

Having conversations with your child about safety and wellbeing concerns

The information below is intended to support parents/carers to talk to their children about wellbeing and safety. This may include concerns about child sexual exploitation, which includes 'grooming' and child abuse content offences (nude or sexual images or videos of children).

Sexual exploitation of children and sexual touching are forms of sexual assault. Sexual assault includes any sexual act or behaviour imposed on a child. It is never the child's fault.

Preparing to talk with your child

You may want to talk with your child about their experiences and whether they have always felt safe and comfortable.

There is no single "right way" to have this conversation. What matters most is that your child feels safe, supported and able to talk to you.

Taking a little time to prepare can help you feel more confident and help your child feel safe and supported.

Before the conversation:

Self-reflection: Before starting, take time to notice how you are feeling. This can help you remain calm and steady and be prepared to handle various reactions from your child. Consider which parent/carer is the most suitable person to have this conversation with your child.

Prepare yourself: Think about the emotional responses that your child might have during the conversation and how you can support them.

Choose the right time and place: Find a quiet, comfortable setting where you can have an uninterrupted conversation with your child. Make sure there is enough time for discussion without rushing. Please consider the privacy of location to ensure other children/people cannot hear the discussion.

The conversation:

Use age-appropriate language: Tailor your language to your child's age and developmental stage. Use simple, clear language. When you speak with your child, it is important for you to be calm, supportive, and to let your child tell you what (if anything) they would like to share, in their own words.

Use open questions: (questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no) to give your child space to talk freely. Closed questions can be confusing for children, and they may answer you with the intention of pleasing you.

Use empathy and active listening: Allow your child to express their feelings without judgement or interruption.

Encourage questions: Let your child know that it's okay to ask questions and talk about how they are feeling. Reassure them that you are there to support them and they are not in trouble.

Validate emotions: Acknowledge and validate any emotions your child may express, whether it's confusion, anger, or sadness. Let them know their feelings are okay and you are there for them.

Introducing the conversation

Starting this conversation may feel uncomfortable and it is okay to acknowledge this with your child. Keeping your approach simple and matter-of-fact can help reduce anxiety and support a more natural conversation.

You are not expected to have all the answers. The purpose of the conversation is to check in on your child's safety and wellbeing, and to give them the opportunity to share anything they want to.

Examples of what to say*

You can gently introduce the reason for the conversation:

- *"I recently got some information about (name of service), and it made me want to check-in with you about how things felt for you there."*
- *"It's my/our job as your parent/carer to keep you safe and you will never be in trouble for telling me/us about anything including anything you have been told to keep secret. You can always come to me about anything"*

Younger children (pre-school)

- *"How do you feel/did you feel about going to (name of service)?"*
- *"What do you/did you like about it?"*
- *"What don't you like/didn't you like about it?"*
- *"Did anything ever feel yucky or icky, or not okay?"*
- *"Who are safe people in your life you could tell if you were worried about something?"*

* The scripts below are a general guide only. It is essential to be attuned to your child/children's reactions and emotions during any conversation.

Primary school children

Children at this age can usually talk about their experiences, relationships and feelings, but still benefit from clear, open and non-leading questions.

Start with general, neutral questions and follow your child's lead.

- *"How did you feel about going to (name of service)?"*
- *"What did you like about it?"*
- *"Was there anything you didn't like or didn't feel right?"*
- *"Did anything ever make you feel uncomfortable, worried, or upset?"*
- *"Who were the people there? Who did you like spending time with?"*
- *"Was there anyone you didn't like being around?"*
- *"Who are the people you trust to tell if something worries you?"*

Pre-teens and early teens

Young people at this age are more aware of relationships, boundaries and privacy. It is important to use respectful, straight-forward language and acknowledge that the conversation may feel unexpected, especially if it relates to something from a long time ago.

Use open, non-judgemental questions:

- *"This might feel a bit out of the blue, especially as it was a long time ago, but I just want to make sure you felt safe and okay while you were at (name of service). How did you feel about attending (name of service)?"*
- *"What did you like about it?"*
- *"Was there anything that didn't feel right or made you uncomfortable?"*
- *"Were there people there that you liked spending time with?"*
- *Was there anyone you didn't feel comfortable around?"*
- *"Is there anything you've never felt able to tell me before?"*

You can also include a broader check:

- *"Sometimes things don't seem like a big deal at the time, or are hard to remember, but feel different later — is there anything like that you've thought about?"*

After the conversation

If your child shares something that suggests they may have felt unsafe or experienced harm, it is important to:

- stay calm
- listen carefully
- respond with clear messages of belief and support.

