

Principles for Child Safe Organisations

CONSULTATION DRAFT

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Child
Safe



Office of the
Children's
Guardian







Foreword

Child-related organisations play an important role in meeting children's health, educational, social, religious and cultural needs. These organisations rely on the commitment of skilled and caring adults to keeping children safe.

The Office of the Children's Guardian plays an important role in assisting organisations to develop their capacity to be safe for children. The *Principles for Child Safe Organisations* have been developed to assist organisations to think about what it means to be child safe and to identify strategies, in addition to the Working with Children Check, that help create safe environments for children.

The *Principles for Child Safe Organisations* are informed by the research and findings of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* regarding the characteristics of child-safe organisations. Research tells us organisations that listen to children, and have an open culture that encourages early detection and reporting of concerns, are better equipped to keep children safe.

The Office of the Children's Guardian has a range of training programs and resources to help organisations to identify and manage risk and implement strategies to keep children safe. A comprehensive eLearning program is available on the Office of the Children's Guardian's website and will assist organisations to think about practical ways to implement child-safe principles in their day-to-day work. I encourage all organisations to make use of this important resource.

I wish to acknowledge the important work that child-related organisations do and encourage all organisations to renew their commitment to becoming child safe.

Kerryn Boland
NSW Children's Guardian



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Introduction



About these guidelines

These guidelines have been developed to assist organisations to think about strategies, in addition to the Working With Children Check, that can help keep children safe. Probity checks are important – they exclude people who are known to pose a risk to children and young people in child-related work – but they do not prevent harm from occurring to children in the future. Organisations must think about other things they can do to minimise the risk of harm to children.

Case studies and research undertaken by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* have highlighted the limitations of the Working With Children Check in terms of protecting children, and there has been much research and discussion about what makes organisations child safe. The Royal Commission has identified ten elements of child-safe organisations:

1. child safety is embedded in institutional 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 promoted and diversity respected
5. people working with children are suitable and supported
6. processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused
7. staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training
8. physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur
9. implementation of Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved
10. policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

The *Principles for Child Safe Organisations* have been developed to help organisations to think about how they can implement these child-safe elements in their day-to-day work.

There are many practical strategies that organisations can put in place to minimise the risk of harm to children, such as screening and recruitment processes, child protection policies and codes of conduct. These things are important, but they will only be effective if they sit within an organisational culture that genuinely values and respects children and places child safety and wellbeing at the centre of everything that it does.

The Office of the Children's Guardian encourages all child-related organisations to become 'high reliability organisations'. These are organisations that operate in environments where the impact of risk, such as child abuse, is significant, but have stringent risk management processes to reduce the probability of harm occurring. High reliability organisations learn from their mistakes and are constantly thinking about ways to improve safety; they encourage all people within the organisation to report concerns without fear of blame; and they address concerns that may seem minor or trivial but could indicate that there is a problem ².

For an organisation to be a safe place for children, it must have a genuine commitment to supporting the meaningful participation of children in decisions that affect them. Organisations need to listen to children and act on their concerns. Organisations need to be proactive and creative in seeking children's views, believe that children have valuable things to say and act on children's ideas about creating safe environments. Child-safe organisations do not underestimate children's capacity to understand the world around them and believe that they should have a say in what happens to them. Child-safe organisations see children as individuals with rights, and take responsibility for upholding these rights.

Why is children's participation so important?

Children experience safety differently to adults. Research undertaken with children and young people regarding their experiences in organisations tells us that feeling safe is as important to children and young people as being safe ³. In the desire to take action to protect children, it is easy to overlook the fact that children have their own ideas about what makes an organisation safe.

Children provide a unique perspective on how an organisation is functioning and often identify problems before adults do. By asking children about their experiences, organisations can identify and manage risks early and improve the services they provide.

Encouraging the participation of children should be a priority for all child-related organisations. To encourage children to speak up, organisations need to treat all children fairly, engage skilled and caring adults to work or volunteer with children, and encourage children's families and communities to take an interest in the organisation.

A note on how to read these guidelines

These guidelines have been developed to help organisations think about the strategies they have in place to protect children and other things they can do to help keep children safe. The guidelines are divided into individual principles; however, no one principle is more important than another, and the guidelines should be read as a whole.

