

Child Safety

Information for
Parents and Carers

Written by
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www.cfss.org.au



Protecting your children

**A Simple Guide for Parents and Carers
to Understand Child Abuse and Neglect**



In the spirit of reconciliation, CFSS WA acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including children.

CFSS WA Ltd acknowledges the Protective Behaviours Program written by ***Peg Flandreau West***, on which this Handbook is largely based.

This resource can be used by parents in the home and complements both the Protective Behaviours and Keep Safe programs used in Australian schools.

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Children's Protective Behaviours Workbook

In order to develop resilience and empower your children the following 10 Teaching Topics are important and can be found in the Children's Workbook. These 10 topics should be taught in chronological order. It is important that your child understands and internalises each topic prior to moving onto the next one.

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Introduction

CFSS WA LTD is committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people. The care, safety and welfare of children relies on a collective responsibility to protect children. Creating a safe community for children and young people is a dynamic process that involves active participation and responsibility by all agencies and their leaders, together with the wider community, including parents, carers and families.

CFSS WA LTD is committed to making this possible through collaboration, vigilance and proactive approaches across legislation, policies, procedures and practices. Our policies and practices reflect zero tolerance to any form of child abuse and neglect.

CFSS WA LTD is informed by a fundamental belief that children and young people have the right to physical and psychological safety at all times and that, as an agency, we should now and into the future be at the forefront of efforts to make this a reality.

Ignorance of child abuse and neglect has been one of the principal factors inhibiting its prevention and prolonging the suffering and distress of many of its victims.

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse recommended that personal safety (prevention) education should be delivered through schools and other community settings. It was also recommended that prevention education for parents be delivered through community settings.

CFSS WA is pleased to provide this handbook and accompanying Children's Workbook which provide the necessary tools and knowledge to educate children on keeping safe. In providing this resource, we acknowledge that there is no 100% fool-proof system for protecting children; however, educating them on personal safety is an important strategy.

These resources have been created in response to the Royal Commission recommendations and have been designed to provide children aged 4-12 years with prevention education in a safe and non-threatening way.

The Parent Handbook also provides parents with increased knowledge on child abuse and, in particular, on child sexual abuse and its impacts on children and young people. The Handbook, when used in conjunction with the Children's Workbook, will help you build the necessary skills and increase the knowledge of your children or the children for whom you care. This resource has been based on the internationally acclaimed Protective Behaviours Program for children and young people.

By sharing this information and working through the 10 Teaching Topics with your child, you will be helping to develop lifelong skills of assertiveness, self-confidence, problem solving, communication, resilience and help-seeking.

You will find that the activities and discussions in this Handbook are simple and presented in a fun, child-friendly way, designed not to frighten children but to inform them of some of the vital skills of personal safety.

Understanding Child Abuse

Understanding child abuse and, in particular, child sexual abuse is essential if children are to be kept safe.

Many individuals think of child neglect and abuse as happening in some other family, somewhere far away. But, in reality, some form of neglect or physical, emotional or sexual abuse occurs to a child in every neighbourhood, in every community across the country every day.

Reports of Child Abuse in Australia

In 2019–20, one in every 32 Australian children aged 0–17 required some form of intervention for abuse or neglect. Regardless of race, age, ethnicity or economic status, child abuse doesn't discriminate. Some other facts in relation to child abuse and neglect include:

- one in six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children received child protection services
- children from very remote areas are three times as likely as those from major cities to be the subject of a substantiation
- slightly more girls (24,500) than boys (23,600) were the subject of substantiation
- in 2019–20, children in younger age groups were more likely to be the subjects of substantiations than those in older age groups
- 67% of children who received child protection services were repeat clients
- at 30 June 2020, approximately 46,000 children were in out-of-home care.

It is a confronting truth that in an affluent and developed country such as Australia, child abuse continues to rise.

Long-term effects of child abuse

The immense long-term, personal, social and economic costs of child abuse and neglect are well documented. Children and young people who have been abused or neglected during childhood commonly experience mental health problems, unemployment, difficulty developing and maintaining healthy relationships, criminality and substance abuse.

"Children are inherently vulnerable and rely on the adults in their life to create a safe and healthy environment and to educate them on personal safety.

