



ISSUES PAPER 3

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CHILD SAFE INSTITUTIONS

ISSUE

Conducting employment screening checks is only one aspect of keeping children safe from sexual abuse in institutions. Good child safe policies and practices are needed to reduce potential risks and keep children safer in institutions.

Examples of child safe policies and practices might include codes of conduct, complaints handling procedures, and the recruitment, education, training and supervision of staff, including volunteers. Good child safe practices may also include promoting an organisational culture that is committed to child safety, and ensuring that children are able to express concerns about safety or disclose harm.

SUBMISSIONS

The Royal Commission seeks submissions from interested individuals, institutions, government and non-government organisations about the content and effectiveness of strategies aimed at creating 'child safe organisations'.

The Royal Commission is concerned with child sexual abuse in an institutional context. Submissions may address any aspect of the concept or delivery of a 'child safe organisation' that is free of child sexual abuse. Of particular interest to the Royal Commission is:

1. The essential elements of establishing a 'child safe organisation' that protects children from sexual abuse in an institutional context. In particular, are there core strategies that should be present and others that are less critical?
 - a) *Specific policies and procedures that aim to create child safe organisations including correct support for reporting and management of disclosures*
 - b) *Specialised training for staff at the point of induction and at least annually (depending on the organisation)*
 - c) *Specialised supervision and staff support*
 - d) *Included in risk management planning*
 - e) *Building the above into quality and accreditation processes. In Victoria the Department of Human Services have introduced their own accreditation standards, this could be extended to a "child safe" standard and equally applied to other accrediting and funding requirements.*

2. The evidence base for the range of strategies associated with making an organisation 'child safe'. Does this evidence base extend to the physical environment?

In America they have used trauma informed architecture in building designs. We are not sure if the evidence base is available for the physical environment however applying the evidence base around trauma would seem appropriate. The elements will depend on the organisations purpose. In general the open plan spaces create high visibility, thus reducing the risks, not eliminating them (grooming, etc)

3. How should the effectiveness of 'child safe' strategies be tested?

We see the value in having both internal reviews and external auditing of procedures and practices so as a 'tick the box' approach will be avoided. Most organisations will feel confident about the safe environment they provide, only education and/or experience in disclosures about organisations will shift this. Organisations need to clearly understand that there will always be a level of risk. This level should be as low as possible and clear support processes used in the case of disclosures.

Effectiveness could be measured in the level of openness to report/disclose, meeting accreditation requirements (of what is considered best practice for the time), clear processes (and their uptake) in reporting, the support given to people who disclose. It would be important to survey stakeholders about this process rather than rely on the number of incidents being reported (as this can create a tick the box environment).

4. How 'child safe' policies and procedures work in practice.

Child safe policies and procedures would need to include basic core principles pertaining to child safety as well as a particular sector's child safety requirements. The latter would make provision for an individual institution's perspective to be included as well.

The process for an individual institution would be collaborative and educative with all stakeholders participating. In the case of a school this would include parents, staff, students, volunteers.

To ensure a person with an interest in an unsafe child environment doesn't monopolise committees, a rotating staff/parent membership could be adopted. This is equally applied to other institutions.

Sexual Assault agencies would provide direction on age appropriate education for children, staff education, parent information/education etc.

5. Should there be a universal framework for a 'child safe organisation' or should strategies be specifically tailored to particular types of institutional settings?

Both. As mentioned above there should be basic core principles pertaining to child safety however the type of institution will also dictate specific requirements. For example a school and a counselling space, whilst it might be acceptable to have open plan environments within the schools, a counselling session needs a degree of privacy. This might mean that the counselling organisation needs extra strategies and processes (or different) to ensure safety of the child.

6. The role of staff performance management systems and disciplinary processes in a 'child safe organisation'.

From the outset qualified professionals engaged to assist organizations to understand the meaning of a child safe environment will help determine the nature of the relationships. Ideally the tone would reflect partnership, co-responsibility and co-operation. This would need to be reinforced through supervision and professional development.

The disciplinary and staff performance systems need to be aligned and reflect the implementation, adherence and monitoring of the child safe policies and processes. All too often policies do not translate into practice. In this case staff needs to be fully aware of the importance and the consequence of non compliance should be serious.

7. The role and characteristics of governance and management leadership in creating and maintaining a 'child safe' organisational culture.

This role will be very important in setting the culture of the organisation (as with other areas. As mentioned above, risk management, policies and procedures, professional development and supervision, use of external specialists (accreditations, sexual assault providers).

8. Should there be any additional enforceable requirements for institutions or particular institutions to maintain a 'child safe' environment?

Yes through funding agreements and accreditation standards.

Submissions will be made public unless the person making the submission requests that it not be made public or the Royal Commission considers that it should not be made public. That will usually only occur for reasons associated with fairness.

Examples of 'child safe organisation' frameworks and checklists in Australia can be found at:
Queensland: <http://www.ccyppg.qld.gov.au/pdf/bluecard/rmst/RMS-toolkit-update-081012.pdf>

NSW: <http://www.kids.nsw.gov.au/Working-with-children/Become-a-Child-Safe-Organisation/Become-a-Childsafe-Organisation>

Western Australia: <http://www.checkwwc.wa.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/D783A393-347E-45A8-AAC0-085F941C1989/0/ChildSafeandFriendlyOrganisations.pdf>

Victoria: <http://www.cryp.vic.gov.au/childsafetycommissioner/downloads/childsafes-organisation.pdf>

Submissions should be made by **Friday 11 October 2013**, preferably electronically, to solicitor@childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au, otherwise in writing to GPO Box 5283, Sydney NSW 2001