

South Australian
Commissioner
for Children and
Young People
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Trust is a Must

What does it take
to be child friendly
and child safe?

The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act').

The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation in the adult world.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda including ways in which children and young people can have input into the design and delivery of policies, processes and practices that relate to delivery of services aimed directly at them.

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Please note: All quotes used in this report are reproduced verbatim.

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Contents

Commissioner's Foreword	4
Why Does Trust Matter?	7
Key Messages	10
How to be more child friendly and child safe	11
What We Did	12
<hr/>	
What We Heard	14
1 Friendly and welcoming staff and environments	15
2 Access to information and clear processes	18
3 Provide different ways to make an enquiry, provide feedback, or make a complaint	20
4 Flexible, timely and solution focussed approaches to feedback and complaints	22
<hr/>	
What Needs to Change	25
Appendix 1: The South Australian Context	27

Commissioner's Foreword

Since commencing as South Australia's Commissioner for Children and Young People, I have had many conversations with children and young people about what makes them feel safe and secure.

Many told me that they feel unsafe in certain environments and that adults often don't show them the respect or protection they want or need. That any child should feel unsafe or insecure in their interactions with adults, whether at home, while in care, at school, or in other community settings, reflects directly on us as adults and it is our responsibility to do something about it.

Committing to providing child friendly and child safe environments for children and young people is not merely something that is 'nice to do'. It is a requirement under international conventions that are embedded in State Legislation. This means organisations in South Australia that deliver services to children and young people must develop child safe policies and procedures that staff in their organisations are required to implement on a daily basis. But what does it take to be an organisation that is child friendly and child safe, and what do these environments look like?

A key focus of being more child safe is to ensure that the interests of children and young people are placed front and centre in organisational culture.

This involves encouraging decision-makers to actively engage children and young people as stakeholders in their decision-making activities, facilitating opportunities for them to have greater input into issues and matters that affect them thereby ensuring they have a voice. It seems logical that services aimed at children and young people should involve them in the planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation phases of those services. In many service delivery areas, gathering feedback from adult users is now standard practice.

We should afford children the same opportunities, and adults should not assume that they are experts in the contemporary world of children.

Listening to children and young people must include both opportunities for input and ensuring they can provide feedback on their experiences in the first place. Establishing or expanding child focussed feedback mechanisms is therefore essential if an organisation is to build trust with children and young people. The best performing organisations are those that commit to continuously improve their services based on feedback received.

Safe environments are found in those organisations that demonstrate values such as confidentiality, transparency, open-mindedness, integrity, respect, as well as feedback that is acted upon in a timely way. Overtime these organisations develop a reputation for being child friendly and child safe so that more and more children and young people seek to use their services, and so it goes with success building on success.

There are examples of organisations who already provide children and young people with child friendly and child safe environments. However, there are many more who don't. This report contains recommendations on how to be a child friendly and child safe organisation made by children and young people themselves, based on their own life experiences.

Organisations who commit to supporting children and young people to actively and meaningfully participate in the design of services aimed at them, are much more likely to deliver these services successfully. They are also likely to enjoy the positive change that the improvement in the design of their service delivery models will produce, while simultaneously building a reputation as an organisation committed to meeting international, national and state level child friendly and child safe standards.

Leaders and decision-makers who are committed to creating an organisation that is child friendly and child safe should reflect on the comments made by children and young people contained in this report. Doing so will provide a deeper understanding of the values, views and positive experiences that children and young people themselves have identified as priorities.

Creating friendlier and safer environments in which children and young people interact with adults will make a difference to how children and young people see themselves and how adults see children. Our collective goal must be to actively engage children and young people as citizens and to uphold their rights, supporting opportunities for their input into the design and delivery of policies and procedures aimed directly at them. When we do this we will be helping to build trust in the adults in their lives.

Yours sincerely,



Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and Young People



Why Does Trust Matter?

Children and young people born since 2000 have had their lives impacted by rapid and significant change – more so than perhaps any other generation before them. Social and technological transformation has challenged and disrupted their thinking, particularly in relation to the way in which they view contemporary society and their agency within it.

For some time now, children and young people have been vocalising their increasing concern about growing inequality, fragmenting societies, and the impact of climate change, particularly on vulnerable populations around the world. In the 21st century these concerns are emerging as key issues affecting intergenerational trust, particularly when governments and leaders dismiss children and young people's concerns, and take limited or no action to address the issues they see as critical.¹

Children and young people understand intuitively that trust is an essential element of a well-functioning society. They also know that their collective trust in civil society is built when they are valued, listened to, and respected for their own views and insights.

