

MACS ChildSafe Presentation on the 10 Child Safety Standards

RC Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.

- Standard one of the Royal Commission guidelines emphasises the embedding of child safety culture within an organisation. This is the halo or leading standard. This standard leads, because if the culture is not established in this way, many of the other efforts (standard actions) will be diminished, diluted or even ineffective.
- The Australian National Audit Office (2014) put this well when they state:
- *Senior management can establish a risk management culture [] by communicating consistent messages about the importance of risk management [] and taking action that clearly demonstrates the agency's approach to managing risk, or in our case, the safety and well-being of children*
- In reality culture is defined by consistency and sustained behaviours. Such communication will also be supported in training.
- 95% of serious abuse perpetrated upon children, is perpetrated by people known to them, often in the context of their wide relational network.
- A key problem exists where adults combine the idea that serious harm to children is rare and is unlikely to occur by virtue of 'people being known to each other'.

RC Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously

- Standard two in our estimation has grown in significance in latter years due to better research and growing awareness into the positive effects of children's inputs into organisational operations. As per the prior standard, much may be assumed about what an organisation is doing with regards to empowering and responding to children's needs, but often they are ad-hoc approaches and the evidence of action is often significantly lacking.
- The Australian Catholic University (ACU ICPS, 2015) in its submission to a RC report, 'Taking us seriously' indicated that:

'being safe' and 'feeling safe' are not the same. An environment needs to be reviewed in terms of lived experience of participants and implied safety structures. While an institution may be focussed on observable threats, it may not be informed by valuable childrens' perceptions and experience.

- An organisation can underestimate the powerful impact children's voices and vision can provide in an array of areas including safety and well-being.

The Royal Commission identifies in this standard four key factors:

- children can express their views
- children generating friendships are critical to them feeling safe
- children's need for information about abuse
- staff and volunteers are attuned to signs of harm

So what might practical applications of this standard look like?

- encourage children's feedback?
- provide a clear report-to person(s) when something is wrong?
- initiatives to get children working well together and trusting each other
- inform children of possible dangers in context of your environment
- capture the above information for your organisation to review and consider?

RC Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved

In providing services, care and comfort to children we literally inherit families to whom the children belong and are the children's primary carers.

Parents and caregivers by virtue of their relationship to children, can provide visibility to safety concerns, not readily visible to organisation.

Research suggests that family relationships are an important part of influencing the:

- impact of disclosure on victims/survivors and family members
- responses to disclosure
- support provided by the family
- identification of support needed.

So what are some practical mechanisms?

Encourage feedback and communicate safety mechanisms that could include:

- what challenges do your children face that they may also face in our organisation?
- what risks do you identify to your child's safety at our site / venue?
- what type of harm education do you think is appropriate to your child? Examples?
- communicate the child safe policy. Have parents read it?
- communicate the child safe code of conduct. Have parents read it?
- does the code include expectations of parents, coaches, leaders, children etc?
- where there is a problem who do we contact?
- communicate the leaders of the organisation
- communicate the screening process for staff and volunteers

RC Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account

Refer to Lewis Holdway Lawyers presentation.

RC Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported.

- Standard five of the Royal Commission looks relatively familiar at first sight in that it deals with recruitment and screening of leaders.
- Start at the beginning and advertise your vacancy roles emphasising your child safety approach. Do this to:
 - head off undesirable applicants
 - encourage better candidates
 - create clear expectations about child safety importance (e.g. in duty statements)
- Good practice, including ChildSafe, generally recommends the following screening elements:

- Working with Children Card (WWCC / WWVP / Blue Card)
- and Police checks, as necessary
- prior employer and/or referee checks
- interviews (seeking to identify motivations)
- applicant sign-off on policy, Code of Conduct and a 'prior conduct' statement

But additional to this should be clear statements around:

- expected behaviours with, to and around children
 - specific role duties and how they interrelate with children
 - nature of role accountability and responsibility
 - ways in which data is stored and protected
 - clear harm reporting mechanisms for incidents and serious both internal and external
 - training
- Expected behaviours are again usually encapsulated in a Code of Conduct document. Staff and volunteers should sign off against the three elements of
 - Policy
 - Code of conduct
 - Prior conduct (where they do not have incidents in their past making them unsuitable)
 - This approach strengthens a duty of care that clearly demonstrates a person has been provided a clear expectation of the behaviours with and around children.
- **Some practical mechanisms to support children's well-being:**
 - Include child safety brief in role vacancy advertisements
 - Include child safety mechanisms in role statement
 - Link the above to organisation website child safety policy / info
 - Provide clear role statements with an emphasis for child well-being

- Provide clear access to policies and procedures
- Keep policies and procedures and concise and clear as possible to support practice
- Provide clear response references for reporting harm and abuse

RC Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused

Refer to the Lewis Holdway presentation

RC Standard 7. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.