The guidelines are not prescriptive and are designed not to tell organisations how to do their work, but rather to help organisations think about the characteristics of child-safe organisations and what it means to be child safe. Each principle includes a list of signs of a child-safe organisation. These lists are not exhaustive and organisations may have other strategies to improve safety for children. The Office of the Children's Guardian will provide training and resources to help organisations implement these strategies and will look for these signs when working with child-related organisations.

Organisations provide services to children in a range of contexts and organisations need to think about strategies that are practical for them to implement. A good place to start is to ask children about their experiences within the organisation and things that make them feel safe or unsafe.

Links to additional resources are included throughout these guidelines. The Office of the Children's Guardian also provides training and has a range of resources to assist organisations to implement child-safe strategies. I encourage you to visit the Office of the Children's Guardian's website at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation for more information.

¹ Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, Creating child safe institutions, <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/5d0dc659-68c2-46f9-847b-fafd52f58673/Creating-child-safe-institutions>, July 2016.

² Dr C. Lekka, High reliability organisations: a review of the literature, HSE Books, Derbyshire, 2011.

³ T. Moore et al., Taking Us Seriously: children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, 2015.

A photograph of several children running on a paved path outdoors. The child in the foreground is wearing a black jacket with pink floral patterns, light blue jeans, and tan boots. Other children in colorful clothing are visible in the background. The image is overlaid with orange and white geometric shapes.

Principle 1

The organisation focuses on
what is best for children

Aim

That children know their rights, they are listened to and their concerns are taken seriously.



Key Messages



All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3)



Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12)

- Keeping children safe is the primary obligation of all organisations that provide services to them
- Children have a right to have a say in what happens to them
- Asking children about their experiences in the organisation provides opportunities to identify and manage potential risks
- Children are more likely to speak up when they feel unsafe if they know the organisation will believe them
- Leadership is essential in creating an organisational culture where everyone takes responsibility for the safety of children and places the rights of children at the centre of their operations

Signs of a child safe organisation – what we are looking for

- Children's views matter and the organisation asks children about what would make them feel safe
- The organisation acts on children's views and addresses their concerns
- The organisation has a child-friendly complaints process for children and makes it easy for children to raise concerns and provide feedback
- Children are consulted before important decisions are made and informed about how the information they provide will be used
- Children are given information about their rights and about how adults should behave towards them
- The organisation has a child-safe policy and staff and volunteers know how to respond when there are concerns about a child's safety
- When a child makes a complaint or an allegation the organisation explains what will happen next

What we hope to hear from children

- “ Adults in this organisation know who I am, what I'm good at and what I need help with, what I like and what I don't like.
- “ I get to have a say in what happens to me.
- “ I know how I should be treated and how adults should behave towards me.
- “ If I tell someone I feel unsafe they will believe me and do something about it.

More Information

For more information, see the “Getting Started” resource at: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/184/CS_Checklist_interactive.pdf.aspx?Embed=Y

More information about developing a child-safe policy can be found at: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation/child-safe-policy

For more information and resources to help your organisation encourage participation, visit the Advocate for Children and Young People's website at: www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/info