Children and young people want to be able to trust leaders and representatives across government, business and the broader community. In particular, they want to have confidence in the effectiveness of government.

Children and young people view trust in institutions as an extension of trust in the people who work within them. They identify the interactions they have with staff as key to determining whether or not the foundations upon which the organisation is built are child friendly and child safe.

Central to their experience of a child friendly and child safe organisation is how individuals within that organisation express their honesty, act with empathy, and act with good intentions. Importantly, this includes whether adults are able to admit mistakes when they're made.

For these positive experiences of child safe environments to become 'the norm' those in authority must become accountable to all stakeholders. This means committing to the view that children and young people are critical stakeholders and ensuring that all interactions within government, community and business organisations reflect this view.

‘I think in life, children and young people don’t have many rights. We’re overlooked, and we get barely any control in our lives and what we do.’

Over the last three years, hundreds of South Australian children and young people have consistently raised issues around being in environments in which they do not feel comfortable and where their interactions with adults are either unfriendly or unsafe.

Children and young people not only described unfriendly and unsafe interactions with peers and family members, but they also included interactions with adults in government, business and community organisations and settings. When children and young people voiced their concerns, many said that they were not taken seriously and neither were their issues adequately addressed.

‘I believe children and young people should have the freedom to do what they want, unrestricted by common stereotypes and influences from other generations. They should have options to dictate

where and what they want to learn and be give options to do this independently.’

Many of the issues they identified can be attributed to a pervasive lack of respect for children and young people combined with limited opportunity to contribute to decisions that impact their own lives. These negative experiences are likely to be perpetuated until children and young people are given opportunities to have influence over issues they consider important.

‘The right to feel safe and secure where they are without fear of others, to speak their opinions/ideas and be heard. To have food and shelter. To be treated [with] respect and equally.’

Young people frequently express concern that although they are often best placed to identify their own needs they are rarely asked to do so. Similarly, although they have ideas and opinions about what will improve their situations, these ideas and opinions are rarely sought. On the rare occasions when they are, they are often overlooked.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) embeds and protects the rights of children and young people around the world. It gives them the right to be active citizens in

today's societies. This international convention has been embedded in South Australia under various laws, including section 5 of the *Children and Young Peoples (Oversight and Advocacy) Act 2016* where 'statutory authorities must seek to give effect to the UNCRC'.

Article 12 of the UNCRC states that 'children are entitled to express their views freely and participate in all decisions that affect them'. Their views are required to be 'given due weight' according to their age and maturity. This means their points of view must be listened to, their opinions taken seriously, and that they are treated with respect at all times.

'Children and young people have the right to feel safe and assured. They should have the right to a say in what they believe in and speak up about any issues.'

Many children and young people are not aware they have rights that are specific to them, let alone that they have the capacity to affect change when these rights are not upheld. Empowering children and young people should be a high priority for organisations and service providers across our communities.

Adults often underestimate the competencies of children and young people, relying heavily upon adult representations and assumptions instead of sourcing children's perspectives and experiences direct.

'I think there definitely should be more rights for young people, and we should be heard and able to voice our opinions and concerns.'

At the core of valuing and respecting children and young people is acknowledging and legitimatising the view that they are critical stakeholders who have a right to have input into decisions impacting on their lives.

'Children have the right to have support from their family and friends.'

Once this view is established, those responsible for creating and maintaining child friendly and child safe environments will be giving effect to the rights set out in the UNCRC. Only then will they be meeting their legal requirement to take into account the views of children and young people in service design and delivery, and only then will they be accepting responsibility for, and being held accountable to, the decisions subsequently made.

Key Messages

1

At the core of creating child friendly and child safe environments, is the need for organisations to put policies and procedures in place that ensure children and young people feel they are being listened to and believed.

2

When children and young people use a service, they want to be explicitly informed about what to do if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. They need to be told when they arrive that a child-focused policy exists. This includes the option to provide feedback on the policy and procedure to improve the services being delivered.

3

Ideally organisations should offer several different ways for children and young people to make direct contact with them through multiple contact points, including by phone, online, and via social media.

4

Children and young people want to be reassured that organisations are committed to responding to any feedback or complaint they may lodge. They want organisations to demonstrate their accountability to children and young people and be notified of the outcome of any feedback or complaint they have made and are happy to receive this via email, SMS notification, or via social media.

How to be more child friendly and child safe



Listen to us with interest and an open mind.



Admit your mistake if you do something wrong.



Employ **friendly staff** who like us and are relatable and approachable.



Find ways for us to be informed, involved and to **have a say** in what is happening.



Get to know us, understand our lives, and do the right thing by us.



