



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia



Creating Child-Safe Organisations

Report on consultation with children and young people

June 2015



Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The Commissioner for Children and Young People WA acknowledges the unique contribution of Aboriginal people's culture and heritage to Western Australian society. For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' encompasses Western Australia's diverse language groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent.

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Foreword

One of the basic premises of our society is that children and young people have the right to be safe and protected from abuse and exploitation.

However, the safety of children and young people does not just occur – a caring and aware community is essential to protect our young and potentially vulnerable citizens.

It also takes good processes and policies within organisations that work with children and young people to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the issues that impact on their safety and a commitment to maintaining the highest standards of care.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People, I have a role to promote and monitor the wellbeing of children and young people and also to ensure they have the opportunity to be heard on matters that are important in their lives.

In 2014 my office consulted with 365 children and young people to find out what a child-safe organisation meant to them.

We spoke to a range of children and young people aged four to 18 years from different cultural backgrounds and life circumstances, such as those with disability or chronic illness, who have experience of out-of-home care, and from regional areas.

As with previous consultations, the results of these discussions are incredibly insightful and provide an opportunity for organisations to respond directly to the views of children and young people and make those with whom they come into contact safer.

I thank the 365 children and young people who took part for their very important contributions, the organisations who supported them to be heard and members of the reference group that helped guide this project.

Enabling children and young people to experience a range of activities and engage with the broad community is an important aspect of their healthy development, and it is vital that work to increase their safety does not impede on this important part of growing up.

This report will help organisations achieve this aim, as children and young people's views will help us work more effectively and alongside them to increase their safety and support their wellbeing.



JENNI PERKINS
A/Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

Introduction

The Commissioner for Children and Young People has a statutory responsibility to promote and monitor the wellbeing of children and young people under the age of 18 years in Western Australia. Under the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006*, the Commissioner must give priority to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and to children and young people who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason.

The Commissioner has specific functions relating to monitoring complaints systems for children and young people. These functions are:

- to monitor the way in which a government agency investigates or otherwise deals with a complaint made by a child or young person and the outcome of that complaint (s19(d))
- to monitor the trends in complaints made by children and young people to government agencies (s19(e)).

The Commissioner has undertaken work with relevant agencies to promote the adoption of complaints systems that are accessible and responsive to children and young people.

Recent inquiries into the abuse of children and young people, including the current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, have identified a number of specific concerns about the safety of children and young people while they are in the care of organisations or participating in organised activities outside of the home.

In recent years considerable work has been undertaken to identify key principles and practices that improve the prevention, identification and management of child abuse within organisations, commonly referred to as 'child-safe' principles.

In 2014 the Commissioner commenced a project to promote the principles and practices of child-safe organisations in WA. Working with a reference group of representatives from key government and non-government agencies, the project has reviewed the existing work being done by organisations to improve child-safe principles and practices.

The project has also undertaken a consultation with children and young people to find out what helps them to feel safe when they are participating in organisations or activities outside of home, and what they need organisations and people to do to ensure that they can raise their concerns about feeling unsafe.

This report outlines the findings from the children and young people from diverse backgrounds in Western Australia who participated in the consultation process.

Participation

A total of 365 children and young people from diverse backgrounds participated in the consultation. Ages ranged from four to 18 years with the majority aged nine to 12 years. Nearly two-thirds of the participants were female.

The majority of children and young people who participated were recruited through mainstream programs such as after-school care and holiday programs. The consultation process also successfully engaged with children and young people from a range of 'at risk' groups including Aboriginal¹ children and young people, those from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, children and young people in out-of-home care, with disability or serious or chronic health conditions, and those at increased risk of homelessness.

Total number of participants: 365										
Ages	5-8 (24%)	Age No.	5 12	6 27	7 21	8 28	9 38	10 59	11 42	12 36
	9-12 (48%)									
	13-15 (15%)									
	16-18 (8%)	Age No.	13 27	14 9	15 20	16 7	17 14	18 9	U/K 12	4 4
Gender	Female: 226 (62%)			Male: 131 (36%)			Not recorded: 8 (2%)			
Diversity	Location	Regional: 62 (17%)			Metro WA: 303 (83%)					
	Cultural	Aboriginal: 81 (22%)			CALD: (refugee/emerging communities) 62 (17%)					
	Disability	Visual impairment, autism, cerebral palsy: 9 (2%)			Serious illness/hospitalised: 17 (5%)					
	Other	Out of Home Care: 28 (8%)			At risk of homelessness: 14 (4%)					

Methodology

Following an Expression of Interest process, the Commissioner contracted 11 agencies² to work with staff from the Commissioner's office to undertake a consultation with children and young people in contact with their organisation.

Standardised scenarios and questions were provided to guide the development of activities suitable to the different groups of children and young people and a facilitator was contracted to support the running of activities as required by agencies. Prior to the consultation the choice of scenario and activity was discussed with the hosting

¹ The Commissioner recognises the diverse cultural and language groups of Aboriginal people in Western Australia. For the purposes of this report, the term 'Aboriginal' is used to encompass all the diverse groups and also recognises those of Torres Strait Islander descent.

² See Appendix 1 for a list of contracted agencies.

agency to understand what adaptations were required to meet the needs of the specific group attending each consultation activity.

Written consent to participate in the consultation was obtained from all children and young people whose views are included in this report. Written consent was also obtained from parents or guardians for all participants, except those who completed the online survey.

Primarily children and young people participated in small group activities where they explored a series of scenarios and answered questions³ relating to different aspects of safety and help-seeking that apply when they were participating in organised activities outside of the home.

Warm up and icebreaker activities were used to introduce participants and facilitators and to introduce the concept of safety. Facilitators of these groups were provided with a list of prompt questions to assist children and young people explore the issues in the scenarios. Each group was provided with butchers paper and pens to record their views. Some children and young people nominated a group leader to write their views but the majority recorded their own views on the paper provided.

