

Parent and carer guide



Australia's Biggest Child Safety Lesson 2021

Australia's Biggest Child Safety Lesson has been developed for children between the ages of 4 to 12 years. It will teach key personal safety concepts in a fun and interactive way. It can be viewed in large or small groups at school, or you can also watch it at home together.

The content of the lesson is evidence-based and developmentally appropriate for early years to primary school children.

Key learning objectives

To **RECOGNISE** safe and unsafe situations and body clues.

To **REACT** to keep ourselves safe.

To **REPORT** unsafe situations.

To understand **HELP SEEKING**.

To know that it is adults' responsibility to keep kids **SAFE**.

Keeping kids safe is the responsibility of adults, however, research shows that teaching children personal safety skills can play an important role in the prevention of harm.

What can you do at home?

Talk about the lesson with your child and encourage them to share what they have learnt. If they bring home activity sheets, look at these together and put them up on the fridge or a wall in the house.

You can also find activity sheets on our website which you could do together at home available from <https://www.DanielMorcombe.com.au>.

Having conversations about personal safety should not be scary for children. Being open and approachable is the most important thing. Regularly encourage your child to talk to you and show them that you are interested in their life by asking questions about their friends and opinions. Listening to children shows them that you care and support them and can open the channels for respectful communication around sensitive topics.

- Discuss who they could talk to if they felt unsafe and what they could do.
- Practice using stories and scenarios to problem solve. Do not always make these about strangers. Try the Daniel Morcombe Foundation's Conversation Cards.
- Reinforce basic safety messages and ensure children know the phone numbers of people they can call on for help or to talk to.
- Explain that it is ok to say 'No' to an adult or child if they are doing something that is not ok or makes the child feel unsafe. Let the child know they will not get into trouble if they tell you about an unsafe secret someone has asked them to keep.
- Remind your child that it is always ok to talk to you, no matter what the issue, you care about them and want to help them to stay safe.



Information about abuse: What to do if you are concerned about a child

If you have concerns about a child's safety, it can be difficult to know what to do. Most children and young people live in safe and supportive environments, however, some will sadly experience child abuse. This may be physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect or exposure to family violence.

If a child seems sad, stressed or worried, but won't say why, it is important to make sure they are safe. Children can be worried that they may be blamed or not know how to talk about what is upsetting them. Spending time doing something else, like a puzzle, can allow a more relaxed conversation to start. Use gentle prompting to encourage the child to open up to you and ensure you don't interrupt them.

Most of the time the thing that is making the child seem sad, stressed or worried will be something minor that you will be able to solve by having an honest conversation and coming up with a plan for managing the issue. However, if the child does reveal something more concerning, it is important to remain calm as strong reactions in an adult can scare children and prevent further disclosures.

The following advice is a guide to assist parents and carers to understand what child abuse is.

Emotional abuse is not a one-off incident but rather a pattern of behaviour over a period of time. It impacts on a child's emotional, social, cognitive and intellectual development. It can include persistent behaviour by adults such as rejection, isolation, ignoring, hostility, yelling, criticism or exposure to family violence. It is the most common type of abuse experienced by children and is likely to be present alongside physical and sexual abuse.

Exposure to family violence is when a child hears or sees a parent, sibling or other family member experience, physical, sexual or emotional abuse. It could also be when a child sees the outcomes from the violence, such as physical injuries to a person or damage to property.

Neglect is the failure to provide the basic necessities for emotional and physical development and wellbeing of a child. This includes food, safe and hygienic housing, appropriate clothing, access to medical treatment, personal hygiene and adequate supervision.

Physical abuse is when a child experiences deliberate physical injury or trauma. Most commonly it includes hitting but can also be biting, shaking, burning or poisoning.

Sexual abuse is when an adult, child or adolescent uses their power and authority to involve a child in sexual activity. Sexual activity includes sexual intercourse and also a range of sexual behaviours that can be physical, verbal or emotional.

What should I do?

- If a child is in immediate danger or if there is an emergency, call the Police or triple zero (000).
- Write down your concerns or observations, making note of times and incidents.
- Speak with the child gently, letting them know they can talk to you if they ever need to.
- Don't force or pressure the child to tell you what is happening, instead ask them how they are or let them know that you have noticed they are looking or behaving differently. This may provide an opportunity for the child to share what they may be experiencing.
- Be conscious of the child's safety and your own. If you think your direct intervention will affect yours or the child's safety, leave it to the people who are trained in this area to respond. You may be able to provide support later down the track.
- Report your concerns to child protection services in your state or territory. There are slightly different processes depending on where in Australia you live. Usually, it involves making a phone call and speaking with a professional in a statutory child safety agency. In some locations there is online or eReporting for child safety reports. The Australian Institute of Family Studies provides an up to date list of contact details for making a report in each state and territory in Australia <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect>.

Do I have to REPORT?

