Social Services Regulator

Working with Children Check

Working with Children Child Safety Training

This training covers 6 modules and takes around 45 minutes to complete.



Content warning: This training includes content that some people may find distressing. Please take breaks if needed and complete the learning at a pace that feels comfortable for you.

1. You play a key role in keeping children safe



The people children count on

watch the video



Childhoods are happening everywhere across this country.



At the beach. On the oval. Down the street.



It's a time of growing. Making friends. Losing and winning.



For working out who you are, and who you want to be.



As a Working with Children Check holder, you might be the one watching over a child, while they figure that out.



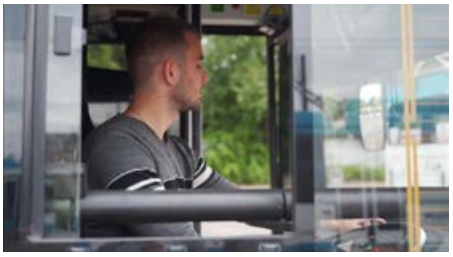
With them on the sideline.



Maybe you're their familiar face at the crossing.



Or in their home. In the room down the hall. In their classroom. At the front desk, or behind the scenes.



Behind the wheel.



These are ordinary interactions. Ordinary moments. But for a child, they can mean everything.



Because children don't just remember what happens. They remember who was there. And how they made them feel.



This child safety training is for everyone who is applying for or renewing their Working with Children Check.



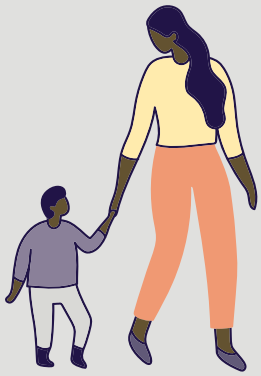
Whether you work directly with children each day, or you provide support from a distance, you are art of what keeps children safe.



As child abuse survivors keep telling us, you are the adults that matter.



You are the adults who can help. This is your training.



Every person who spends time with children — in any setting, any role — plays an important part in keeping them safe.

Note: In this course, the terms **child** and **young person** refer to anyone under 18 years of age.

What is your role in keeping children safe?

Explore each setting. Find your role with children and consider who else is part of keeping children safe.

Select the label that best describes where you work or volunteer with children.

On the sideline

You might be a coach, official, referee, or instructor in a sport, a pool, a gym, or a recreational program. Children in your care experience genuine trust.

Your role is important because children trust you. It is important to pay attention and keep that trust with children by listening to them, respecting them and helping them.



In the room or classroom

You might be an early childhood educator, a counsellor, someone running school holiday programs or in a different type of role where children are present. You see children at some of their most unguarded moments.

Children carry their feelings, experiences and worries with them wherever they go. That makes you well-placed to notice when something doesn't look or feel right.



In the community

You might be a crossing supervisor, bus driver, canteen volunteer, or someone who helps run a community program. Your contact with each child might be brief but it's regular.

Being reliable and steady matters to children. It may not seem like it, but the time a child spends with you means a lot to them.



At home and in care

You might be a foster carer, kinship carer or residential youth worker. The children in your care may carry complex histories.

The care you give is the most important part of your job. Knowing how to keep children safe is not an extra task. It is a main part of what you do every day.



Behind the scenes

You might work in administration, reception, IT, or another support role in an organisation that works with children. Your Working with Children Check reflects the fact that children are part of your role and may be present in your environment, even if you don't work with them face to face.

If you work with children, you need to know how to spot warning signs. If something does not look or feel right, you must know who to tell. Doing this is an essential part of every person's job when they work with children.



Support services

You may be a youth worker, social worker, or counsellor. This training teaches the basic child safety skills everyone needs. You will learn about building safe relationships, spotting right and wrong behaviour from staff and see warning signs of abuse in children. Most importantly, you will learn how we all work together to keep kids safe.

This course focuses on the shared foundations: building safe relationships, recognising appropriate behaviour by workers and signs of concern, and knowing your part in a collective responsibility.



In health and care

You might work in a paediatric ward, a community health service, or another setting that cares for children. Children can be at their most vulnerable, tired, unwell, or away from their usual support people, in these settings.

Being alert to what a child tells you, or doesn't, matters as much here as anywhere else.



In faith and cultural life

You might support children through a religious organisation, or a cultural group. Families often place particular trust in these settings.

That's why noticing and speaking up can make a meaningful difference in keeping a child safe or not.



In the words of child abuse survivors

watch the video



Emma: I'm a survivor of child sexual abuse. I developed this child safety training with other survivors and experts.



Portia: We know best what adults could have done differently to protect and keep us safe.



Emma: Many survivors, like me, were abused by trusted people who held a Working with Children Check. That's uncomfortable. It's also exactly why this training matters.



Harriet: Some people choose to hurt children. We can't prevent that alone. But every safe adult around children, every one of you, can create an environment where children are safe.



Conor: That collective safety is stronger than those who want to do harm. It starts with safe relationships where children feel respected and heard.



Portia: It also comes from knowing the signs of abuse, and what to do next when something feels off.



Emma: As a Check holder, you're not expected to do this alone, but as part of a network of adults keeping children safe. Your actions matter.



Emma: On behalf of the survivors who co-developed this child safety training, thank you for making children safer with us.



Key messages

1. **Being there for children, caring about who they are, and respecting them is not an extra task.** It is a central part of your role. This is what makes children trust you enough to tell you when something is wrong.

2. **When you notice a problem, take action.** You do not need to be certain. A child's safety is always more important than your own worry about being wrong.



Children are surrounded by adults every day. To keep kids safe, these adults must pay attention, notice warning signs, and take action. Doing this is a central part of your role.

Reflect



Think of one child you work with, volunteer with, or care for. Keep them in mind as you go through this course.

2. Child abuse is more common than you think



What the data tells us

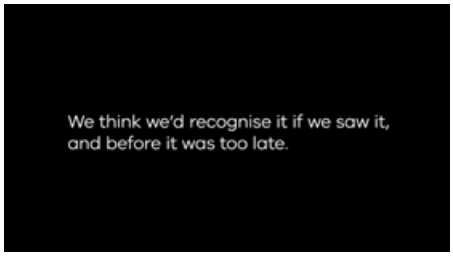
watch the video



Most people think child abuse is rare.



That it happens in other families, communities or institutions, with other people they don't know.



We think that we'd recognise it if we saw it, and before it was too late.



But the data tells a different story.



The largest study of child abuse ever conducted in Australia found that 62% of adults experienced at least one form of abuse as children.



It's not rare. Not somewhere else. It's most people's childhoods.



We picture the person responsible as someone unknown, a stranger.



But the data shows that the people responsible for hurting children are almost always already in a child's life.



Someone related. Someone helping out. Someone overlooked.



Abuse isn't one thing.
It's neglect.



Emotional abuse.



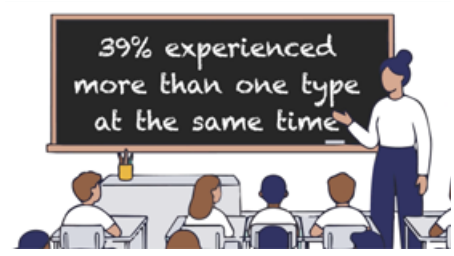
Family and domestic violence.



Physical abuse.

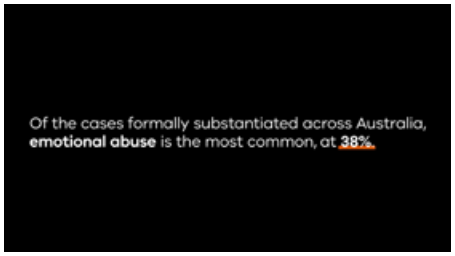


Sexual abuse.
The law treats all of them very seriously, and so should we.

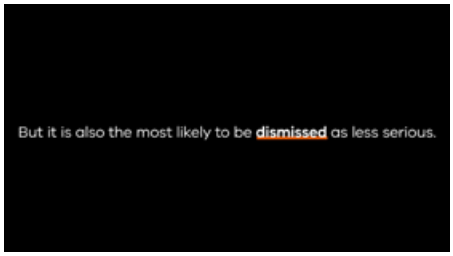


Almost 40% of children who are abused experience more than one type at the same time.

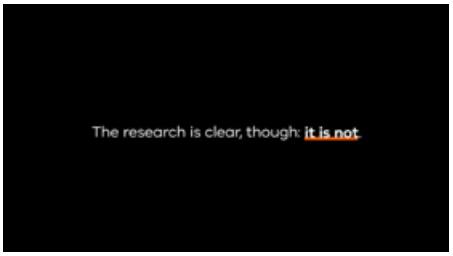
What the data tells us



Of the cases formally substantiated across Australia, emotional abuse is the most common, at 38%.



