into age groups and divided into one of its five small rooms. These have large, heavy wooden doors and windows that are above head height.

Marie is the centre director. She is handing out leaflets advertising the organisation's holiday care service. She attempts to enter the Cheeky Monkeys room where Brayden is the educator but it is locked.

She knocks on the door and Brayden opens it. He explains they were having story time and it was too noisy so he closed the door. Marie notices all the children are sitting in the corner of the room on cushions that aren't visible from outside.

She gives Brayden the flyers but as she leaves she hears the children urge Brayden to come back. Some are also asking if it is their turn to sit on his lap.

Factors leading to environmental risk

Being out of the line of natural sight and behind a closed door increases the likelihood a child might be harmed as there is no opportunity for them to be observed via natural surveillance

In this scenario Brayden has the children sitting on his knee during story time. This can increase the likelihood of a child being harmed because it may be Brayden's way of engaging the child in unacceptable touching or testing the child's resistance. It also allows him to choose favourites and some children may allow abuse to occur so he 'likes' them more. The 'favourite' could then be isolated from other children, removing their network of peer support

Ways to prevent the likelihood of this risk occurring (risk controls)

It may not always be possible to modify the physical environment of some buildings. Keeping the door always open would help but, more importantly, have protective strategies in place that prevent adults being alone with children. For example, have more than one adult in the room where staffing allows it, or have an adult 'float' between rooms.

Child safe policies should include guidance on safe and acceptable touching. A rule that didn't allow children to sit on adults' knees would mean Marie would be able to report Brayden. If the behaviour continued, she would also have options for further disciplinary action.



Image used on this page is commercial photography and not an actual picture of someone who has been exposed to abuse.

Factors that increase the risk of children being harmed

There can be a number of factors that increase the likelihood of child harm or abuse occurring, and in [part 1 of the risk management handbooks](#) the four dimensions of risk were introduced. Here, they are discussed in more detail, and it's recommended that child safe organisations know what they are. Being transparent about how abuse can occur and honestly assessing the likelihood of it occurring does not mean it will occur. It simply means you have considered the risk and put protective strategies in place to prevent or minimise it.

While most people who work with children are committed to providing a safe place for them, child

safe organisations that fail to consider the risk of harm because they don't believe it can happen leave children exposed.

Having effective protective strategies and interventions in place not only lowers the risk of harm but also places organisations in a position to effectively respond to an incident should it occur. Furthermore, it allows the organisation to develop strong child safe policies and practices that reduce the opportunities for harm and abuse to occur.



Organisational risk

Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
<p>Leaders fail to see child safety as a priority</p>	<p>Leaders who do not see child safety as their priority may not encourage a child safe culture. A child safe culture is one where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ the best interests of children are paramount ▪ children’s rights are prioritised ▪ children are listened to and respected ▪ abuse is reported internally and externally. <p>Additionally, cultures where adults recognise signs of abuse but do not respond – or dismiss any concerns – could expose children to ongoing abuse. This is because it can facilitate a ‘bystander’ culture where inaction is acceptable. Such cultures also reduce the likelihood that children will speak up about safety concerns.</p>	<p>Leaders should view child safety as the priority. They should model the behaviour they expect their staff and volunteers to follow. They should ensure the organisation has appropriate policies and procedures, and that all breaches of these are responded to. Without prioritising child safety, secondary aims (such as protecting the reputation of a perpetrator or an organisation) may become the primary focus. This can mean the organisation may not implement protective strategies or make the appropriate decisions to protect children. They may also fail to report incidents of abuse when required.</p>
<p>Emphasis on power, aggression, strength and competition</p>	<p>Cultures focused on power and competition can make the disclosure of abuse difficult because it may be considered a weakness. The normalisation of violence or sexualised behaviour can also create an environment where abuse may go unrecognised or be viewed as unavoidable. This can have a devastating impact on the proper identification and response to child abuse.</p>	<p>Leaders should ensure everyone who interacts with the organisation understands child safety is the priority, even above winning. When child safety is prioritised, violence and sexualised behaviour can be seen as inappropriate and harmful rather than a necessary ‘rite of passage’. Once this understanding is established, children are safer and organisations become more respected.</p>
<p>Sexuality and gender orientation of staff</p>	<p>Some adults in child safe organisations may target young people because of the young person’s sexuality or gender orientation. The adult may believe the young person is isolated from their family and friends, or see them as being emotionally vulnerable.</p>	<p>All adults should follow the organisation’s Child Safe Code of Conduct. It should be clear that staff are not to demonstrate bias towards young people because of sexuality or gender orientation (or race, culture and so on). Supervision and appropriate training should educate all staff about the importance of reporting any concerning behaviour that may be observed in other adults.</p>

Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
Lack of understanding or awareness of child abuse	<p>Leaders and staff may have little understanding about how perpetrators work to access and abuse children, or how and where abuse tends to occur. This lack of education, in addition to staff not readily knowing and understanding their obligations to keep children safe from harm and abuse, means children can be exposed to ongoing abuse because staff are unable to respond appropriately.</p>	<p>In situations where leaders do not understand the importance of child safe protective strategies, it is often the case that staff will fail to recognise – or enact – them as well. It is vital that leaders not only understand what it takes to be child safe but ensure everyone across the organisation also understands, including (in an age-appropriate way) children. These protective strategies include having a Child Safe Code of Conduct that describes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and a Child Safe Reporting Policy that is accessible to everyone in the organisation and includes recognised processes to ensure fair and transparent responses to any allegations of abuse.</p>
Protection of reputation of the organisation	<p>Organisations that rely on their reputation as safe and nurturing environments for children can be quick to defend threats to their image. This can mean they do not respond adequately to matters relating to child abuse and can place their interests and reputations above those of a child. This may lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ organisations taking no or inadequate action in response to complaints ▪ allegations being concealed or an approach of damage control being adopted ▪ staff ignoring minor breaches of their organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct because they dismiss them as 'irrelevant'. 	<p>Leaders should understand that cover ups, poor investigations or excuses are not the best ways to protect the reputation of their organisation. Organisations with the best reputations take robust steps to prevent abuse from happening in the first place, and have systems in place to recognise and respond to it if it does occur. These organisations build on their reputations as being safe places for children and young people.</p>



Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
Unclear expectations about staff-child relationships	Organisations are more vulnerable to abuse occurring when expectations about child and adult interactions are not articulated in a Child Safe Code of Conduct, and staff are not held accountable for unacceptable behaviour.	Leaders who ensure their organisations have robust child safe policies and procedures in place to support a child safe culture oversee environments where children are less vulnerable to abuse. A Child Safe Code of Conduct plays an important role in these environments as it sets clear expectations of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for adults in their interactions with children. All breaches are reported and responded to, ensuring children are kept safe.
Culture of not listening to and respecting children	Children are exposed to an increased risk of harm or abuse in organisations where they are not listened to because in these environments they may not feel comfortable to disclose abuse. The tendency to disbelieve children can be more likely for some cohorts of children such as children with physical or intellectual disability, children in detention or children with low self-esteem.	Leaders should ensure all children and young people feel empowered to speak up regardless of their situation in the organisation. Providing protective behaviours training can be helpful, empowering children and young people to speak about anything that concerns them. Leaders should model behaviour that demonstrates all children should be believed if they're raising concerns about harm and abuse.
Close-knit and longstanding relationships between adults	In an organisation where staff are close or have known each other for a long time, it may be difficult to question longstanding co-workers. Abusive behaviours may be ignored or reinterpreted to reconcile uncomfortable information. This may lead workers to view a colleague's behaviour as harmless or innocent, even when it indicates grooming or abuse. Voicing concerns may be interpreted as disruptive in some organisations and may not be welcome. When there is a culture that normalises violence or sexualised behaviour, it can increase the risk even further.	Leaders should ensure a Child Safe Code of Conduct describes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour so any unacceptable behaviour can be recognised and responded to. It can be difficult to acknowledge when a longstanding co-worker is acting inappropriately; however, if workers are encouraged to respond to <i>all</i> breaches of their Child Safe Code of Conduct, it encourages people to speak up if they recognise behaviour that requires reporting. They can feel confident they are reporting a breach – and this is not necessarily the same as accusing someone of abusive behaviour.

Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
Lack of access to a trusted adult	Organisations where children do not have access to a trusted adult may find themselves isolated with no one to disclose abuse to when it occurs.	Leaders in these environments should support all children and young people to speak up; they should also ensure appropriate processes are in place so children have a means to communicate their concerns, including children who are isolated, have disability or are in other situations that make it more difficult for them to report harm.
Invisible child safe policies and procedures	Invisible or no child safe policies and procedures can increase opportunities for perpetrators to abuse children because organisations may not have established child safe practices, clear professional boundaries or processes for identifying and reporting unacceptable behaviour. Perpetrators may even target these organisations because they do not appear to emphasise child safety.	Leaders should ensure that effective child safe policies and procedures exist in their organisations and that they are used. They should also ensure their child safe policies are updated regularly, especially after critical incidents, so they reflect best practice outcomes for keeping children safe from harm and abuse.
Internal disciplinary processes that are not adequate	Where internal procedures are not applied consistently or are too weak to deal with allegations of child abuse, concerns about child safety or other complaints may not be dealt with in a way that prioritises the best interests of children.	Leaders should ensure all workers have faith that disciplinary processes will be fair and transparent. Where this happens, they are more likely to raise concerns.



Vulnerability risk

Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children¹⁰

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
<p>Diverse backgrounds</p>	<p>Some children from diverse cultural backgrounds may lack the language skills required to report abuse. Different cultural norms, such as the unqualified respect for the head of the household may also contribute to them being reluctant to report abuse. Some children and young people from refugee backgrounds may distrust authority figures. Some young women may also fear their future marriage prospects will be diminished if they disclose abuse, as it could affect their reputation and provoke a sense of shame.</p>	<p>The organisation can recruit workers who have a similar cultural background to the child, increasing the opportunity for the child to communicate their concerns. The child can also be supported to learn English, and community members from the child's cultural background can be encouraged to interact with the organisation.</p>
<p>Children with physical or intellectual disability</p>	<p>Children with intellectual disability, or communication or behavioural disorders are at higher risk of all forms of abuse and are often deliberately targeted for this reason.</p> <p>It can be hard for children with communication difficulties to convey their experience of abuse or name perpetrators. Moreover, children with intellectual disabilities or cognitive impairments may be less likely to be believed or listened to.</p> <p>Some are unaware that what has happened to them is abuse because they haven't been provided with appropriate sex education and protective behaviour programs.</p> <p>Some children with disability need help with personal or medical care. This relative intimacy may also create a risk of abuse within an organisational setting. The likelihood of detection may be reduced because this assistance is often provided in private.</p> <p>Additionally, frequently being assisted in this way may affect a child's understanding of what is and is not appropriate touch.</p>	<p>All children should be encouraged to let their carers know if they feel worried, sad or angry. They should be provided with accessible means to communicate, and given an ability- and age-appropriate understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable adult behaviour. Child safe organisations should ask: 'How can each child be supported to tell us if something is wrong?'</p>



Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
<p>Age</p>	<p>All children are vulnerable to abuse because they are dependent on adults. For the most part, adults are physically stronger than children and have social power.</p> <p>In matters reported to the OCG, children aged between 13 and 15 years, and one and six years, were the highest represented age groups, each accounting for approximately a quarter of alleged victims.¹¹</p> <p>The power imbalance between children and adults is enhanced in certain organisational contexts.</p> <p>For example, in organisations that are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ very strict and authoritarian ▪ closed to the outside world or do not involve families or the community ▪ hierarchical and ordered, where those in authority have significant power or unquestionable authority. <p>Additionally, children may not understand that what is happening is wrong and may not have the capacity to communicate what has happened to them.</p>	<p>All children should be empowered with protective behaviour strategies and be offered accessible means to report harm and abuse.</p>
<p>Child's family</p>	<p>Some children fail to speak up if they feel worried, sad or angry because they are not encouraged to do so in their own families.</p>	<p>Protective behaviour strategies will assist children to recognise unsafe situations and encourage them to speak up. Child safe organisations should provide children who indicate a reluctance to speak up with encouragement and ways to help them understand that the organisation is child focused. Where possible, consideration should also be given to providing access or referrals to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ delivering early intervention programs for the child ▪ parenting programs and support processes ▪ developing stronger parent-child relationships.



Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
<p>First Nations backgrounds</p>	<p>Some First Nations children and young people may have a lack of trust in authority figures. Inter-generational trauma may also stop them from speaking up about abuse.</p>	<p>First Nations children should be supported: celebrate their culture and acknowledge past trauma. Learn about the history of First Nations people in Australia, and form genuine, trusting relationships with community members, including parents, carers and elders.</p>
<p>Children and young people in remote areas, or who are in closed organisations such as boarding schools and juvenile justice facilities, may lack access to trusted adults they can report abuse to</p>	<p>Cultural characteristics that arise in closed organisations¹² include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ secrecy, where information sharing on any level is restricted ▪ abuse of power, where people exert significant control over the lives and actions of those engaging with the organisation on any level ▪ prioritisation of discipline, order and conformity over the wellbeing of individual children ▪ isolation from the outside world, including oversight authorities ▪ prioritising the organisation's reputation over the safety of children ▪ failure to deal with complaints and undertake investigations. 	<p>Extra support for these children and young people should be offered. Make sure methods of communication are provided that are appropriate to their circumstances. Responsible adults, including parents, carers and teachers should explore how communication can be facilitated for them, reinforcing to them that they have the right to speak up about anything that concerns them. They should also be given an understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable adult behaviour. Children are less likely to be harmed in organisations that involve families and communities in programs, activities and services. Organisations should encourage their participation and welcome their feedback.</p>



Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
Child has been abused previously	<p>Research indicates that children who have been abused or not appropriately cared for can be more vulnerable to subsequent sexual victimisation because of the impacts of the initial maltreatment. These impacts include¹³:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ low self-esteem or a sense of powerlessness – feeling they ‘deserve’ the abuse because it is happening again ▪ poor relationships that lead to social isolation and ostracism by their peers ▪ heightened need for affection and attention ▪ poor interpersonal relationships with family or carers ▪ developmental disorders or cognitive impairments resulting directly from prior trauma ▪ having ‘shut down’ emotionally ▪ feeling they might not be believed because they may have previously reported and not been believe. 	<p>All children should be supported to understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from the adults in whose care they are in. If there is a known history of abuse, these children should be offered extra support and intervention. All children in organisations should be encouraged to participate in the decisions affecting them, which leads to feelings of empowerment and confidence to speak up if they need to.</p>
Children are not listened to in the organisation	<p>Children who speak up and are not listened to will be reluctant to speak up again. It’s important for them to know they can speak up about anything so if they ever need to disclose abuse they know it’s OK to do so. Valuing the child’s input on all levels will help them feel empowered.</p>	<p>Workers should use responsive approaches such as using or learning key phrases in the child’s first language when they are interacting with them. All adults in your organisation should be supported to understand what they need to do if a child speaks up about something that concerns them.</p>
Sexuality and gender orientation	<p>Some children may become vulnerable because of their sexuality or gender orientation. They may have become isolated from their family and friends, or are being deliberately targeted by people seeking to exploit their emotional vulnerabilities.</p>	<p>All children should know what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from the adults in whose care they are in. They should be encouraged to discuss their feelings in appropriate ways and to be empowered and confident.</p>

You may not know if children in your organisation have any of these vulnerabilities. This means you should build preventative strategies into your risk management plan so all children feel safe and protected.

Environmental risk

Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children

Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
<p>Opportunity to be alone with children and young people</p>	<p>The risk of child abuse is increased when organisations have physical spaces where adult interactions with children cannot be observed by other adults. Additional risk arises where interactions occur offsite because there are increased opportunities for adults to be alone with children such as on excursions or camps.</p>	<p>Areas that have clear lines of sight (natural surveillance) provide a natural deterrent to unacceptable behaviour. Spaces should be designed with natural surveillance where possible. Where this is not possible, processes and procedures should be put in place to restrict the opportunities for adults to be alone with children in these spaces, or to clearly describe the circumstances where it's permitted to take place and what is expected of adults in these situations.</p>
<p>Opportunities to form relationships that could involve physical contact or emotional closeness</p>	<p>The risk of children being harmed increases when they spend one-on-one time with adults without oversight. The opportunity to form relationships that could involve physical contact and emotional closeness can present opportunities to cross professional boundaries. For example, where a child is dependent on an adult for success. Some children may be reluctant to disclose abuse because they feel it will impact on their chances of success. For example, a gifted musician or athlete who is very dependent upon a teacher or coach, or on the financial stability they provide for their family, may feel reluctant to disclose any abuse.</p>	<p>All children should be encouraged to talk about anything that makes them worried, sad or upset. The use of protective behaviour programs when children are young should mean they feel supported and encouraged to continually speak up as they grow older.</p>
<p>Use of online environments</p>	<p>Some perpetrators use the internet and social networking sites to contact and groom children. People who work with children can often connect with them through social media or their personal email addresses. This allows the adult to have private conversations. Perpetrators may use online interactions with children to build relationships and groom them, or may use online environments to abuse children (for example, cyberbullying).</p>	<p>Where possible, children and young people should be supervised while using devices, particularly those who are younger or more vulnerable. In addition, all children and young people should be given clear rules and boundaries around the interactions they have with others on social media. A Child Safe Code of Conduct should also describe what appropriate contact looks like when adults are required to contact young people online.</p>