"It is our individual and collective responsibility to become increasingly sensitive to those situations that pose a risk to children and act to remove them.

"The consequences of child abuse and the associated trauma can be severe and can last a lifetime."

Child Maltreatment in Australia Study - www.acms.au

On April 3rd 2023, the Australian Child Maltreatment Study team published the primary outcomes of the study in a special supplement of the Medical Journal of Australia. The results of this study showed that:



References: Department of Communities, Child Protection and Family Support, ([WHO], 2006, p. 9), (Bromfield, 2005; Child Family Community Australia [CFCA], 2016).



The Origins of Protective Behaviours Education

Peg Flandreu West was a school social worker in Madison Wisconsin USA in the early 1970s. During this time, children would often come to her for her help, many of whom were not feeling safe for one reason or another

Due to the increasing numbers of children who felt unsafe, Peg realised something needed to be done to help these children and so she started to work with school psychologists, Joan Levy and Donna Fortin. All three women started to devise a program to help children recognise when they did not feel safe and to explore what they could do about it.

Peg and her colleagues consulted with survivors, professionals, friends, colleagues and anyone who could offer some support and advice. It was through this work and sharing the ideas with many people the program evolved into what we now know as the Protective Behaviours Program.

In the late 1970s here in Australia, it was becoming clear to law enforcement agencies that child sexual abuse was a growing crime, although silent in its nature. At the time, the Victorian Police were leading the charge in finding a solution to the problem.

In the 1980s, Sergeant Vicki Fraser attended a national conference on child abuse. It was at this conference that she was given a manual written by Peg Flandreu West. After reading the manual, Sergeant Fraser came to understand that the information contained in the manual was extremely valuable and, as such, shared it with a number of key stakeholders.

In 1985, Peg Flandreu West came to Australia. This original training was provided to a variety of child protection workers and agencies and from here the Protective Behaviours Program in Australia was established. Since then, the use of the Protective Behaviours Program has developed and evolved across Australia.



In November 1988, Peg said ...

I continue to be astounded at how many children and adults are telling us how they're using Protective Behaviours to change their lives and cherish themselves. I have enhanced my own creativity, increased my life energy and sharpened my sense of adventure. How strange it was at first, to realise that work involving something as painful as violence could involve laughter and joy. For, as we move beyond reaction to violence, we are moving into the alternatives of empowerment, we are finding new ways to get through painful times. We are finding, even in the midst of it all, excitement, creativity, laughter and adventure for ourselves.

In 1992, Protective Behaviours WA Inc was formed and this is where we come in. The Protective Behaviours WA Inc Board of Management invited Sergeant Fraser to WA to facilitate Protective Behaviours training in Perth. At the time, our Managing Director, Andrea Musulin, was a serving police officer attached to the WA Police Force, Community Services Command. Andrea attended the Basic Training Workshop (as it was known then) whilst working as a school-based police officer in 1994. Andrea was inspired with what she had learnt and immediately started to put it into practice with students and staff with whom she came in contact. It is here that Andrea's life-long journey of teaching Protective Behaviours began.

Why Children need to be taught **Protective Behaviours**

Australian data tells us that one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused before they turn 18 and most will never speak about it.

Throughout this parent guide, it is our aim to help parents raise resilient and empowered children whilst taking nothing away from their childhood. What we have come to realise over the past 30 years is that the Protective Behaviours Program value adds to children's lives and allows them to live life to its fullest according to their age.

All too often, children are sexually abused by family members, friends and the people we entrust our children to and many parents do not pick up on the indicators or the subtle hints their child may be trying to give them to let them know they need help. It is for this reason that all parents need to educate their children in Protective Behaviours. It is and will always remain the responsibility of adults to keep children safe; however, children can also play their part in keeping themselves safe.

Instead of waiting until significant harm has occurred, parents and carers need to ask, "What can I do to prevent the abuse from happening in the first place".

Whilst the material contained in this resource provides vital life skills for children that can be applied to all forms of unsafe situations children may find themselves in, there is a specific focus on the prevention of child sexual abuse. Those who harm children sexually rarely have any trademarks of



being a sex offender that is visual to a parent or carer's naked eye. Their actions, however, may alert us to a possible need for concern and, as such, attending a Protective Behaviours Parent Workshop is highly recommended.