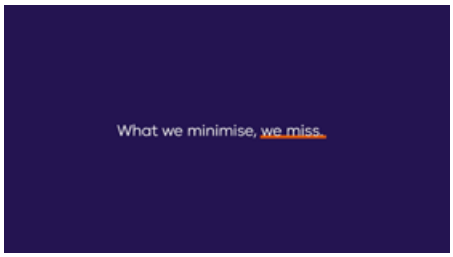
But it is also the most likely to be dismissed as less serious.



The research is clear, though: it is not.



The abuse does not stay in childhood. Adults who experienced emotional abuse as children are more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide in the past year.



What we minimise, we miss.



Australians who experienced abuse are far more likely to live with depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress.



Nearly three times more likely than those who were not abused.



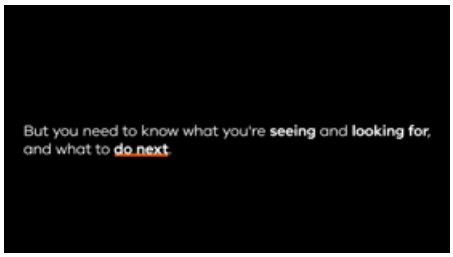
The early signs – quiet and easy to explain away - are the ones that matter most.



Catching them early changes everything.



You don't need to be certain.



But you need to know what you're seeing, and looking for — and what to do next.



And that's what this training is for.

Understanding abuse

Child abuse is more common than many people realise, and it rarely looks the way we expect. Because of this, Victoria has Child Safe Standards that organisations working with children must follow, including training like this, so people know how to keep children safe.

The Child Safe Standards are a set of mandatory requirements that ensure organisations have systems, policies, and practices in place to keep children safe from abuse and harm in organisational settings.

The Child Safe Standards apply to organisations that provide services or facilities to children and young people or that engage children and young people.

For further information, you can visit the Social Services Regulator's website: https://www.vic.gov.au/about-child-safe-standards-0.



If you only know one type of abuse, you'll only see one type of abuse.

This module gives you the picture behind the numbers: what each type of abuse looks like in real life, so you can understand the different types of abuse.



Five types of abuse

Explore each setting. Find where you show up and consider who else is part of keeping children safe.

Neglect

What is it?

Neglect is a failure to provide a child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision. The neglect of a child:

- can place the child's immediate safety and development at serious risk or
- may not immediately put a child in danger, but may result in longer term ongoing harm.

Example

- In a school or childcare centre, a staff member might notice a child who frequently arrives without suitable clothing for the weather or appears consistently hungry.
- Health clinic workers may see children with untreated medical issues or poor hygiene.

You might also hear this called physical, medical, educational or emotional neglect, or abandonment. These are all forms of neglect — the term used often describes which need isn't being met.



Emotional abuse

What is it?

Emotional abuse happens when a child is repeatedly made to feel unwanted, left out, threatened, or scared. It can also include constant criticism, name-calling, put-downs, or a lack of warmth and support from an adult. Over time, this can harm a child's emotional wellbeing, development, or health.

Example

- In a sports club or after-school program, a child may frequently appear anxious or overly eager to please, reacting strongly to criticism or feeling unsafe to express themselves.
- Staff might overhear a caregiver or volunteer making derogatory remarks or belittling the child's achievements, causing the child to become withdrawn or isolated from the group.



You might also hear this called psychological abuse. This includes using a child's culture as a reason to abuse them, as well as cultural abuse and racism directed at a child by a caregiver and/or relative.

Family violence

What is it?

The *Family Violence Protection Act 2008* (Vic) defines family violence as behaviour towards a family member or intimate partner that is physically, sexually, emotionally or economically abusive, threatening, or coercive, or that otherwise controls or dominates them and causes fear for their safety or wellbeing. A child does not need to be directly hurt to be a victim — family violence includes behaviour that causes a child to hear, witness, or otherwise be exposed to it. Children who have previously experienced family violence are particularly vulnerable to further abuses.

Example

- At a family support service or during a health visit, a child may show signs of distress or anxiety and disclose or indirectly reveal exposure to violence at home.
- Teachers and youth workers might notice behavioural changes linked to family violence.



You might also hear this called coercive control, economic abuse, or technology-facilitated abuse. These often occur alongside each other.

Physical abuse

What is it?

Physical child abuse is any non-accidental use of physical violence on a child by any person. It can be applied in many ways, including beating, shaking, burning, using an object to hurt a child and female genital mutilation, where a girl's genitals are cut or injured for non-medical reasons.

This includes a child believing they're about to be hurt, even without being touched — for example, a raised hand or an object thrown nearby.

Example

- Childcare workers or sports coaches may notice unexplained injuries or children flinching when approached.
- Residential care staff might observe signs of physical harm or hear disclosures.

You might also hear this called excessive discipline.



Child sexual abuse

What is it?

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in a sexual activity. It includes sexual behaviour against, or near a child that:

- a child does not understand
- a child does not or cannot consent to

A child can never consent to sexual activity with an adult, no matter what the adult thinks.

- is not accepted by the community
- is unlawful.

Child sexual abuse can take many forms and does not always involve physical contact. Examples include talking to a child in a sexual or inappropriate way, making a child look at sexual imagery, or making, sharing or possessing child exploitation material. It can occur within families, in organisations, or online, and can happen once or repeatedly.

Example

- Teachers or youth group leaders might notice inappropriate behaviours or hear disclosures.
- Online moderators or support workers might identify grooming or exploitative behaviour happening digitally.

Recognising and responding to child sexual abuse is the responsibility of everyone in an organisation. Non-direct care staff also play a critical safeguarding role by identifying concerns, noticing risks and contributing to safer environments for children.



The law treats all five types of abuse very seriously. They often overlap: a child experiencing one type is often experiencing others too.

It is important to note that young people can abuse other young people where a difference in ability, power, status or age exists. This may also tell us that the young person harming another may be being abused by someone else.

Every child is different

Noticing a change starts with knowing a child's usual baseline. This means how they normally look, sound, and behave. Culture, background, disability, and other personal circumstances can all shape how abuse affects them.

The signs of abuse may not look the same in every child. For example, babies and toddlers can have completely different warning signs from older children and teenagers. As someone who works with children, knowing a child well enough or being aware of the signs to notice when something changes is important.

Children with disability face a higher risk of abuse. A person wanting to abuse a child with disability can exploit the same things that make everyday life harder for that child: fewer trusted people around them to notice or believe them, communication differences that make it harder to tell someone, or fewer people to help them recognise that what's happening isn't normal. Relying on carers for personal support can also give an abuser access, and cover, to act without being seen. And when abuse is suspected, it can be dismissed as a carer simply being stressed, rather than investigated.

This does not mean looking for different signs. It means knowing a child well enough or being aware of the signs to notice when something changes. It also means making sure every child has a way to tell you when something is wrong, including children who communicate differently.

Trust and history

For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, checks and reporting processes can bring up real and painful history. Past government policies, including the forced removal of children now known as the Stolen Generations, caused deep and lasting harm. They broke trust in government and organisational systems, and that history still shapes how some families experience contact with services today.

Understanding this helps you build trust in a different way. It means listening first, being patient, and recognising that caution is not the same as having something to hide.

Activity

What type of abuse?

Select the correct answer for each question below.

Scenario

1 A child in out-of-school care has become quieter over the past month. They flinch when an adult raises their voice nearby, and a staff member notices bruising on their arm that the child says came from "just falling over." Their caregiver often criticises them in front of other children and dismisses any achievements.

Select what stands out *(what seems important or concerning)* **to you in this scenario?**

- ☐ The child has become quieter
- ☐ The child flinches when an adult raises their voice
- ☐ There is unexplained bruising
- ☐ The child gives an unclear explanation for the injury
- ☐ The caregiver regularly criticises the child publicly
- ☐ The caregiver dismisses the child's achievements
- ☐ Nothing: there is not enough evidence to know that abuse is occurring

Feedback

Several things in this scenario warrant attention.

You don't need to determine exactly what type of abuse is occurring before responding to a concern. Changes in behaviour, unexplained injuries, fear responses, humiliation, and repeated undermining of a child's worth can all be signals that something may not be right.

A child's explanation should be listened to respectfully, but it does not automatically resolve the concern.

The task is not to diagnose. It is to notice.



Key messages

1. **Child abuse is more common than most people realise.** When a child is abused, it is usually someone the child knows. They are often family members, coaches, neighbours, or other people in a child's life. It is hard to imagine abuse happening in your own workplace or organisation. But if you are aware of the risks and the signs, you can help stop the abuse before it happens.
2. **Abuse rarely occurs alone.** More than one type can be present at once, and early signs can be subtle.
3. **Your role is to notice, respond safely, and report.** Whether you work directly with children or provide a support role. Follow your organisation's safeguarding procedures. If you are not part of an organisation with formal reporting pathways, it is important to identify the appropriate child protection or safeguarding service and share your concerns. There are always pathways to report, depending on your role. Even if it feels small, your concerns may not be the only ones reported, adding them together may show a pattern of behaviour.
4. **Every child is different.** Culture, background, and individual circumstances can shape how abuse affects them, so the same warning signs may not look the same from child to child.