Some people who work with children and families are mandatory reporters. This means if they have reasonable grounds to suspect or believe a child has been harmed or is at risk of harm, they must report it to the relevant child protection agency in their state or territory. Some examples of professionals that are often mandatory reporters include: teachers, doctors, nurses and police.

In some states and territories, **all adults** are legally required to report any reasonable belief that a child is being, or has been, the victim of a child sexual offence. More information about the laws specific to your state and territory can be found at <https://www.aifs.gov.au>.

Regardless of whether you are a mandatory reporter or not, we all have a responsibility to ensure that children are safe within our community. If you have concerns about a child, you should contact the relevant state or territory child protection agency.

Common worries about reporting child abuse

One of the reasons adults do not act when they suspect abuse is because they are worried about the consequences for them, the child or the family.

If I tell, the family will know it was me: Each state and territory department that responds to child safety reports ensures that your identity remains confidential. You can even make an anonymous report. It is helpful to provide your contact details as you may need to be contacted for further information or so the department can provide you with an update. In extremely rare circumstances, a court may order that the reporter is identified.

I don't want to break up the family: Reporting child abuse does not automatically mean that a child will be removed from their home. Wherever possible the goal of child protection professionals is to ensure that children are able to remain with their parents if it is safe to do so. Your report might mean the family receives additional support and resources.

Maybe it's not as bad as I think: Trust your instincts if you feel that something isn't right. By making a report you can talk to child safety professionals who are trained to identify and assess risk. It is better to make a report and let the professionals decide the seriousness of it.

It's not going to change anything: It could be that the piece of information you provide makes all the difference. Your report could contribute to other reports that may have been received about a child. It may demonstrate a pattern of behaviour or confirm that child abuse has occurred.

It's none of my business what goes on behind closed doors: Child protection is everyone's business. It is not a child's responsibility to keep themselves safe, this is the job of adults. As individuals and a community, we need to ensure that all children are safe and that we know who to contact when we see or hear that a child has experienced or is at risk of harm.

Maybe it's a cultural difference, I shouldn't impose my standards: Diverse communities contribute to the richness and vibrancy of our country and there are a variety of approaches around the world to raising children. However, Australia has a legal, ethical and political framework that places the rights of the child as paramount. As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children in Australia have the right to be safe and live lives free of violence.

What to expect when making a report

Making a report about a child you have concerns for can feel like an overwhelming task. It helps to know a little about the process prior to making the call.

You will most likely be asked a combination of the following:

- The child's name, age, address and school.
- The parent/carers name, address and contact number.
- To be specific about what your concerns are and why you believe harm has occurred or is likely to.
- How safe is the child right now? Are they in a safe location or do you know where they are?
- The name, contact details and the whereabouts of alleged abuser/s and their relationship to the child.

- Whether there are other support services involved, if so which ones?
- What is the living situation for the child and information about the child's family, such as who lives at home.
- Other considerations such as culture, disability, mental health or drug and alcohol use.
- Any other relevant information.
- Provide your name, contact details and relationship to the child or family (remember, this information is kept confidential).

If you don't know all these details, don't worry, just share what you know, it is important that you still make a report.

What happens now?

The following are potential outcomes from your report:

- After an assessment of risk, no further action is required but the family may be provided with counselling or support referral options.
- An investigation takes place and the child remains in the family home with direct support to ensure that the child remains safe in that environment.
- For the child's safety they may be removed from the family home for a short time so safety measures can be implemented or for a longer time if it is unsafe. Depending on the circumstances the child may be placed with other family members or friends, in foster care or a group home with other children, with support workers onsite.

In 2015-16, 46% of reports made to statutory child safety agencies were serious enough to be investigated. Of these investigations, 37% resulted in a substantiation of abuse (Gray & Daraganova, 2017).

Will I find out what has happened from my report?

You can request to be informed of what happens as a result of your report. The information you may be provided will depend on what happens after your report and will always take into consideration the need for maintaining confidentiality for the child. Some mandatory reporters may be provided with information that can help them to continue to support a child or family if that is part of their role.

Where to get help

- In an emergency, call the Police or triple zero (000)
- If you suspect that a child has experienced abuse or is at risk of harm you should contact the relevant state or territory child protection agency. The Australian Institute of Family Studies has an up-to-date contact list <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect>
- If you make a report and you still believe that a child is not safe or receiving the support they need you can contact the children's commissioner or guardian in your state or territory. They are independent of government and their role is to advocate for the rights of children <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/mandatory-reporting-child-abuse-and-neglect>
- Parentline - 1800 30 1300 provide free counselling and advice to parents and carers. Resources are available at <https://www.parentline.com.au/> to support parents and carers to understand a wide range of issues related to raising children and young people
- Find the right service for you <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/helplines-and-telephone-counselling-services-children-young-people> the Australian Institute of Family Studies, helplines and telephone counselling services for children, young people, parents and carers

Useful resources

- Keeping Kids Safe Resources – The Daniel Morcombe Foundation provides free downloadable activities to engage children and young people in learning about personal safety at <https://danielmorcombe.com.au/keeping-kids-safe-resources>

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