Propensity risk

Factors that can increase the risk of harm to children		
Factor	How it can put children at risk	How to prevent it being a factor
Staff gender ratios	While more men abuse children than women, it is a relatively small proportion of the male population as a whole, and between three to 10 per cent of abusers are female. ¹⁴ In NSW in 2021-22, male and female employees were the subject of reportable allegations in equal numbers. However, male employees were the subject of allegations of a sexual nature 3.5 times the rate of females, while female employees were notified at higher rates than males for allegations of neglect, ill-treatment and assault. ¹⁵	All workers must be across their organisation's Child Safe Risk Management Plan and make sure protective strategies are established and reviewed as needed.
Context	While sexual interest in children is a common factor for those who offend against them, the Royal Commission found that anti-social behaviour was also a contributing factor. This becomes more relevant when living arrangements are considered. For example, juvenile justice facilities can have an increased risk of peer-on-peer abuse because individuals with anti-social characteristics may be clustered together. ¹⁶ Other residential environments where abuse may be more likely to occur include boys' schools and non-related co-residences, such as out-of-home care.	Children and young people who are in contact with those who demonstrate anti-social behaviour should be provided extra support so they can recognise unacceptable behaviour and know how to respond to it if it occurs.

Case study

A group of children and young people in a particular military environment suffered widespread abuse in the 1970s and '80s. This included 'bastardisation' practices such as having boot polish and toothpaste smeared on their genitals and their anal areas. Others were sexually abused to a harsher degree. They were discouraged from reporting because they didn't want to be labelled 'dobbers'. Most didn't believe that reporting the abuse would result in anything changing other than them being humiliated. They were told that it was a 'rite of passage'. Some of those who did attempt to report the abuse were dishonourably discharged.



Factors leading to environmental risk

Ways to prevent this type of abuse from occurring

A hierarchical 'closed' environment

Cadets existed in an environment that was to some degree self-controlling, which meant the people in it had their own rules that differed from outside society. Since these rules allowed the abuse, nothing was done if cadets attempted to report it. The Royal Commission later found that adults had failed in their duty of care to junior recruits who were children. Child safe organisations are open to scrutiny and the inspection of their child safe practices. They promote child safety and invite the engagement of families and communities.

No reporting mechanisms

Without clear and transparent reporting processes, children and young people who were abused had no way to report their abusers. An organisation's Child Safe Reporting Policy should describe obligations and processes around reporting.

Organisational tolerance for abuse

There were no child safe policies that specifically said abuse was not allowed and encouraged reporting it. Tolerance and sometimes even support for abuse (in the belief it helped children to toughen up) meant children and young people were exposed to more abuse.

Reporting abuse in accordance with an organisation's Child Safe Reporting Policy helps to create a culture where everyone in the organisation understands that abuse is not accepted or tolerated.

No empowerment of children and young people

The cadets in this situation were vulnerable because of their age and position at the bottom of the navy hierarchy. Support for children and young people in these kinds of situations can assist them to understand that some actions are wrong, and also provide them with an understanding that reporting these actions is not only allowed but encouraged.

RECOGNISING GROOMING AND OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR



Identifying grooming and patterns of behaviour

Grooming is behaviour offenders use to manipulate children and adults with the intent to abuse a child. This part explores how child safe practices, when they are embedded into your organisational culture, can make it easier to identify and stop opportunities for offenders to groom children.

Understanding grooming behaviour

Some actions perpetrators engage in, particularly grooming, are very subtle and don't seem harmful of themselves. Rather, they are cumulative and only when taken as a whole can it be seen that someone is preparing to harm a child. In other words, the potential harm can only be identified when a pattern of behaviour is revealed, and this can only happen if the actions are recognised as a concern.

Of course, not every action undertaken by adults working alongside children is grooming or abuse. This is why a [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#) is so important. It establishes a set of rules that adults must follow so any action that could potentially be grooming behaviour is immediately addressed. Any breaches are reported and the isolated incidents can then be assessed against repeated breaches to reveal any patterns of behaviour.

Some offenders use violence, the threat of violence or their authority over children to abuse them. Others abuse because they see an opportunity and take it.* Around 25 per cent of offenders rely on grooming.¹⁷ This is a process where a person manipulates a child or group of children and sometimes those looking after them, including parents, carers, teachers and leaders, to establish a position of trust so they can later abuse the child.

Understanding grooming or recognising the signs that a child is being groomed can be difficult because sometimes we only see a small incident that seems easy enough to brush off and aren't aware of the bigger picture. It can also be because we naturally want to believe a person's actions towards a child and their co-workers are honest ones. We want to believe they are a caring person.

Often when offences are brought to light, the caring adults in the child's life can feel angry, exploited, betrayed and foolish for believing the offender was a good person. Yet, it was all part of the offender's plan. They deliberately lied, hid their true intentions and pretended to be of good character.

Offenders don't want people to question their actions or report them. They would rather people excuse their behaviour and think things such as, 'Oh, they're good, it's just a small rule they've broken. That's just how they are. They're like that with everyone.'

We don't want to think the people we work with, or friends, family members or the people in our community who we trust to care for our children, would harm them. Some people may therefore be reluctant to raise an allegation of unacceptable behaviour because they believe a person is acting in a way that is really in the best interests of a child. They may also be hesitant because making an allegation against a person, particularly when the person is highly regarded, can be very confronting. Establishing a culture of reporting in your organisation can help prevent grooming from occurring, including even small incidents such as a breach of your organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct.

Understanding what grooming is and recognising the signs can help your organisation develop child safe policies that help to prevent it. There are a range of behaviours that may suggest a person is grooming a child. The Office of the Children's Guardian has compiled the following list of grooming behaviours from its workplace misconduct records. Not every instance of these identified behaviours indicates grooming is occurring, but if they are in breach of your Child Safe Code of Conduct or workplace rules, they should always be reported.



