



The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has exposed some of the dark side of our society. It showed us that there are some truly evil people that are willing to threaten and hurt the most vulnerable and innocent individuals in our world and that many institutions became dysfunctional and enabled such abuse to take place. It is unsurprising therefore that the Royal Commission in its final report published in December 2017 proposed 10 national standards. It is expected that these standards will become law at some time, and by July 2018 the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) each responded as required, to these standards, affirming them.

The proposed national standards therefore represent national 'best practice' and should serve as a minimum standard for all organisations that want to protect children; that want to be 'child safe'. These standards are:

Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

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

Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved

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

Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported

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

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

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

Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

The Royal Commission focussed on harm from sexual abuse, but there are other ways that children can come to harm. ChildSafe has adopted the Royal Commission's 10 standards and extended their definition to help organisations keep the children in their care safe from all forms of potential harm.

Standard 1 Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture

Culture is about how the people in the organisation think and what they do. Organisations are responsible for building a culture of safety so that the children and other vulnerable people in their care are kept safe all the time. The ChildSafe organisation takes a system approach to safety management by concentrating on the conditions under which individuals work and is proactive in identifying potential risks and planning ways to keep the children in their care, safe from harm. A child safe culture is built through good governance that sees child safety as a priority from the board down, with board policies and procedures implemented throughout the organisation. Strong committed leadership is essential in building and sustaining this culture.

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

It is important that any organisation working with children or other vulnerable people creates an environment where the participants are empowered to choose whether to participate in each activity and feel that they can report incidents or practices that make them feel unsafe. Children and vulnerable people feel comfortable in participating in safety decisions and are informed about safety approaches.

Standard 3 Families and communities are informed and involved

An organisation seeks to involve families and community in its approach to child safety and well-being. This informs parents and carers about safeguarding children and vulnerable people and encourages their feedback and opinions about relevant policies and practices. This can provide further insight into issues and concerns.

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

An organisation should recognise children and vulnerable people's diverse circumstances, empowering children and vulnerable people to participate more effectively. This builds an organisational culture which embraces ALL children.

Standard 5 People working with children are suitable and supported

Recruitment and staff development policies, including appropriate screening, are a foundation of child safe organisations. This includes induction training, understanding child safety responsibilities, and appropriate supervision of staff and volunteers. Training and information sharing provide staff and volunteers with the relevant practice tools to better safeguard children and young people.

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

Complaints processes should be responsive to, and understood by children and vulnerable people, families, staff and volunteers. Complaint processes should be linked to the ChildSafe Code of Conduct.

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

The organisation values training as a way of providing staff and volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed to maintain the system of safety and care. It must provide information, ongoing education and training for staff and volunteers that supports child safety practice and prepares them for the role they are required to fulfil.

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

To keep children from harm, organisations need to plan to manage risk, as an important preventative mechanism to reduce the risk of harm in physical and online environments. Risk management strategies clarify potential risks where adult-to-child or child-to-child interactions occur, or where the physical environment is unsafe.

Standard 9 Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved

Safety systems should evolve constantly as the organisation responds to changing conditions and learns from experience. A system of regular review of the organisation's ChildSafe practice ensures that continuous improvement happens.

Standard 10 Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe

Organisations should have a clearly documented policy for child and vulnerable person safety and wellbeing. Thereby all stakeholders, including organisational staff and volunteers, children and vulnerable people and their families and carers, are aware of how the organisation is planning to create an environment that is safe. Documenting and communicating policies and procedures ensures consistent application of child safe practices across the organisation.

References:

- Royal Commission, Creating child safe institutions (the 'ten standards'), Jul 2016
- Australian Human Rights Commission, National Principles for Child Safe Organisations, Jun 2018
- Royal Commission, Best practice principles in responding to complaints of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, Mar 2016
- Royal Commission Records and recordkeeping practices, Sep 2016
- Hear no evil, see no evil: Understanding failure to identify and report child sexual abuse in institutional contexts, Sep 2015
- NSW Ombudsmen presentation to CCYP Victoria, Reportable Conduct seminar, Oct 2017
- ISO 31000:2009 Risk management – Principles and guidelines