Abuse can happen in the normal places where children spend their time every day. This is why you need to stay alert.



Reflect

Now that you know the five types of abuse, which one do you think would be easiest to miss in your own setting?

3. Recognise indicators of concern



Be someone who notices

watch the video



The adults who make a difference in a child's life are rarely the ones who did something extraordinary.



They are the ones who consistently created a safe space. In the ordinary moments.



They are curious about children as people. Not just how they are performing, but who they are. What they care about. What is going on for them each day.



They listen in a way that tells a child: 'what you say matters'. You matter.



That kind of listening builds trust. And trust is what makes children feel safe enough to show you when something is wrong.



These adults treat children with genuine respect. They ask rather than assume. They give children a say, because children who feel respected feel safe.



And children who feel safe are more likely to tell you when they don't feel that way.



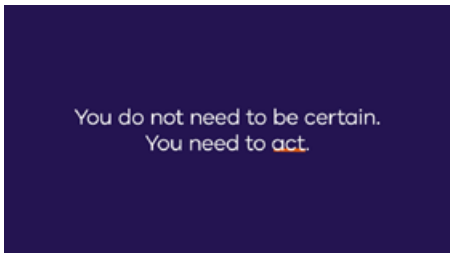
And when an adult – like you – is present, curious, listening and respectful, you notice more. Not because you are looking for signs.



Because you know this child. So, when something changes, even slightly, you can feel it before it can be named. That is where recognition begins.



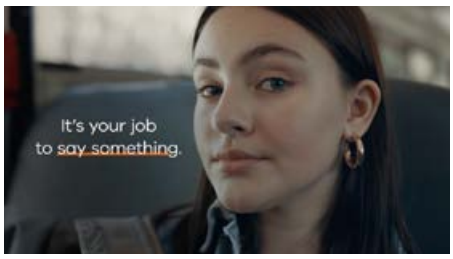
Your relationship with a child is not separate from keeping them safe. It is what keeping them safe looks like.



You do not need to be certain. You need to act. Concerns about child safety rarely come with clear evidence or obvious signs.



Most people who fail to act do so not because they did not notice, but because they were not sure and waiting for certainty felt safer than being wrong.



It is not your job to investigate. It is your job to say something.

Building genuine relationships and understanding indicators of concern is what makes noticing possible. The next section gives you the knowledge to understand what you might be seeing when something feels off, or doesn't seem right, and what you can do about it.

What to look for

Explore common signs and changes in behaviour for each type of abuse. Examples of what you might notice in other staff or volunteers are also provided.



Neglect

Neglect is when a child's basic needs are consistently not being met. It is often a pattern over time rather than a single incident.

What you might see

- Hiding food or eating too much at once
- Consistently poorly dressed for the weather
- Poor hygiene — unwashed, unkempt, body odour
- Tired or lethargic, falling asleep during activities
- Untreated injuries, illness or dental problems

What you might notice in behaviour

- Sudden or persistent drop in school performance, attendance, or engagement without explanation
- Appears to have no one checking on them or following up on their needs
- Excessively friendly or affectionate with strangers or new adults
- Taking on an adult caregiving role at home
- Reluctant to go home, or staying in your care for long hours without explanation
- Involvement in criminal activity, or self-destructive behaviour

Signs you might see in other staff or volunteers

- Staff or volunteers who consistently ignore a child's basic needs, such as not responding when the child is hungry, dirty, or tired.
- Adults who leave children unsupervised or fail to ensure appropriate clothing or medical care.
- Dismissive or blaming attitudes toward a child who appears neglected.

Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is when a child is repeatedly rejected, humiliated, threatened, isolated or ignored by a person in ways that damage how they feel about themselves. It is almost always a pattern over time.

What you might see

- Speech difficulties, such as language delay or being unable to speak in some situations or around specific people
- Delays in emotional, mental, or physical development

What you might notice in behaviour

- Very low self-worth, regularly saying they are stupid, worthless or unloved
- Extremely anxious, fearful of making mistakes
- Excessively eager to please adults
- Withdrawn from activities or friendships they previously enjoyed
- Reacts with significant distress to minor correction or criticism
- Describes (often in words that aren't obvious) being regularly humiliated, threatened or dismissed at home
- Lying or stealing in ways that seem out of character or beyond normal development
- Lack of apparent connection with parents or carers
- Behaviour that isn't age-appropriate (overly adult or overly babyish)
- Violent drawings or writing
- Poor social or interpersonal skills
- Unexplained mood swings, depression, self-harm, or thoughts of suicide

Signs you might see in other staff or volunteers

- Staff or volunteers who frequently belittle, shame, or ignore a child's feelings or efforts.
- Adults using harsh or hostile language, yelling, or showing anger that does not match the situation.
- Excluding a child repeatedly from group activities or social interactions without good reason.

Family violence

Family violence is when a child lives in a home where violence, threats or coercive control occur primarily by one family member toward others. A child does not need to be physically hurt or directly witness violence to be harmed by it; being exposed to a harmful environment is a violence in itself.



What you might see

- Easily startled, jumpy
- Excessively and consistently tired or withdrawn

What you might notice in behaviour

- Becomes distressed at raised voices or conflict between others
- Struggles to concentrate or settle
- Unexplained changes in mood, behaviour or attendance
- Describes frightening events at home, sometimes casually or in passing
- Takes on a caretaking role toward a parent or younger siblings
- Minimises or makes excuses for adult behaviour at home
- Cruelty toward animals or other children
- Expresses fear about going home, or reluctance to leave school or other safe environments

Signs you might see in other staff or volunteers

- Adults who appear controlling or overly punitive toward a child or their family without cause.
- Staff who minimise or dismiss concerns about a child's distress or fear.
- Volunteers or workers who gossip or speculate insensitively about a child's home life.

Physical abuse

Physical abuse is when a person deliberately hurts a child physically. Any unexplained physical injury in a child warrants attention, particularly in infants.

What you might see

- Unexplained injuries, or injuries that don't match the explanation given
- Bruising in unusual locations — face, back, ears, upper thighs, buttocks
- Multiple injuries at different stages of healing are visible
- Burns, cuts or marks that look like they were caused by a tool or restraint
- Female genital mutilation
- Signs of poisoning, such as nausea, drowsiness, or abdominal pain
- Bald patches where hair may have been pulled out

What you might notice in behaviour

- Flinches at sudden movements or unexpected physical contact
- Wears clothing unsuitable for the weather — long sleeves in summer
- Appears fearful when asked about home life or about returning home
- Explanation of an injury changes or seems rehearsed
- Becomes distressed when other children cry or shout
- Unclear understanding of appropriate boundaries between adults and children
- Wary or distrustful of adults, or excessively clingy toward particular adults
- A strong desire to please or seek validation from certain adults — for example, overcommitting to sport or schoolwork

Signs you might see in other staff or volunteers:

- Adults who use excessive or harsh physical discipline, raising hands, grabbing, or shaking children.
- Staff or volunteers who try to hide injuries on a child or give inconsistent explanations for bruises or marks.
- Observing a tense or fearful atmosphere around certain adults.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse is when a person uses power or authority over a child to involve them in a sexual activity. It includes physical touch as well as viewing or witnessing sexual acts. It is almost never committed by a stranger — most often it is someone already known and trusted by the child.

What you might see

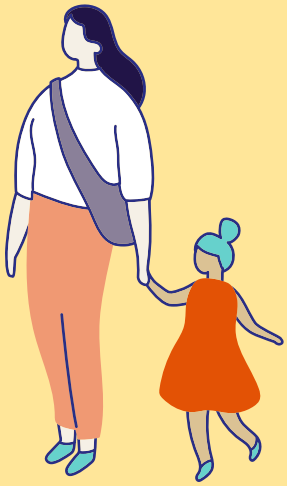
- Physical signs may also be present, but these are rarely visible to someone outside the family, a health professional is usually needed to identify them.

What you might notice in behaviour

- Fear or avoidance of a particular person, place or activity without clear explanation
- Unexpected changes in behaviour, mood or sleep — increased anger, rudeness, or complaints of headaches
- Regression to younger behaviours — bedwetting, thumb sucking, clinginess, baby talk
- Sexual knowledge, language or behaviour that seems beyond the child's age or experience
- Distress around physical contact or personal care
- Sudden accumulation of money or gifts with no clear explanation
- Indirect or partial disclosure — something said in passing, through play, or through art
- Being contacted online, such as through social media, by an adult or young person with greater power
- Developing an unusually close connection with an older person
- Being very secretive about phone, internet, or social media use
- Going missing for long periods of time, or appearing extremely tired
- Being dishonest about who they've been with or where they've been
- Substance misuse, such as drinking alcohol or taking medications in a way that is harmful
- Being collected from a program or activity by an unfamiliar person

Signs you might see in other staff or volunteers

- Adults showing inappropriate familiarity with a child, favouritism, secretive behaviour, or giving special gifts without reason.
- Staff or volunteers who seek to spend time alone with a child or isolate a child from others.
- Notices of staff or volunteers making suggestive comments, inappropriate jokes, or touching children inappropriately.