Image used on this page is commercial photography and not an actual picture of someone who has been exposed to or perpetuated abuse.

Indicators of grooming

Breach of professional conduct (in a professional setting)

- Spending time alone with a child under a professional pretext such as:
 - providing unofficial counselling or breaching the boundaries of professional counselling
 - discussing intimate matters about the child such as the child's sexuality or their own sexuality
 - discussing intimate personal matters with the child that you would only normally discuss with close associates, including marriage breakdowns or other family concerns
 - arranging meetings with a child in an area that does not have natural surveillance such as a locked room, cafe or the child's home.

Manipulating situations to be alone with a child

- Transporting a child in a personal vehicle alone
- Seeking information about the child's movements and activities outside the professional setting
- Finding reasons to contact the child outside of the professional setting such as delivering 'missing' homework or sharing computer games
- Requesting a child's contact details on the pretext of professional reasons
- Contacting a child directly rather than through their guardian

Breach of professional conduct (outside professional setting)[†]

- Attending events not related to the professional relationship such as:
 - birthday parties
 - sporting events
 - award ceremonies
 - dance contests
 - drama presentations
 - inviting a child to their award ceremonies or other special events.

Public or secret meetings

- Arranging to meet a child in a secluded or secret setting
- Requesting a child visits their home for a massage or to discuss their sporting or academic achievements
- Visiting a child who is at home sick or alone
- Inviting a child on holiday or overnight break
- Taking a child shopping
- Meeting a child at the movies
- Meeting a child for coffee or a meal
- Requesting a child go to their home for non-professional reasons such as to play video games or just hang out

Secondary employment

- Offering to babysit in breach of an organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct, or offering to care for children at low or no cost
- Offering tuition or mentoring, particularly if this gives the person time alone with a child

*We discuss these types of offenders in more detail in the next section.

[†]In religious contexts, some youth leaders may attend functions such as these. The organisation's Child Safe Risk Management Plan should describe how risk can be mitigated in these situations. (See [part 1 of the risk management handbooks](#) for more information on how to create a CSRMP.)

Communication with a child for non-professional reasons

- Communicating with a child on a device they purchased for them and have asked the child to keep secret
- Sending personal emails, letters or private messages on social media
- Linking up with a child through social media, chat rooms, Skype, Zoom or other online platform
- Communicating with a child in code or 'text talk'
- Talking to a child in peer group slang
- Engaging a child in late night contact
- Asking a child to send photographs
- Asking a child to keep the contact secret

Gifts and benefits

- Giving a child or group of children gifts in secret or at the exclusion of others
- Encouraging a child to give them gifts
- Paying for a child to attend events such as football games or concerts
- Giving a child a personal gift such as a locket or jewellery with an inscription
- Purchasing a phone for a child



Physical contact (some of these examples may also be sexual misconduct)

- Brushing against a child
- Inappropriately touching a child while performing a legitimate task
- Deliberately touching intimate areas but passing it off as 'accidental'
- Engaging in activities that result in touching such as rough play, wrestling or tickling
- Adjusting a child's clothing inappropriately
- Restricting or trapping a child
- Massaging or caressing a child
- Hugging a child (not to comfort) or insisting a child hugs them
- Sitting a child on their lap
- Kissing a child
- Taking photographs of a child with or without their guardian's knowledge or consent

Special treatment

- Allowing a child to break the rules
- Showing favouritism
- Consistently selecting one child for a demonstration and special treatment
- Allowing a child to access their smart phone, computer or tablet
- Giving a child birthday or Valentine's Day cards
- Arranging job interviews or casual work for a child
- Having a special (pet) name for a child

Note: Sometimes the special treatment might involve continually shaming a child, to socially isolate them and leave them more vulnerable to harm.

Grooming doesn't only occur between adults and children. Young people may also manipulate other children or young people to meet their sexual desires or not report their unacceptable behaviour.

Influencing guardianship

- Influencing the child's family or relationship with their family
- Manipulating a parent or guardian to make them believe they are a person of integrity or expertise
- Making themselves appear invaluable to a child's success and achievements
- Showing a special interest in a child and their ability
- Undermining parental guidance
- Ignoring requests from parents to limit contact with a child
- Telling a child their 'friendship' should be a secret
- Telling a child their parents don't understand them or their relationship
- Telling a child they will not be believed if they speak up
- Seeking invitations to a child's home for family functions

Influencing other professionals or colleagues

- Undermining other professionals in the organisation to deflect or disguise their behaviour
- Minimising breaches of an organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct as being 'trivial'
- Ignoring warnings from others about their breaches of professional conduct or boundaries
- Encouraging others to breach professional conduct or boundaries as a way of minimising or deflecting their own breaches
- Arranging extra activities that involve a child and also require their supervision
- Volunteering for tasks that leave them alone with a child
- Encouraging colleagues to believe a child has a crush on them or blaming a child for unacceptable behaviour
- Describing behaviour changes in the child victim as trivial or 'just their age'

Desensitisation (some of these examples may also be sexual misconduct)

- Flattering or complimenting a child
- Flattering a parent, either personally or about their child
- Flirting with a child
- Purporting to have a 'special relationship' with a child
- Talking openly about promiscuity (with adults or in front of children) in an effort to desensitise others to their behaviour
- Engaging in sexual banter or innuendo with a child or their peers, including sending inappropriate memes or social media content
- Telling jokes with sexual undertones
- Exposing a child to pornography
- Talking to a child about their sexuality or an adult's sexuality
- Entering private areas such as change rooms unnecessarily or unannounced
- Partially undressing or being nude in front of a child
- Unnecessarily or inappropriately supervising a child during a personal care activity such as toileting or undressing
- Normalising their sexual behaviour to a child such as explaining that their actions are normal when you 'love each other'
- Asking a child, 'Do you love me?', or manipulating them to do something by saying, 'If you loved me you'd do it'
- Having a child pose in an adult or sexualised way for photographs
- Sending a child pictures of themselves or others naked or in a state of partial undress
- Commenting on the sexual characteristics of a child such as puberty, the growth of their breasts or the way they are dressing
- Threatening a child not to disclose their relationship, including the threat of violence (to the child or their family or guardians)

Perpetrators may target vulnerable children because they feel those children have fewer caring adults in their lives or less ability to report abuse. Conversely, these children may be looking for a supportive relationship. Perpetrators will seek to exploit both their isolation and their desire for support.