Where appropriate, children and young people also completed an individual worksheet answering three questions about safety, help-seeking and participation.⁴

A small number of children and young people completed an online survey. One online discussion forum was held with young people with serious or chronic illness who spend considerable periods in the care of health professionals.

Analysis of the views was undertaken by manually coding responses according to the particular background of group participants. Five different backgrounds were identified:

1. Aboriginal (further separated for country and metro location)
2. Refugee/CALD
3. Disability/serious health issues
4. Trauma/abuse history (with a sub group of at risk of homelessness)
5. Mainstream children and young people.



3 See Appendix 2 for scenarios and questions used in the consultation. Note variation in the wording of the questions may have occurred to facilitate understanding across different groups of children and young people.

4 See Appendix 3 for a copy of the worksheet. Some variation occurred in the design of the worksheet to improve accessibility for different groups of children and young people.

The participants in the mainstream group may have also identified with some of the other categories but it was not possible to separate the data gathered in those forums according to individual background.

Responses were then grouped according to theme for each scenario and question.

Using this report

This report provides a brief overview of the key findings of the consultation process and detailed findings in relation to each of the consultation questions. Copies of the scenarios and questions asked are available within the Appendices. Questions may have been modified to suit the age and background of participants and supplementary questions asked to promote discussion and explore answers given.

Direct quotes from participants are transcribed directly from the participant's records of the consultation. The quotes are selected as representative of the range of quotes provided and are not a complete transcript of all the quotes from all participants. It is not possible to attribute individual quotes to specific gender or age where the comments were provided as a part of a group activity. Where the quotes are taken from individual worksheets the gender and age of the participant is noted.



Summary of findings

Children and young people who participated in the consultation were on the whole very positive about the organisations they engaged with and generally reported feeling safe and able to raise concerns if they had any.

The consultation did not specifically ask participants to nominate places where they felt safe or unsafe, working primarily with scenarios about hypothetical activities. During the course of the consultation, however, participants indicated that incidents of not feeling safe were most likely to be experienced at school. This related largely to bullying from other students. Raising and reporting concerns within the school environment was also often criticised with many children and young people reporting not being listened to or allowed to have a say, unfair or inconsistent arbitration on incidents of bullying or dispute, and lack of action to address concerns when they did raise them.

Given the compulsory nature of school and the significance of engagement in education on present and future wellbeing, further research on the experiences of children and young people in school settings would be helpful in understanding the extent of this and their views on the preferred strategies to address their concerns.

Further consideration of the work on bullying in school settings already undertaken by Professor Donna Cross would also be useful.⁵

What makes them feel unsafe?

The focus of feeling unsafe for most participants related to their experience and concerns about bullying behaviour from other children and young people, citing a range of bullying behaviours such as physical threats and actual violence, teasing, shaming and being left out or isolated.

The prospect of an adult doing something that made them feel unsafe was rarely raised spontaneously by the children or young people. When participants were prompted by the facilitator asking if it would make a difference if the person who did something to make them feel unsafe was an adult, they were more likely to talk about taking immediate and definitive action stating they would either leave immediately, call a parent to collect them, or they would call the police.

Concerns about the friendliness, trustworthiness and competence of the staff were all raised as issues that would be important to feeling safe and comfortable.

The nature of activities, safety and quality of equipment, the physical environment and practicalities such as transport, food and access to telephones were also raised as important issues.

⁵ Professor Cross' research has identified strategies to assist in reducing the likelihood of bullying in schools occurring by focusing on building children's emotional intelligence.

What makes them feel safe?

For the majority of children and young people having friends with them and the vigilance of trusted and skilled staff in supervising places and activities were critical to them feeling safe in organisations. A number of children and young people in different consultation groups cited screening of staff as an important indicator that staff were trustworthy.

Having prior information, knowing there were rules in place, having access to sources of support (both internal to the organisation and to external sources such as parents) and having choices were raised as important strategies to make children and young people feel safe.

The reputation of an organisation also influenced children and young people's decision to participate and their feeling of safety and trust.

How do they usually deal with feeling unsafe or uncomfortable?

Responses to concerns about safety were complex. Many participants talked about how their response would depend on the issue and the circumstances, including the nature of the issue, who was involved and any prior circumstances leading up to a specific incident.

For those who reported bad experiences where they had felt unsafe or uncomfortable, ceasing involvement was the most common way of dealing with the problem. This presented difficulties when children and young people were not easily able to 'opt out', such as in school settings or in health services.

Unsurprisingly, the different needs of different developmental ages was also apparent, with more autonomy and choice desired by older groups and more reliance on parents to keep them safe for younger children.

Children and young people clearly play a significant role in supporting friends who are experiencing problems and this also created additional complexity and was a source of considerable anxiety around how to get help for friends who were at risk.

Raising concerns and reporting problems

Not being taken seriously remains a significant concern for children and young people in feeling comfortable about raising problems with adults and, given that in their view they only raise matters that are serious, it is important that adults respond appropriately to any matter of concern raised by a child or young person. What was clear from the views of children and young people was that they were unlikely to report a problem unless they considered it 'serious enough'.

Staff who were approachable, engaging and inclusive made a significant difference to the feeling of safety and the capacity of children and young people to report a problem or concern when necessary.

When reporting problems, in addition to the approachability of staff, participants clearly needed to feel that they could trust staff and have the opportunity to speak privately with a trusted adult when necessary.

The need for organisations to be proactive in checking in with children and young people on a regular basis was most likely to reveal any issues and is a useful ‘barometer’ of the safety and comfort for children and young people engaging with an organisation.

What do they want to see happen?

