

Child Safe Action Plan

2022-2026



RESTORE & THRIVE

ARMIDALE
Regional Council

Background

In December 2017 the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted the need for action to make organisations across Australia safe for children. Among the recommendations from the Royal Commission is the development of the standards to ensure a nationally consistent approach to embedding child safe cultures within organisations that engage with children, and act as a vehicle to give effect to all Royal Commission recommendations.

In December 1990 Australia was one of 194 countries that committed to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that organisations and people working with children in N.S.W share responsibility for keeping children safe. Ten standards were developed (see below) and are in the process of being legislated (2021) to ensure that organisations are child safe and underline the premise that child safety is everyone's responsibility.



Definition of a Child-Safe Organisation

The Office of the Children's Guardian was appointed to provide oversight of the provision of safety, welfare and wellbeing of children through the Children's Guardian Act, in 2019.

The Office of the Children's Guardian defines a child-safe organisation as follows:

Child-safe organisations create cultures, adopt strategies and act to prevent harm to children, including sexual abuse. The Australian and New Zealand Children's Commissioners and Guardians define a child-safe organisation as one that systematically:

Child Protection Statement

Armidale Regional Council is committed to fulfilling its duty of care to ensure that children and young people who access our services are safeguarded from harm, recognising that feeling safe can be as important to children and young people as being safe.

Child protection is everyone's responsibility, including Council officers and families and carers of children and young people.

Council is a registered agency under the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act and is committed to fulfilling its legislative and regulatory obligations regarding child protection.

Creates conditions to reduce the likelihood of children being harmed

Creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying and reporting harm

Responds appropriately to disclosures allegations and suspicions of harm

Child Safe Standards and Principles

The Child-Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission provide a framework for ensuring organisations are safe for children. Based on extensive research and consultation, the Standards guide organisations to create cultures, adopt strategies and act to put the interests of children first, to keep them safe from harm and are specifically related to child sexual abuse.

The National Office for Child Safety developed National Principles for Child Safe Organisations which are derived from the Child Safe Standards, and addresses other forms of abuse (psychological, emotional and physical) and neglect.

Both the N.S.W Child Safe Standards and the National Principles provide guidance for child-safe practices. The Office of the Children's Guardian considers organisations in N.S.W that are implementing the National Principles will be simultaneously implementing the Child Safe Standards. Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

1. **Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.**
2. **Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.**
3. **Families and communities are informed and involved.**
4. **Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account.**
5. **People working with children are suitable and supported.**
6. **Processes to respond to complaints of child abuse (or other concerns) are child focused.**
7. **Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe, through ongoing education and training.**
8. **Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse or other kinds of harm to occur.**
9. **Implementation of the child-safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved.**
10. **Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe.**

STANDARD 1

Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders and staff champion a set of core values that inform the organisations approach to child safety

Leaders demonstrate attitudes and behaviours that priorities the safety of children through the behaviours and practices they reward and challenge

Leaders incorporate risk management of child abuse into decision making and actively monitor risks to child safety

Leaders encourage day-to-day practices that priorities child safety

Leaders set clear expectations around child safety and ensure they are followed by staff

Leaders promote a culture of reporting

ACTIONS

Provide professional development for Councilors

Identify people across the organisation who can champion Child Safety and assist staff and volunteers when further information is required

Build awareness of child protection statement through internal and external communications channels

Posters around staff-facing areas of the workplace

Staff working directly with children carry out online child protection course

Review contracts to include clauses around Child Safety and distance ourselves from organisations who have not put measures in place to work towards being Child Safe

The Child Protection Statement sent out to all staff to read via e-learning and available on Internet

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Child safety is embedded in day-to-day practices

Staff follow the Code of Conduct and child-safe procedures

Decision-making priorities children

Organisational culture creates an environment where it is difficult for abuse to occur

Staff appropriately respond to and report child abuse



Adults in this organisation ask my opinion and listen to what I say

I feel respected and trust the adults looking after me

STANDARD 2

Children Participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

APPLY THE STANDARD

Children's participation is embedded in organisational practice through feedback mechanisms

Opportunities are created for children to be included in organisational decision-making

