

# Empowering children and young people

While we need to emphasise the responsibility of adults working or in ministry within the Archdiocese to promote the safety of children and young people, an effective child safety approach requires parishes, agencies and entities to involve and empower children and young people.

Research commissioned by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse found that the way in which children and young people are viewed within an organisational context significantly impacts their safety and the risk of abuse. The risk to children and young people within an organisational context is diminished when organisations acknowledge and actively seek to address the significant power imbalance that exists between adults, and children and young people.

Not surprisingly, child abuse was more likely to occur in organisations that did not value, respect or listen to children and young people. If children and young people are not valued, included or respected, there is a greater likelihood that they will be mistreated and that abuse will remain undetected because children and young people do not feel empowered to tell.

The Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne values the contribution of children and young people and creates opportunities to involve children and young people in decision-making about programs, activities and events that affect them. The Archdiocese recognises that the empowerment of children and young people and their involvement in decision-making are protective factors in relation to organisational abuse.

## DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO RAISE CONCERNS

Encouraging and equipping children and young people to recognise abuse and to 'speak up' in order to raise concerns, make complaints or let someone know they feel unsafe is a significant protective factor.

There is a need to teach children and young people (in an age-appropriate manner) to deal with unsafe interactions and build confidence in letting someone know.

The Commission for Children and Young People recognises that 'often children do not know what to do if they feel unsafe or are concerned about something' (2018, p. 62).

Communication with children and young people about what the parish, agency or entity is doing about child safety can help children feel safe. Regular communication with children and young people about what they can do if they feel unsafe is helpful in letting them know that we are listening and will take their concerns seriously.

The Archdiocese is committed to:

- recognising the rights of children and young people
- acknowledging children and young people as 'partners' and listening and taking seriously the voices of children and young people
- promoting the participation and involvement of all children and young people in the life of the Church
- informing children and young people about what is being done in the parish, agency or entity to keep children and young people safe

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- seeking input and feedback from children and young people regarding the creation of a culture of child safety
- supporting children and young people with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD children and young people to contribute their voices
- providing accessible information to ensure that children and young people are informed of policies and procedures that impact their participation
- equipping children and young people to speak up about child safety concerns, allegations and complaints.

Enabling children and young people to understand, identify and raise their safety concerns with a trusted adult within safe organisations is vital.

Moore 2017, p. 1

## PROMOTING THE EMPOWERMENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Parishes, agencies and entities can promote the empowerment of children and young people in a number of ways:

- Provide rights education (where appropriate) (e.g. *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*).
- Consult with children and young people about issues that impact them (e.g. youth leaders can work with young people to jointly plan the youth group program for the next term).
- Create formal structures and processes that provide an opportunity for children and young people to participate and 'have a say' within the parish, agency or entity through representation (e.g. consultation, surveys, being involved in policy reviews, advisory committees, representation on Parish Pastoral Council, or involvement in event planning).
- Undertake an annual survey of children and young people's views on their involvement in the parish, agency or entity programs, activities and events.
- Produce versions of documents that relate to the standards of care that children and young people are entitled to (e.g. Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy, Code of Conduct, reporting procedure in relation to the rights of children and young people) that are in child-friendly language (plain English), accessible and engaging (e.g. on the website, brochures, posters, photographs, artwork).
- 'Induct' children and young people when they participate in parish, agency or entity programs, activities and events to ensure that they are aware of the importance placed on child safety and who they can speak with in relation to concerns (e.g. develop an information pack for children and young people).

Well-intentioned people implement policies and procedures aimed at protecting children, but often children are not aware that they exist.

CCYP 2018, p. 6

- Develop a Child and Young Person Code of Conduct with the involvement of children and young people (in child-friendly language) that sets out their rights and responsibilities e.g. acceptable and

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unacceptable behaviour in relation to their interaction with adults, children and young people within the parish, agency or entity.

- Teaching children and young people (in a developmentally and age appropriate way) the necessary skills and knowledge to understand and maintain their personal safety, where appropriate (e.g. to identify when they feel safe and unsafe, to speak up and report concerning behaviour and seek support).
- Consider the needs of children and young people with additional vulnerabilities to ensure that efforts are made to ensure culturally appropriate communication in relation to child safety (e.g. in community languages, using visual materials, video or artwork).

## USEFUL RESOURCES

Australian Childhood Foundation November 14, *The rights of all children and young people – Poster.*

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/app/uploads/2014/11/ACF355-Revised-Childrens-Rights-Poster-Final.pdf>

Australian Childhood Foundation July 18, *We want children and young people to feel safe and be safe – Poster.*

<https://professionals.childhood.org.au/app/uploads/2018/08/ACF354-SGC-Standards-Poster-1-8419.pdf>

Protection through participation: Involving children in child-safe organisations (Webinar) – Tim Moore, Senior Research Fellow – Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University

<https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/events/protection-through-participation-involving-children-child-safe-organisations>



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE  
OF MELBOURNE

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Safeguarding Unit  
safeguardingunit@cam.org.au

*The Archdiocese is committed to the safety, wellbeing and dignity  
of all children, young people and vulnerable adults.*