Children and young people most often wanted to see action as a result of raising concerns or they wanted adults to provide active support to assist them in resolving the matter. “Do something about it!” was the most common response to questions about what they would like to see happen as a result of raising concerns. However this was also tempered by comments about not losing control completely once a concern has been raised and wanting adults to still keep them involved, listen to them, give them choices and keep matters private as much as possible.

Participants clearly articulated that in order to feel safe in different environments, it was vital for there to be clear rules of behaviour that were monitored and enforced when necessary.

Children and young people of all age groups conveyed a strong sense of wanting to share their ideas and be included in decision-making processes. A range of options for such participation reflected the different needs and preferences of different children and young people. Most importantly, they stated the need for a strong commitment from organisations to value the contribution of children and young people and be proactive in encouraging participation from all children and young people who want to be involved.

Variations by children and young people from different backgrounds

While there was consistency on issues from participants of all backgrounds, the vulnerability and particular needs of special groups was also apparent at times. Experiences of racism or being left out were more likely to be reported by Aboriginal children and young people in the metropolitan area and by children and young people from different migrant backgrounds. Children and young people with disability or serious health needs reported concerns about the capacity of organisations to consider and meet any special requirements they may have. The additional vulnerability of children and young people with a history of trauma or abuse was also apparent at times, particularly around issues such as needing prior information and the ability to access sources of support and comfort. The attentiveness of staff, flexibility of systems and programs, and the need to remain engaged with individuals to monitor such issues is important to ensure all children and young people can participate while feeling safe.



Detailed responses from children and young people

SCENARIO ONE

The first scenario introduced the idea that the child or young person had the opportunity to attend an activity for the first time. For some the scenario involved an overnight camp situation and for others it was centred on a new youth centre that had opened in their area. Participants were asked questions if there was anything they would be worried about and what would help them feel safe or comfortable to attend. Participants identified things that would concern them and some identified questions they would want answered in order to make a decision about whether to attend or not.

Participants often told stories about their personal experiences to illustrate concerns they raised although these were not necessarily captured in the recorded data.

Some participants also completed individual worksheets. This worksheet asked the question, 'The most important thing that makes me feel safe is...'

What children and young people worry about when getting involved in organisations/activities outside of home

Other kids

The most common response from children and young people who participated in the consultation was that they would be concerned about the other children and young people attending the activity and the prospect of bullying by other kids who may be attending. For some this was about not knowing who the other kids were and for some the prospect of 'seeing enemies' or known 'troublemakers' attending was also an issue.



Bullies make me feel unsafe.
Being bullied.
Bullies!
If the bully came up to you.
When kids pick on me.



A range of bullying behaviour was of concern, including fear of physical violence, being teased, picked on or humiliated.

For the younger age groups, the mix of age groups attending, 'older kids' or 'bigger kids' were often suggested as a source of worry.

'Not fitting in' or being left out was a concern across the participants.

Being judged, disrespected, shamed or experiencing racist comments was raised by Aboriginal participants in the metropolitan area, and also by participants from CALD or refugee backgrounds.



Maybe people won't accept you.
Being left out.
Not being judged.
Getting humiliated.
People disrespecting you and other people.
They might laugh at you.
Shame.



Participants were also concerned about the behaviour of other participants, such as swearing, fighting and cheating, even if it wasn't specifically directed at them.

Staff

The second biggest area of concern for all participants was not knowing who the staff or supervisors were. This included simply not knowing the staff, wondering if staff had the right kind of qualifications or if they had been 'screened', staff not being fair, or not paying enough attention to what was going on. Some participants also raised the issue of the gender mix of the staff available and also the reputation of the organisation as a whole.



I'd be wondering if it was supervised.
Not knowing the staff.
Laid back instructors that don't really care.
If the person in charge is qualified.
Worried if no children's check was shown.
If there were only male staff.



Participants with disability or serious illness also raised the issue of whether staff would understand and take their special needs seriously. The gender mix of staff was also significant for this group where there were procedures or issues of an intimate nature that they needed to have attended to.



People in charge understanding our special needs.



Activities

Participants were also very concerned about the nature of the activities on offer and sought reassurance that the activities would be fun and that the standard of equipment would be good.

“ Is this place going to be fun for kids?
Know the activities before I go.
Is there any great game?
Because we know we are going to have fun.
Boredom.
Is there going to be good equipment?
Is the play stuff/equipment broken?
What sort of computer games – are they appropriate to ages? ”

Some participants indicated that they would be more likely to overcome their fears if they were really keen on the activity on offer, while others expressed anxiety about undertaking unfamiliar activities, or a lack of choice about what they were able to participate in.

“ If I was dedicated to do the new things I was going to try.
If I was obsessed with the theme.
Unfamiliar activities.
Might be forced to do something you don't want to do.
Can we ask for help if we need it? ”

Participants with a disability or serious health issue were also concerned about their capacity to participate.

“ Not being able to fully participate.
Performing badly in front of da pros! ”

Environment/practicalities

A range of practical information was sought by participants, such as opening times, cleanliness, safety of the facility, costs involved and transport to and from the activity. What food might be provided was also a common theme!

“ What time is it open?
Too far from home.
Can I get a lift home afterwards?
Have everything clean.
What food do they have?
Is there going to be some good food? ”

Aboriginal participants in the Kimberley also raised the issue of how long the activity was likely to be around and whether the venue would be air-conditioned.

“ Is it air-conditioned?
How long will it keep running?
How long has it been there? ”

Participants working with the overnight camp scenario were also interested to know about what the accommodation facilities would be and how it would be supervised.

“ Sturdy cabins.
If the tents were weatherproof.
Is it secure from animals?
Are we staying in dorms or tents? ”

Participants who had a background of trauma or abuse specifically raised the nature of sleeping and ablutions, and raised concerns about the separation of facilities for different genders and for adults.