Children communicate when something is wrong. Adults need to learn to read the signs.

Children rarely disclose abuse directly. The largest study of child maltreatment in Australia (Australian Child Maltreatment Study, 2023) found that for some forms of abuse, like child sexual abuse, disclosure can take on average 20 to 25 years. That's how scary and unsafe it can feel to share what's happened. Instead, children communicate through behaviour, through changes, through things said in passing.

Note: These indicators are not a checklist. A single indicator does not confirm abuse, and the absence of indicators does not rule it out. What matters is patterns, changes from a child's normal baseline, and signs that persist or accumulate over time. Every child is different, so how they show they're in danger will be different too.

The most important foundation is the relationship you already have. A child who feels safe with you is more likely to show you, or tell you, when something is wrong. That trust is built through being present, curious, listening and respectful. Recognising indicators of concern builds on that foundation.



Activity

What do you notice?

Noticing is the first step in keeping children safe. Children do not always tell us directly when something is wrong. Sometimes they communicate through changes in their behaviour, mood, relationships, participation or the things they say. This activity checks your understanding of what to notice and when a concern needs to be shared.

Question 1: How might a child show that something is wrong?

A. They say it directly and right away. ☐

Feedback: This can happen, but it is not always the case. Children may find it difficult to talk about what is happening, particularly when they are worried about what might happen if they tell someone.

B. They may show it through changes in behaviour, mood, relationships or things they say over time. ☐

Feedback: Correct. Children may communicate that something is wrong in many different ways. Changes in behaviour, mood, relationships, participation or things they say can all be important. This is why knowing the child and noticing what is different from their usual behaviour matters.

C. They only show signs when something serious is happening. ☐

Feedback: Not necessarily. A sign on its own does not tell us how serious a situation is. What matters is paying attention to changes, patterns and circumstances and considering whether they give you reason for concern.

D. If there is no injury, there is probably nothing wrong. ☐

Feedback: Not true. Many forms of harm do not result in a visible injury. Children may communicate distress through their behaviour, emotions, relationships or what they say.



There is no single story

watch the video



Emma:

When I was a child I told an adult that my coach was weird. I didn't think I could say anything negative about adults in positions of power. My attempt to disclose was missed.

There were other signs. I got extra free time with my coach. I came late to coaching but never anything else. These signs were seen as lucky and forgetful, not patterns worth wondering about.



Portia:

I acted out. Adults labelled me a naughty, problem child who was too much and too hard. Instead, adults should have been curious about my behaviour, my constant illness, my school refusal.

Each child responds to abuse differently. Often these responses are not polite. They should not have to be.



Tessa:

I coped by withdrawing and becoming non-verbal with all adults except my parents. I was in an ongoing freeze response, but no adults seemed concerned because this quiet behaviour was valued as the compliance of a "good girl".



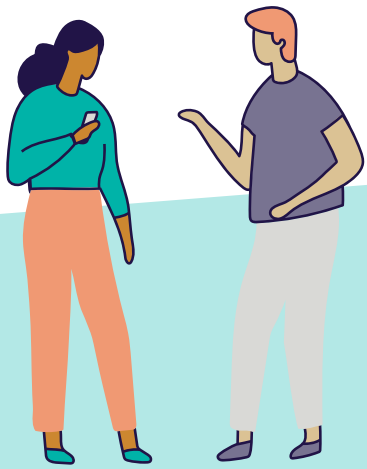
Liz:

I didn't tell anyone what was happening to me because I was trying to protect the adults who respected and loved my abuser. I didn't want to upset those meant to protect me, or to face what would happen if I told the truth. Many children do this.



Connor:

At 14 I didn't know how to say I was experiencing abuse, I just knew I was scared and how my body felt. Too often, adults wait for children to disclose abuse with adult words that children just don't have. Sometimes kids are angry or shut down. Other times they are standing in front of you, hoping you will notice what they can't yet explain.



Key messages

1. **Building safe relationships with children is child safety.** When a child feels truly noticed, heard, and respected by an adult, they are much more likely to show that adult when something is wrong.
2. **Children rarely come right out and say they are being abused.** Instead, they show it through their behaviour, through everyday changes, or by dropping hints in conversation. A single sign does not always mean abuse is happening. What matters most is a pattern of signs that keeps happening or builds up over time.
3. **You do not need to be sure before you take action.** If something feels wrong or off, trust that feeling. It is important to pay attention to these feelings or changes and pass the information on. Reporting systems exist so you can share your worries, meaning you never have to carry the burden alone.



Noticing is a start.

Reflect



Before you continue, think about the child you identified at the start of this course.

Has anything shifted in how you see them, or what you might notice?

4. Respectful and appropriate behaviour with children and young people



What appropriate behaviour looks like

watch the video



Every day, people who work and volunteer with children have dozens of small interactions.



Many might feel routine, but each one carries meaning about how we relate to children, and what we show them respectful behaviour looks like.



Whether you talk *at* a child, talk *down* to them, or talk *with* them, the way you communicate has an impact.



Appropriate communication with children is as much about listening as it is about talking. Drop down to a child's level to really listen to them.



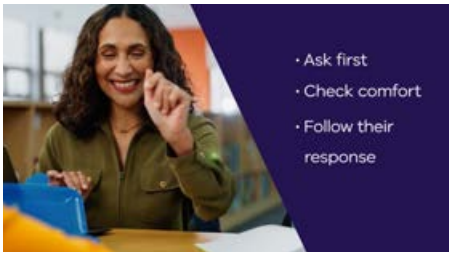
Stay calm, clear, and on topic.



Appropriate physical contact always means checking in and following the child's response.



In many roles, physical contact is a normal part of what you do.



Ask first, check comfort, follow their response. That's what appropriate looks like.



Moving a child's body without asking, even casually, even to help, sends the wrong message. It tells them that their boundaries can be ignored.



Every time you check-in first, you show them that their comfort matters and their "no" (however that looks) will be respected.



Staying visible is one of the most important protections you can offer, for a child and for you.



Keep doors open, stay in shared spaces. Make sure nothing happens out of sight, or out of the awareness of others.



If you're a carer, this looks different. A conversation in the car, or a chat at the kitchen table, is a normal part of caring for a child.



What makes it safe is getting on their level, giving them choices, and letting *them* set the pace.

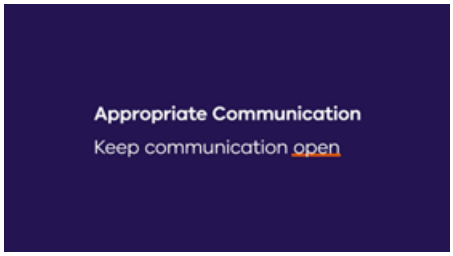


Appropriate behaviour also has boundaries around what we share, and how we stay in touch.

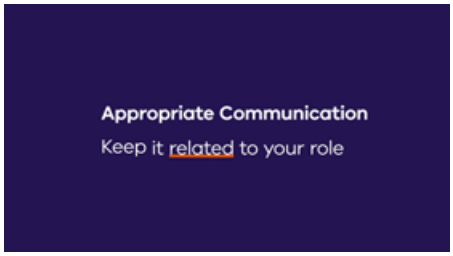
What appropriate behaviour looks like



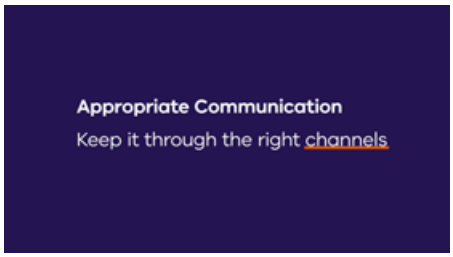
Knowing where the lines are is part of what appropriate behaviour looks like.



Your organisational policies will guide the detail, but the principle is simple: keep communication open, related to your role, and through the right channels.



Related to your role,



And through the right channels.



Children have rights, but a right only means something if a child feels safe enough to use it.



Children have the right to be heard, to have preferences, and to make choices, including the choice to say 'no'.



A child who's never allowed to choose learns something different: that they don't have a say in what happens to them.



None of this is extraordinary. It's what appropriate behaviour looks like in real life.



And it matters in every role, every setting, every interaction.



Every child has the right to feel safe, valued and supported



Child Safe Standards and appropriate behaviour

Victoria's Child Safe Standards require every organisation working with children to have a clear Child Safe Policy and Code of Conduct. These documents:

- outline which behaviours are appropriate and inappropriate, and
- are tailored to your specific workplace, so that everyone understands their role in keeping children safe and respected.