Make it easy to for us to provide **feedback** or to make a complaint.



Provide us with an **environment** that is comfortable, welcoming and well signed.



Show us respect by **updating us** on what is going on with our feedback.



Let us know what to do and who to talk to if we feel unsafe or uncomfortable.



Share with us how our feedback has been used to improve services.

What We Did

The most effective way we can protect children and young people from harm and support them to be active and confident citizens is to listen to them.

In 2019, a series of conversations with children and young people asking them what they thought would make ‘feedback mechanisms’ better, were undertaken. The conversations included ways in which they thought these feedback mechanisms could be made more accessible and useful to children and young people.

More than 80 children and young people aged 10 to 22 years, contributed ideas around how to design a child friendly and child safe feedback mechanism by responding to key questions posed by the Commissioners:

- What do feedback and complaints mechanisms which are accountable and designed for children and young people look like?
- What are the fundamental principles underpinning these mechanisms?
- What expectations do children and young people have of organisations who deliver services to them?

From this feedback an online survey inviting other young people to share their ideas and opinions about what organisations should or could do to become more child friendly and child safe was designed.

The online survey asked four questions reflecting the National Principles for Child safe Organisations:

- 1 What do organisations need to do to improve child safety?
- 2 What would make you feel comfortable to speak up and report feeling unsafe to an organisation?
- 3 If you raise an issue of safety, how should the organisation provide feedback to you?
- 4 What rights do you think children and young people have in relation to child safety?

From a total of 269 responses received, the majority (94%) were from young people aged 12 to 17 years, while the remainder (6%) were from young people aged 18 and 22 years. Of the total respondents, 53% identified as female, 43% as male, and 4% as non-binary/prefer not to say.

The body of this report outlines the responses children and young people made to the survey questions. At the heart of their responses is the answer to what it means to create a child friendly and child safe environment.

The clarity and pragmatism of the responses received provided us with clear guidance on what children and young people believe will work best. Their responses provide organisations seeking to develop, improve, and promote child friendly and child safe environments with information sourced directly from children and young people themselves.

‘Educate children and young people on what their rights are, what violations of those rights may look like, while encouraging them to have confidence in their autonomy and in their ability to identify when they feel uncomfortable.’



What We Heard



1 Friendly and welcoming staff and environments

At the core of creating child safe environments is the need for organisations to put policies and procedures in place that ensure children and young people feel they are being listened to and believed.

Children and young people want relationships with adults who genuinely listen to their concerns and who try to understand their point of view and opinions. When children and young people are given the opportunity to provide feedback, a strong level of trust is engendered, thereby encouraging an open and honest dialogue about the issue or situation that caused them concern.

“ ‘They don’t take younger people as seriously as they take adults.’

“ ‘Adults don’t understand what we are saying.’

“ ‘Our thoughts and ideas are not respected.’

Many of the children and young people consulted said they are often treated condescendingly by adults, and are not taken seriously or treated equally, simply because they are a child or young person.

*‘Bad customer service
is a judgemental, negative
and rude demeanour.
Making excuses for behaviours.
Not listening and making
someone’s opinion feel lesser.’*

A key feature of a child safe environment is designating someone who children and young people know they can talk to. This needs to be someone who is trustworthy, non-judgemental and who can offer a number of options, including ongoing support.

First contact between children and young people and a service provider is crucial. It is when a child or young person decides whether they feel safe and welcomed. These first impressions strongly influence a child or young person’s decision to continue with a particular service.

They want to be dealt with by an approachable and caring member of staff. They also want organisations to make them aware of their rights, including their right:

- to be in a safe place;
- to privacy; and
- to have their voices heard, and their ideas and opinions validated and respected.

Young people want customer service staff who have an approachable manner and attitude; someone who knows how to treat children and young people well, and who takes them seriously. They don’t want to deal with an adult who trivialises or speaks down to them.

In practice, the adults that children and young people like to deal with are members of staff who are happy, helpful, and accommodating; who have a friendly smile, a warm and welcoming manner, and who show children and young people empathy, honesty and respect.

To create safe environments, children and young people want organisations to invest in the quality and diversity of their staff members. They want staff who are from all different ages, backgrounds, and genders, and who have had diverse life experiences. Children and young people said that they believe an organisation committed to diversity would create an environment where staff are more caring, relatable, responsible and trustworthy.

“ ‘Respect young people, no abuse of authority, have a diverse range of staff (genders, ages, experiences, ethnicities).’

“ ‘They need to pay their workers well to do a good job and make sure they are not creating dangerous things.’