“ Safety of the area the club is in.
Sleeping arrangements, showers/toilets
private or separate for boys and adults. ”

Physical safety

Some young participants worried about the prospect of getting hurt or having an accident and wondered about the care that would be available to them if this did happen.

“ If we get hurt will we be looked after?
Falling off a climbing wall.
Breaking your bones.
Falling out of a tree.
Deep water. ”

Participants with a disability or severe health condition were again concerned about the physical suitability of the activities.

“ I wouldn't go because I have a frame in my
face from surgery and I would get bumped. ”

External threats

Participants who worked with the camp scenario raised multiple concerns about external threats from the environment, such as wild animals and the prospect of contact with potentially dangerous adults.

“ Grizzly bear attacks.
Snakes.
Dingoes.
Poisonous things.
Escaped convicts.
Drug dealers.
Dodgy people hanging around. ”

For participants with a history of trauma or abuse this was a particular concern.

“ Scared at night in case someone comes to you. ”

Other concerns

A number of particular concerns were raised by different groups of participants. Those with a history of trauma or abuse were concerned about how they would cope in a different environment.

“ Not getting butterflies in my belly.
Missing my routine. ”

Participants from a refugee background raised a range of unique concerns relating to missing study and being in an unknown environment.

“ Getting past the first day.
Time losing – not learning or studying.
Stressed because so excited.
If you break something they might charge you. ”

What would make you feel safe and happy?

Unsurprisingly, participant's views on what would make them feel safe and comfortable addressed many of their concerns.

Friends

Having friends with them was the number one thing that made participants from all backgrounds feel safe.

“

If you will have friends there.
Having friends going too.
Friends with me.
I would only go if I went with my friends – not alone.
Having people I know around me, like my friends.

”

For some this was also about knowing people, even if they weren't special friends. Having the opportunity to get to know the other children and young people to establish new friends was also important.

“

Knowing other people.
Knowing someone there.
If you know other people that are coming.
Making new friends.
Be nice to your new friends.
Having a partner (another kid) you can talk with.

”

Some participants were also reassured by knowing that the other kids attending would be of similar age.

“

Knowing everyone will be around your age.

”



Family

The possibility of family also attending or being around was also important to some participants. This appeared to be particularly the case for participants from Aboriginal backgrounds and for participants who had experienced trauma or abuse.

“ Being with my family.
Go with friends/family.
Having friends and family there. ”

The younger participants often nominated an adult relation as the person who made them feel safe, including mum, dad, grandparents or aunties and uncles.

“ Being with an adult. (Girl aged 5)
Sitting with my mum. (Boy aged 5)
My pet dog, my mum and dad and my friends. (Girl aged 8) ”

For older participants, the prospect of family attending was less attractive, even if they agreed they would feel safer.

“ I would feel a bit embarrassed going with my parents. ”

Staff

Knowing that the staff or supervisors would be friendly, accessible and appropriately skilled was also of great importance to participants from all backgrounds.

“ Friendly staff.
If the staff are friendly.
You can trust the staff.
Know the people in charge.
Staff make you feel comfortable.
Undergoing training for all staff.
Experienced adults.
It would make me feel very safe if I knew they [staff] were sensible people.
You can talk to staff. ”

Participants wanted staff and supervisors to be vigilant in their supervision, although some of the older participants did qualify this, expressing a desire for some privacy and freedom.

“ Make sure they are watching everyone.
Adults to supervise at all times.
Watching you. ”

For participants with a history of trauma or abuse, the role of staff appeared to have particular significance.

“ Having a safe adult around.
Stay with your carers.
Workers communicating well together and to the kids.
Know who I can talk to if I don't feel safe. ”

Participants suggested a number of different skills and attributes that staff would need to help them feel safe.

“ If they know your name and say hello.
They make you feel welcome by knowing your name
and they are open by talking about themselves.
They listen.
They will be kind.
There would be a mix of genders on the staff.
Someone who speaks the same language.
They understand us.
Respect from the people around you. ”

Practical strategies to assist with participants getting to know one another and to meet immediate needs were also identified.

“ Activities to introduce you and friends to one another.
Playing games to know the other kids.
If you're thirsty they take you to get a drink and a feed. ”

Children and young people had a range of ideas about what staff could do to make them feel safe and comfortable and these are detailed later in this report.

Information and rules

Having sufficient prior information and knowing that rules will be in place was important to many participants in helping them to feel safe. This seemed to be particularly important to more vulnerable children and young people and was more often raised by those from multicultural backgrounds and those with a history of trauma and abuse.

“

Knowing everything about the situation – what is expected of you, when, where, why, how.

Having lots of info before the camp about what it will be like.

Know what you will be doing.

I'd probably ask people from school about it – read some internet or newspaper reviews.

Know who I can talk to if I don't feel safe.

How are they running it?

Need to have rules.

Who puts the schedule together?

Respect people.

No kicking.

No hitting, punching or spitting.

Not going in the deep water.

Boys and girls to be equal.

”

Choices

The importance of having choice was emphasised by participants from all backgrounds.

“

If we had a choice of activities.

A time limit and a choice to leave at any time.

Having choice and freedom (friends, activities).

You could have a choice of people to come.

Doing something you are good at.

”

Choice was particularly important to participants who had a history of trauma, abuse or were from refugee backgrounds.

“

Doing assessments with child/young adults to see if they need to attend specific activities or not (this is a big issue for lots of young people) ie drug education I don't need it but have to do it!

I preferred my old school I felt safer there I didn't want to move.

Not having to do activities that you don't want to do.

”

Access to sources of support

Participants from all backgrounds raised the issue of having the capacity to contact parents if they needed to and to have identifiable and accessible staff with whom they could raise issues.

“ Having a phone to call your parents.
Let you have the chance to ring your parents. ”

For some participants with history of trauma, abuse or those from refugee backgrounds, the issue of safety was clearly more of a struggle and access to other strategies that provide comfort or support was significant.