There are subtle techniques used by offenders designed to not only manipulate and engage children into sexual activity but to also silence them after the abuse has occurred. This is called the Grooming Process or Child Entrapment Process. Research has shown that some children are, in fact, more vulnerable to grooming than others. As such, parents need to know all they can about grooming in order to better protect their children. After all, knowledge is power!

Whilst there is no 100% fool-proof system for protecting your children, teaching them the Protective Behaviours Program aims to increase their personal safety and empower them to tell you or another trusted adult about someone or something that may be threatening their safety or wellbeing.

At CFSS, we have also come to realise the importance of crime prevention initiatives and how they play a large part in keeping children and young people safe. Reducing the opportunity for harm to occur is a necessity in keeping your child safe. The Protective Behaviours Program outlined in this resource aims to do just that. By teaching your child the prevention education information contained in this resource, you may reduce the opportunity for harm to occur.



Child Abuse and Neglect

Definition

The World Health Organisation defines child abuse and neglect as follows.

All forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

Definitions of child abuse and neglect can include adults, young people and older children as the perpetrators of the abuse. It is commonly stated in legislation that the term 'child abuse and neglect' refers to behaviours and treatment that result in the actual and/or likelihood of harm to the child or young person. Furthermore, such behaviours may be intentional or unintentional.

In Western Australia, under the Children and Community Services Act 2004, a child is a person under the age of 18 years.

There are four main types of child abuse:

Physical

Emotional

including psychological abuse and exposure to family and domestic violence neglect

Sexual abuse

Neglect

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a child is deliberately hurt or is at serious risk of being hurt by someone they know such as a family member, relative, carer, another adult or child. The signs of physical abuse may be subtle and may be easier to spot if the child has no way of concealing the injury.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when a child is repeatedly rejected, isolated, threatened or humiliated. Emotional abuse also includes exposure to family and domestic violence which causes serious emotional, physical and psychological harm to children, as well as placing them at increased likelihood of other kinds of abuse and neglect.

Sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is when a child is forced or persuaded to take part in sexual activities. This may involve physical contact or non-contact activities and can happen online or offline. A child may not always understand that they are being sexually abused.

Neglect

Neglect is when a child does not receive adequate food or shelter, medical treatment, supervision, care or nurturance to the extent that their development is harmed, or they are injured.



Family and domestic violence

Family and domestic violence is an intentional pattern of behaviour intended to coerce, control and create fear within a current or former intimate partner or family relationship. It includes, but is not limited to, emotional and/or psychological abuse, physical violence, sexual violence, financial abuse, technology-facilitated abuse and religious/spiritual violence. The perpetrator of the violence is the person responsible for the abuse.

The Grooming Process

Grooming can be described as the 'preparation' phase of child sexual abuse. The perpetrator relies on this process to gain not only the trust of the child or young person but also the responsible adults and parents of the child in order to gain access and establish secrecy and silence. It is the secrecy and silence that allows the abuse to continue for extended periods of time.

Grooming may cause a child to feel:

- special
- confused
- ashamed
- worried
- guilt
- fear
- conflicted
- angry

Often, it is for these reasons that the child or young person chooses not to speak about the abuse. Grooming includes a range of behaviours and/or verbal or written communications with the child or young person (or significant adults). The intention of this communication is to make sexual contact with the child or young person, whilst maintaining the child or young person's silence.

The Grooming Process involves ten stages, usually occurring in chronological order (but not always).

1. Choose a child based on age and appearance
2. Groom the parents or carers
3. Create fake trustworthiness
4. Develop a special and exclusive relationship
5. Break the rules and test the boundaries of secrecy
6. Non-sexual touch and desensitisation
7. Lower the child's inhibitions
8. Sexual assault occurs
9. Intimidation and demanding of secrecy
10. Establishing blame and fear



To help you to understand this process, think about sharks and how they select and circle their prey prior to attacking. A shark will circle its victim until it feels comfortable that it can attack and get away with it. This is exactly what child sex offenders do and they have been quoted as saying they will not offend against a child unless they are **99% certain** the child will keep it secret.



**It's a Parent's Role
to Teach Sex Education**

After working in the child protection industry for over 35 years, I can confidently tell you that providing your children with sex education is safer than no education.