Children are given information on internal and external support services

Staff are provided with knowledge and skills to support children's participation

Staff encourage peer support for children

Adults understand what safety means to children

Age-appropriate information that describes how adults should behave is provided to children and consistently reinforced

ACTIONS

Consult with children when Council is developing plans, strategies and events

Develop child-friendly posters for display in key Council sites where children visit, eg libraries, so that children know who to talk to if they feel uncomfortable

Partner with child and family service providers to improve engagement with young people

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Children know how adults should behave

Children understand that they are listened to and respected

Children speak up about their safety and the safety of their friends

Children are aware they can access support services when needed

Children feel safer knowing they have input into the organisation

Adults in this organisation listen to me and ask my opinion about things that affect me

I can talk to adults if I feel unsafe, even if it is a difficult conversation

I know that staff sometimes need to tell someone else if I need extra support



STANDARD 3

Families and communities are informed and involved

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders and staff encourage families to take an active role in keeping children safe

Policies and procedures (including Codes of Conduct) are clearly communicated to parents and carers

Families and community members are encouraged to provide feedback on how the organisation keeps children safe, and this information is acted upon where necessary

ACTIONS

Arrange information sessions for staff, families (parents of children) and children on child protection

Host information sessions for community groups to support them to become child-safe organisations

Place child-friendly information signage at children's height at key sites in the Armidale region

Work with Engagement, Communication & Education Team to distribute child safety information through relevant communication channels

Develop Child Protection Information Packs for community groups, local businesses and street safety, including checklists to enable them to facilitate child-safe events, sessions, workshops, programs, meetings, games, etc

Partner with child and family service providers who are expert in and/or funded to deliver training to improve engagement

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Families feel welcome

Families and the community support the organisation to be safer for children

Families and the community are comfortable asking questions on how the organisation prioritises child safety

Community groups and organisations across the Armidale Region demonstrate an understanding of Child Safe Standards and principles and are confident in applying them



My Family is welcome here

The special days of my community are celebrated

The people here talk to my family about me

STANDARD 4

Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders and staff understand the barriers that prevent children from disclosing abuse or adults from recognising children's disclosure

Leaders and staff identify and respect the diverse needs, abilities and backgrounds of children, and understand the value of treating them fairly

All staff are given information about the factors that increase a child's vulnerability to harm

Leaders ensure that the workforce reflects the diversity of the children it provides services to, where possible

Leaders and staff adapt activities and services to ensure all children feel included

ACTIONS

Review current Disability Inclusion Action Plan and ensure children are included. If not, make recommendations for next Disability Inclusion Action Plan

All sections of Council to actively engage with Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse groups for input when planning projects to ensure inclusion

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Children with diverse needs speak up about concerns around their safety and the safety of their friends, and adults take them seriously

Children are not disadvantaged by programs and activities.

Organisational culture allows children with diverse needs to feel valued

Adults recognise the value of diversity and inclusivity

Staff feel confident in working with diverse groups

Increased participation of children with disabilities in the mainstream community

I feel safe to talk about my differences

I'm treated fairly

I feel included

I feel proud of my background



STANDARD 5

People working with children are suitable and Supported

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders and staff champion
Leaders expect that recruitment does not rely only on the Working With Children Check, and support ongoing training opportunities for all staff

Hiring managers are trained in child-safe recruitment practices

Staff recruitment includes job ads that identify your organisation as valuing child safety

Recruitment processes involve a range of interview questions to establish staff suitability

Background and reference checks are carried out and recorded

Supervision includes regular reviews to check whether staff are following codes of Conduct and other child safe policies

Staff, families and the community are aware of recruitment and other child safe human resource practices

ACTIONS

Child Safety Statement included in all job advertisements for Council

Include Child Safety Statement in all child-related Position Descriptions

Adding Child Safety into the recruitment process, especially for identified child-related roles

Consult with young people on job design, outcomes and potential interview questions

E-learning and scenario-based videos included in on-boarding component for new starters and Child Safety component included in Induction Day

Ensure all staff in child related work have annual refresher training for Child Protection

Staff survey before and after training to ascertain level of awareness within the organisation

Survey community groups to ascertain level of awareness within the Armidale region

Work with local businesses and community groups to enhance their child safety measures

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Staff recruitment and supervision practices priorities child safety