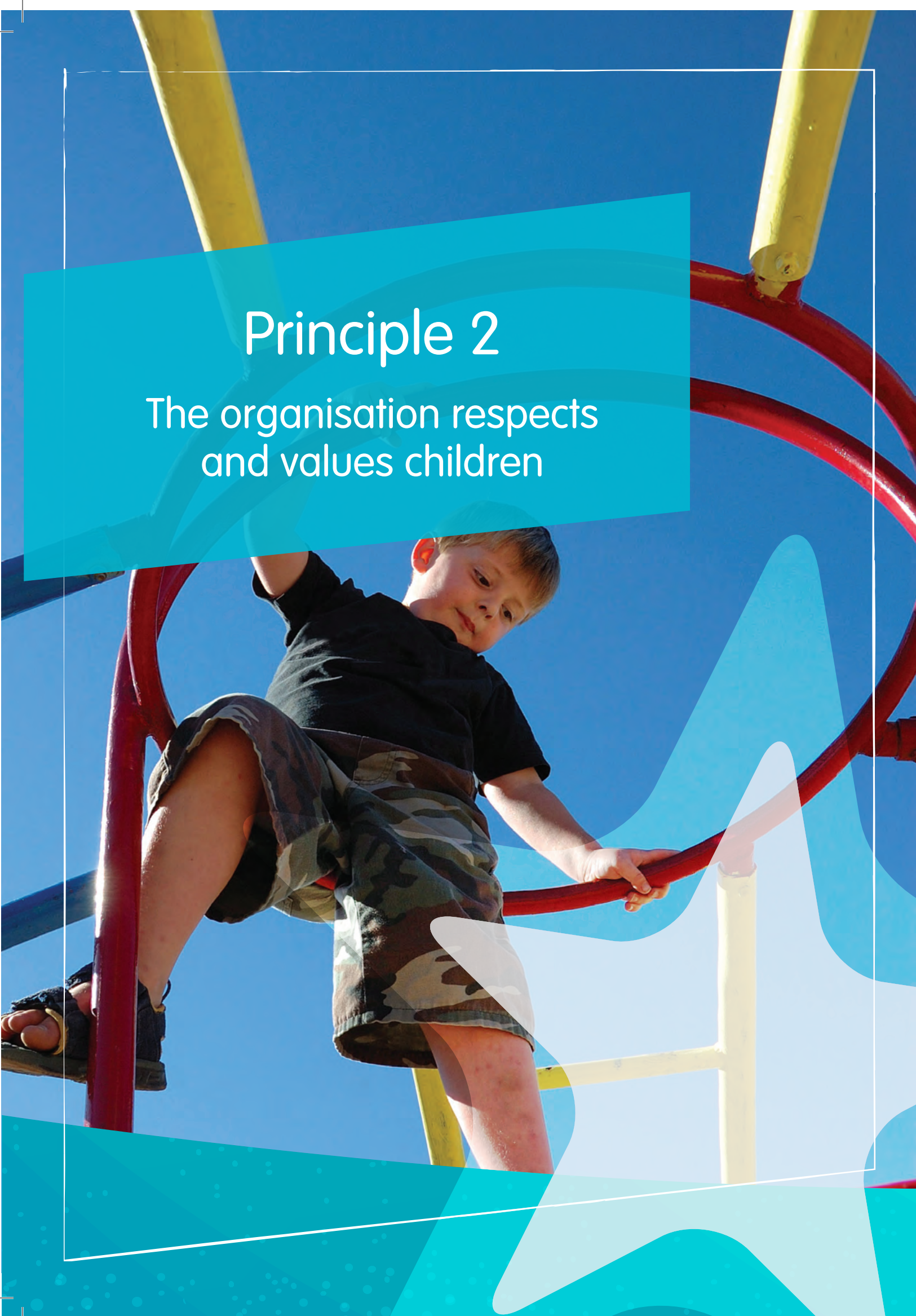
For more information and guidance regarding child-focused complaints processes, visit: <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation/complaints-management>

For more information and resources regarding organisational responsibilities regarding complaints management, visit the NSW Ombudsman's website at: www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/complaints

For more information regarding reporting child protection concerns, visit the NSW Department of Family and Community Services website at: www.community.nsw.gov.au/preventing-child-abuse-and-neglect/reporting-suspected-abuse-or-neglect

Principle 2

The organisation respects
and values children



Aim

That all children are treated fairly, regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality and abilities.



Key Messages

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Children have the right to meet with other children and young people and to join groups and organisations, as long as this does not stop other people from enjoying their rights.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 15)

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Children who have any kind of disability should receive special care and support so that they can live a full and independent life.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23)

- Children communicate and participate in organisations in different ways
- For all children to feel safe, organisations must value and respect people from different cultural backgrounds and with different abilities
- Child-safe organisations treat all children fairly and with respect.



Signs of a child safe organisation – what we are looking for

- The organisation demonstrates through the language it uses and the way in which people behave that it respects and welcomes children from diverse backgrounds
- All children are treated fairly
- The organisation has zero tolerance for bullying and discrimination
- Information about child safety is provided in a range of languages and in ways that children can understand
- Children with disabilities are given the help they need to participate in the organisation.

What we hope to hear from children

- “ Adults and other children should not hurt or bully me, and if they do something will be done about it.
- “ I get the help that I need to join in with other children.
- “ Adults do not have favourites and I am treated fairly.