**Andrea Musulin
Managing Director
CFSS WA Ltd**

Key Considerations

- Parents are the primary educators of their children and, as such, responsible for teaching their children about sex.
- Parents should not rely on their children's school to do this.
- It is important to start talking to your child about sex when they are young and deepen that conversation as they get older.
- Most children will be able to understand age-appropriate concepts from six years of age.
- In such a technologically advanced world, children are exposed to a variety of information about sex from siblings, relatives, school, friends and the media at a much earlier age than most parents think or expect.
- Healthy sexual development needs a two-way communication system between parent and child.

Talking to your children

As a parent or carer, no doubt it may seem difficult or uncomfortable to talk to your children about sexual matters. In order to remove some of the difficulty, it is recommended that sex education shouldn't be provided once but, rather, should be an ongoing process. Shorter, frequent conversations are recommended rather than a long, one-off talk.

Talking about your child's concerns can also help them feel valued, respected and supported. Research shows that the earlier you speak to your child about sex, the greater the delay in first sexual experiences. Furthermore, speaking to your child about sex demonstrates that you are up for a conversation about the subject and comfortable speaking about such matters. In turn, this may alleviate any reservations they may have about coming to you when they need to talk to you about sex, sexuality or sexual matters. It is suggested these conversations should take place in a relaxed, neutral environment like when doing everyday tasks like driving, kicking a ball, cooking, washing the dishes or walking the dog. Maintain eye contact with your child as much as possible and try not to interrupt while they are talking.

Key Considerations Continued

Before you start

Every day, parents in Australia and the world over for that matter are caught off guard by their children's natural curiosity and questions about sex and sexuality.

Before you can start the sex education journey with your child, it is important that you understand the sexual development of children. This will also alleviate any false misconceptions around what is normal and what is not normal. Sexual growth is part of your child's normal healthy development. Such growth involves curiosity towards sexuality and sexual play, which are most common in pre-school children. If not taught by the parent, it is very easy for the information to be misinterpreted or misunderstood by your child. Story books are a great non-threatening way to introduce sex education to your child. Here is a list of sex education books we recommend.

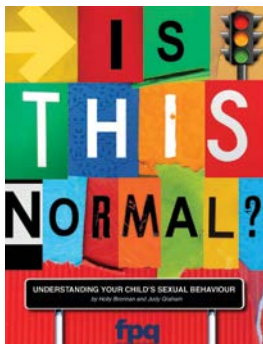


Visit

www.wachildprotectionsociety.com.au/

[child-protection-suggested-reading#Sex-Education-and-Pornography](https://www.wachildprotectionsociety.com.au/child-protection-suggested-reading#Sex-Education-and-Pornography)

To help you in this



Family Planning Queensland has written an excellent resource for parents titled *Is This Normal?* written by Holly Brennan (Author) and Judy Graham.

This book explains the "Traffic Lights" framework for understanding and responding to children's sexual behaviours. It describes everyday situations and provides tools to support communication with children about sexuality and relationships. It also provides ideas on what to do when a child's sexual behaviour is not appropriate for their age. Knowing more about sexual behaviours is important to protect children from harm. The book is a valuable tool for any parent, carer or childcare professional.

Another great tool



Another great tool for parents and carers that supports regular age-appropriate conversation is the Western Australian Department of Health's free parent resources titled *Talk Soon, Talk Often, and Yarning Ways*.

This resource includes:

- age and stage guidance for parents of children 0 – 18 years
- how to answer tricky questions on topics such as how babies are made, puberty, sexting, contraception and sex
- conversation starters
- key messages on preparing your teen for healthy sexually active lives, consent, contraception and sexually transmissible infections
- Western Australian and Australian statistics
- references to services and reliable websites and books
- culturally appropriate information for Indigenous.



Visit

https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/S_T/Talk-soon-Talk-often

The background of the page features a blue-tinted photograph of a woman and a child standing on a beach, facing each other as if in conversation. The woman is on the right, leaning slightly towards the child on the left. The scene is overlaid with several large, semi-transparent, overlapping circles in various shades of blue, creating a layered, abstract effect. The title text is centered over the middle of the image.