You can say:

- *"I believe you"*
- *"You're brave for telling me"*
- *"What has happened is not your fault"*
- *"I'm here for you and will support you"*

These messages help your child feel safe, supported and able to keep talking.

Getting support

If your child makes a disclosure of abuse or harm, or you have ongoing concerns about their safety or wellbeing:

- find a private space and call the **Child Protection Helpline on 132 111**
- provide the details of your concerns, including the service your child attended or attends.

You do not need to manage this alone. Support services can help you understand what to do next and ensure your child receives the appropriate care and protection.

If this brings up feelings for you

It is common for parents and carers to experience strong emotions after talking with their child about safety and wellbeing. You may feel worried, upset, confused or overwhelmed.

For some parents and carers, this situation can also bring up memories or feelings from their own experiences of sexual assault, domestic and family violence, or physical or emotional abuse. Responses may include feeling unsafe, distressed, or finding past memories returning.

These reactions are common and do not mean you have done anything wrong.

It can help to:

- talk with a counsellor, health worker or trusted support person
- seek support for your own wellbeing

- recognise that the responsibility for any harm always lies with the person who caused it.

Looking after yourself can help you feel more able to support your child.

Who can I talk to about child sexual abuse and support?

We understand this situation can be distressing for children, parents and carers and support is available.

NSW Health provides free, confidential counselling and support for people who have experienced sexual assault, as well as their families.

Support is available whether the experience is recent or from the past.

See the link below for contact details for your local **NSW Health Sexual Assault Service**.

www.health.nsw.gov.au/sas

Where can I go for additional support?

There are services available to support you and your family. You do not need to manage this alone.

Full Stop Australia (24/7 support)

Free, confidential 24-hour counselling for people impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence.

Phone: 1800 385 578

Kids Helpline (24/7 support)

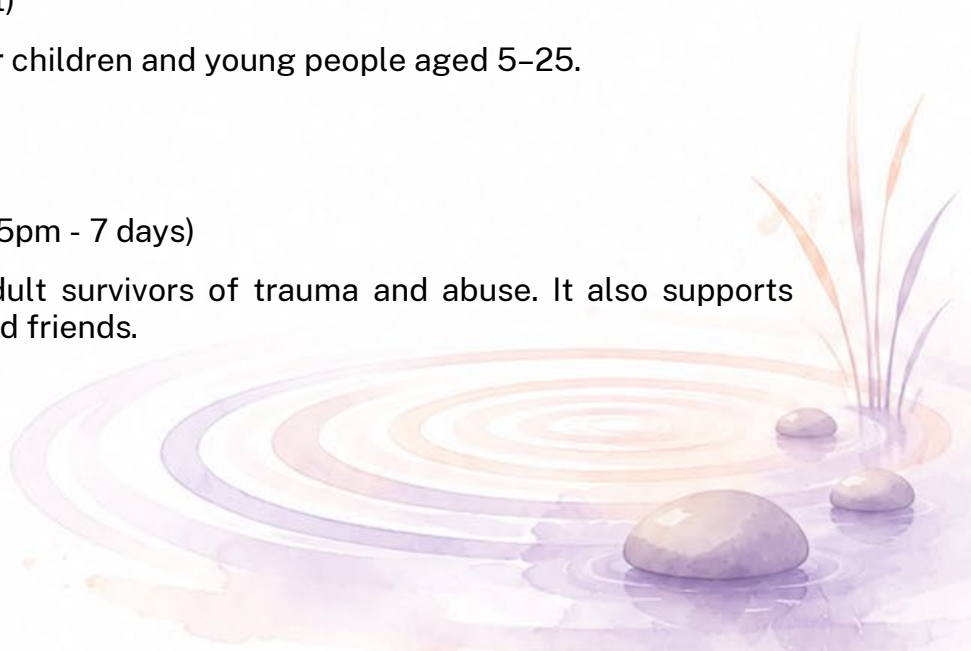
Free counselling service for children and young people aged 5–25.

Phone: 1800 551 800

Blue Knot Helpline (9am – 5pm - 7 days)

A telehealth service for adult survivors of trauma and abuse. It also supports parents, partners, family and friends.

Ph: 1300 657 380



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Mental Health Line (24/7 support)

Provides mental health advice, support and referral to local services.

Phone: 1800 011 511

13YARN (24/7 support)

Free, confidential crisis support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Phone: 13 92 76

Additional information:

For more information about child sexual abuse, see:

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/issues/understanding-child-sexual-abuse>