Anyone who suspects a child is being groomed (or harmed in any other way) should call the Child Protection Helpline on 13 21 11, NSW Police and the OCG's Reportable Conduct Directorate.

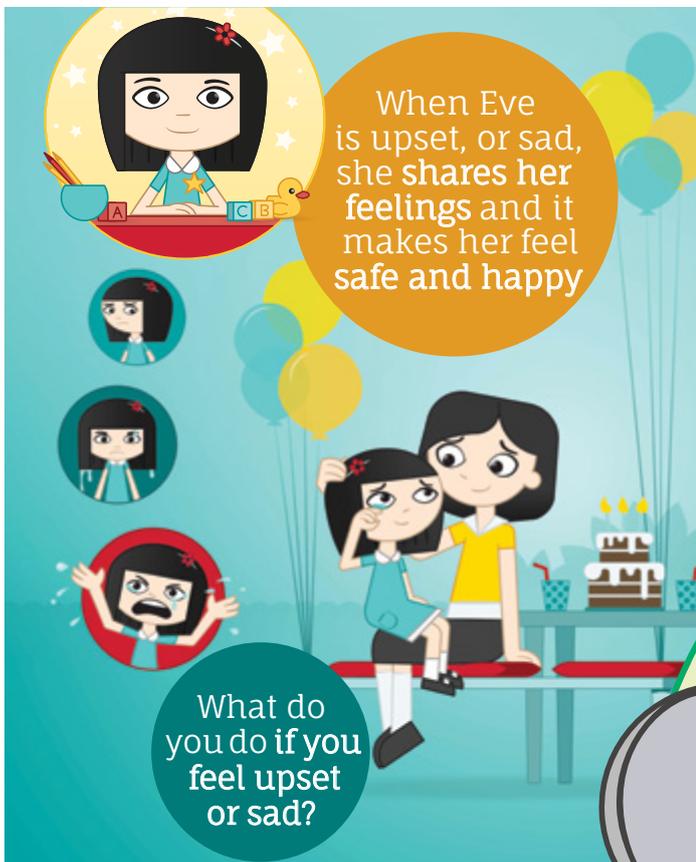
As well as encouraging a culture of reporting all breaches of an organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct, your leaders should make sure all child safe policies and procedures are consistently enforced.

Risk management procedures should also be followed after an allegation is received. See the OCG's [Reporting Obligations and Processes](#) handbook for more information.



Protective behaviours

Teaching children about how to stay safe can also help to protect them from behaviour intended to groom, harm or abuse them. Commonly referred to as 'protective behaviours', the Office of the Children's Guardian has developed a number of resources to help carers and guardians teach children and young people about protective behaviours. [This includes the OCG's SAFE series protective behaviours training program, offered online and in person.](#)



RECOGNISING OFFENDERS

Recognising offenders

This part discusses the different kinds of offenders and their motivations for offending, to help your organisation identify and prevent abuse from happening.

Understanding the behaviour of offenders

Understanding the characteristics of three distinct types of offenders and what steps an organisation can take to prevent them from offending, particularly in the case of opportunistic or situational offenders, helps to keep children safe.

A number of studies have attempted to identify the characteristics and predispositions of people who abuse children. One study¹⁸ showed the majority of offenders had no previous history of abuse and claimed they had not sought employment with children with the intention to abuse them. Neither had they previously been attracted to them.

In these instances, the abuse of children occurred either because the offender exploited an opportunity presented to them or because they recognised a sexual interest in children after being in close proximity to them. This study did not ignore that there are some people (determined offenders and paedophiles) who *do* have a sexual propensity towards children and who *do* try to seek to create opportunities to be close to them, including seeking employment in child-related roles because they intend to offend against them.

The descriptions of the three types of offenders that follow relate to their propensity to offend. See [Risk Management and the Child Safe Standards - Part 1: Responding to risk](#), under the section Developing a Child Safe Risk Management Plan, for how to use this information to help prevent harm to children.

The evidence is unclear regarding how many offenders deliberately seek work with children to commit abuse. One study found 57 per cent of offenders chose their profession either solely or partly so they had access to children; however, another found only two per cent fell into this category. Twenty-nine per cent of offenders sampled in that study had, however, befriended a parent to gain access to a child.¹⁸



Research has identified three types of offenders each explained below.

Determined

This type of offender is described as persistent and calculating. They have an unambiguous sexual interest in children. They are prepared to invest effort if necessary and may become adept at creating opportunities to offend and avoiding detection. This person is often described as a paedophile* and may also be referred to as a persistent or motivated offender.

Preventing them from harming children can be difficult. A determined offender may be quite skilled at grooming children (and the caring adults in their life) to make sure they have access to children and that their abuse goes undetected.

Opportunistic

Generally, this type of offender will exploit chances for personal gain at the expense of others but is unlikely to invest significant effort in creating opportunities. They often have no special or unusual sexual interest in children, and will only sexually abuse in low-risk, low-effort situations.

Rather than plan, they are more likely to exploit a small lapse in child safe practice, especially if they feel the chance of being caught is low.

An example of an opportunistic offender could be an adult regularly driving a child home from a sporting event who learns the child lives in a difficult or stressful family situation, such as separated parents, an out-of-home care arrangement or a domestic violence situation.

Situational

This type of offender usually has conventional social values. They often have adequate self-control and are sensitive to informal social controls. They will, however, succumb to temptation in specific sets of circumstances. A typical scenario is one where they convince a child they are in love and that their 'relationship' is normal.

