

Child Safe Organisations and Safeguarding

OUR POSITION:

Bravehearts advocates for robust approaches to ensuring child safe organisations and safeguarding for all industries that work with or employ children and young people.

- **While some jurisdictions have embedded child safe organisation requirements in legislation, there are some that still need to enact supporting legislation or amendments to current legislation.**
- **Funding needs to be provided for resources and support for staff training on the relevant child safe standards in their jurisdiction.**
- **Contextual prevention is an approach to safeguarding that focuses on understanding and addressing the environmental and situational factors that contribute to harm, rather than solely focusing on individuals who might cause harm.**

Background

"Child Safe Organisations" and "Child Safeguarding" are related but distinct concepts in promoting the safety and wellbeing of children. "Child Safe Organisations" focuses on creating a whole-of-organisation culture that prioritises and embeds child safety in all practices, while "Child Safeguarding" refers to the broader range of actions and policies an organisation implements to prevent harm and promote the safety and wellbeing of children.

Through the work of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, two volumes were released in 2017, relating to system improvements aimed at protecting children from harm (Volume 6, Making institutions child safe; Volume 7, Improving institutional responding and reporting). In response to these reports, extensive work has been undertaken in the development of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018) and the Commonwealth Child Safe Framework (National Office for Child Safety, 2020).

National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations in Australia were developed to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating and maintaining child-safe environments across all sectors in which children are involved. These principles are based on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and align with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The 10 National Principles are (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018):

1. Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance, and culture: Leaders must promote a child-safe culture where child safety is a shared responsibility.

2. Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them, and are taken seriously: Organisations empower children to understand their rights and actively involve them in decision-making.
3. Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing: Engagement with families and the broader community supports child safety and transparency.
4. Equity is upheld, and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice: All children are treated equitably, with attention to those who may be more vulnerable (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with disabilities).
5. People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice: Robust recruitment, screening, training, and ongoing support are essential.
6. Processes for responding to complaints and concerns are child-focused: Complaints mechanisms are accessible, responsive, and focus on the needs and rights of children.
7. Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and awareness to keep children and young people safe: Regular training and education are required to maintain a child-safe environment.
8. Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising opportunities for harm: Risks in both physical and digital spaces are identified and mitigated.
9. Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved: Organisations must evaluate and refine their child safety practices continuously.
10. Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people: Clear and accessible documentation supports consistent and accountable child-safe practices.

Commonwealth Child Safe Framework

The Commonwealth Child Safe Framework (National Office for Child Safety, 2020) is a mandatory policy for all Australian Commonwealth government entities. It ensures that these entities create environments that are safe for children and young people by setting minimum standards.

To protect children by embedding child safety practices and culture into the operations and services of Commonwealth entities, the Child Safe Framework outlines four key requirements:

1. Adopt the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations: These are the 10 principles set out above.
2. Undertake Risk Assessments: Entities must assess the risk of child harm in their operations and services annually. They must also identify strategies to mitigate or eliminate these risks.
3. Establish and Maintain a Child Safety Reporting Mechanism. Entities must have accessible and effective procedures for reporting concerns about child safety. This includes allowing children and adults to report concerns safely and confidentially.
4. Publish an Annual Statement of Compliance: Every year, entities must publicly report on their compliance with the Framework. This improves transparency and accountability.

Jurisdictional Implementation

Since The National Principles were introduced at the federal level, each state and territory has made progress in developing statewide frameworks. As part of this process, Australian states and territories may adapt or interpret the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations to suit their local context. As of June 2025:

- New South Wales: [Guide to the Child Safe Standards](#) (guided by amendments made to the *Children's Guardian Act 2019*)
- Victoria: [Child Safe Standards](#) (guided by amendments made to the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*)
- Tasmania: [Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework](#) (guided by the *Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023*)
- Queensland: [Child Safe Organisations](#) (guided by the *Child Safe Organisations Act 2024*)
- South Australia: [Child Safe Environment Program](#) (guided by the National Principles as well as state-informed policy, through the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*)
- Western Australia: [Child Safe Organisations](#) (guided by the Australian Government's National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, however, has not implemented the Principles into legislation)
- Northern Territory: [Child Safe Organisations](#) (guided by the Australian Government's National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, however, has not implemented the Principles into legislation)

Child Safeguarding Policies and Practices

The objective of child safe organisations should be to foster a cultural transformation within the community and its institutions, ensuring that children are respected, their rights are upheld, and their welfare is prioritised. This requires the establishment of a framework that enhances the prevention, identification, reporting, and response to institutional child sexual abuse.