Children and young people said the likelihood of them reporting negative experiences, or providing feedback on the services they receive, depends on how friendly and trustworthy they perceive the organisation to be, and whether they perceive that there are robust mechanisms in place to receive their feedback.

‘Do not invalidate a child or young person when they are reporting feeling uncomfortable or unsafe in an environment and build trusted networks for them to report to.’

Organisational trustworthiness was influenced by several factors, including:

- how confidential the organisation was perceived to be;
- the overall feeling of privacy in the environment;
- the skills of the person receiving feedback from a young person; and
- the level of individualised response received including how the case was followed up.

The traits of the person receiving the feedback were seen as critical, with significant numbers of children and young people identifying that staff who are placed in roles designed to elicit or encourage feedback must be:

- friendly and relatable
- confidential and trustworthy
- safe and welcoming
- supportive and approachable
- active listeners

Significant numbers of children and young people also identified other factors that organisations should consider if they wish to encourage children and young people to provide feedback, or let a service know if they feel unsafe or unsupported. These other factors included:

- allowing friends or family members to be a part of the process so they are able to support the child or young person seeking support
- ensuring staff members (including teachers) are approachable
- providing opportunities to provide feedback in private or anonymously
- introducing incentives for providing feedback; and
- being reassured that feedback is appreciated and will be treated privately and/or confidentially.

Enabling children and young people to connect to agencies or organisations through a trusted support person was important for younger children. Particularly those who wanted teachers and parents, as well as other adults they trust, to relay information on their behalf.

When organisations demonstrate their commitment to working in the best interests of the child or young person, they are upholding Article 3 of the UNCRC and helping to provide children and young people with the confidence they need to report their concerns, feelings or experiences.

‘An anonymous way to report more challenging issues; have someone in particular within the organisation [that] I know has my best interests and safety at heart.’

Children and young people also need to perceive that the physical environment in which they are in is safe. A safe environment is one that is comfortable and welcoming. It has good infrastructure and signage, as well as areas that have clearly been designed to appeal to children and young people.

It also has a degree of passive design security and supervision so that children and young people can be confident they are safe. Child friendly environments usually look more like a house than a corporate business or government department or institution. It must be clean and environmentally friendly, and ideally offer food options and water positioned at child friendly heights.

“ ‘Being open and welcoming, as well as being able to make the child feel confident in what they do.’

“ ‘Have a caring, safe and fun area.’

2 Access to information and clear processes

When children and young people use a service, they want to be explicitly informed about what to do if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. They need to be told that a child-focussed policy exists. This includes the option to provide feedback on the policy and procedure to improve the services being delivered.

A number of children and young people identified the need for organisations to provide child friendly and easy-to-access information about the organisation's child safe policies and procedures. The information would be explained in child friendly language and formats and include details about what they can expect from staff when they interact with them as well as what services are available to them. Ideally they would like access to this information prior to visiting, or immediately upon arrival.

For example, when a staff member answers a phone call from a child or young person, or welcomes them onto the organisation's premises, they would like to be given a set of guidelines that the organisation has agreed to in relation to their dealings with children and young people.

Children and young people also spoke about being informed about their rights and being informed about what measures are in place to ensure they are in a 'child safe place'. This includes strategies for preventing bullying or harassment of adults by other adults, of children by adults, and of children by other children.

Children and young people want to be assured that staff are trained in child safe practices and know what the organisation's child safe policies and procedures are. This includes being reassured from the outset that all staff are aware of their requirement to use a child focussed approach in all interactions with children and young people.

Children and young people want both human contact and the option of using technology when they are seeking, providing or receiving information from service providers. They also want to feel confident that those adults who are seeking information from them are professionally trained and are not manipulating them to answer in ways that do not reflect their actual concerns and issues.

'I would want them to give me direction and provide me with many options on what to do rather than tell me what to do and manipulate my mind into thinking that that is the only path left.'

Whether provided face-to-face or online, young people want access to information that is easy to find and easy to understand. They also want to connect with service providers through platforms they prefer to use. This includes accessing articles online, receiving email notifications and updates, receiving SMS reminders, and viewing material aimed at them via popular social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook.

Young people said organisations need to embrace new technology, particularly the platforms that young people themselves have said they prefer to use. By using social media in integrated ways, with messaging made relevant to young people, an organisation is likely to engage more effectively with a young person reaching out to them.

Young people said that ‘bots’ are useful, but only in some situations, such as providing and responding to FAQs. They did not think bots were helpful when reporting feeling unsafe.

“ ‘Bots for feedback are good for personal information if you don’t want another person to know something, BUT (real people) can give more personalised and sensible responses.’