An example of a situational offender is a counsellor who feels they have developed a 'special bond' with one of their clients and starts behaving in inappropriate ways in to convince the child the relationship is appropriate.

Making sure opportunistic and situational offenders don't offend generally requires protective strategies such as increased supervision and monitoring and the use of natural surveillance.



Image used on this page is commercial photography and not an actual picture of anyone who has been exposed to or perpetuated abuse.

*A paedophile may also describe someone who is attracted to children, particularly pre-pubescent children.

Steps of offending behaviour

There are four steps, explained below, that each type of offender must take before they can abuse a child.

1

Internal motivation

A person needs to have motivation to abuse a child sexually. This may be ingrained (they may be a paedophile) or it can be triggered by an event. The kind of event can vary. Some offenders talk about a marital breakdown or loss of job, which they feel justifies them seeking the attention of a child.

2

Overcoming internal inhibitions

To act on their motivation to offend against a child, a potential offender has to overcome their own internal inhibitions. This means switching off from any internal thoughts that say this feeling about children is not acceptable. Inhibitions may also include thoughts relating to the risks of being caught, including loss of job, rejection from family and friends and potential imprisonment. A potential offender rationalises and justifies their intentions to themselves before proceeding.

3

Overcoming external barriers

Offenders must next overcome any external impediments to committing sexual abuse. They do this by manipulating the protective adults in the child's life to enable them to be alone with a child. Some grooming of other adults will occur and the offender may establish online contact with the child via text or email.

If the organisation's child safe culture is robust enough, potential offenders can't proceed past this stage.

4

Overcoming a child's resistance

The final stage a potential offender takes is to overcome the child's resistance. Often they groom them to undermine or overcome their reluctance to the abuse. Grooming may take place over time and can require significant effort. Offenders can convince the child their relationship is 'real'. Alternatively, they may encourage the child to do something small, but still wrong, and then use this to blackmail the child to go further. Sometimes grooming does not occur and the abuser will overcome the child's resistance by threatening violence against them or people they care about.





Reflective questions

1. How do you train your staff to recognise grooming?
2. How do you train your staff to report all breaches of your organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct?
3. Do your staff understand there are different kinds of offenders?
4. Do your staff understand the different steps offenders go through before they abuse children?
5. How do you make sure children in your organisation can cultivate protective behaviours to keep them safe from harm and abuse, and know how to report any instances of harm or abuse they experience or witness?

“ **Offenders come from all walks of life. We have professionals, we have businessmen, tradies, a whole gamut of offenders – there is no stereotypical person who engages online in this space.** Detective Acting Superintendent Chris Goddard¹⁹



Situational crime prevention

Situational crime prevention aims to reduce the criminal opportunities that arise from the routines of everyday life. It helps reduce the likelihood of certain crimes occurring, including the abuse of children, and is one way to address environmental risk factors. (For more information, see the handbook [Child Safe Standards - Part 1: Responding to risk](#), under the section Developing a Child Safe Risk Management Plan.)

Rather than try to change an offender's criminal disposition, situational crime prevention aims to make changes to an organisation's environment and culture. Examples of how it can be used to reduce everyday crimes include:

- electronic tagging of retail items to prevent theft
- closed circuit television to observe criminal acts
- using plastic cups in pubs so they cannot be used as weapons.

Situational crime prevention strategies do not need to be complex or expensive. Some can be as simple as placing signs in crime hot spots such as:

'Thieves operate in this area. Have you secured your vehicle and removed your personal belongings?'

In a child safe setting it relates to changing environmental factors that may increase the likelihood of child harm or abuse occurring. For example, making sure there are no secluded or obstructed areas where adults can be alone with children.

The three crime prevention theories on the next page describe the central concepts of situational crime prevention.



Rational choice theory

This theory suggests a person commits a crime after considering the likely outcome. Will the benefit of the crime outweigh the potential costs? If the perceived gain outweighs the likely punishment, or the risk of being caught is low, offenders may then decide to commit the crime.

In a child-related organisation, encouraging adults to follow child safe policies and procedures, and having a child safe culture that prevents or minimises the opportunity for unacceptable behaviour is important. Not allowing excuses, including for instances of small breaches, and applying good governance (such as having leaders who model acceptable behaviour) increases the risks for potential offenders, in turn decreasing the likelihood of an offence occurring.

Routine activity theory

This theory suggests that for a crime to occur in child-related settings three key characteristics need to be present: a motivated offender, a suitable victim and a lack of appropriate guardianship (that is, no capable guardian to provide oversight).

Opportunities to commit this type of crime are more likely to be found in routine activities where adults are in close contact with children such as school, one-on-one therapy sessions and recreational activities. The offender could be a teacher, a counsellor or a parent giving a child a lift, and a cycle of predictability often motivates them.



Crime pattern theory

This theory explores how environmental cues in everyday activities may motivate or assist offenders. It considers how physical spaces may contribute to the decisions an offender makes in selecting a victim.

In a child safe context, an environment is poorly designed if it does not have clear lines of sight or if it has secluded, private rooms that do not allow for easy observation from the outside (such as offices or rooms without windows or with glass that is frosted or obstructed by artwork).

Making systematic and permanent changes to social and physical environments can reduce the likelihood of unacceptable behaviour taking place.

Increasing the effort needed to engage in unacceptable behaviour

Studies looking at when and how people offend against children have shown that an organisation is safer when leaders take steps to create a safe environment and don't focus their efforts on trying to change a person's desire to harm a child.

They create spaces where adults know the rules, everyone applies them and there are consequences for failing to follow them. They have child safe cultures where children are valued and listened to, and where complaints and allegations are encouraged and acted on. In these environments offenders are less likely to engage in harm and abuse because the organisation's vigilance means they are more likely to be caught. They are less likely to switch off that internal dialogue that tells them what they want to do is wrong because everyone else in the organisation follows and lives its child safe values.