“ Try not to have nightmares.
I feel home is more safe than school because people can't get in as easy and take you.
Take something that makes me feel safe.
Taking your own stuff to camp.
Pack things that will comfort you.
Having a quiet place.
Breathing exercises.
Have my own space.
Think positively before going there, think about having fun. ”

Other 'safe' strategies

Safe transport was an issue, particularly for participants in the country areas.

“ More safe if transport is organised, less if you walk. ”

A safe physical environment with appropriate equipment was also important to some participants.

“ Yes definitely a first aid kit with medicine in it.
[Place] is safe and calm.
I like security cameras.
Safe activities. ”

The reputation of the organisation was influential for some participants about how safe they would feel.

“ If it was run by a known organisation like Starlight or Beyond Blue then I would go.
Feel safe with the Save [Save the Children]. ”

SCENARIO TWO

In scenario two, participants were asked to consider what advice they would give to a friend who told them that someone had done something or said something that made them feel uncomfortable or unsafe. Consistent with the concerns about bullying incidents by other children or young people in scenario one, in this scenario participants also primarily focused on incidents between children or young people. Participants often spoke about different strategies depending on the nature and severity of the incident or incidents that had upset their friend.

What advice would you give to a friend who tells you someone has done or said something that makes them feel uncomfortable or unsafe?

Tell a staff member of supervisor

The most common response from participants was to tell their friend to report it to staff or a supervisor.

“

Tell a responsible adult.
Encourage them to tell a responsible adult.
Tell the staff.

”

Responses were often complex, reflecting the challenges confronting children and young people in these situations. Responses were further complicated if their friend was reluctant to tell for some reason. This included when the friend had done something wrong, such as retaliating to the incident.

“

If it is a big thing go tell someone straight away – but if the friend doesn't want to tell because they did something back, still TELL!
Tell them it's ok someone needs to know, best to tell someone or you will get more sad.
Only if very uncomfortable.

”

Sometimes it was indicated that they might need to seek help from an adult on behalf of the friend, sometimes with permission and sometimes not, and particularly if they were concerned about the friend's safety.

“

Be the person to tell someone.
I would help them go up and tell an adult.
Your friend may not listen to you but may listen to an adult.
Find the boss or manager and make sure they were safe immediately.

”

Participants often indicated that they wanted staff to take action against the other person to punish them in some way.

“ Tell the staff to send them home.
Ask the camp director to exclude the bully from the camp.
I will talk to the man to send the kid home. ”

Some participants preferred to tell a parent or someone outside of the organisation running the activity if they didn't feel they would be taken seriously or could trust the staff.

“ I feel like another supervisor wouldn't listen because they may be close friends with the offender.
Don't go to a grumpy person.
I would advise them to call their parents and maybe call them to pick myself and my friend up. ”

Rarely was the prospect of an adult being the person of concern raised spontaneously by the participants. However, when prompted to consider if their advice to their friend would be different if the person who had made their friend feel uncomfortable was an adult, most participants indicated that they would be more likely to immediately leave or contact their parents. Some indicated that they would contact the police but only in very serious situations. Some were concerned that they wouldn't be believed if they reported an adult and that they may need to verify whether other kids had had any concerns.

“ Often an adult's word is taken as being more genuine than a minor's.
If an older person did something, tell police, parents, leave club.
If an older person in a group be mean I would quit.
I'd maybe ask some other kids what they thought of the offending supervisor but not tell them what happened. ”

One participant from a refugee background indicated that money might influence a person's decision to tell. Although the meaning of this is unclear, it is indicative of how unexpected cultural influences can impact on children and young people's behaviour.

“ Money might stop people from telling. ”

Provide comfort

Participants from all backgrounds spoke about providing comfort and support for their friends, including managing their distress, cheering them up and assisting them to seek help.



- Try to make them feel better.
- Sit them down and give them lollies and ask what happened.
- Make them laugh and have fun.
- Take them to somewhere they like/feel comfortable.
- Show sympathy.
- Calm him/her down.
- Think of a solution together.



Participants with a history of trauma or abuse had slightly different responses that identified the potential for risk and highlighted the need to 'believe them' and to 'do something that makes them feel safe'.

Less serious incidents

Where the incidents were assessed as being less serious, the participants indicated that they were more likely to encourage their friend to avoid the person, stick up for themselves or, in a few instances, intervene on their friend's behalf.



- Tell the friend to ignore the other person.
- Let's go make new friends.
- Try to forget what happened.
- If they will come up to you say stop it I don't like it and go away from them.
- Help to stand up for them.
- [Say] Hey my friend don't like that so stop it.
- I'd go and sort it out for them.
- Fight the bully.



Responding positively

A few participants commented on the potential to mediate between the friend and the antagonist.



- Communicate with them in case it's a misunderstanding.
- Say to them they should talk with them directly.
- Tell the bully that they are bullying you and making you feel uncomfortable.



Participants from Aboriginal, refugee or CALD backgrounds raised the issue of being responsible to not antagonise the situation further. This is possibly reflective of their involvement in programs that address interpersonal violence incidents.

“

Don't be part of the problem.
Be responsible for what you do.
Don't be revengeful and don't get pay back.
Don't retaliate.
Do the right stuff.

”

What do adults need to do to make sure kids can talk about problems?

Responses to this question were obtained from both group work on the scenario and from the individual worksheets, which asked the question, 'I would only tell an adult about a problem if...'.

Participants had a lot to say about what was needed in order for them to feel comfortable enough to raise a problem. While the preferred method might vary between different children and young people, there were very clear and consistent messages from participants from all backgrounds.

A range of options

Participants suggested having a range of options to suit different children and young people.

“

Make an email address for complaints.
Have a helpline available to call.
Problem box – write your problems.
Handing out weekly surveys.
Get a machine that if you press the button you can report if you are shy.
A tell-it-all box which kids that feel unsecure or uncomfortable can write their worries and only camp leaders can read and try and solve the issue.