In most situations, young people wanted the option of providing direct feedback to a person in the organisation. To feel comfortable reporting to organisations, young people want reassurance that whatever they share with a member of staff from an organisation will be taken seriously and acted upon. They want to be advised of what action has been undertaken and to receive this information and respect in line with their expectations and right to privacy.

“ ‘Knowledge that the information would go to make useful changes.’

Young people said that for issues requiring a personalised response and human contact, the opportunity for face-to-face communication is what they prefer. They also believe face-to-face communication could increase the likelihood of them being understood, and that the responses they receive will be more child-centric.

They said that any direct contact an organisation has with a child or young person means the organisation has permission to discuss the issue internally, so that it can be properly understood and resolved in the shortest possible timeframe.

However, many children and young people also expressed concern that organisations that take a one-size-fits-all approach are not able to gauge the urgency of a child or young person’s enquiry.

Children and young people usually reach out to organisations for support when they have exhausted all other avenues. This means they need confidentiality and support to find a resolution quickly. Being able to trust in the staff members with whom they are dealing is of paramount importance to them.

Demonstrating to a child or young person that the organisation they are reaching out to is trustworthy is the key. How this is achieved is determined by the values of the organisation and how these are applied to processes and procedures. In particular, how an organisation promotes and encourages feedback from children and young people and their commitment to making continuous improvements based on this feedback.

3 Provide different ways to make an enquiry, provide feedback or make a complaint

Ideally, organisations should offer several different ways for children and young people to make direct contact with them from multiple contact point including by phone, online, and via social media.

Feedback mechanisms should also be put in multiple places both online and in the physical space so that children and young people can see that feedback is welcomed. This should also include an assurance that the feedback or complaint will be taken seriously and will be acted upon.

‘I think that they should have a few ways to do it, because some people might feel safer over email, and some people might prefer to meet in person or something. I think email would be the most useful.’

Providing multiple contact points for children and young people to provide feedback allows them to select the one that they are most

comfortable to use. It also means children and young people will be aware from the outset that there are options for them to provide feedback, or make a formal complaint when interactions with staff within an organisation, do not meet their expectations.

In this way, services can be adjusted and refined with direct input from the children and young people who use them, establishing a cycle of continuous improvement that will lead to better outcomes overall.

An organisation's child friendly and child safe policies and procedures should also be very easy to find and equally easy to navigate so that the diverse needs and preferences of children and young people will be taken into account.

An organisation which commits to providing easy access to child friendly and child safe policies, procedures and feedback mechanisms is likely to bring about measurable improvements in their service delivery and outcomes.

- “ ‘Should be easily accessible to everyone! Not hidden at the bottom of a website/social media site so that no one can find it and complain.’
- “ ‘I want to be approached and be provided with assistance as I am too anxious to speak to people no matter how horrid I feel’

Organisations who provide services to children and young people must also be wholly transparent. Transparency fosters trust, which in turn encourages children and young people to engage with greater confidence. Just like access and feedback, being transparent is also likely to lead to more appropriate and effective outcomes.

‘Being transparent and telling me what goes on.’

Children and young people said that organisations need to be more ‘open-minded’ and ‘willing to receive feedback’ with a particular emphasis on staff believing children and young people when they raise issues.

‘Replying whilst recognising what the issue is and ensuring that I know you believe what I have brought up.’

No matter which channel is used, many children and young people emphasised the need for organisations to provide constructive and personalised responses to their enquiry, ensuring it is one that a child or young person can easily understand and find comfortable.

- “ ‘Showing support and interest and acting on the issue instead of letting it slide under the carpet.’

Depending upon the complexity of the issue raised, some children and young people are willing to have face-to-face conversations within organisational settings. They would prefer, however, to be given a choice around whether to do this or not.

Young people in their early teens often prefer initial interactions to be undertaken via SMS messaging rather than via a face-to-face interaction. Others with more independence tend to appreciate an opportunity to meet in person, particularly if the issue is highly sensitive or confidential. But whatever method chosen, or point of contact used, whether done in-person or via communication technology, organisations must respect children and young people’s right to privacy.

This also relates to receiving feedback from children and young people. Young people emphasised that good organisations offer feedback mechanisms that are easy to access and equally easy to navigate, including ensuring they are accessible to young people of varying abilities.

They also want feedback mechanisms that protect their rights to privacy and confidentiality, and at times to their anonymity. Being told upfront about how and why some service providers collect personal information, including where and how this personal information is stored and how it will be used is very important to children and young people, as it allows them to decide if they wish to provide these details in the first place. They also want assurance that their involvement with an organisation or service provider, will not negatively affect them in the future.

