

Recruitment is your first line of defence in keeping children safe. These interview questions are designed to help you assess a candidate's genuine understanding of and commitment to child safety - not just their qualifications. For each question you will find examples of strong responses to listen for, and red flag responses that should prompt you to pause and probe further.

What does child safety mean to you in your day-to-day work as an educator?

Good answer:

- Gives specific, practical examples of child safety in action
- Mentions maintaining visibility, following policies around touch and supervision
- Knows how to respond to disclosures
- Frames child safety as an active, ongoing responsibility rather than a set of rules
- Covers emotional and relational safety, not just physical safety

Red flag:

- Vague or generic - "I love kids and would never hurt them"
- Cannot demonstrate any understanding of practice
- Focuses entirely on physical safety, missing emotional, relational or reporting dimensions
- Treats child safety as obvious or self-evident

Tell me about a time you observed a colleague doing something that didn't sit right with you in relation to a child. What did you do?

Good answer:

- Describes a real situation with specificity
- Took action - spoke to the person, raised it with a supervisor, or documented it
- Understands that acting on concern is expected, not optional
- Comfortable with the discomfort of speaking up

Red flag:

- Says they have never seen anything concerning (implausible in any career)
- Describes letting it go or assuming good intent without acting
- Says "it wasn't my place" to say anything
- Becomes defensive or reluctant to engage with the scenario

What does appropriate physical contact look like when working with infants and toddlers? Can you give me an example from your practice?

Good answer:

- Speaks confidently and specifically about care routines and comforting children
- Understands the importance of maintaining transparency and visibility
- Knows the difference between nurturing touch and touch that could be misinterpreted
- References service policies or professional standards

Red flag:

- Uncomfortable with the question or dismisses it - "I just use my instincts"
- Cannot articulate any specific guidance or principles
- Over-explains in a way that suggests they have thought a lot about physical contact with children for the wrong reasons

How would you respond if a child disclosed to you that they were being hurt at home?

Good answer:

- Knows not to investigate or ask leading questions
- Describes listening calmly and reassuring the child without promising confidentiality
- Reports to their director or nominated supervisor immediately
- References mandatory reporting obligations
- Understands the importance of documenting accurately and promptly

Red flag:

- Says they would handle it themselves before involving anyone else
- Would promise the child confidentiality
- Doesn't know what mandatory reporting is or minimises the obligation
- Would wait to see if it happened again before acting

Child Safe Recruitment

Interview Tip Sheet

Describe a situation where you had to set or reinforce a boundary with a child or family. How did you handle it?

Good answer:

- Gives a real, specific example
- Communicated the boundary respectfully and clearly
- Understands boundaries as protective and positive, not punitive
- Reflects on why it mattered for the child's safety or wellbeing

Red flag:

- Cannot give a specific example
- Didn't enforce a boundary to avoid upsetting the child or family
- Shows discomfort with the concept of boundaries in caring relationships

How do you make sure children in your care feel safe to tell you if something is wrong?

Good answer:

- Describes specific relationship-based practices - consistent presence, following the child's lead, using age-appropriate language
- Never dismisses what a child says
- Understands that children who feel heard are more likely to disclose
- Recognises that some children communicate distress through behaviour rather than words

Red flag:

- Gives a generic answer about "being approachable"
- No understanding of how children disclose or what psychological safety means
- Centres their own qualities rather than the child's experience

Have you ever disagreed with a child safety policy or practice at a previous service? How did you handle it?

Good answer:

- Gives an honest, specific example
- Raised it through appropriate channels - director, team meeting, or formal review
- Followed the policy while advocating for change
- Demonstrates reflective, critical thinking

Red flag:

- Ignored policies they disagreed with
- Has never disagreed with anything (suggests lack of critical reflection)
- Went around leadership or involved families in their disagreement
- Dismissive about the importance of policies

What do you understand about your obligations under mandatory reporting, and can you walk me through what you would do if you had a concern about a child?

Good answer:

- Knows what mandatory reporting is and that they are a mandatory reporter
- Can describe the process - identifying the concern, speaking to their director, reporting to child protection if required, documenting accurately
- Understands that reasonable belief is sufficient - they do not need proof

Red flag:

- Doesn't know what mandatory reporting is
- Thinks the director is the only person responsible for reporting
- Would need to be "sure" before acting
- Confuses mandatory reporting with internal complaint processes

A note on using these questions:

These are starting points - adapt the language to your service context. The goal isn't a "right answer" but to listen for specificity, self-awareness, and genuine alignment with child safety values. Always use behavioural framing - "tell me about a time" rather than "what would you do" - and probe vague answers with a follow-up: "Can you give me a specific example?"

Child Safe Recruitment

Interview Tip Sheet

Why do you want to work with young children, and what do you think makes someone genuinely suited to this role?

Good answer:

- Speaks warmly and specifically about children - their curiosity, development, relationships
- Naturally includes professional qualities alongside personal ones - patience, boundaries, respect for children's rights, commitment to safety
- Balances enthusiasm with professionalism

Red flag:

- Focuses heavily on personal need or emotional gratification - "children make me feel needed"
- Cannot articulate professional qualities or the importance of boundaries
- Talks about children in ways that feel possessive or that centre the adult's experience
- Becomes uncomfortable when the conversation shifts to professional responsibilities

How do you maintain professional boundaries with colleagues and families, and what would you do if a colleague's behaviour toward you or others felt uncomfortable or inappropriate?

Good answer:

- Understands professional boundaries apply to all workplace relationships, not just with children
- Can describe what appropriate collegial relationships look like
- Comfortable naming discomfort and knows who they would speak to
- Recognises that inappropriate adult behaviour in a service is a child safety issue, not just a HR one

Red flag:

- Dismisses the relevance of adult boundaries in a children's service
- Describes very intense or exclusive workplace relationships as normal
- Cannot identify what inappropriate colleague behaviour looks like
- Becomes uncomfortable or defensive with the question

Outside of work, what do you enjoy doing? Tell me a little about your life outside of the service.

Good answer:

- Describes a balanced life with interests, relationships and activities outside of work involving peers and adults
- Talks about work as something they are passionate about but that exists alongside a full personal life
- Comfortable and natural in answering

Red flag:

- Cannot identify any interests, hobbies or relationships outside of work
- Social life centres heavily or exclusively on children and young people outside of a professional context
- Describes multiple informal care arrangements with children across different families
- Isolated from peers, family or adult friendships without explanation
- Says that they "just prefer children to adults" or that children are "easier to be around"

Our service has CCTV cameras, high levels of staff supervision, and a policy that personal devices are not permitted. How do you feel about working in that environment?

Good answer:

- Understands and accepts these measures as standard child safe practice
- Recognises these measures protect children, families, and staff equally
- Reflects that these kinds of environments give them confidence they are working in a service that takes child safety seriously
- Asks questions that show genuine interest in understanding the policies rather than finding exceptions to them

Red flag:

- Expresses discomfort, reluctance or resistance to any of these measures
- Questions why the service doesn't "trust its staff"
- Attempts to negotiate exceptions - "what if I just need to check my phone quickly"
- Frames these measures as an invasion of privacy rather than a child safety tool
- Shows more concern about own comfort than about what these measures mean for children