It is critical that strategies employed in creating child safe organisation be based on evidence-based practice. Within the framework of the Child Safe Organisations project, the Australian Government directed the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop effective tools and resources to support organisations in the execution of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (see: <https://childdsafe.humanrights.gov.au/tools-resources/practical-tools>)

As outlined by the AHRC, a child-safe organisation purposefully and systematically:

- Cultivates an environment where the safety and well-being of children are central to its thoughts, values, and actions.
- Emphasises meaningful engagement with and respect for children and youth.
- Establishes conditions that lower the risk of harm to children and young individuals.
- Promotes conditions that improve the likelihood of detecting any harm.
- Addresses any concerns, disclosures, allegations, or suspicions of harm promptly.

Risk Management

There are a number of organisational factors that are associated with greater risk of child sexual assault. Having a clearly defined strategy for managing risk allows an organisation to minimise these risks. This need should be recognised as of fundamental importance by all managers and staff.

Organisational risk management policies should include:

- **Statement of intent and commitment to the safety and protection of children:** For example: “Bravehearts is committed to the safety and well-being of all children and/or young people accessing our service. We support the rights of the child and will act without hesitation to ensure a child safe environment is maintained”.
- **Reference to legislation that applies to your organisation:** This should include legislation specific to the sector the organisation is part of, as well as relevant child protection legislation in the specific state or territory.
- **A risk assessment or audit:** This includes the identification and assessment of risks relevant to the protection of children generally as well as specific to the organisation and its activities. This should also include strategies for controlling these risks.
- **A strategic plan for reducing risk for your organisation:** The policy should include strategies for the reduction of future, foreseeable risks, including for possible activities outside the organisation’s day to day function (include all activities – low, medium and high risk - and special events).
- **A policy for managing breaches of the risk management strategy:** Strategies for reporting and managing breaches of the organisation’s risk management approach should be clearly articulated.

Contextual Prevention

Bravehearts also notes, that recent research has emphasised the importance of contextual/situational prevention in the prevention of child sexual abuse (Firmin & Lloyd, 2020; Rayment-McHugh et.al., 2024; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Contextual prevention represents a method of safeguarding that prioritises the understanding and management of environmental and situational factors contributing to harm, instead of focusing exclusively on individuals who could potentially cause harm. It includes the identification and alleviation of risks present in the settings where children live, learn, play, and interact with others.

Child safe organisations are those that prioritise the safety and wellbeing of children in all their operations, environments, and practices. Contextual prevention aligns strongly with this by ensuring:

- **Risk-Aware Environments:** Organisations assess and redesign spaces and policies to minimize opportunities for harm (e.g., ensuring that there are no isolated areas where abuse could occur unseen).
- **Cultural Safety:** It supports creating a culture where child safety is valued, staff and children feel empowered to speak up, and inappropriate behaviours are addressed early.
- **Broader Engagement:** Child safe organisations that use contextual prevention actively involve children, families, and communities in understanding risks and developing protective measures.

- Beyond Working with Children Checks: While background checks are important, contextual prevention adds a layer of safety by focusing on the setting and reducing opportunities for abuse regardless of who is present.

Bravehearts Position

Bravehearts advocates for robust approaches to ensuring child safe organisations and safeguarding for all industries that work with or employ children and young people.

- While some jurisdictions have embedded child safe organisation requirements in legislation, there are some that still need to enact supporting legislation or amendments to current legislation. Including child safe organisations in legislation brings several important benefits, especially in protecting children and ensuring accountability. This would ensure that organisations are legally required to implement child safe practices, not just encouraged to do so voluntarily. Legal frameworks push organisations to move beyond reactive responses and focus on prevention and early detection of harm. In addition, legislating for child safe organisations helps ensure that all organisations working with children meet consistent safety standards, regardless of size or sector and can establish or empower regulators or commissioners to audit, monitor, and support child safe compliance.
- Funding needs to be provided for resources and support for staff training on the relevant child safe standards in their jurisdiction. Training helps foster a proactive and vigilant culture where child safety is everyone's responsibility. This reduces the likelihood of harm being overlooked or ignored and helps staff understand relevant laws, mandatory reporting obligations, and the consequences of failing to act. Additionally, well-trained staff feel more confident and competent in handling child safety concerns. This leads to quicker, more effective interventions when something is wrong, as staff are able to recognise signs of abuse, know how to respond appropriately to disclosures or suspicions, and understand boundaries and appropriate behaviour with children.
- Contextual prevention is an approach to safeguarding that focuses on understanding and addressing the environmental and situational factors that contribute to harm, rather than solely focusing on individuals who might cause harm. It involves identifying and mitigating risks in the contexts where children live, learn, play, and interact. Contextual prevention is a vital component of building truly child safe organisations, because it addresses the "where" and "how" abuse can happen, not just the "who".

References

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Bravehearts Foundation Limited
ABN: 41 496 913 890 ACN: 607 315 917
PO Box 575, Arundel BC, Qld 4214
Phone 07 5552 3000 Email research@bravehearts.org.au
Information & Support Line 1800 272 831
bravehearts.org.au