

Fact Sheet

HOW TO BE A Safety Helper



Congratulations!

You have been selected as one of _____'s Safety Helpers.

A safety helper is an adult who forms part of a child or young person's safety network. Safety helpers are responsible for making sure children feel safe and heard.

Keeping kids safe is the responsibility of all adults in our community.

Your Responsibility as a Safety Helper

Being selected as a Safety Helper is an important role. Children are taught to talk to their Safety Helpers if they ever feel unsafe. Make sure that they know how to contact you if they need to. You might want to talk to their parent/ carer to decide how the child can reach out if they need help.

Learn about the signs of child sexual abuse and stay alert to any changes in the child's behaviour and wellbeing.

Here's what children will need from you:

- **Listen:** Make time to hear what is happening for the child. Children don't always have the words to describe how they are feeling, or what is going on. Give them time to gather their thoughts and let them speak in their own words.
- **Believe:** Reassure the child that you have heard them and that you believe them.
- **Support them to be safe:** Do what you can to ensure that the child is safe:



If you believe that the child is in immediate danger, call 000.

If the child tells you something that you believe indicates abuse:

- Listen carefully to them and tell them how pleased you are that they feel able to talk to you about tricky stuff.
- Tell them it isn't their fault, that you believe them and that you want to help.
- Monitor your own reactions, body language and tone of voice to ensure that the child does not feel guilty or to blame.
- Help Seekers are not likely to come out and directly tell you what is going on. They may hint that something is going on, they may ask you a hypothetical "what if someone..." question, or they may ask if you will keep what they tell you secret.
- In these situations, it can be helpful to use the Kids Helpline website with your Help Seeker and read the articles about different situations together. If it is a situation you don't know how to handle, you can encourage the Help Seeker to call Kids Helpline to speak to someone.
- 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.
- Do not confront the perpetrator. This can put the child at risk of further harm.



Do I need to make a report?

In some states and territories of Australia, all adults are mandatory reporters if they have a reasonable suspicion that a child is being sexually abused.

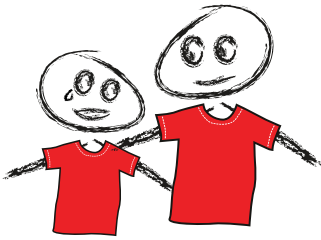
In all states and territories, any person is entitled to report any concerns they have about a child's welfare, even if they are not legally required to do so.

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.

Making a report

If a child is in immediate danger or if there is an emergency, **contact 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.

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. 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 www.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/reporting-abuse-and-neglect.

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 abuse 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.

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 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>.