- Standard seven deals with equipping staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills to keep children safe. It emphasises that training as a mechanism to do this, and is ongoing.
- The Royal Commission put it fairly plainly in its final report in volume six when it states:
- *"We heard through our case studies, commissioned research and private sessions that education and training of staff and volunteers could have assisted with the prevention, detection and response to child sexual abuse."*
- Training is therefore a critical way to inform people taking a role with children, including helping them 'unlearn' some all too common myths including:
 - it is always older men who abuse
 - it is usually a stranger who abuses

- if children told of their abuse, they would usually be believed
- abuse is usually occasional, not repeated and limited in its tangible effects
- it is only abuse when it is violent
- Training has multiple purposes that include:
 - communicate
 - promote
 - learn
 - identify and respond
 - build capacity
 - reinforce

Royal Commission standard seven indicates three prime elements for focus:

- the nature and indicators of child maltreatment
- the institution's child safe practices and child protection
- to develop practical skills in protecting children and responding to disclosures

In addition to what are sometimes relatively generic principles of safety, you will want to look for:

- A clear understanding of authority responses and reporting locally
- Applying the principles to the context your organisations operates in

Additional training should be provided where Reportable Conduct Schemes are also active in the relevant State and Territory.

- Key questions you will want to ask include but are not limited to:
 - who needs to be trained in our organisation?
 - what do they need to be trained on?
 - does everyone require identical training?

- who can deliver this training?
 - what are our obligations under law locally?
 - do we have clear response procedures
 - have policies and key procedures been featured in our training?
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- One way moving forward in your organisation could be to get all volunteers and staff working with children or young people to be ChildSafe trained not just working with children checked. This will ensure that they have the knowledge and understanding of what it means to protect the wellbeing of children and young people. Then let the parents/caregivers and the community know that this is what you as an organisation do as part of who you are.

RC Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur

Refer to EA Insurance Services Presentation

RC Standard 9. Implementation of child safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved.

- Standard nine outlines that the implementation of child safe standards is continuously reviewed and improved. Its ongoing nature speaks to a regularity of review, the timing which your organisation will decide.



- A way forward for reviewing process
- The application of this process adds weight to the first standard that there is a culture that not only says this is important, but metrics and action that follow this. In its final report, volume six the RC states:
- *An open culture encourages people to discuss difficult decisions and identify and learn from mistakes. Complaints are an opportunity to identify the root cause of a problem and improve policies and practices to reduce the risk of harm to children.*
- In an excellent Royal Commission Report, 'Hear no evil, see no evil', Professor. Eileen Munro and Dr Sheila Fish (2015) assert under the heading 'Drift into failure'
- *"for any one worker, the chances of working with an abuser are low and so they may not be as vigilant as they would be if they had recurrent experiences of detecting abuse. Indeed, if they are asked to report low level concerns, they may experience so many false alarms that they become cynical about them. [] It requires that managers continually monitor and endorse protection policies to stress the importance of vigilance."*
- **So what are key take-aways of this standard?**
- periodic child safety review is always warranted
- commit to a regular review process and special review for major incidents
- have a process to capture complaints, incidents and related feedback
- training emphasises an open culture that supports reporting

- a review process that in turn feeds into opportunities for improvements
- appreciate under standard two, how childrens' feedback might be captured
- don't succumb to a 'drift to failure'

RC Standard 10. Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.

- In standard ten the Royal Commission elaborates how policies and procedures should reflect and document how the organisation is child safe.

An organisation wants to ensure its policies and procedures:

- address all child safe elements
- are accessible
- are user-friendly
- have stakeholder input
- are championed by leaders
- are complied with
- understood by staff and volunteers
- supported by training

As highlighted above organisations do well to avoid the danger of:

- ignorance of policies
- lack of will to effect
- lack of compliance
- cynicism of safety process and its effect