Five areas of appropriate behaviour

Whatever your role, and whatever setting you work in, here are five key areas that define appropriate behaviour when working with children:

1. **Communication**
2. **Physical contact**
3. **Privacy and online contact**
4. **One-on-one situations**
5. **Children's right to choice and decision-making**

Following these areas helps you contribute to a safe and respectful environment that is consistent with both the Child Safe Standards and your organisation's policies.

Read through each area to learn what it means for you.

1. Communication

Keep your interactions open, visible and respectful.

1	**Swim instructor**	Complimenting students' figures during a lesson.	**Inappropriate**
2	**Bus driver**	Greeting students by name – friendly, appropriate, brief.	**Appropriate**

2. Physical contact

Physical contact should have a clear reason behind it, whether that's safety, comfort, or care, and you should be checking in with the child as you go.

1	**Coach**	A child initiates a high five — the coach receives it naturally.	**Appropriate**
2	**Youth worker**	Insisting on a hug before a one-on-one check-in.	**Inappropriate**

3. Privacy and online contact

Do not share personal contact details or social media profiles with children or young people. All communication should go through channels your organisation knows about.

1	**Recreation centre staff**	Sending program information through the centre's app.	**Appropriate**
2	**Faith or cultural leader**	Sharing group photos on social media without asking for consent.	**Inappropriate**

4. One-on-one situations

Avoid unsupervised one-on-one contact with a child wherever possible. Keep interactions in open, visible spaces. If a private conversation is necessary, ensure another adult is nearby and aware. This protects children, and it protects you.

1	**Support staff (pair)**	Two staff present when a child needs support through a difficult moment.	**Appropriate**
2	**Out-of-hours care supervisor**	Meeting a student in a closed office with no windows and no one else present.	**Inappropriate**

5. Children's right to choice and power to make decisions about things that affect them

Children have the right to have their feelings, preferences, and comfort taken seriously. When a child expresses discomfort with words or through their body language, it must be respected.

Your role includes demonstrating respectful and appropriate behaviour, and showing children that adults respect a child's boundaries. These boundaries include a child's personal space and their right to choose what feels comfortable.

If children are in immediate danger or at risk of harm, it may be necessary to override a child's preferences. This should always be done sensitively and thoughtfully, explaining clearly why certain actions are needed, and ensuring the child feels heard and supported throughout.

This balance helps protect children while respecting their independence and building their trust and confidence.

1	**Event staff**	Guiding children where they want to go with words and gestures (not touch).	**Appropriate**
2	**Facilitator**	Demanding eye contact when talking with a child who seems uncomfortable with it.	**Inappropriate**



Family can mean more than parents

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, family often extends well beyond parents. Kinship networks, extended family, and community members can all play a part in a child's care and safety.

Avoid assuming a child's main contact is a parent. Ask, and follow the family's or community's guidance on who should be involved.



When behaviour isn't appropriate

The five areas covered in this module describe what appropriate behaviour looks like. Pay attention if someone's behaviour starts to move away from these expectations, even if you're not yet sure why.

Sometimes it involves one adult, and it's important to pay attention to where the behaviour might lead. Sometimes it isn't about one person. It can be a pattern that has become part of how a team or organisation works, a pattern that may make children less safe. Either way, it is important to notice it and speak to someone about your concerns.

Inappropriate behaviour does not always look obvious. It often starts small. An adult who consistently seeks one-on-one time with a particular child. Communication that becomes personal rather than role relevant. Physical contact that is adult-initiated rather than child-led. A pattern of small exceptions to the rules that each seem harmless on their own.

If another adult's behaviour makes you feel uncomfortable or concerned, don't ignore it. That feeling may be a sign that something is not right. You do not need to be certain. You do not need to name what you think is happening. You need to notice it and tell someone.



Only engage in interactions and activities that are authorised, part of your role, and known to caregivers.



Activity

Appropriate, or worth a second thought?

For each scenario, choose whether you think the behaviour is “appropriate” or “needs rethinking”. Some will be straightforward. Others might make you think twice, and that is the point.

Scenario		Behaviour
1	A youth worker texts a young person from their personal phone. **Correct:** Correct. All contact with young people must occur through official channels. Never use personal phone numbers or apps unless there is an emergency. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about how the worker is contacting the young person. Does using a personal phone help maintain clear professional boundaries?	**Needs rethinking**
2	A teacher tells a child to hug grandma goodbye. The child looks uncomfortable. **Correct:** Correct. Even well-meaning prompts or affection can override a child’s comfort and teach them they must accept physical contact, even when they don’t want it. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about the child’s reaction. If a child looks uncomfortable, should they be expected to give someone a hug?	**Needs rethinking**
3	A scout leader asks a child to join a holiday program, and accepts their ‘no’. **Correct:** Correct. The child’s choice is accepted without pressure. This is what respecting their right to choice and power looks like in practice. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about how the scout leader responds when the child says “no”. Does the adult accept the child’s decision, or try to change their mind?	**Appropriate**
4	A swim instructor crouches to the child’s level and calmly explains the drill. **Correct:** Correct. Communication that is respectful, calm and relevant to the role. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about how the instructor speaks to the child. Is the communication calm, respectful, and focused on the activity?	**Appropriate**

Children's right to choice and voice

watch the video



Emma:

I was a gymnast as a child. Gym isn't where I was sexually abused, but it's where I learned adults had the right to ignore my comfort.

In training, we were pushed into splits between two boxes, so our legs went wider than 180 degrees. It hurt. Many of us cried. But the crying was normalised. You didn't get to say stop. You were shamed if you tried to refuse.

So, when I was alone with my abuser, I didn't think I had the right to preferences, or even the right to feel uncomfortable or scared.



Caroline:

In my family, culture and community, children were expected to do what they were told. I did not believe I had the right to say or do anything that went against what an adult said or did. I was the child, they were the adult. Those were just the rules.

This is a dangerous lesson for children to learn, because it means we believe we are forced to accept what hurts.



Portia:

The adults around me made me feel like I wasn't allowed to express negative emotions. These feelings weren't meant with curiosity, they were stopped.

I learned my emotions were to be hidden not understood. I believed my feelings were less important than keeping things calm for adults.



Tessa:

Children are relatively powerless compared to adults. If we don't actively encourage their voice and rights, they will be less safe.



Key messages

1. **Every interaction with a child matters, even the small ones.** Your words and actions show a child whether they are respected, safe, and heard.
2. **Appropriate behaviour starts with respect.** Listen. Speak calmly. Put the child's comfort first.
3. **Keep interactions visible.** Open spaces and official channels protect children, and they protect you too.
4. **Inappropriate behaviour rarely starts big.** It starts small, like a private moment with no one else around. If something seems off, or doesn't feel right, trust that feeling and tell someone.
5. **You don't have to work it out alone.** If you're unsure, ask. Support is always there.



Knowing and using appropriate behaviour is how you keep children safe.

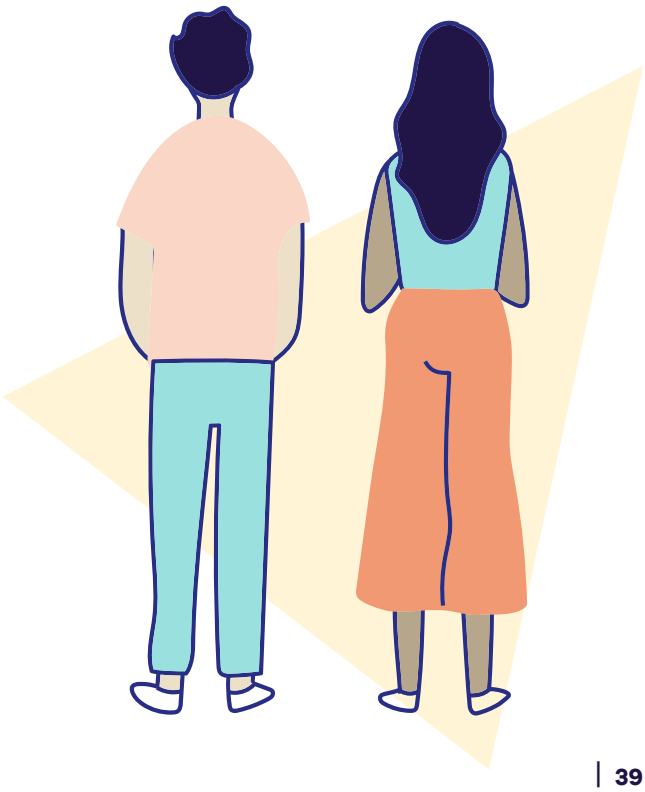


Reflect

Think about a child you've spent time with, at work, volunteering, or in your own family.

Is there a moment in it where checking in first, rather than assuming, would make a difference?

