

Child Safe Standard Seven

Promoting the participation and empowerment of children

Becoming a child safe organisation means developing strategies to communicate and engage with all children who are involved with our organisation. It is important to ask children when they feel safe, and when they feel unsafe.

The concept of 'safety' is very broad and means different things to different people, especially children. It is much easier to understand the concept of 'physical' safety and the need for safe practices around hygiene, road and water safety, slippery surfaces, pool fencing, sign-in and sign-out procedures and staff supervision ratios. All of these contribute to the physical protection of children.

In a child safe organisation, we also want to promote 'psychological' safety. Even if the physical environment is as safe as we can make it, when children feel unsafe we need to understand why and respond to their needs. Psychological safety means children feel valued, respected and cared for. They know they can speak to people if they feel unsafe or unhappy, and that something will be done to address their concerns. Knowing this increases their self-esteem, which boosts their confidence and empowers them to speak up when necessary.

Children also contribute valuable insight and ideas towards the creation of a meaningful child safe organisation. Children may be able to identify strengths, weaknesses, risks and dangers in activities that may not be identified by other methods.

Children must be empowered to understand their rights, recognise what abuse is and understand it is not ok and that they can do something about it.

Children's views can be sought by:

- consulting directly with children about what they think makes an organisation safe for them
- giving children information about the standards of care they are entitled to, particularly about their rights
- teaching children how to raise concerns, make complaints or let someone know they feel unsafe
- regularly checking with parents and children that they are aware of relevant child safe policies and procedures and that the child safety culture is visible within the clinic.

Promote the participation of children:

It must be acknowledged that a significant power imbalance exists between children and adults. Specific efforts must be taken to ensure the voices of children are heard. Enabling and promoting the participation of children within our organisation has many benefits, including:

- demonstrating our commitment to upholding the rights of children
- providing staff with the opportunity to check that what we are doing is actually what children want
- strengthening the commitment of children to our organisation
- building the communication and leadership skills of children
- building cultural understanding and respect
- enhancing the safety of children.