

3 How can we help keep children and young people with disability safe?

There are many ways we can reduce the risk of harm to children and young people with disability.

These focus on working with:

- The child or young person
- Families and carers
- Organisations that work with children, e.g. schools, sporting clubs
- The broader community.

All approaches are needed. Together, they can help children to **feel** and **be** safe.

Raising expectations about safe lives for all children and young people

All children and young people have the right to be safe. This is no different for children and young people with disability.

They are more likely to be safe when:

- They are meaningfully included and treated respectfully
- Their perspectives are valued
- They have peer networks, friendships and trusted adults in their lives.

The things families can do to build inclusion are also protective measures – they work to keep children and young people safe. For example, you can:

- Show all children examples of children and adults with disability that are inclusive and positive, including books, stories, television shows, pictures and media reports.
- Make sure children and young people have regular opportunities and ways to communicate good and not-so-good things. Practicing communicating about easy things prepares children and young people for times when it's not so easy.
- Work with the school and other places/organisations your child might attend, like sporting groups or community groups, to make sure they are included in appropriate learning about keeping safe.

- Work to ensure all workers, volunteers and any support people have appropriate training and worker screening, such as Working with Children Checks and police checks.

Access to communication supports, tools and training should always be available if children and young people need it. This can be built into learning at school, as part of formal support, at home and wherever else the child goes. This support helps children to express their needs and wants and to speak up about whatever matters to them.

Building trusted relationships

Children and young people with disability need to have people they trust in their lives, at home, at school, and in the community. An example might be a cousin, friend or neighbour – it is someone who knows the child well and whom the child trusts.

These are people who will listen to and support them. People who are there for the long haul and in the best interests of the child. These are people who will act on what children and young people say.

Family members can help to build these relationships within their own network of family friends and contacts – people they know who get on well with their child. It could be a friend from a sporting team, another school parent, someone from church or a community group.

Another way is for families to consider using skilled paid support to help the child or young person form friendships, and providing them with opportunities to participate fully in the community. This might be through activities where they can meet other young people their own age, such as recreation and sporting activities. If the child or young person is a participant in the National Disability Insurance Scheme, this activity may form part of their goals and funding package.



People that are trusted in your child's life need to know what to do to keep children and young people safe. Talk to them about this openly. Make sure they know the signs when your child is upset, what their communication needs are, what some of the risks are, and what they can do to help.

Teaching children and young people to trust their instincts

It is a common message that children should tell trusted adults when they don't feel safe. For this to happen, they need to learn how to recognise their own feelings about safety and lack of safety. Children with disability are often left out of this kind of education.

A practical way to help children trust their instincts is by teaching them about their feelings when something is not right.

This could be understanding what they might feel in their body if they feel unsafe, such as 'a pain in the tummy', goosebumps, or 'like I am going to be sick/throw up'.

Children need to be aware of what 'good' and 'safe' touching is, who can do this and how they can consent. It is okay to have 'good' touching; for example, "when Nanna gives you a cuddle".

Children also need to know what 'unsafe' touching is. For example, "Emma at school, Mum and Dad are all people who can help you to change your underpants. No one else should touch your underpants".

It is important that children, young people, and families think about what safety looks like, and how to tell when something is not right, not just once, but many times as they grow up.

Talking openly about feelings in everyday situations and helping children and young people to name what they are feeling is great practice for trickier conversations. For example, sharing news about the day or what you had for lunch are easy entry points for kids with all kinds of communication preferences.

How to change the way an organisation is working with your child

There may be times when you will have to speak up, ask questions and work to make things safe for your child. Even though this is the right thing to do, it can be hard going for families. The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations guide organisations on how to keep children safe, and may be a useful resource.

Here are some actions that may help:

- Take a support person with you to meetings.
- Seek help from a disability advocacy organisation.
- Get help or support from other parents or carers with previous experience.
- Practice what you want to say and make notes to take along to meetings.
- Be clear about what you expect from the situation. For example, it might be that all children in your child's class learn what autism is, and that information is sent home to their parents and families.
- Write down the agreed outcomes from the meeting and send them to meeting participants so you have a record of what has been agreed.
- Find out what laws, information, and policies are relevant.

Seek some support for yourself – this advocacy can be tough. It can help to have someone to talk with after meetings and conversations.

The more easily we can do prevention work the better – even if we feel uncomfortable about it. It is everyone's responsibility to keep children and young people safe.

More information

This fact sheet may have raised concerns for you or for people you know.

If you have any concerns or you would like support, please contact CYDA on:

t: 03 9417 1025 or 1800 222 660 (regional or interstate callers outside Melbourne metro)

e: info@cyda.org.au

For information about providing a submission to the Disability Royal Commission, please visit our website:

<https://www.cyda.org.au/disability-royal-commission>

or the Disability Royal Commission website:

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/>