5. Grooming and grooming risk factors



Trust, secrecy, and safety: identifying grooming behaviour

watch the video



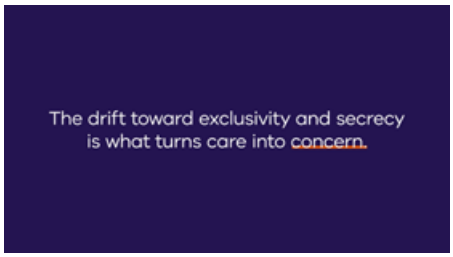
Grooming isn't always obvious. It often hides inside everyday moments, where trust is built quietly, sometimes with a child, sometimes with the adults around them.



On its own, extra time and attention can look like simple kindness. But watch for a pattern.



One young person, consistently singled out, drawn away from the group, and quietly encouraged to keep it just between the two of them.



That drift toward exclusivity and secrecy is what turns care into concern.



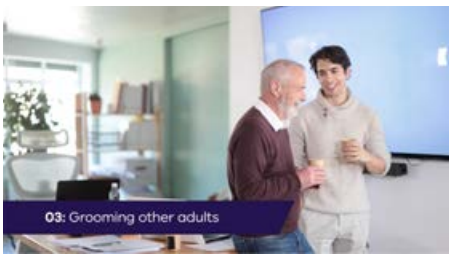
Grooming isn't only adult to child. It can happen between children and young people too.



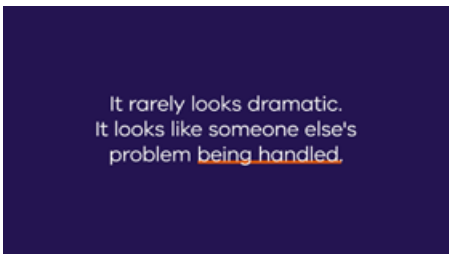
Being singled out by an older child can feel exciting to a younger one, special attention, a secret just for them.



But creating dependence, secrecy, and distance from friends is the same pattern, whoever it comes from.



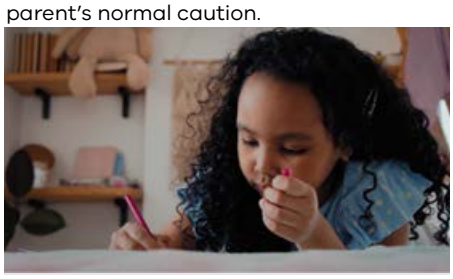
Groomers can target everyone around them, not just children. Quiet, repeated reassurance, "I've got this," "no need to escalate," can wear down a colleague or parent's normal caution.



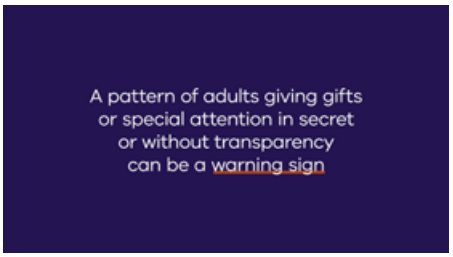
It rarely looks dramatic. It looks like someone else's problem being handled. And that's exactly what makes it dangerous.



Children rarely speak openly when something feels wrong.



When their words are dismissed, contradicted, or explained away, especially by someone they rely on, that is a signal to pay close attention.



A pattern of adults giving gifts or special attention in secret or without transparency can be a warning sign of boundary violations.



Grooming works by building trust to create secrecy, control, and access.



Notice the pattern early. If something feels off, record it, and reach out.



Speaking up protects children, and the adults around them, before abuse happens.

Understanding grooming: A subtle process to gain trust

Grooming is rarely a single, obvious act. It is a slow and deliberate process that is often hidden behind kindness or helpfulness. The abuser builds the child's trust, isolates them, and makes inappropriate behaviour seem normal so they can abuse them.

Grooming involves relationships and does not just target the child. Abusers also trick the adults, systems, and groups around the child, including parents, carers, and coworkers. This allows the abuser to spend time alone with the child and makes the abuse harder to notice or stop.

Abuse can come from people you least expect. Groomers often make children look untrustworthy while making themselves look safe and reliable. Because of this, you must stay alert, even with people who seem completely trustworthy.

What to look for

No single behaviour confirms grooming. Instead, watch for patterns that build over time:

Trust: becoming a "special" or favoured adult

Secrecy: encouraging things to be kept from parents or colleagues

Dependency: making themselves seem uniquely needed or understanding

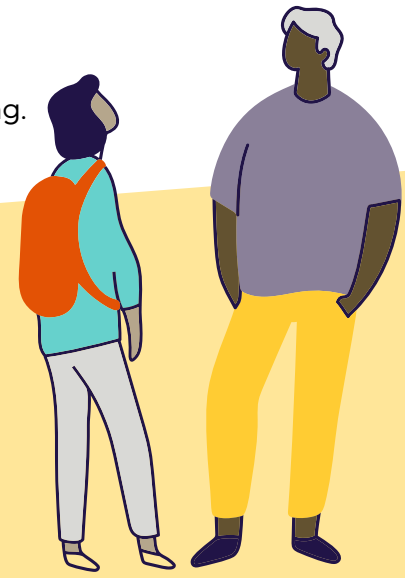
Isolation: creating reasons for one-on-one time, away from others

What to do

Your role is not to investigate or confront a suspicion yourself. If something concerns you:

1. **Document** what you've observed, as clearly and factually as you can
2. **Report** it through your organisation's procedures
3. **Seek advice** rather than deciding alone.

Acting early, on patterns rather than proof, is what prevents abuse. It's always safer to speak up than to stay silent for fear of getting it wrong.



Grooming is a specific criminal offence in Victoria under the *Crimes Act 1958*.



Activity

Spotting grooming – what needs attention?

Review the following scenarios, and select the right response.

Some describe normal, appropriate behaviour, while others hint at grooming or warning signs. Some behaviours might seem harmless alone but could be concerning if repeated or part of a pattern. Think carefully about the context.

Scenario		Response
1	A youth leader often praises one child's appearance in front of others. **Correct:** Correct. Consistently singling out one child to make them feel special can be part of a pattern, especially alongside exclusivity or secrecy. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about who is receiving the attention. Is the adult treating children fairly, or focusing on one child much more than others?	**Requires attention or monitoring**
2	A piano teacher insists on private one-on-one talks with a child. **Correct:** Correct. Private, unsupervised interactions reduce transparency and may bypass normal safeguarding practices. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about where these conversations are happening. Can other adults easily see or be aware of what is taking place?	**Requires attention or monitoring**
3	A volunteer smiles and waves at children entering a community centre. **Correct:** Correct. This is appropriate, visible behaviour in this context. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about whether the behaviour is friendly, appropriate, and easy for others to see.	**Appropriate in context**

Activity

Scenario	Response
4 A mentor asks permission before hugging a distressed child. **Correct:** Correct. Respecting a child's consent models healthy boundaries. Worth watching only if repeated or combined with other behaviours. **Incorrect:** Not quite. Think about whether the child has a choice. Is the adult respecting the child's decision about physical contact?	**Appropriate in context**

Notice and act early.

No matter your role, noticing small or repeated behaviours and acting early helps create a safe place where children feel secure and supported.

Avoid confronting people whose behaviour you're concerned about and contact your child safety representative. When unsure, always document and share concerns.



Children are usually groomed by those we least suspect

watch the video



Conor:

It is possible that you may be groomed by an adult who wants you to miss signs they are hurting a child. It might be scary or awkward to comment on someone's behaviour, especially if they work alongside you or had been trusted. But what could happen if we do not flag risks is much scarier.



Tessa:

My abuser was trusted and respected by our family and community, who overlooked inappropriate behaviours because he was charming, friendly and trusted. There can be feelings of shame and guilt when adults realise they missed signs an adult was unsafe, and these feelings can stop people from taking action. But denial helps no one.



Harriet :

The person who abused me didn't just groom me, but also the adults around me. They felt this man could be entrusted with my care, that he was safe. As a doctor he used medical issues like thrush as a reason to be alone with me. Over time, he normalised inappropriate behaviours like being naked or giving massages to each other, before things escalated further.



Emma:

By twelve I was self-harming and suicidal. Some adults were convinced I was being sexually abused. They made a list of all the adults I had been left alone with, trying to keep me safe. My abuser was not on that list, even though I was alone with them every week. That's because she was a grey-haired woman everyone wished their child could learn from. Does that surprise you? When we reinforce stereotypes about the "kinds of people" who abuse children, we miss the reality that anyone could be a risk. We forget those who abuse children carefully curate a safe persona that is often celebrated by their community.



Key messages

1. **Grooming is usually a pattern of small behaviours, not just one single event.** From the outside, it can look totally normal, or even like someone is just being extra helpful and caring.

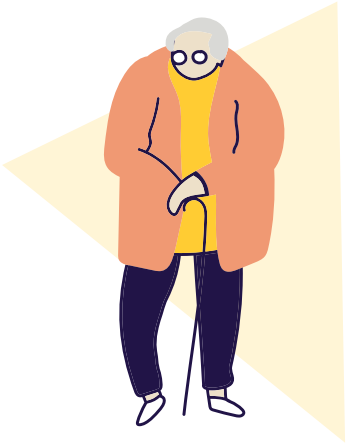
2. **If something feels strange or wrong, speak up.** No matter your role, there is always a way to report it. What matters most is that you notice and take action. Even a small concern is important, because someone else might have reported something too. Together, these reports can reveal a dangerous pattern.