More Information

Play by the Rules has a series of anti-discrimination resources. For more information visit: www.playbytherules.net.au/toolkits/racism-in-sport-toolkit or www.playbytherules.net.au/toolkits/homophobia-in-sport-toolkit

A photograph of three children in school uniforms (white shirts with blue collars and blue shorts) sitting on a grassy field. They are each holding a black and white soccer ball. The background shows a green field and trees under a bright sky. An orange semi-transparent banner is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'Principle 3' and 'The organisation welcomes children's families and communities'.

Principle 3

The organisation welcomes
children's families and
communities

Aim

That families and communities get involved with the organisation.



Key Messages

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Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights properly.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 5)

- Parents, carers or significant others have the primary responsibility for the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children, including making decisions about what organisations are appropriate for their child
- Children feel valued when the people who are important to them take an active interest in their lives
- Organisations should engage parents, carers and significant others as partners with a shared concern for the safety of children
- Parents, carers or community members who have a relationship with the child can provide important information that helps organisations keep children safe



Signs of a child safe organisation – what we are looking for

- Families feel welcome and are encouraged to participate with their child
- The organisation's commitment to child safety and its strategies for ensuring children are safe is publicly available information
- Families are invited to provide feedback and there is an easy process for families to make a complaint or raise a concern
- The organisation provides families and communities with up-to-date information about how it keeps children safe

What we hope to hear from children

- “ The people who are important to me and know me the best can be there for me.
- “ The people who care about me can check that the organisation is doing the right thing.
- “ The adults around me are making sure that I am safe.

More Information

Play by the Rules has a series of resources to assist sporting organisations to be welcoming and inclusive of children and their families. For more information, visit: <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources>



Principle 4

The organisation has skilled
and caring employees
and volunteers

Aim

That staff and volunteers are supervised and supported and know how they should behave towards children.

Key Messages

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Governments should ensure that children are properly cared for and protect them from violence, abuse and neglect by their parents, or anyone who looks after them.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 19)

- Having clear expectations regarding the conduct of staff and volunteers is important for protecting children
- Working With Children Checks and criminal record history checks are important but should be complemented by other pre-employment screening processes, including interviews and reference checks
- Organisations have a responsibility to ensure that all staff and volunteers know what to do if they suspect a child is at risk of harm or abuse
- It is not necessary to have evidence of abuse before reporting; if a child reports feeling unsafe the organisation must act on this information
- Children need adults to notice when something is wrong, so problems can be addressed early
- Organisations should learn from their mistakes and continually strive to be safer for children



Signs of a child safe organisation – what we are looking for

- People who apply to work or volunteer with the organisation know that the organisation is committed to providing safe environments for children
- The organisation has a code of conduct for all staff and volunteers and everyone in the organisation knows how they are expected to behave towards children, children's families and each other
- People working or volunteering with children have a valid Working With Children Check and the organisation verifies the Working With Children Check of every person in the organisation who works or volunteers with children
- The organisation conducts other screening processes, including interviews and reference checks
- People who work or volunteer with children are supervised and supported to do their work
- Everyone in the organisation understands their obligations towards children and knows what to do if a child reports abuse or harm
- Staff and volunteers are provided with information and training about indicators and dynamics of child abuse and maltreatment
- Staff and volunteers are quick to notice when there are risks and take action to keep children safe
- Staff and volunteers feel confident to report problems and concerns, without fear of blame
- If a child reports that they have been harmed or feel unsafe, staff or volunteers report this immediately, even if they have not witnessed harm occurring
- If something does go wrong, the organisation identifies what went wrong and implements strategies to prevent this from happening again

What we hope to hear from children

- “ Adults in the organisation do the right thing and I can trust them.
- “ Adults are predictable and the rules apply to everyone.
- “ Adults do what they say they are going to do.
- “ If something goes wrong, adults are confident and calm, and know what to do.

More Information

For more information and resources regarding recruitment, screening and training processes, visit: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation/staff-recruitment-and-management/recruitment--induction-and-training

For more information about developing a child-safe code of conduct, visit: www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au/child-safe-organisations/become-a-child-safe-organisation/codes-of-conduct





Feedback

We want to hear from you!

Your feedback will help us to make these principles as practical and user-friendly as possible.

Please visit the Office of the Children's Guardian's website at www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au to provide your feedback and to check out other child safe organisations resources.



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