

# Promoting Equity in Child Safety Practice

## Vulnerable Populations

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) recognises and celebrates the diversity of children, young people and families, and understands that due to health and social inequalities some children may be particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Effective child safeguarding requires organisations to foster socially, culturally and emotionally safe environments. Whilst engaged with member churches, all children should be able to feel safe, be listened to and respected regardless of their cultural identity, abilities, gender, sexual orientation or economic background. Member churches can demonstrate they recognise, celebrate and support vulnerable groups through:

- Ensuring a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination;
- Specifically referencing the safety of particularly vulnerable children and young people in policy;
- Providing training and professional development that addresses equality issues.

## Cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Cultural safety is fundamental to a child's or young person's overall wellbeing. It affects how children and young people see themselves in relation to others and may impact the extent to which they would feel safe to raise concerns or complaints in organisations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people may be particularly vulnerable due to health and social inequality, limited access to services, and the continuing legacy of previous government policies such as forced removal from families and country. Creating a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people requires a willingness to learn, understand and respond to cultural diversity, whilst acknowledging the impact of oppression. The NCCA supports member churches to develop culturally competent practice that enables every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child to feel that their sense of self and identity is valued in by the people and environments that surround them. Member churches can demonstrate that they embrace and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, values and practices through:

- Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have a voice and presence in member churches' policy, planning and activities;
- Recognition of the historical context of colonisation and the impact of the Stolen Generations;
- Holistically considering and responding to the child's/young person's educational, physical, emotional or spiritual needs, from the perspective of culture;
- Understanding that the child's/young person's significant relationships encompass wider community, including Elders, and Aunties and Uncles, not just immediate family;
- Giving consideration to the child's physical environment, e.g. acknowledging traditional ownership through a plaque or poster;
- Seeking the views of Elders and other significant community members particularly in relation to education and the maintenance of culture;
- Being a culturally competent communicator, e.g. being flexible and non-judgemental in approach, avoiding jargon, and observing cultural protocol relevant to the local area such as use of names and titles, eye contact and sign language; and
- Addressing the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in training and capacity building programs.



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## Children with disability

Children with disability are at a higher risk of abuse and maltreatment and may be less likely to report these concerns. Reasons for this include reliance on caregivers for personal care, social isolation and low expectations held by others about their capacity to identify and report concerns. Further, reporting systems and process are all too often not inclusive or accessible. The NCCA actively promotes understanding and acceptance of differences in abilities without making assumptions. In order to effectively safeguard children with disability, policies, procedures and processes must address issues relating to disability, particularly concerning the identification of risks and response to concerns. Further, they must ensure that all safeguarding processes are accessible to children and young people living with physical, cognitive, sensory, and/or intellectual disabilities, or neuro-diversities. Leaders must also foster an organisational culture that is inclusive, accessible and values diversity. Ways that member churches can promote the safety of children with disability include:

- Being aware of and working in accordance with the Code of Conduct for interactions with children, particularly in relation to boundaries for employee/volunteer/contractor interactions with children with disability;
- Making sure the environment does not pose access difficulties;
- Empowering children and young people with disability as active participants in the organisation, and ensure engagement strategies are inclusive and accessible;
- Ensuring safeguarding information is available in a range of accessible formats;
- Communicating regularly with children and young people with disabilities about safety and wellbeing;
- Being inclusive and collaborative with families of children and young people with disabilities; and
- Making an effort to facilitate communication in ways that minimise specific barriers arising from a child's/young person's disability.<sup>1</sup>

## Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The NCCA recognises that children, young people and their families have diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Some may have experienced trauma including violence and persecution. They may be new to Australia and adapting to laws, systems and processes, and experiencing language barriers. Many may also experience discrimination. The NCCA recognises the vulnerabilities experienced by children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and is committed to their safety. The NCCA and member churches can demonstrate this commitment by:

- Being inclusive and welcoming of families from a range of backgrounds through the provision of translated documentation, interpreters and demonstrated awareness of other cultures;
- Increasing awareness and understanding of diverse perspectives and equality;
- Ensuring child safety training addresses issues pertaining to equality;
- Increasing awareness and understanding of relation to trauma-informed practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Commission for Children and Young People, [A guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisations](#), 2018



# Promoting Equity in Child Safety Practice

## **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender Diverse and Intersex and Queer Children and Young People**

Children and young people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Gender Diverse, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) are exposed to discrimination, abuse and violence at rates which are higher than their cis-gender, heterosexual peers.<sup>2</sup> The NCCA actively welcomes and supports LGBTIQ+ children and young people and expects member churches to do so as well through means such as:

- Ensuring the Code of Conduct states that discriminatory behaviour is unacceptable;
- Consulting with LGBTIQ+ children and young people about what makes them feel safe and unsafe;
- Equipping member churches with the skills and knowledge to provide appropriate support to LGBTIQ+ children and young people and respond with sensitivity;
- Supporting and respecting decisions that people make about their gender identity, including using their affirmed name and pronouns.<sup>3</sup>
- Addressing the safety of LGBTIQ+ children and young people in training and capacity building programs.

## **Children and Young People who are unable to live at home**

The NCCA and its member churches recognise that it is not safe for some children and young people to live at home with their families. These children and young people may have particular support needs and be at greater risk of harm for a range of reasons including past experiences of trauma, disconnection from family and community and social isolation. Where member churches are aware that children and young people are living away from family due to reasons of safety and protection, care will be taken to ensure these children and young people are well supported. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Speaking to children, young people and their carers about support needs;
- Maintaining confidentiality and sharing information in line with privacy policies.
- Engaging additional supports where needed.

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<sup>2</sup> Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental Health in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) Youth. Annual review of clinical psychology, 12, 465–487. doi:10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-021815-093153

<sup>3</sup> Commission for Children and Young People, [A guide for Creating a Child Safe Organisations](#), 2018