3. **Grooming can happen between adults and children, between peers of the same age, or across an entire team or organisation.** You must take every single concern seriously.

4. **Clear boundaries and teamwork keep children safe.** A Working with Children Check helps reduce risk, but it does not replace the need for you to stay constantly aware.



Anyone can be a risk. Noticing what's really happening matters more than trusting what looks safe.

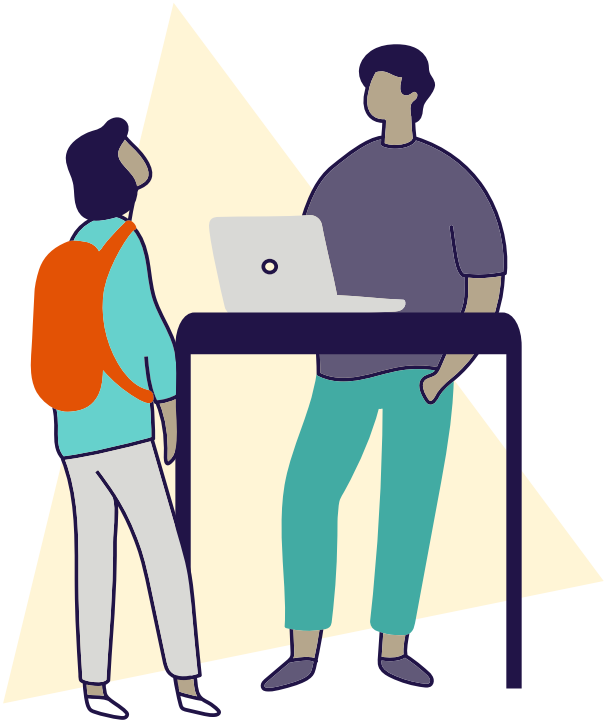


Reflect

Think of a relationship or setting where trust runs deep, a long serving volunteer, a respected Elder or older person, a close family friend.

How easy would it be to notice a concern there, even if it felt uncomfortable to raise?

6. Responding and acting when concerned



Responding when it matters: Trusting your gut and believing children

Watch the video



Trusting your gut and believing children when they show signs of concern is vital for keeping them safe.



This video shows five scenarios where adults notice worrying signs in children or situations.



Recognising these signs and taking action early can protect children from abuse.



Children rarely disclose abuse directly. Instead, they may show changes in behaviour over time.



On its own, a single change may not be concerning.



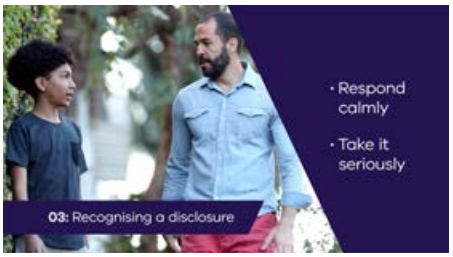
But when behaviour shifts from a child's usual pattern, it is important to notice, document, and consider whether further support or sharing of concerns is needed.



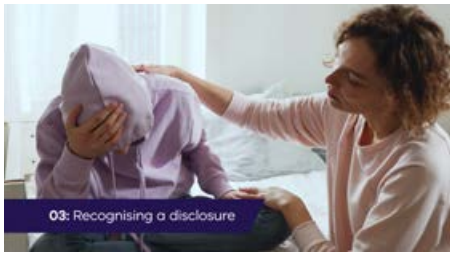
Concerns may range from low-level indicators through to situations requiring immediate attention.



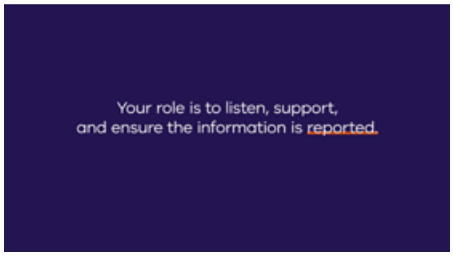
What matters is that they are shared through the appropriate safeguarding pathway, rather than managed alone or left unspoken.



If a child shares something with you, respond calmly and take it seriously.



You do not need to investigate or ask leading questions.



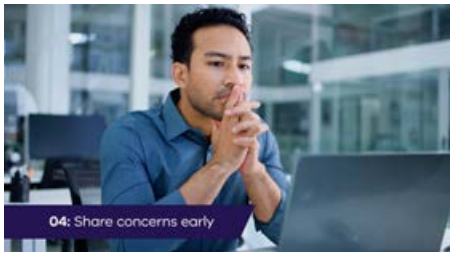
Your role is to listen, support, and ensure the information is reported.



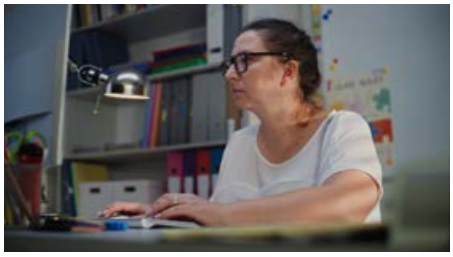
Even partial or unclear disclosures should be treated with respect.



A child may not remember everything that has happened to them, and this is a normal response to something traumatic.



Many people hesitate to act because they worry about being wrong. But safeguarding depends on sharing concerns early, not waiting for certainty.



It is always safer to report concerns than to remain silent. You are not expected to make decisions alone; systems exist to assess and respond.

Responding when it matters: Trusting your gut and believing children



Even if it feels small, your concerns may not be the only ones reported.



Adding them together may show a pattern of behaviour.



Every organisation providing services or facilities for children must have clear safeguarding practices.



These include documenting concerns and escalating them through the appropriate pathways.



The response may vary depending on the level and immediacy of concern, but all concerns should be recorded and shared according to organisational requirements.



Where staff are mandatory reporters, they are also required to report a reasonable belief of child physical or sexual abuse to child protection authorities.



Protecting children is about noticing patterns, responding supportively,



And sharing concerns through appropriate pathways.



Trust what you observe. Act early. Together, we can create safer environments for children.



Reporting further

In Victoria, a number of different bodies may respond when a concern about child abuse is raised. Which one responds depends on the nature of the allegation, who is involved, and what kind of organisation you work for.

The list below is not exhaustive and there may be other sector-specific requirements relating to your own work. If unsure, always check with your organisation's management or child safety representative.

1 **Victoria Police 000**

In an emergency, such as when a child is in immediate physical danger or a criminal offence against a child has occurred.

Victoria Police 131 444 (or your local police station)
Non urgent reports, such as a case or concern about child abuse, including historical child abuse.

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2 **Child Protection**

If a reasonable belief is formed that a child is in need of protection and the child's parent/s have not protected or are unlikely to protect the child from this harm (see further advice below). Mandated reporters are also required to report to child protection if they form a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection from physical injury or sexual abuse.

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3 **Your organisation's child safety representative:** _____

For raising child safety concerns or if you need help and support about reporting obligations and the steps that should be followed.

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4 **Social Services Regulator**
1300 310 778

Allegations of reportable conduct against a worker or volunteer for organisations covered by the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

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5 **Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority (VECRA)**
1300 307 415

Concerns about the safety, health or wellbeing of a child in a regulated early childhood service.

Further information can be found at vecra.vic.gov.au

In some instances, you may need to report to a few of these bodies, depending on both the source of the suspected abuse and/or the specific sector the person works in.

It's normal to feel unsure about reporting. You don't need to feel embarrassed or hold back. Speaking up is doing the right thing to help a child.

Note re Child Protection: Child Protection should only be contacted based on **a belief on reasonable grounds that a child needs protection**.

A child may need protection if they have experienced or are at risk of significant harm, and their parents have not protected or are unlikely to protect them.

To make a report during business hours, contact the relevant child protection division:

North Division: 1300 598 521
South Division: 1300 555 526
East Division: 1300 360 452
West Division: 1300 360 462

To report concerns about immediate child safety outside of normal business hours, on weekends and during public holidays, contact:

After Hours Child Protection Emergency Services: 13 12 78.

A note regarding Reportable Conduct Scheme:

The Reportable Conduct Scheme requires some organisations to notify the Social Services Regulator of allegations of child abuse and other child-related misconduct made against their workers and volunteers, and to investigate these allegations.

There are five types of reportable conduct that are listed in the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic):

1. **sexual offences (against, with or in the presence of, a child)**
2. **sexual misconduct (against, with or in the presence of, a child)**
3. **physical violence (against, with or in the presence of, a child)**
4. **behaviour that causes significant emotional or psychological harm**
5. **significant neglect**

Reportable conduct allegations and findings may affect someone's ability to keep working or volunteering with children and can result in the suspension or removal of their Working with Children Check. Further information about the Reportable Conduct Scheme can be found here: https://www.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme.