”



A proactive approach

Participants indicated that a proactive approach to seeking out their feedback was very important to them as it provided an opportunity to talk about any issues they might have.

“ Remind the children to tell them when there is a problem.
They can ask how we are doing once in a while.
Staff going around and asking the children one at a time.
Staff asking kids, ‘how are you going?’ more often.
Talking about it with us. ”

They also had suggestions about how this could be a positive activity rather than ‘problem’ focused.

“ Broadcast messages over the Tannoy [public address system] every day saying ‘We want you to be happy, don’t forget to come and talk to us so we can help you.’ ”

Trusted and approachable people

Feeling confident that the adult was trustworthy and approachable was important to facilitate disclosure of problems and was a common theme raised across participants from all backgrounds.

“ It is better when an adult you know and trust asks you for your feedback/thoughts rather than a random person because you may be shamed to say some things.
Talk to someone that is your same gender.
Know people well enough before telling secrets.
[If] I know I can trust them.
[If] They were trustworthy.
I feel comfortable confiding in them.
Easier to tell if they have shown that you can trust them. ”

Participants wanted adults to listen to them and make them feel okay about talking about the issue.

“ Listen carefully and make them feel safe.
Adults to listen and to respect.
Give you a hug.
Listen to me and what I am saying.
Understand and listen to what I say and believe me.
Listen and understand and maybe keep it a secret. ”

Trusting adults to believe them when they shared a problem was a common response from participants from all backgrounds. Participants commonly shared stories about not being believed and instances of bullying where it was one person's word against another. This often led to issues going unresolved and a resulting lack of confidence in the benefits of raising issues. Some participants called for more surveillance of their activities by staff and CCTV to address this issue.

“

Someone who is nice and believes you.
They should believe the person when they tell.
Should be believed and not accused of lying.
I have been suspended three times and two of those times I did the wrong thing but one time I didn't and they wouldn't believe me.

”

Seriousness of the problem

Many participants stated that they would only talk about problems with an adult if it was serious enough and often indicated that they would rather try and solve it themselves.

“

If it got serious, or I was hurt or very upset.
I'm in danger or really annoyed.
It's really big the situation I'm in.
The problem is big or important.
It gets violent and serious.
It's really big and unacceptable.
I cannot solve it on my own.
I couldn't figure it out myself.
If I had to [and] it was very bad.
If I didn't already sort it out and if it is serious upsetting me.

”

Some participants reported being given mixed messages about whether it was okay to raise a problem.

“

My teacher said that we should only raise a problem if it was as bad as the sky falling down.

”

Privacy and confidentiality

Participants from all backgrounds raised the issue of needing a private place and the opportunity to talk about problems.

“ Have a safe/quiet place.
Have a room where you can go and tell them.
Talk to adults in a private place.
Be able to see my social worker alone. ”

Confidentiality remains a source of much concern with participants indicating that trusting the person to keep the information private was a significant issue in them deciding whether they would raise a problem.

“ Tell an adult to make sure that they don't talk about situations behind your back.
Adults being nice and keeping your secrets.
To make sure that they get the situation over with and don't tell no one. ”

Solutions wanted

Participants clearly wanted adults to be able to help them when they talked about problems, including giving advice and taking more direct intervention to 'sort it out'. Some participants wanted the antagonist to be given consequences as a result of their bad behaviour.

“ Give me advice to help me work out what to do.
Solve the problem and help me.
They would listen to me, understand the problem and help me fix it.
Do something!
Sort this situation out.
Adults help you sort it out.
Staff that actually do something about the problem.
Adults word things in a way that means it doesn't escalate.
Help me to fix the problem and the person who started the problem to have a consequence. ”

Some older participants were more wary of losing control and adults intervening without their agreement or putting them under pressure.

“ Knowing that adults will only offer advice and not take action unless it is completely necessary or requested by the child/me.
Don't place them under pressure. ”

SCENARIO THREE

In the third scenario, participants were asked to consider what, if they were the boss, they would do to make a place safe for children and young people and to include them in making decisions. Some participants were also asked on individual worksheets how they best liked to share their ideas.

If you were the boss what would you do to make this place safe for kids?

Participants had lots of ideas about how to make places feel safe and comfortable for children and young people. Two key themes dominated these ideas:

- 1 Having the right staff who were friendly and engaged with the participants.
- 2 Making sure there were rules in place and they were clearly explained and enforced, with consequences for those who broke the rules.

Have the right staff

Having the right staff was critical to participants. Staff had to be approachable, friendly, trustworthy, competent and enthusiastic.



Interview the workers, ask them if they like children and are you kind to people.

Employ people who are happy working with young people (e.g. enthusiastic).

Always have happy staff.

Staff should be kind and considering.

Have respect towards kids.

Behave in a trustworthy and honest manner.

Make themselves approachable.

Staff attitudes are important, be positive its important!

Commitment of the staff to keep kids safe.

People/staff qualified for the job.



Participants also wanted a mix of staff to suit different personalities.

“ You also need a mix of personalities. Like you don't want every supervisor to be the same. Like artsy, smarty, nerdy, funny – it's like lollies you want a good variety – jubes, toffee, chocolate etc. ”

For some, this meant staff with similar backgrounds to participants who understood their issues and could be good role models.

“ Run by blind people – less sighted people involved. ”

Importantly, they wanted staff to be involved with the children as a way of getting to know each other and also so staff could monitor what was going on more closely.

