

# Consulting with Children and Young People

Children and young people as participants of programs, activities and events are key stakeholders and will often provide valuable and unique insights from their perspective. As the 'world' often looks and feels different to a child or young person, listening to children and young people's views about child safety allows organisations to respond more effectively to their concerns.

Involving children and young people enables them to have input and to contribute to the development of child safe practices that reflect their needs. The age and stage of development of children and young people will inform our approach to consulting with them. While it would be appropriate to engage young people attending youth group in discussing, filling in a questionnaire or completing an online survey to express their safety needs and concerns, the approach with younger children may need to be creative, visual and supportive (e.g. using art activities).

I think that adults think they know what kids need to be safe but I don't think they do. They base it on what they remember from when they were kids and the world is different now. So they need to talk to kids and find out what it means to them.

Young person (quoted in Moore 2017)

When children and young people talk about safety they will often differentiate between strategies designed to keep them physically safe – to 'be safe' (e.g. putting on sunscreen, wearing hats, first aid, rules) and strategies that help them to 'feel safe'.

Feeling safe for children and young people may include feeling welcome, experiencing respectful and positive interactions, being cared for, being surrounded by safe, trusted and accessible staff, knowing they can speak to someone if they are feeling unsafe, being listened to and having fun. Children and young people feel safe when they know that the adults around them take their roles seriously in relation to child safety and will act to keep them safe.

Moore et al (2015) suggest that adults often focus on strategies that keep children and young people physically safe and pay less attention to factors that help children and young people feel safe (psychological safety). Ideally, within an organisation, it is important to consider strategies that help children and young people 'be safe' as well as those which assist them to 'feel safe'. Being safe and feeling safe are equally important to children and young people.

## POSSIBLE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (OVER 10 YEARS OF AGE)

- What do you enjoy about coming to .....
- What don't you enjoy about coming to .....
- What does it mean to feel safe at .....
- When you attend ....., what makes you feel safe?
- When you attend ....., is there anything that makes you feel unsafe?
- What would you like staff to consider when they run ..... to help you feel safe?
- Safety is important at ....., how can we keep the kids who attend ..... safe?
- What do adults currently do at ..... that makes you feel safe?
- What do adults currently do at ..... that makes you feel unsafe?
- What could we do at ..... to help you feel safe?
- What do you think is in place at ..... to keep you safe?

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- If you were in charge of ....., what would you do to improve safety?
- As we plan the ..... (e.g. camp, excursion, fete), what do we need to consider to keep kids safe?

## POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO CONSULTING WITH CHILDREN (UNDER 10 YEARS OF AGE) ABOUT CHILD SAFETY

- Brainstorming group activity – What do you enjoy about coming to .....? What don't you enjoy about coming to .....?
- Draw a picture of what makes you feel safe at .....
- Brainstorming group activity – What does being safe 'feel like'? What makes you feel safe at .....
- Ask children to take photographs of 'safe' and 'unsafe' aspects of the physical environment (e.g. sections of the playground, car park, roads, equipment, rooms in a venue).

## ACTIVITY: MIND MAPPING WHAT MAKES CHILDREN FEEL SAFE AND UNSAFE (MOORE 2017, P. 4)

Materials: A3 sheets of paper (two per person); pens and coloured pencils or markers.

1. Give each child and young person an A3 sheet of paper and writing/drawing materials.
2. Ask them to draw a cloud in the centre of the page and write the word 'SAFE' inside.
3. Ask them to draw a cloud in each corner of the page and write in it one of the words 'WHO?' 'WHAT?' 'WHERE?' and 'WHEN?'



4. Invite children and young people to: write words or draw pictures that represent the things that come to mind when they think about safety; identify people, places and times when they felt safe; and identify things that made them feel safe.
5. Then invite the children and young people to do the same for the word 'UNSAFE'.
6. After each topic has been explored, encourage the children and young people to share their answers with the group. Discuss and document emerging themes.

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## ACTIVITY: SAFETY MAPS TO IDENTIFY CHILD SAFE SPACES (MOORE 2017, P. 7)

Materials: Map of the parish, agency or entity.

1. Ask children and young people to take a tour of the location to decide which spaces are safe and which are not.
2. Children and young people can colour-code the map and explain why they felt certain places were safe and others were not.
3. Discuss the findings with the children and young people and develop a plan as to how to make these spaces more child-friendly.

## REFERENCES

Moore, T 2017, *Protection through participation: Involving children in child-safe organisations*, CFCA Practice Paper, April, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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Moore, T, McArthur, M, Noble-Carr, D & Harcourt, D 2015, *Taking us seriously: Children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns*, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

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