4 Flexible, timely and solution focussed approaches to feedback and complaints

Young people want to be reassured that organisations are committed to responding to any feedback or complaint they may lodge. They want organisations to demonstrate their accountability to young people and be notified of the outcome of any feedback or complaint made, by email, SMS notification, or via social media.

An organisation that is accountable to the children and young people it is designed to support will ask for feedback about the service they provide and involve children and young people in their decision-making processes. Children and young people said they are more likely to engage with organisations that develop ways to handle complaints effectively and who ensure they communicate outcomes to those children and young people who raised their concerns or provided feedback on their services.

They also want organisations to keep them informed of any progress and to advise of any follow-up actions that will be taken in response to the feedback or concerns they have raised.

Children and young people also said it was very important that they be sent immediate

acknowledgment of any enquiry they make. This includes an estimate of the time it will take to receive a full response.

They also said that if, for whatever reason, an organisation or service provider is unable to respond to the concern or issue raised, the child or young person needs to be provided with an adequate explanation as to why this is the case, and then be guided to alternate organisations or avenues for support.

“ *‘Feedback must be there for everyone – it NEEDS to be actions done afterwards. The company, business or community (e.g. schools) must be ready to take on the feedback and there MUST be someone to implement change. Responses to feedback must be fast, efficient, reliable and must cater to the needs of whoever needs assistance.’*

Importantly young people said that what makes an organisation more trustworthy, safe and child friendly is when the response to their enquiry comes directly from the staff member who initially received it, and in whom they have confided.

They are very happy for acknowledgements to be communicated via an automatic email or online messaging platform, just as long as they actually receive one.

“ *‘Actually getting back to you instead of ignoring it and forgetting.’*

It is also important to children and young people that they receive a timely response to the enquiry they have made and were concerned about the response times to enquiries made via online feedback forms. They said they considered a turnaround time of five business days to be a very long time, and that they felt somewhere between four and 24 hours was a much more appropriate length of time to wait for an acknowledgement or response. They said that this would demonstrate they were dealing with a higher quality and more trustworthy organisation.

Children and young people make a distinction between personal complaints, which they say should be kept confidential, and other more general feedback that is less personal in nature. They said general feedback should be published and shared online to improve experiences for all.

There was a consensus view that if organisations posted feedback or general complaints they received from children and young people, on their websites or social media platforms including how they responded children and young people would develop greater trust in them.

“ *‘Responses should be made public so others can see positive AND negative feedback. You should be able to clearly see how your feedback is implemented or given legitimate reasons as to why it can’t be applied.’*

Children and young people said they would value updates on how feedback is being used to improve services designed to meet their needs. They said a feedback tracking dashboard that shows an organisation’s progress and outcomes in relation to feedback would demonstrate how seriously the organisation takes input from young people.

Children and young people also want to know whether the organisation has the capacity to apply appropriate discretion to certain issues raised. For some, this equated to having a younger person on staff who they felt they could speak more openly with and be more likely to understand their concerns. For others it was about assurance that their feedback would be taken seriously, or that they would receive appropriate help, not only in relation to their immediate situation, but also to ongoing support being made available.

“ *‘Direct communication of what they plan to do and giving me the option to stop them from doing what they plan on if I see fit if I think it will impact negatively. Also, provide options for what I could do to help with my own mental health even after the issue is dealt with i.e. counselling.’*

Children and young people said they would appreciate a non-judgemental response from staff with whom they interact. This should include an assurance that they will not be ‘in trouble’ with the adults in their lives as a result of having spoken out. Clearly this is very important to children and young people who are seeking support in relation to issues they have with adults in their lives, and whom they would not wish to be made aware of the fact that they had reached out for support.

They want responses that will inform them about what will be happening next. They want to be shown kindness and respect at all times, and to be provided with responses that show the organisation is open-minded and understanding. This includes an acknowledgment that the issue they have raised is important to them, no matter how minor it might seem to a member of staff, and even when this may be different to the importance the organisation places on the same issue.

Children and young people also said that where possible they want to be part of the solution, and to have input into the proposed steps that will be taken to resolve the issue. They also want these proposed steps to be carefully and clearly explained so there is no confusion or ambiguity and so that they can agree or disagree to any or all of them.

“ ‘They should discuss options and their opinion on what happened. They should ask the kid how they [could] help solve this issue. They should discuss some techniques.’

“ ‘Actively engage with me in the process and where appropriate engage me in the process. Also having the option of external individuals being there for support and secondary information on the organisations feedback.’