“ Make sure they keep an eye on them all the time and not to have favourites.
Hang out with the kids.
Play lots of games with the students so they learn to trust the teachers.
Organisers are fun and do the activities.
Interact with us more.
I think the best way to supervise is to get amongst the action – so if the teens are drawing, the supervisors draw a little too, this way they can help people who get stuck and keep an eye out for bullying too.
Be perceptive and observant to find students reactions to those around them.
Never leave the area where there are kids playing.
Try a variety of food/games and take note of what everyone enjoyed. ”

Although, older participants did not particularly like the idea of being supervised too closely.

“ I think that they shouldn't be too carefully supervised, like supervised enough.
You don't want to feel like the supervisors are listening to every word.
If they joined in with your activities that would be good although sometimes you don't want them to join in with you. ”

Staff should be easily identifiable through a visible means and certain staff should have specified roles to help out.

“

Always stick around - put a glow vest on.
Wear a colourful shirt so we know who you are.
Have a person specifically for bullies.
More school reps [Year 6 students who help the other students].
Have more Chaplains for people to talk to.
In case something happens or they feel unsafe they have the name of the staff person to speak to or call.

”

Staff were seen as an important source of encouragement and support and were also important to ensure inclusion and equality.

“

Encourage you to have a go at activities.
Make sure no one is left out.
Pay attention to the person who is being bullied.
Making sure no one is alone.
Adults talk to children properly, e.g. tell you that it is a normal problem.
All kids are valued regardless of their background.
Visually impaired be equal (VIBE!)

”



Rules and consequences

Participants from all backgrounds were strong on their need for clear rules about what was allowed and what was not. These rules needed to be enforced with appropriate monitoring and consequences where they were breached.

“

Make sure kids know the rules.
First timers - rules and information is given to them.
Have strict rules.
Policies and procedures.
Like rules enforced but you can have fun and be yourself.
No bully policy and strict consequences.
Send the troublemaker home.
Consequences for bad people.
The organisers should tell the parents, call them and set up a meeting to tell them that the child has been mean to others.

”

Staff needed to get involved and other participants were also seen as having a role.

“

[Staff] make sure that people don't argue over small things.
Staff have the authority to stop kids bullying.
Put school reps in charge of counselling club for children that are being bullied and they report back to staff.

”

Information and education

Participants indicated that children and young people should be provided with information and educated about how to deal with problems.

“

The centre should have clear instructions on appropriate behaviours and what to do if something happens, like in public swimming pools.
Tell us about the safety and what will happen if there is a problem.
Ask kids questions and help them if they don't understand words and questions.
Talk to the kids about how to deal with bullies and peer pressure.
Make sure everyone knows the rules.

”

Participants from refugee or CALD backgrounds and those with a history of trauma or abuse raised the need for parents to be involved and for staff to be aware of what might be going on in their family situation.

“

Communication to your family.
More contact with family.
Ask children what is going on at home in their family.
Help parents to look after their kids and be safe.

”

Have the right set up

Participants had a range of views about the environment in which services and activities were provided. Grouping of different ages and the physical security of the building were raised by participants from all backgrounds.

“

Limit the age range, not too many older kids 20+.
Have different areas for different ages.
Keep them in different groups.
Have a sign in book to check before you go in, in case enemies are there.
Have a fence.
Make sure the doors are locked.
Check it's a safe environment.
Leave the lights on outside.
Install security cameras.
Have cameras so they know if anything goes wrong.

”



How would you involve kids in making decisions? How do you like to share your ideas?

Participants from all backgrounds shared a range of ideas about how they liked to be involved in decision making and share their ideas.

A range of options

A range of options were seen as the best approach as different participants had different preferences. Some preferred group work such as focus groups or committee meetings, while others preferred individual and non-direct options such as email or suggestion box options.



Have a meeting and brainstorm ideas.
Set up groups/councils to discuss topical issues with kids of all ages.
Having an annual general meeting of young people.
Have a meeting like this with kids.
Having referendums.
Public speaking.
Give sticky notes out so the children can write their opinions.
Feedback sheets.
Questionnaires.
Writing them down and maybe sharing them out loud.
Drawing, singing and writing stories.
Writing because you don't have to share them out loud.
Through surveys and emails.
Idea box – option to be anonymous.
Give out survey forms to ask for comments /changes with questions to answer and ratings (1–10) e.g. How do you feel about the staff who work here? Do you have any problems that you want to share?



Supportive environments

A number of participants highlighted their need for a supportive environment to ensure that a range of children and young people could be encouraged to contribute.



Have a person tasked with asking young people for their contribution.
Everyone takes turns having their say.
Let them know that people want their opinions.
By being given the opportunity to contribute and share what you think personally.



Participants with a history of trauma or abuse suggested a few more strategies to encourage them to contribute. One young person indicated they wouldn't share ideas at all.

“

By talking softly.
I like sharing answers in a happy way.
I don't [want to share my ideas].
No best way.

”

Being taken seriously

Importantly, participants wanted to know that their contributions were valuable and being taken seriously. They provided a number of examples of how this might be communicated, including having senior staff of organisations involved in hearing the views of children and young people.

“

Having adults taking the sensible ideas from young people seriously.
Make sure their voices are heard.
Interaction from high level staff to show comments are valued.
Telling the runner of the YMCA what I want to do.
A quota of young people on committees.
Write a letter to the parents/kids to tell them what they did with the feedback.

”



Summary

In summary, there are clear messages for organisations that stand out from the views of children and young people.

- Staff and volunteers need to be engaging, trustworthy and involved.
- Supervision and adult scrutiny to monitor children and young people is critical, particularly regarding bullying issues.
- Be proactive in connecting with children and young people to ensure they are able to raise issues.
- Take children and young people seriously if they raise a matter of concern and ensure that staff and volunteers have appropriate training and processes to ensure that such matters are dealt with effectively.
- Pay attention to children and young people who may be more vulnerable, particularly those without the natural allies of strong friendship groups or parental support.
- Choices and options are important and respect the differences of individuals.
- Discuss the environmental issues and programming of activities with children and young people in regard to safety as an ongoing quality improvement activity.

