



INFORMATION FOR PARENTS:

**WHAT TO LOOK FOR WHEN
CHOOSING A CHILD SAFE
ORGANISATION**

DOCUMENT NO.

1.0

DATE

OCT. 2015

A WORD FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Tasmanian children and young people regularly spend time away from their families in a range of activities. For example they go to school and childcare, they attend activities such as sport, music or dance classes, scouts, guides, religious services and a wide range of youth groups. These activities and services may be run by government agencies or non-government agencies. Some of these rely heavily on volunteers in addition to paid employees. Many of these organisations are unregulated.

Most children's experiences in organisational settings are positive and the majority of people working in these environments have children's best interests at heart. However, it is important to be aware of what to look out for in organisations to help keep children safe from physical, sexual or emotional abuse. The Working with Children registration has been a great start in ensuring the safety of children in Tasmania, although the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has shown us that the culture of an organisation is also very important. As a parent sometimes it is hard to know the right questions to ask when choosing an organisation that is safe for your children. This booklet has been created as a guide to assist you in selecting a child safe organisation.

As a parent there are a number of issues you should consider to ensure that your child is welcome and safe in these environments. This booklet identifies some of the key child safe issues you may need to consider when making the important decision of which organisation to choose.

Our thanks to the Victorian Child Safe Commissioner, the Western Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People and the New South Wales Office of the Children's Guardian for allowing us to utilise some of their material for this booklet.



MARK MORRISSEY
COMMISSIONER
FOR CHILDREN



WHAT IS A CHILD SAFE ORGANISATION?

All children have the right to feel safe in any environment. A child safe organisation is welcoming of your whole family and takes steps to ensure the safety of your child. This includes the requirement for those employees and volunteers who engage in child related work to obtain a working with children registration.

For a list of organisations and activities that require this registration please visit the Department of Justice website on http://www.justice.tas.gov.au/working_with_children

There are also strategies that an organisation can follow to ensure their culture is one that creates and maintains a child safe approach. The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians have developed key principles that you can look out for in organisations that work directly with children.

According to the Australian Children's Commissioner's and Guardians, a child safe organisation:

- Understands the importance of child safety
- Has clear procedures to help prevent the possibility of harm
- Is able to provide families and carers with a written copy of their procedures
- Encourages children to engage in decisions that affect them
- Recognises and respects distinct needs of children from diverse cultures and backgrounds
- Takes all reports of suspected harm seriously by reporting it immediately to the appropriate authorities
- Welcomes and values open communication with families and carers
- Ensures that children know who they can talk to if they are feeling unsafe
- Promotes a safe and open environment which supports the disclosure of suspected harm

A child safe organisation has your child's safety as its number one priority.

WHAT DO THESE PRINCIPLES MEAN IN PRACTICE?

- Does the organisation have a child safe policy that includes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour by staff and volunteers?
- Are staff and volunteers aware of the child safe policy?
- Have you been provided with a copy of the child safe policy in an easy to read format?
- Is the child safe policy easily accessible in the reception area or on the organisations website?
- Is your child aware there is a child safe policy and what it includes?
- Do you know who to speak to if you need to make a complaint?
- Does the child safe policy include a thorough complaint handling policy?
- Does your child know who to speak to if they are feeling unsafe?
- Have the staff and volunteers made yourself and your child feel welcome?
- Have you been introduced to all the staff and volunteers who will be engaging with your child?
- Have you been taken on a tour of the organisation?
- Are the rooms open and welcoming?
- Does the organisation maintain appropriate child to staff numbers?
- Are staff and volunteers registered to work with children?
- Are children given the opportunity to take on leadership roles in the organisation where appropriate?
- Does your child feel like their opinions are listened to and valued?

As a parent you are encouraged to ask about and to be shown this information.

Ask the organisations questions about child safety.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU LOOK FOR WHEN CHOOSING A CHILD SAFE AND FRIENDLY ORGANISATION FOR YOUR CHILD?

Ask questions – As a parent you have a right to ask about and to see an organisation's child safe policies. Talk with staff about their recruitment processes, training and how they handle suspected harm against children. Request a copy of their child safe guidelines and inquire whether they welcome family, carer and children's involvement in their procedures and guidelines. Ask other parents what they think about the organisation and its services, including any possible negative impacts on parents and children when issues or complaints arise.

Look around - Ask to have a look around the organisation and observe how staff and volunteers interact with children. Pay attention to the environment; is it safe for children?

Talk with your child – Speak with your child on a regular basis about their experience and how they are feeling. Be open with your child when talking to them about abuse and safety – this will make it more likely that your child will feel comfortable being open with you if they have any worries.

Get involved – Participate in any open days and speak out if something concerns you or doesn't seem right.

Teach your child about personal safety – Tell your child they have the right to say no if they feel that they are being asked to do something that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. Teach your child what kind of behaviours aren't acceptable – even from adults they know and like. Talk to your child about who they can talk to if they have worries and assure them that it's always ok to tell an adult if they feel uncomfortable with the way they are being treated.

Informed children are safer children.

RESOURCES

Understanding abuse, sexuality and personal safety and talking to your child about these things can be difficult but there are resources that can help you.

Everybody's Got a Bottom

A book to help adults talk to young children about sexuality and personal safety. Available from various online sources including Family Planning Queensland at <http://shop.fpq.com.au/>

Is this normal?

A guide to the Traffic Light system for understanding children's sexual behaviours including when behaviours may be warning signs. Available from Family Planning Queensland website at <http://shop.fpq.com.au/>

NAPCAN

The National Association for Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect has various resources and information for parents and organisations. You can find their website at <http://napcan.org.au/>

Strengthening Child Safe Organisations

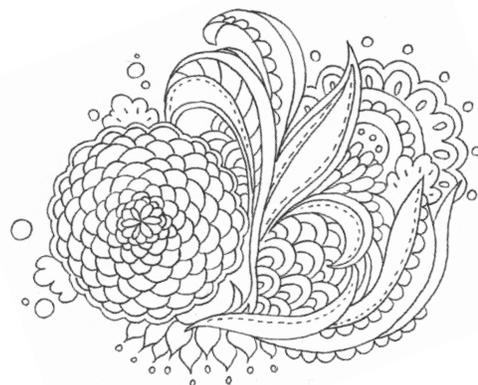
The Commissioner has written a report titled 'Strengthening Child Safe Organisations' which details what is needed to create child safe organisations. The report can be found on our website at <http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/>

Child Wise

A National child sexual abuse prevention organisation that provides tools to empower individuals and communities so they can actively prevent child sexual abuse and exploitation. Resources are available on their website at <https://www.childwise.org.au/>

NSW Office of the Children's Guardian

The New South Wales Guardian for Children's website provides resources that can be helpful for parents and children on child safe organisations. You can find their website at <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/>



Commissioner
for **Children**
tasmania

Level 1, 119 Macquarie St.
Hobart, TAS 7000

Telephone: (03) 6233 4520
Country Freecall: 1300 362 065
Fax: (03) 6233 4515
www.childcomm.tas.gov.au
childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au