Some organisations provide children and young people with annual surveys to encourage and enable them to participate in decision making processes. However, some of the children and young people surveyed were concerned that this approach meant the timeframe was too long, particularly if you had a problem eleven months or so ago. They said this approach only allows organisations to look at the ‘most important’ issues, while other feedback or complaints never appear to get resolved.

They felt organisations would be better off providing an ‘enquiries, feedback and complaints’ report to children and young people each year. They recommended this report cover the accuracy, timeliness, reliability, and consistency of the organisation’s response, believing this would not only provide insight into what children and young people think of the services they’ve received, but would also help to build community trust in the organisation in the wider community.

‘Feedback should be fast, accessible and available on a range of platforms. People should also be aware of how long feedback takes for different businesses/organisations but organisations should also be asking customers how long they’d like their feedback back’

What Needs to Change

Establishing child friendly and child safe environments requires organisations and service providers to address inequities, and meet their obligation to show all children and young people respect and protection, fulfilling their rights under the UNCRC.

Values of confidentiality, transparency, open-mindedness, trust, integrity and respect are at the core of what it means to be child friendly and child safe. Children and young people have said these are the values that underpin how they view their community, how they judge leaders, which 'causes' they choose to support, who influences them; and how they want to be in the world.

Trust has become an increasingly important and crucial value for children and young people, particularly when raising or reporting issues and concerns, or when making complaints or providing feedback about services they have used.

Studies from around the world indicate that young people are often unwilling or unable to obtain services they need, due to barriers relating to availability, accessibility, acceptability and equity.

Children and young people sometimes lack information and knowledge about what child friendly and child safe services are, and

where these can be accessed. Even when these services are available and accessible, they are not always appropriate for children and young people in the same way they might be considered appropriate for adults.

As well as easy access to relevant information, children and young people want genuine opportunities to participate in improving processes that affect their lives.

To ensure the conditions for creating child friendly and child safe environments are being met, children and young people need to be involved in the design and delivery of services that are aimed directly at them. This can be achieved through integration of feedback mechanisms that promote continuous improvement, as well as by consultation mechanisms that invite children and young people to have input into new services being as these are being designed.

Children and young people need organisations to consult with them as well as inform them. They need them to commit to building trust and to being transparent. Having a reputation for transparency with children and young people will help an organisation build their reputation for being child friendly and child safe.

For this to occur the barriers between organisations and children and young people need to be identified and removed. If organisations are to foster and support positive outcomes for children and young people, they need to introduce policy and procedures that support the design and delivery of child friendly and child safe environments with conviction and commitment.

Children and young people want leaders who are listening to them. They want decision makers who are taking their needs seriously, and they want service providers who are communicating with them effectively in ways they can easily understand and access. They want their opinions to be taken into account, and for organisations to admit when they or a member of staff has done something that has impacted negatively on them, particularly when they sought support from the organisation to begin with.

When an organisation does not offer a particular service or have information that the child or young person seeks, they want to be confident they will be met with kindness and respect and be offered options for seeking alternative support, including a referral to another organisation or another person within the same organisation who may be able to assist.

They want to understand what an organisation values through the sharing of anonymous examples of personal stories and experiences that have successfully connected children and young people to the services their organisation provides. They also want the option of choosing to have regular interaction with the service or organisation, and to feel that the organisation cares about them and has their best interests front and centre at all times.

Providing child friendly and child safe environments involves creating a set of policies and procedures that reflect current legislation and international standards.

Offering multiple points of contact and ways for children and young people to access and provide feedback on services delivered will enable an organisation to evaluate whether their services and staff performance meet the standards required to be child friendly and child safe.

In order to build and maintain trust – to have a 'social licence' to operate – an organisation needs to build a positive reputation amongst children and young people themselves. This involves ensuring that confidentiality, transparency, open-mindedness, trust and integrity are embedded in all transactions with children and young people, wholly supported by those in leadership. When these values are embedded in an organisation's operations, the foundations for being a child friendly and child safe organisation will be in place with positive outcomes for children and young people likely to be exponentially improved as a result.

Appendix 1:

The South Australian Context

Under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* (OAB Act), each State authority ‘must, in carrying out its functions or exercising its powers, protect, respect and seek to give effect to the rights set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child’.²

Under the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017* (Safety Act) and the *Child safety (Prohibited Persons) Act 2016*, statutory bodies and any other organisations that provide services to children must provide safe environments for children.³

In fact, the objects and principles of South Australia’s Child safety Act give effect to Article 3 of the UNCRC, stating that the ‘paramount consideration’ throughout the administration, operation and enforcement of the Act must always be in the ‘best interests of children, having regard to their safety and protection’.