Children are safe around staff

Staff have, or are working towards having, suitable skills and experience to work with children

Staff attitudes and behaviours create and maintain a child safe culture

Staff values align with the organisations commitment to child safety



I trust adults here and can talk to them about things that upset me

I feel safe with the adults here

I'm asked about what kind of staff the organisation should have in it

STANDARD 6

Process to respond to complaints of child abuse are child focused

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders create a culture where complaints are taken seriously and all adults take responsibility for the safety of children

Leaders clearly explain that breaches of Codes of Conduct will result in disciplinary action

Staff are given support and information on what and how to report, including to external bodies

Accessible processes are provided to enable children, staff and others to make complaints

Procedures describe likely timeframes, review processes and potential outcomes of complaints

Complaints are handled confidentially

Processes are reviewed at regular intervals and after complaints are made

Complaint handling procedures are publicly available

Staff are offered a variety of learning strategies

Documents are confidential where required

ACTIONS

Review procedures relating to child safety to ensure the processes are child-centred

Review Complaint Handling Policy to ensure child-centred (clearly outline roles and responsibilities, approaches to dealing with child-related complaints)

Ensure there is a child-champion at events where children will be present, who is identified as part of 'housekeeping' process, so that children know who they can talk to

Staff are trained in Council's child-safe Policy and Procedures, and know how to report if necessary

Develop scenario-based Q&A for all business units

Review current access to record management and security

Review publicity permission processes

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Organisational culture where complaints are taken seriously and acted on

Staff feel supported to raise concerns about child safety

Children feel safe to raise concerns about themselves or their friends

I will be believed if I speak up about something that is concerning me, and action will be taken because of it

I know who to talk to if I feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unhappy

I will not get into trouble if I speak up



STANDARD 7

Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders provide ongoing education and training opportunities for all staff

Training provides staff with the knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent and identify abuse, and to respond to complaints

Staff who are involved in roles and situations with higher risk are provided more advanced training opportunities

Where possible, the organisation employs a child safety officer responsible for training

Specialised training is provided to staff working in high-risk situations or with vulnerable children

Training is regularly reviewed in response to emerging best practices

Attendance at conferences and other forums to learn about improvements in child safe practices

ACTIONS

Ensure that staff are aware and appropriately trained in reportable conduct. Including how to manage a complaint either made by a child or about a child protection incident

Design flow charts of the process to follow and provide to all staff

Implement e-learning modules for all staff

Develop a page on the Intranet with information about what to report and avenues on how and who to report to

Source scenarios for Child Protection agenda items at staff meetings and include as examples on the Intranet for Coordinators and Line Managers to use

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Staff feel confident to identify, respond to and report child abuse

The organisation has a culture of continual learning

The organisation can demonstrate it stays up to date with emerging best practices



I understand that adults are taught how to behave around me

Sometimes the staff here tell me about what they've been learning and how that keeps me safe

Adults understand how to keep me safe; they notice when I feel sad

STANDARD 8

Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders set expectations about behavioural standards for staff interacting with children in physical and online environments

Risk assessments identify areas where adults have opportunities to interact with children unsupervised, including for one-off events and overnight camps

Physical environments are altered to increase natural lines of sight while respecting a child's right to privacy

Higher-risk areas such as change rooms, cars, boarding facilities and offsite locations are managed using specific safety measures, such as spot checks and log books

Children are provided information about online safety and regularly encouraged to tell staff about negative experiences

Staff and parents are provided information about risks in the online environment, such as online grooming, cyber bullying and sexting

ACTIONS

Develop collateral for Council buildings to raise awareness that Armidale Regional Council is a Child Safe organisation

Add Child Protection to Business Units' Risk Register

Review security settings on all public access computers

Include signage on all Council digital screens

Incorporate Child Safe design into public spaces, including Crime Prevention through Environment Design principles and advice from the Office of the Children's Guardian

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Opportunities to harm children are reduced or removed

Children engage in creative and safe activities

Children speak up about risks in the online environment

Children's privacy is balanced with the need to keep them safe

I know there are some spaces in organisation I'm not allowed into

I can talk to someone I trust about anything I have seen or done online

I know what to do if I feel unsafe online



STANDARD 9

Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

APPLY THE STANDARD

Leaders and staff champion
Leaders maintain a culture of continuous improvement to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented and routinely reviewed even though staffing may change