A situational crime prevention approach to being child safe means:

- increasing the effort needed to engage in offending behaviour
- increasing the chances of the offender being caught
- removing any excuses for poor behaviour.

The following table looks at what is needed to help prevent a crime in a child safe setting. These are the things all organisations should have in place to make it more difficult for offenders to commit abuse.

Checklist for situational crime prevention

Increase the effort	Increase the chances of the offender being caught	Remove excuses
<p>Deflect offenders</p> <p>Do your workers understand and employ the Child Safe Standards to underpin your organisation's child safe culture?</p> <p>Do your job advertisements promote your organisation's commitment to being child safe and make clear that any child-related roles require workers to hold a Working with Children Check?</p> <p>Does your organisation have a Child Safe Recruitment, Induction and Training Policy?</p> <p>Does your organisation make its Statement of Commitment to Child Safety and child safe policies publicly available?</p> <p>Screen applicants</p> <p>Does your organisation verify the Working with Children Checks of all your child-related workers?</p> <p>Is there a robust interview process to understand the applicant's child safe values?</p> <p>Do you conduct reference checks for all applicants to confirm previous employment and any instances of unacceptable behaviour with children?</p> <p>Modify physical environment</p> <p>Where possible, have you modified the physical environment to assist in natural surveillance?</p> <p>Have you closed off or locked all secluded areas such as closets, storerooms or areas that are out of sight?</p> <p>Do you have rules to make sure the above areas are out of bounds?</p> <p>Do you use clear glass in doors and windows to assist natural surveillance?</p>	<p>Extend guardianship</p> <p>Do you encourage and support the inclusion of parents, families and children in programs and decision-making?</p> <p>Do you encourage and support children to have a voice and speak up if they feel worried, sad or angry?</p> <p>Do you teach children protective behaviours?</p> <p>Assist natural surveillance</p> <p>Do you make sure areas are well lit?</p> <p>Where possible, do you design open plan spaces where children interact with adults?</p> <p>Do you ask children to identify areas where they do not feel safe?</p> <p>Do you make sure interior windows are not obscured, e.g. with posters or frosted glass?</p> <p>Do you make sure children are not in isolated areas unless accompanied by more than one adult?</p> <p>Reduce anonymity</p> <p>Are all your workers easily identifiable to parents and families because of their uniforms or name badges?</p> <p>Do you encourage feedback on all areas of the service, including about workers, the environment or the culture of the organisation?</p>	<p>Set rules</p> <p>Do you have child safe policies and procedures for workers, children and families, and make sure they are applied consistently with clear outcomes when breaches are identified?</p> <p>Do you have a Child Safe Code of Conduct that describes expected day-to-day practices and behaviour?</p> <p>Do your workers have role descriptions outlining their duties and responsibilities?</p> <p>Does your organisation have regular feedback opportunities?</p> <p>Post instructions</p> <p>Are all your child safe policies and procedures accessible and discussed regularly in team and parent meetings?</p> <p>Do stakeholders know what to do if they suspect or witness harm or abuse to a child?</p> <p>Do you have posters prominently displayed demonstrating your organisation's commitment to being a child safe organisation?</p> <p>Governance and leadership</p> <p>Are there disciplinary procedures for all breaches of your organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct?</p> <p>Is there ongoing mentoring, support and guidance about child safe best practices in the workplace?</p> <p>Are there performance appraisals identifying and responding to any concerning behaviour?</p> <p>Is there support for stakeholders who make complaints or allegations?</p>



Reflective questions

1. Have your leaders or staff had training in understanding situational crime prevention?
2. Are there any areas of your organisation where staff are able to be alone with children and out of the line of sight of other adults?
3. How does your organisation make sure that adults working with children are safe and responsible?
4. Do you have a [Child Safe Code of Conduct](#)?
5. How do you make sure all adults working with children understand how to make a report if they witness breaches of your organisation's Child Safe Code of Conduct?



Case study

Jim volunteers at his local church. He recently completed the OCG’s Child Safe eLearning and noticed there are some areas of the church’s environment where adults can be alone with children.

At the next staff meeting, Jim suggests the church should have a Child Safe Policy and adults involved with the church should adhere to it. He also suggests the choir office should remain locked and out of bounds while children are in the building, and the door to the sacristy should have a window in it.

Currently, the choir mistress relies on personal texts to contact the children in the choir. Jim suggests this should be replaced by something accessible to children and the organisation, but not public, remembering Facebook groups should only be used for young people aged over 13.

There was some initial resistance to Jim’s suggestions as no one in the church’s management committee could believe the people they worked with would harm or abuse children or young people. They trusted they had a safe environment.

At the next meeting a month later, Jim presented the committee with a range of newspaper clippings from other churches where abuse had taken place. The committee then voted to support Jim’s suggestions.



Factors leading to environmental risk

Ways to prevent the likelihood of this risk occurring (risk controls)

Private rooms and areas where children were present with adults without natural surveillance

Locks to prevent entry to rooms, windows installed in doors and rules forbidding adults to be alone with children.

Opportunities for adults to engage in private messaging with children and young people

Rules that forbid adults from contacting children and young people privately by electronic means.

An organisational culture that didn’t believe abuse could happen in their environment

Developing an understanding that while abuse may not be likely, having protective strategies in place removes or reduces the likelihood of it ever occurring.

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) '[Child protection Australia 2018-2019](#)', p 21, accessed 27 February 2023.
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Office of the Children's Guardian Child Safe Standards Handbooks



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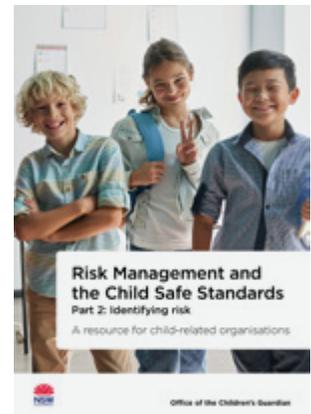
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