Chapter 8 of the Safety Act requires all statutory and non-statutory organisations that work with children or provide services to children must develop child safe policies and procedures that must be submitted, these to the Child safe Environments unit of the Department of Human Services (DHS).⁴

To support organisations in the creation of child friendly and child safe environments, South Australia established a Child safe

Environments, Principles of Good Practice Guide (CSE Guide). This guide has been in place since 2012.⁵ It contains seven overarching principles that organisations are required to follow to ensure they create a safe environment for children and young people.

The seven principles include:

- 1 Identifying and analysing risk of harm
- 2 Developing a clear and accessible child safe policy
- 3 Developing codes of conduct for adults and children
- 4 Choosing suitable employees and volunteers
- 5 Supporting, training, supervising and enhancing performance
- 6 Empowering and promoting the participation of children and young people in decision making and service development; and
- 7 Reporting and responding appropriately to suspicions that a child or young person is at risk.⁶

These principles are supplemented by a set of ten National Principles for Child safe Organisations, devised in response to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (RCIRCSA) and effectively build on the seven principles set out in the CSE Guide. The South Australian Government has now committed to rolling out these National Principles replacing the seven principles previously put in place.

The ten National Principles are more holistic and include the following:

- 1 Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.
- 2 Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
- 3 Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.
- 4 Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.
- 5 People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.
- 6 Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.
- 7 Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.
- 8 Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.
- 9 Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.
- 10 Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

The ten National Principles are underpinned by a child-rights approach (see Table 1).

Although the National Principles are not currently mandatory, they are the 'gold class' standard that all organisations working with children and young people should ascribe and aspire to implement and against which they should measure their performance.

Those organisations that do so will not only demonstrate their leadership and commitment to child safety and wellbeing, they will also become 'organisations of choice'. Children and young people, as well as their families and broader community, will feel confident they will receive the services to which they are entitled within a friendly and safe environment.⁷

Table 1: The National Principles for Child safe Organisations and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Ten National Principles for Child safe Organisations	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
1 Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.	<p>Article 3(1) – In all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.</p> <p>Article 3(3) – State parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities.</p>
2 Children and young people are informed about their rights and invited to participate in decisions that affect them with their contributions taken seriously.	<p>Article 42 – State Parties undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike.</p> <p>Article 12 – States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.</p>
3 Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.	<p>Article 5 – State Parties shall respect the responsibilities, right and duties of parents or, where applicable, the members of the extended family or community as provided by local custom. To provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction or guidance.</p>
4 Equity is upheld and diverse needs are respected in policy and practice.	<p>Article 2(2) – State parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians or family members.</p>
5 People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.	<p>Article 3(3) – State parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as by competent supervision.</p>

Ten National Principles for Child safe Organisations	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
<p>6 Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focussed.</p>	<p>Article 12(2) – A child shall ... be provided the opportunity to be heard in any ... administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.</p> <p>Article 12(1) – State parties shall afford to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child; the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.</p>
<p>7 Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.</p>	<p>Article 3(3) – State parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children, shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as by competent supervision.</p>
<p>8 Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.</p>	<p>Article 3(3) – State parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities... in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as by competent supervision</p>
<p>9 Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved upon.</p>	<p>Article 44(1) – State Parties undertake to submit to the Committee, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, reports on the measures they have adopted, which give effect to the rights contained in the CRC and any progress made on the enjoyment of those rights.</p>
<p>10 Policies and procedures documenting how the organisation is to be made and maintained as safe for children and young people is shared with staff who are asked to make a commitment to ensuring they are upheld.</p>	<p>Article 4 – State Parties shall undertake all appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures for the implementation of these rights.</p>

Endnotes

- 1 The Guardian, Scott Morrison tells students striking over climate change to be 'less activist', 26 November 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/nov/26/scott-morrison-tells-students-striking-over-climate-change-to-be-less-activist>
- 2 Section 5 of the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016.
- 3 This includes accommodation and residential services, commercial services providing directly to children, including the sale or supply of services where physical contact with children would reasonably be expected to occur, recreational service, entertainment services, photography of children and non-government organisations that provide welfare and cultural services wholly or partly for children. For more information, see <https://www.education.sa.gov.au/child-protection/child-safe-environments/about-child-safe-environments#organisations>.
- 4 For a list see <https://dhs.sa.gov.au/services/community-and-family-services/child-safe-environments/about-child-safe-environments#organisations>
- 5 Department for Human Services, Child safe Environments: Principles of Good Practice, accessed at https://dhs.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/82658/cse-principles-of-good-practice-2019-dhs-update.pdf
- 6 *ibid*
- 7 See Child safe Organisations at <https://childdsafe.humanrights.gov.au/about>

