

Information for Parents

Things to look at when selecting child-safe activities or services for your child



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Our thanks to the New South Wales Commission for Children and Young People for providing us with the inspiration for this guide and a source of ideas.

Disclaimer: This booklet is provided for general information only to assist parents to select child-safe environments. Parents will need to tailor this information to meet the specific needs of their child.



Foreword



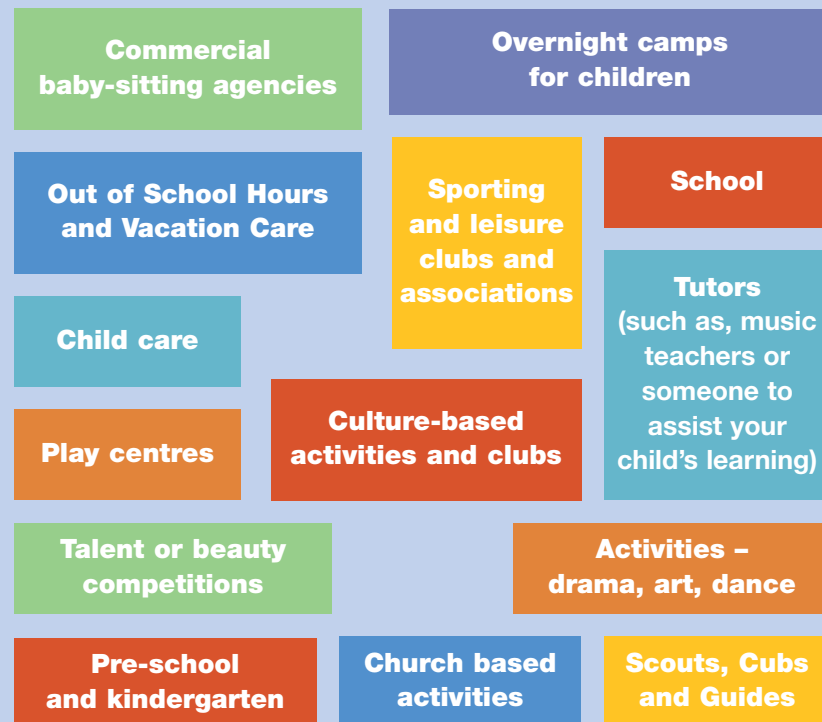
Children have the right to feel safe and be safe in any environment. As parents and carers we all have the best interests of our children at heart but at times don't know the questions to ask or the things to look for when selecting activities, services or organisations for our children.

Entrusting the care of your child to someone else is a big step. This booklet raises some of the key child safety issues that may assist you to decide how child-safe an activity, service or organisation is.

Bernie Geary OAM
Child Safety Commissioner

As a parent, you are frequently choosing activities, services or programs for your child. To be confident your child is welcome and safe when attending an activity or service, you need to consider a range of issues. This booklet raises some of the key child safety issues you may wish to consider.

During your child's day, your child comes into contact with a wide range of people and places. Sometimes children will be with a parent and at other times will be cared for by other adults. Examples of environments your child may experience include:



You need to feel confident your child is in a safe environment.

What is a child-safe environment?

All children have the right to feel safe and to be safe all of the time. An agency, activity or organisation providing a child-safe environment is one that has in place a range of strategies to ensure children are protected from harm. These include strategies about children's safety, health, development, education and wellbeing.

Child-safe strategies are informed by important principles, such as those developed by the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner. You should be able to see these types of principles in action in a child-safe environment.

Child safety principles

A child-safe organisation:

- welcomes children and their families/carers
- recognises that children are vulnerable
- actively encourages the participation of Aboriginal children
- recognises and responds to the particular needs of children from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds
- recognises and responds to children with special needs including a disability
- encourages children to participate in making decisions
- carefully recruits and manages its staff and volunteers
- ensures the commitment to child safety is clear and shared by all
- educates staff and volunteers about child safety.

When I needed child care for my daughter I was glad I checked a number of centres as I found quite a difference.



What do these principles mean in action?

Child-safe principle

Welcomes children and their families/ carers

What does a child-safe environment look and feel like?

- Staff and volunteers readily interact with children in an age appropriate and respectful way.
- Children are treated as individuals and staff and volunteers strive to understand each child's particular interests and needs.
- Staff and volunteers listen to children and encourage their participation.
- Children are supported and comforted in an appropriate way, consistent with the child's wishes.

Recognises that children are vulnerable

- All staff and volunteers accept it is their role to protect children involved with their service or activity.
- Staff and volunteers accept there is a difference in power between a child and an adult.
- The service maintains appropriate child-to-staff ratios.
- Policies are in place to minimise risk involved in one-to-one situations with a child.
- Equipment and activities appear appropriate for the activity and the age of the children.
- Information about children is treated confidentially.

I like the fact that when I raised an issue with my son's music tutor, she was willing to listen and act.

Child-safe principle

Recognises and responds to children with special needs including a disability

What does a child-safe environment look and feel like?

- The service or activity is accessible to these children as demonstrated through their inclusion in the service or activity.
- Staff and volunteers relate to all children in a respectful and developmentally appropriate manner.
- Policies are in place to guide the physical and psychological care requirements of all children.

Actively encourages the participation of Aboriginal children

- Staff and volunteers and other children acknowledge and show respect for Aboriginal culture.
- Policies acknowledge that an Aboriginal child's cultural identity is fundamental to their overall wellbeing.

Recognises and responds to the particular needs of children from diverse cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds

- Cultural diversity is welcomed and celebrated.
- The children participating in the activity or service are representative of the cultural and religious mix of your local community.
- Staff and volunteers and other children acknowledge and show respect for their diversity.