Attracting and retaining staff who can engage and involve children and young people while safeguarding them from potential abuse presents a challenge for organisations. Codes of conduct that outline appropriate behaviour yet do not stifle the development of trusting relationships are important.

Empowering children and young people to understand their rights, to report problems and concerns, and effectively support them to address the issue raised is critical.

It is important to continue to address the level of peer-to-peer bullying that appears to dominate the experiences of many children and young people when they are engaged in activities outside of the home environment.

Generally, participants reported feeling safe in the organisations in which they were engaged.

Participants in this consultation often told anecdotes about experiences that made them feel unsafe or uncomfortable in the school environment and, given the compulsory nature and extent of their involvement in schools, further investigation of children and young people's feeling of safety in a schools is warranted.

Acknowledgments

This consultation was based on a similar consultation undertaken by the ACT Children and Young People Commissioner and the WA Commissioner's office is grateful for their generosity in sharing their ideas and learnings.

Members of the Commissioner's Child-Safe Organisations Project Reference Group⁶ provided valuable comments on draft consultation proposals and materials and their time in doing so is appreciated.

Lianda Gibson was contracted by the Commissioner as an expert facilitator to assist with the consultation process and her expertise and flexibility in working with the agencies to adapt the consultation and facilitate the groups was invaluable.

The willingness of the 11 agencies to participate in the consultation provided a very rich source of knowledge and expert support that facilitated the contribution of such a broad range of children and young people. It was evident that they engaged well with children and young people and provided them with high quality services and support.

The consultation would not have been possible without the input from the 365 children and young people who enthusiastically participated in the activities and engaged with the facilitators about what helps to keep them safe when they participate in organisations outside of the home.

It is hoped that the views presented in this report inspires and informs organisations to continue to work towards improving the quality and safety of services they provide to children and young people.



6 See Appendix 4 for a list of Reference Group members.

Appendix 1

Agencies that supported consultations

- Association of Services for Torture and Trauma Survivors
- Centrecare
- Child and Adolescent Health Services, Department of Health
- City of Wanneroo
- Communicare Inc
- Girl Guides WA (metropolitan and regional groups)
- Parkerville Children and Youth Care
- Save the Children (metropolitan and regional groups)
- VisAbility WA
- YMCA Perth
- Wanslea Family Services



Appendix 2

Scenarios and questions

All scenarios were developed to help guide discussions and were trialled with a group of children and young people prior to use. Different consultation groups may have adapted the wording of the scenarios and questions to suit the needs of the children and young people attending.

SCENARIO ONE

Option one

Think of an activity you enjoy or would really like to try (sport/art/music), then imagine you are given the opportunity to go to a really cool camp for a weekend where you get to practice this activity and learn from lots of experts. The adults running the camp come to your school to talk about it. They say that they will take you and other kids away for two nights. Your parents have said that you can go if you want to.

Or

Option two

A new club for young people has opened up near your suburb. They have really good facilities, a music recording/playing area, computer games, sports activities and heaps of other good stuff. You would really like to go along and get involved.

Question 1 – is there anything that you would be worried about?

Question 2 – what would make you feel safe and happy to go?

SCENARIO TWO

Option one

Imagine that you have decided to go on the camp. You are enjoying yourself but one of the other kids you've made friends with at the camp tells you that someone has either said or done something that has made them feel kind of uncomfortable and unsafe.

Or

Option two

Imagine that you have decided to go to the club. You are enjoying yourself but one of the other kids you've made friends with there tells you that someone has either said or done something that has made them feel kind of uncomfortable and unsafe.

Question 1 – what would you suggest your friend does?

Question 2 – what do you think that the camp organisers should do to make sure that kids at the camp/club can tell them about any problems or if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable?

SCENARIO THREE

Imagine that you are in charge of this organisation in 10 years' time. You want to make sure it is a place where children and young people feel safe and where kids can be involved making decisions about how the organisation works.

Question 1 – What would you do to make the organisation a safe place for kids?

Question 2 – How would you involve kids in making decisions about how the organisation is run?



Appendix 3

Worksheet

A worksheet was provided to groups to further discussion if appropriate. Groups may have adapted the wording and added graphics to suit the children and young people attending.

The most important thing that makes me feel safe is...

When I tell an adult about a problem I want them to...

The best way I like to share my ideas is by...

Please circle whether you are a Girl or Boy

and tell us how old you are: Age _____

Thanks 😊

Appendix 4

Reference group members

- Jenni Perkins – Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Caron Irwin (Chair/Project Director) – Executive Director, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA (CCYP)
- Trish Heath – Manager Policy and Research, Commissioner for Children and Young People
- Tricia Murray, Chief Executive Officer, Wanslea Family Services – representing Alliance for Children at Risk
- Kay Benham, Executive Director, Policy and Learning, Department for Child Protection and Family Support
- Troy Daniels, Director Service Delivery, Department of Local Government and Communities
- Helen Creed, Policy Manager, Vulnerable People, WACOSS
- Peter Scaife, Manager Specialist Services, Department of Education
- Daniel Morrison, CEO, Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service
- Phil Badock, Department of Sport and Recreation
- Sharleen Chilvers, Statewide Resources and Consultancy Manager, Disability Services Commission
- Juan Larrañaga, WA State Manager Programs, Save the Children WA
- Susan Burton, Manager Community Engagement and Policy, Working with Children Check Screening Unit
- Wayne Flugge, Manager Program Development, Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service
- Ross Kyrwood, Chief Executive Officer, YMCA WA
- Vinje House, WA Sports Federation
- Joanne Taggart, Assistant Director, Quality Assurance Education and Training Regulation, Department of Education Services.



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Not all children and young people depicted in this publication took part in this consultation. They are all West Australian children and young people who have provided permission to the Commissioner to use the images.