The Social Services Regulator also receives complaints about out-of-home care workers or carers under the Worker and Carer Exclusion Scheme (WCES). Further information about WCES can be found here: The Worker and https://www.vic.gov.au/worker-and-carer-exclusion-scheme



You don't need to know the legal details. What matters is this: allegations are taken seriously, organisations are required to act, and there's a system checking that they do.





Failure to report a sexual offence is a criminal offence.

It is a criminal offence in Victoria to fail to report to police a reasonable belief that another adult may have committed a sexual offence against a child under 16.

Children are kept safe through a network of safe adults who each take responsibility to work together, not by any one person carrying it alone.

Activity

What should you do?

This activity provides you with a scenario, then asks that you choose the most suitable response when a decision is required.

Instructions: Read each brief scenario below and select the best response from the choices provided. Remember, your role is to notice, believe, and act by sharing concerns appropriately.

SCENARIO 1

You notice a child who usually enjoys school has become withdrawn and quiet. You feel something might be wrong.

a. Wait to see if they improve before doing anything

b. Notice the change in behaviour and share your concern with the appropriate person (e.g., a supervisor, child safety officer, or according to your organisation's reporting procedures)

c. Talk to the child's parents or guardians only, avoid involving others

Correct answer: (b)

Noticing the change and sharing your concern is the safest response. Two things are worth remembering here: you may not always know whether a parent or carer is connected to what's worrying you, so going straight to family isn't always safe. And trusting an adult's reassurance, even a familiar coach or carer, isn't a substitute for sharing what you've noticed. Your organisation's reporting pathway exists so someone else can look at the full picture.





Activity

SCENARIO 2

A child confides in you about feeling scared because of someone they spend time with. You aren't sure how much is true.

a. Don't believe them until it's confirmed by an expert

b. Tell the child to keep it to themselves so they don't cause trouble

c. Listen carefully, take the child seriously, and report your concern according to organisational policy

Correct answer: (c)

Listening and taking the child seriously, then reporting through your organisation's child safety policy, is the safest response. You don't need to know how much is true, or wait for expert confirmation, before taking a concern seriously. Telling a child to stay quiet, even to avoid causing trouble, teaches them that speaking up isn't safe. What matters is passing it on, not deciding the truth yourself.

SCENARIO 3

You overhear a colleague dismissing a child's hurt feelings as "just attention-seeking."

a. Ignore it because it's not your responsibility

b. Record and escalate appropriately rather than confronting informally in the moment

c. Join in the dismissal to avoid conflict

Correct answer: (b)

Recording and escalating this is the safest response. Dismissing a child's feelings can be part of a larger pattern, even if it seems minor in the moment. Staying silent, or going along with it to avoid conflict, lets that pattern continue unnoticed. Your role isn't to confront a colleague directly, it's to make sure the concern is seen by someone who can look at the bigger picture.

Remember, your role is to notice early signs, trust your gut, believe children, and act by reporting concerns. Even small worries are important as they may add to other concerns that have been reported and may help to build or uncover a pattern of behaviour. When you act responsibly, you help create a safe space where children can feel protected and supported.

If you're ever unsure, talk to your supervisor or child safety officer. Protecting children is a shared responsibility, and every voice counts.

In their words

watch the video



Emma:

I was asked if I was 'abused' but I didn't know what that meant. I was asked if I was 'hurt', but I didn't think this counted. I said 'no'. We must talk to children in their own words and take their lead. We must listen and believe children's feelings, words and actions are true.

The person I finally disclosed to believed me. Unfortunately, that makes me lucky. 35% of Australians would not believe a child who shared they were abused.

Many other Check holding adults didn't believe me. This wounded me further and kept other children unsafe.



Liz:

Abuse can happen in a small amount of time, even in seconds, and near others. That's a scary thought, so some adults disbelieve children who disclose this kind of abuse. When I disclosed, adults wondered how the perpetrator could be so brazen. Alongside his perception as an upstanding citizen, this meant people did not trust me. That hurt me a lot, for a long time.



Caroline:

I know adults saw signs that I was not okay, and things were not right. Because I was abused by my father, I learned later that some people felt it wasn't their place to get involved in my family's business, especially if they weren't sure what was happening. This left me to suffer the abuse alone.



Portia:

I was also abused at home. I couldn't tell anyone else in my family, they were too close, preoccupied, or unwell. If I felt there was someone at school, or in one of my activities, any adult who wanted to hear from me, it could have made a difference.



Ariel:

Being in out of home care doesn't mean a child is safe. For me, safety would have meant adults noticing when something wasn't right, believing me when I tried in my own way to tell them, and not passing responsibility on to someone else in the system. The safety of children is really everyone's responsibility.



Conor:

You don't need to know exactly what is going on or everything that must happen next. You need to trust your instinct that something is not right, find out more, and act. You can't do that alone. Children are kept safe through a network of safe adults working together.

Key messages

1. **Children rarely come right out and say they are being abused, even when you ask them.** Instead of looking at just one moment or one answer, watch for patterns of change over time.
2. **If something feels wrong, do not wait until you are 100% sure.** Even if your worry seems small, someone else might have noticed something too. Together, these different pieces of information can show a clear pattern that no one person could see on their own.
3. **There is always a way to report a concern, depending on your job and where you work.** For most people, this means passing the information to a supervisor or manager who can take action. Some jobs have specific legal duties to report. If you work or volunteer with an organisation, they will tell you exactly what rules apply to you.
4. **If your organisation is covered by the Reportable Conduct Scheme, allegations against staff must be reported to the Social Services Regulator.** If you don't know whether these rules apply to your organisation, ask. Do not guess.
5. **If you hold a Working with Children Check but work independently, as a private tutor, contractor, or sole practitioner, it is your responsibility to know which reporting pathway applies to your situation.** Victoria Police and Child Protection are available to everyone, regardless of your employment arrangement.
6. **Speak up early.** It is safer than staying quiet. You are not expected to investigate, prove, or resolve anything alone, your job is to get the concern to the right people.

Children are kept safe through a network of safe and responsible adults who work together, not by any one adult carrying it alone.



Reflect

Before you continue, think about the child you identified at the start of this course.

Has anything shifted in how you see them, or what you might notice?

A closing message from survivors

watch the video



Emma:

On behalf of every person who experienced child abuse and shared insights you have just learned from, thank you for completing this child safety training. Children in our communities across Victoria are safer from abuse like that we endured, because people like you take the time to learn about child safety.

Every time you use the skills and information you have learned today, you are ensuring that less children suffer the way we did.



You can't do it alone, but it can't be done without you.

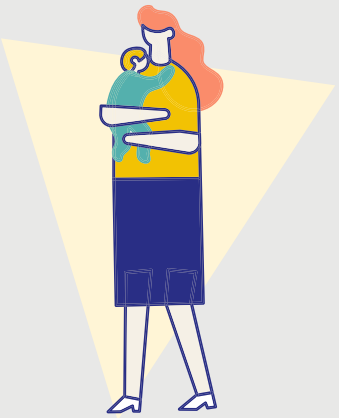
Final message

Thank you for completing the Working with Children Child Safety Training. This training gives you practical knowledge to help keep children safe in a range of settings.

You now understand the different types of abuse children can experience, and how the signs are not always obvious. You know that your role is to stay attentive, notice changes in behaviour, and take children seriously when they raise concerns, whether they tell you directly or show it through how they act.

You don't need to be an expert or have all the answers. Your responsibility is to notice worrying signs, document what you see, and report your concerns through your organisation's procedures. Child safety is a shared responsibility, and the actions you take make a real difference.

You are now part of a network of adults across Victoria working together to keep children safe. Every person who notices, documents, and reports plays a part in creating safe environments for children and young people.



References & resources

Child Protection
https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/child-protection

Child Safe Standards
https://www.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards

Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) Victoria
https://ccyp.vic.gov.au

DFFH Reporter Hub – how to report
https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/reporter-hub

Protect: Identifying and Responding to All Forms of Abuse in Victorian Schools
https://www.vic.gov.au/protect

Reportable Conduct Scheme
https://www.vic.gov.au/reportable-conduct-scheme

Social Services Regulator
https://www.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulator

Working with Children Check Victoria
https://www.vic.gov.au/working-with-children-check

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) – What is child abuse and neglect?
https://aifs.gov.au/resources/policy-and-practice-papers/what-child-abuse-and-neglect

Beyond Blue – Mental health information and support
https://www.beyondblue.org.au

Blue Knot Foundation - Trauma and Recovery Resources for Adult Survivors of Childhood Abuse
https://www.blueknot.org.au

Lifeline Australia – Crisis support and counselling services
https://www.lifeline.org.au

Raising Children Network – Abuse, violence, trauma & grief
https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/mental-health-resources/abuse-trauma-violence-and-grief



