1. What are the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations?

# Fact Sheet

## Families and communities

As part of the Child Safe Organisations project, the Australian Government commissioned the National Children’s Commissioner, Megan Mitchell, to lead the development of National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

The National Principles were developed under the guidance of Community Services Ministers across Commonwealth, state and territory governments under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020.* The Principles respond to recommendations by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The National Principles aim to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing across all sectors in Australia. This will help to keep children and young people safe and reduce future harm in organisational settings.

The newly formed [National Office for Child Safety](https://www.dss.gov.au/the-national-office-for-child-safety) will seek Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsement of the National Principles in late 2018.

The National Principles are:

* Underpinned by a child rights, strengths-based approach.
* High-level and designed to allow for flexibility in implementation across all sectors that engage with children and young people and in organisations of all sizes.
* Aligned with existing state and territory child safe approaches and regulations.

The draft National Principles are available on the Child Safe Organisations website: [www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe).

1. What is a child safe organisation?

A child safe organisation puts the best interests of children and young people first.

Children can gain great benefits from being involved with organisations of various kinds – such as local sports clubs, arts or cultural centres, pre-schools, schools and youth centres. Organisations can enable children to meet friends, learn new skills and be active participants in their community.

The vast majority of organisations, workers and volunteers are motivated to do what is best for children and young people. Many organisations are already working to ensure child safety and wellbeing, for example by having a child safe policy.

Members of the public, children and young people, parents, carers, families and communities should be confident that all organisations working with children and young people provide safe environments where their rights, needs and interests are met.

A child safe organisation consciously and systematically:

* Creates an environment where children’s safety and wellbeing is the centre of thought, values and actions.
* Places emphasis on genuine engagement with and valuing of children.
* Creates conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people.
* Creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying any harm.
* Responds to any concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm.

1. How do I know if an organisation is child safe?

Many organisations in Australia are already taking important steps to ensure child safety and wellbeing. These might include, for example, assessing and screening employees and volunteers for suitability to work with children, and meeting the child safe requirements of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments.

A child’s family and community members are an important part of their protective network. They should feel empowered and comfortable speaking to organisations about what policies and practices are in place to keep children safe, and what mechanisms exist for children, parents or carers to raise questions or concerns.

Information about what policies or practices are in place within an organisation to keep children safe should be readily available. Children, parents and carers should be given opportunities to provide feedback and get involved in refining those policies and practices.

There are a number of resources that can assist parents and community members to learn about child safe organisations.

Links to state and territory child safe resources are available on the Child Safe Organisations website: [www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe).

The Australian Government commissioned the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop practical tools and resources relating to the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. These tools will be available on the Child Safe Organisations website in late 2018. They will include a guide for parents and carers, focusing on what to expect and look for in a child safe organisation.

1. What are children’s rights?

Children, like adults, have human rights. Children also have the right to special protection because of their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Children’s rights are things that every child should have or be able to do – such as being safe, having a name and getting an education.

The main international human rights treaty on children’s rights is the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). The CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. As a party to the CRC, Australia has a duty to ensure that all children in Australia enjoy the rights set out in the treaty.

The CRC covers the whole spectrum of children’s rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. It is underpinned by four general principles: children’s right to survival and development; children’s right to enjoy their rights without discrimination; respect for the best interests of the child as a primary consideration; and children’s right to be heard and to participate in decisions that affect them.

As children grow, they have greater responsibility for the choices they make. A very important right for children and young people is the right to have a say. Having a say does not necessarily mean getting your way. This right is both empowering and safeguarding for children, because they are able to speak up if something is worrying them.

The CRC is clear that parents and carers have the primary role in guiding and raising their children. The CRC also requires governments to implement legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure that children are properly cared for and protected from violence, abuse and neglect by anyone who cares for them.

Further information about the CRC and children’s rights is available on the Australian Human Rights Commission website: [www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/childrens-rights).

1. How do the National Principles relate to the work of the Royal Commission?

In 2013 the Australian Government authorised a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in response to community concern about widespread reports of cases where Australian institutions failed to protect children from sexual abuse and failed to respond appropriately when abuse came to light.

The work of the Royal Commission emphasised that members of the public, children and young people, parents, carers, families and communities should be confident that all organisations working with children provide safe environments where children’s rights, needs and interests are met.

In its final report in December 2017, the Royal Commission set out ten standards for making institutions in Australia child safe. It recommended that these standards be adopted as part of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, and that COAG endorse the National Principles.

The National Principles reflect the Royal Commission’s ten child safe standards, with a broader scope that goes beyond child sexual abuse to cover other forms of potential harm to children and young people. The National Principles also include a focus on child wellbeing.

The Royal Commission also recommended that:

* The Australian Government require all institutions that engage in child-related work for the Australian Government, including Commonwealth agencies, to meet the child safe standards.
* The Australian Government evaluate, publicly report on and drive continuous improvement of the implementation of the child safe standards, and coordinate national capacity building and support initiatives.
* State and territory governments require all institutions in their jurisdictions that engage in child-related work to meet the child safe standards.
* There be a new National Framework for Child Safety, to include a national strategy to prevent child sexual abuse.
* There be a National Office for Child Safety established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to be transitioned into an Australian Government statutory body within 18 months. The National Office would, among other functions, develop and lead the coordination of the new National Framework, including national coordination of the child safe standards.

In June 2018, the Australian Government tabled its response to the Royal Commission’s recommendations. The Australian Government accepted, or accepted in principle, each of the above recommendations.

As one element of its response, the Australian Government established the [National Office for Child Safety](https://www.dss.gov.au/the-national-office-for-child-safety) in the Department of Social Services in July 2018. The key activities of the National Office will include leading national coordination of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, working with the National Children’s Commissioner, states and territories and the non-government sector.

1. Will the National Principles be mandatory for organisations?

As noted above, the Royal Commission recommended that all institutions that engage in child-related work be required to meet ten child safe standards, which have been incorporated into the National Principles.

The National Principles are currently being finalised. At present, they are not mandatory, but the draft National Principles still act as a good starting point for organisations to consider child safety and wellbeing.

The draft National Principles will be submitted to COAG for endorsement in late 2018. Implementation of the National Principles will then proceed in line with the responses of the Australian Government, and state and territory governments, to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission.

In the meantime, organisations that provide services to or work with children and young people must continue to meet existing requirements in their state or territory.

To sign up for updates on the National Principles, visit the Child Safe Organisations website: [www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe).

1. Where can I learn more?

To find out more about the Child Safe Organisations project and the National Principles, visit the project website: [www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe).

On the website you can:

* read the draft National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
* learn about our upcoming practical tools and resources
* find links to existing child safe resources at the state and territory level
* read about children’s safety and wellbeing and cultural safety
* sign up to receive e-newsletters

You can contact the Child Safe Organisations project team at [childsafe@humanrights.gov.au](mailto:childsafe@humanrights.gov.au).

For more information about the Australian Government’s child safety initiatives and activities, visit the National Office for Child Safety website: [www.dss.gov.au/the-national-office-for-child-safety](http://www.dss.gov.au/the-national-office-for-child-safety).

For more information about the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual, see: [www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/](http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/).

The Australian Government’s response to the Royal Commission’s recommendations is available at: [www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/Australian-Government-Response-to-the-Royal-Commission-into-Institutional-Responses-to-Child-Sexual-Abuse](http://www.ag.gov.au/RightsAndProtections/Australian-Government-Response-to-the-Royal-Commission-into-Institutional-Responses-to-Child-Sexual-Abuse).