Encourages children to participate in making decisions

- Children are asked their views and their views are respected and taken into consideration in making decisions.
- Children are involved in discussing appropriate behaviour.

I appreciate the good communication between my child's coach and all the parents.

Child-safe principle

Carefully recruits and manages its staff and volunteers

Ensures the commitment to child safety is clear and shared by all

Educates staff and volunteers about child safety

I like the fact that my child's kinder promotes their no rough play policy.

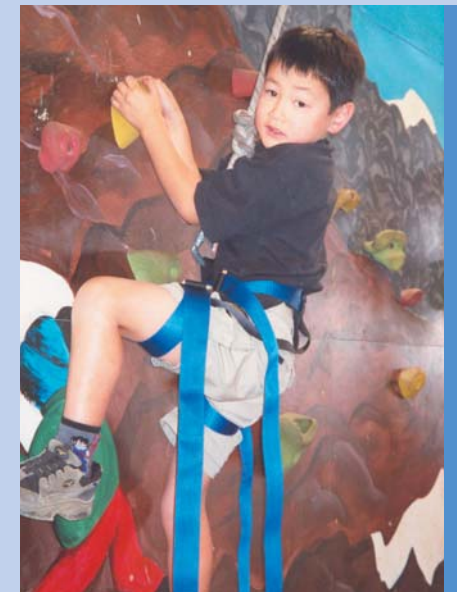
What does a child-safe environment look and feel like?

- The service or activity has policies on staff and volunteer recruitment and management covering:
 - recruitment processes, including skills and qualifications required
 - background checking and screening processes for all staff and volunteers
 - the Working with Children Check (if required)
 - a Code of Conduct showing what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour by staff and volunteers
 - a clear and accessible complaints procedure for use by children, parents and staff.
- Parents can access the policies on request.
- A Child Safety Policy is in place across the service or activity. You should be able to see this policy on request.
- Staff and volunteers are aware of the Child Safety Policy.
- Staff and volunteers are interested in and engaged in their job.
- Meets children's services regulations if applicable
- The service or activity has a clear staff development policy.
- The staff development policy includes the areas of:
 - child development
 - child protection and risk management
 - safety procedures.

Things you may see that could be concerning or 'warning signs'

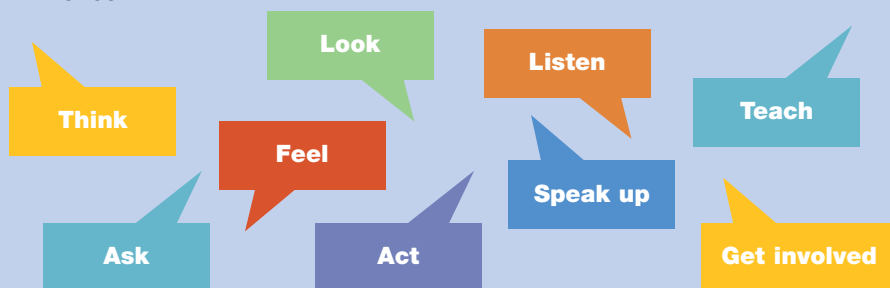
Look out for these things of concern or potential warning signs:

- rough play among children
- sexual innuendo between staff and volunteers or between staff or volunteers and children
- encouragement of inappropriate physical contact
- lack of respect for children or their parents
- staff or volunteers who favour particular children
- poor communication with parents
- poor interaction between staff members or volunteers
- physical, inappropriate or harsh discipline
- your own child's negative reaction.



What can you do?

You are the best judge of what will suit your child. When thinking about the child safety steps taken by the activity or service, use your intuition as well as:



Think about child-safe practice.

The information in this booklet can guide you in what to look for in the context of your child's age and needs.

Does it feel right?

When you enter the service or activity, do the children and other parents appear relaxed, happy and at ease? Do the staff make you feel comfortable? Trust your feelings.

Pay attention to what you see.

Are the children happy? Do the staff or volunteers appear to relate well to the children and other staff or volunteers? Are parents encouraged to participate in activities? Do the staff-to-child ratios seem right? Does the program appear stimulating and age appropriate? Does the physical environment look well cared for and clean?

Ask questions.

Are questions encouraged? Can the organiser or manager tell you about their recruitment and selection process? Do they have a Child Safety Policy they can show you? How do they manage and supervise staff? Can staff

talk in an informed way about child development? Does the organisation have a bullying prevention policy?

Listen to your child.

How a child experiences the world is different from that of an adult—even their parent. It is only through their eyes that you can gain a sense of how safe the environment feels to them. Some of their comments may surprise you. Routinely asking them about their day, what they did and who was there, what they liked and what they didn't like, can give you insight into their level of comfort at an activity or organisation.

Act on their concerns.

Should your child tell you something that is concerning, try to react calmly. Suggest solving problems together and make sure you listen to the whole story. Tell your child they have done the right thing by telling you, and that you will take action.

Teach your child about personal safety.

Talk to your child about keeping safe. Ensure they can identify who they would talk to if they felt uncomfortable or unsafe. Tell your child they have the right to say no if they feel what they are being asked to do is wrong or unsafe.

Get involved.

Taking part in your child's activities helps to keep them safe. Not only can you see what is going on in your child's world, people know you are there from time to time and this makes your child less vulnerable.

Speak up.

Don't forget that you have something to offer and can assist in a variety of ways to help your club, school, kinder or sporting group to become child-safe. It is also OK and often helpful to make a complaint.

