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

# Fact Sheet

## Organisations

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 National 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 or 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 or screening workers for suitability to work with children.

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 are 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. 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.

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 incorporates 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.

The CRC specifically recognises children’s right to safety. Article 19 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 from their parents or anyone else 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 requirements in my state or territory?

Organisations and some individuals that provide services to or work with children and young people must meet relevant child safe requirements in their state or territory. This includes background check schemes for those seeking to work or volunteer with children.

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

The National Principles provide additional high-level guidance to organisations, to allow flexibility in implementation and recognising the variety of organisational types, sizes and capacities.

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.

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 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. What consultation took place on the National Principles?

The draft National Principles were developed through a consultation process including Australian governments, national peak bodies from different sectors that work with children and young people, national advocacy organisations, and children and young people.

The National Children’s Commissioner undertook targeted consultations in the first half of 2017 with Australia’s Children’s Commissioners and Guardians, the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing, and peak organisations from key sectors such as health, education, sport and recreation.

In October 2017, Community Services Ministers in Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments endorsed draft National Principles for further consultation.

Broader consultations were then held on the draft National Principles. The Child Safe Organisations project established two advisory groups for this purpose. The Implementation Advisory Group included representatives of key sectors working with children and young people. The Consumer Advocacy Advisory Group included researchers and advocates in the areas of disability, children and young people, parents, mental health, family and domestic violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

In January 2018, the Child Safe Organisations project held a forum on cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, which sought feedback on the draft National Principles from a cultural safety perspective.

The National Children’s Commissioner also undertook consultations with children and young people, discussing what is important to them in terms of safety and wellbeing.

The draft National Principles have been agreed to by Community Services Ministers and will be submitted to COAG for endorsement in late 2018.

1. Will the National Principles be mandatory?

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. However, the draft National Principles are a good starting point for your organisation’s consideration of 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. How can my organisation implement the National Principles?

The National Principles include guidance material to help organisations and their staff and volunteers understand the important aspects of building a child safe culture.

Each principle has key action areas and indicators. The key action areas are based on the core components of the Royal Commission’s child safe standards. The indicators are examples of signposts that an organisation is meeting that principle in practice. The indicators are provided as a guide only and will vary for different organisations.

The Australian Government commissioned the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop practical tools and resources to help organisations implement the National Principles.

Initially, these will include:

* An introductory self-assessment tool for organisations.
* An organisational Charter of commitment to child safety and wellbeing.
* An organisational checklist for online safety.
1. How do the National Principles relate to workplace health and safety?

Australia has a national scheme for work health and safety (WHS) that aims to protect and promote the health and safety of workers and other persons in the workplace. The reference to ‘other persons’ means that employers have a duty of care to clients and visitors, including children and young people, in places of work.

All organisations should consider the management of visitors, family members, children and young people in the workplace in order to ensure their safety. For organisations working with children and young people, Principle 8 of the National Principles covers physical and online environments and the importance of developing strategies to manage potential risks.

Organisations should consider the physical spaces where visitors, families and children interact, the facilities in which services are provided, and communication protocols about access to and use of online technologies.

The Royal Commission noted that there could be benefit in aligning child safety and WHS requirements of organisations.

Tools and resources are available to assist organisations in meeting their work health and safety responsibilities. For more information on the WHS scheme, see the Safe Work Australia website: [www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au](http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au).

1. Where can I learn more?

Visit the Child Safe Organisations project website at [www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/child-safe), where you can:

* read the draft National Principles for Child Safe Organisations
* learn about our upcoming practical tools and resources
* 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.

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).