Responding to a Disclosure

Teaching the Protective Behaviours Program aims to empower children with the right to speak out about anything that is worrying them or is making them feel unsafe. As such, they may disclose to you more serious incidents that have occurred.

Children and young people are most likely to initially disclose abuse to either a parent or same-aged friend (Priebe & Svedin, 2008; Shackel, 2009). Hearing that your child has been abused is distressing, and this will be felt even more acutely if you are a parent or relative.

It is also possible that the perpetrator might be known to you and may even be a family member. If this is the case and your child decides to talk to you about abuse, this is no doubt going to be emotionally challenging for you and your child.

Below are some considerations to help you deal with a disclosure in the best possible way.

Be mindful that your child may:

- feel confused, scared, guilty, ashamed, sad, angry or powerless
- not understand that person's behaviour may be abusive
- believe they are responsible for the abuse
- want to protect the person responsible - and be frightened for them
- want to protect family or their own reputation
- have been threatened with more harm to themselves or others if they tell someone.



When responding to a disclosure from your child:

- find a quiet place to talk, a space that your child feels comfortable in
- remain calm. This may be difficult under the circumstances. However, your child may have been told that if they tell they will make people angry or upset
- assess your child's immediate safety
- reassure your child that telling was the right thing to do and that you believe them
- let your child take their time telling you and be a supportive listener. However, remember it is not a counselling session. Let them talk freely when telling you their story
- let your child know what will happen next
- be truthful, don't promise to keep a secret – you may need to advise the civil authorities such as the WA Police or the WA Department for Child Protection. Be honest and advise your child that you may not be able to keep what they tell you a secret in order to keep them safe
- let the child or young person use their own words. A good rule of thumb is not to ask your child a question that only has a yes or no answer. For example, a leading question is "Did Uncle touch you?" versus "Who touched you?"
- if necessary, notify the authorities: the state department responsible for child protection or the police
- child abuse often leaves children feeling disempowered and lacking control in their own life. Making sure the child or young person is fully aware of each step of the process can make it less intimidating and can help return a sense of power and safety.



If your child discloses to you that he or she has been abused in some way and you feel you need help with managing the disclosure or how you are feeling, make sure you seek professional help and advice with an appropriate service provider.

Resources and support services are available in the Contact Numbers section of this Handbook.



A complete list of services to help children and parents is provided by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and can be found here.

Visit

<https://aifs.gov.au/>

[cfca/publications/cfca-resource-sheet/](#)

[helplines-and-telephone-counselling-services-children-young-people](#)

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, call Police on 000.

Quick Links and Websites

Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800

Crisis Care Helpline

Provides an information and counselling service for people in crisis who need urgent help from the Department for Child Protection and Family Support.

Freecall: 1800 199 008 (country areas)

Phone: (08) 9223 1111

Family Helpline

Offers a telephone counselling and information service for families with relationship difficulties.

Interpreter services are available.

Freecall: 1800 643 000 (country areas)

Phone: (08) 9223 1100

TTY: (08) 9325 1232

Incest Survivors Association (ISA)

A specialist support service providing counselling and support to survivors of child sexual abuse. ISA also provides services to (non-offending) significant others in a relationship with the survivor, including spouses, family members and friends. Some services may involve a fee.

Phone: (08) 9443 1910

Monday-Friday, 9.00am-5.00pm

Parenting WA Line

Offers an information, support and referral service to parents, carers, grandparents and families with children up to 18 years of age.

Freecall: 1800 654 432

Phone: (08) 6279 1200

Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC)

An emergency service that offers assistance and support to any person, female or male, aged 13 years and over who has experienced any form of unwanted sexual contact or behaviour in the last two weeks. A free counselling service is also available (during business hours) to people who have experienced sexual assault or sexual abuse in the past (more than two weeks ago).

Freecall: 1800 199 888

Phone: (08) 9340 1828

1800 Respect

Commissioner (Office of the E-Safety)

Provides online safety education, assistance and a complaints service for cyber bullying and illegal online content.

Phone: 1800 880 176

Website: www.esafety.gov.au

CFSS WA Ltd

Committed to the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people.

Phone: (08) 9941 1251

Email: familysupport@cfss.org.au

See the latest complete list of Quick Links and Websites

www.cfss.org.au



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