Leaders know the value of continuous monitoring, open conversations and exploring new ways to keep children safe

Child safe policies and practices are regularly reviewed

Staff refer to the Standards when creating, reviewing or evaluating child safe policies and procedures

Leaders and staff review critical incidents to identify the root cause of the problem, identify risks to the safety of children and make improvements

Children are supported to provide feedback and this information is acted on

ACTIONS

Conduct an audit of the organisation to:

confirm child-related role identification

identify how each section can comply with the Standards

assess levels of professional development required

Review agreements and inclusion of Armidale Regional Council Child Safety approach for events and within our facilities / venue hire

Child Protection Officer is involved in the development of Policies to help identify how they promote child safety as appropriate

Child protection added to internal audit

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Leaders and staff are open to change

Leaders and staff reflect on critical incidents

The organisational culture creates an environment of ongoing learning and improvement



Staff ask my opinion if something unusual happens

Activities keep getting better

Staff regularly ask my opinion

STANDARD 10

Policies and procedures document how the organisation is Child Safe

APPLY THE STANDARD

Child safe policies are specific to the organisation and its environment, and they address local risks to the safety of children

Child safe policies, Codes of Conduct and complaint handling procedures are publicly accessible

Policies and procedures are available in child friendly and accessible formats that pay attention to children's diverse characteristics, cultural background and abilities

Staff follow child safe policies and procedures

Documents are saved in accordance to N.S.W record keeping requirements

ACTIONS

Review procedures, agreements and internal policies and requirements related to working with children, e.g. Youth Taskforce, Libraries, Customer Service

Provide information on the Website

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Staff and the community understand the organisations approach to child safety

Staff and the community know that the organisation takes child safety seriously

Staff, parents and carers know where to find the organisations child safe policies and procedures

Staff, parents, carers and the community can use policies and procedures to hold the organisation to account

My parents and I know where to find the rules that keep me safe

Adults have rules to keep me safe

I can understand what the rules mean



Definitions

Children:

All children and young people under the age of 18.

Complaint:

Any suggestion of abuse or harm that is disclosed, witnessed or demonstrated by a child. Typically, three categories of behaviour are the subject of a complaint: (a) Concerning conduct - behaviours or patterns of behaviour that are a risk to the safety of children. This also refers to ambiguous behaviours that are potentially inappropriate for children to be exposed to but may not necessarily be indicators of abuse occurring. The sharing of inappropriate jokes may be an example of this. (b) Misconduct - behaviours that constitute a breach of the institution's Code of Conduct. (c) Criminal conduct - conduct that, if proven, would constitute a criminal offence.

'Equity' and 'equality':

Equity encourages people to live to their full potential. Equality is treating everyone the same. If someone is disadvantaged they may not achieve the same outcome as a non-disadvantaged person if they are treated 'equally' because they may need more support.

Grooming:

Occurs when an adult person engages in conduct that exposes a child to indecent material or provides a child with an intoxicating substance or with any financial or other material benefit with the intention of making it easier to procure the child for unlawful sexual activity. It means gaining or increasing access to a child, parents or co-workers in order to facilitate abuse. The process involves building trust, obtaining compliance and maintaining secrecy to protect the abuser from being caught. Grooming is commonly an incremental process and can involve stages of increasing intensity. It may consist of many separate actions that, in isolation, are not necessarily criminal or abusive. Grooming behaviour may not be obvious to the victim or to a bystander and can co-exist with behaviour that occurs in normal relationships between adults and children. Children do not need to be alone to be groomed. They are usually sexually abused by someone they know. Online communication and pornography can be used as tools for grooming.





Leader:

Anyone in a position of authority in a child-related organisation, including board members, managers and supervisors. One of the findings of the Royal Commission, however, was that all adults have a responsibility for child safety, so leadership is a shared responsibility in this context.

Organisational culture:

The organisations values as demonstrated on a day-to-day basis by its leaders and staff, and as experienced by the children they care for. It is founded on the organisations values and supported by leadership and governance.

Staff:

All employees, volunteers and contractors.



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