

Tools for Listening



**NATIONAL
SAFE CHURCH UNIT**

A Safe Church For All People

How to engage children and young people to participate in decisions affecting them in your community

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(CONSULTATION DRAFT)



A safe Church for all people

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This resource was collaboratively developed by the Synods of the Uniting Church and is recommended by:



1. Our commitment to children & young people

The National Child Safe Policy Framework provides the premise from which our conversations with children are valued and respectful:

“The [Church] believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the UCA Commission on Women and Men in 1997). Central to living out the gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness. We also acknowledge the rights of children as detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990, Article 49) that States shall protect children from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation.”

An excerpt from the National Child Safe Policy Framework

The Uniting Church in Australia (the Church) supports and upholds a culture of inclusion and safety, in which the voices of children are listened to and responded to. This is underlined in its National Child Safe Policy Framework:

“Children are gifts of God to be received, welcomed and to be cared for responsibly and justly. The Gospel also directs us to listen to and learn from children. In On the Way Together (1998) it is affirmed that “children in the Uniting Church in Australia are nurtured in Christian faith and discipleship, experiencing relationships which promote trust, cooperation, honesty, positive valuing of persons, responsibility and Christian service.” It adds that the church “affirms the value and the rights of children as human beings as it listens to, guides, protects, advocates for, and empowers children within its own communities and the wider community.”

Where the term ‘children’ is used throughout this document, it refers to children and young people under 18 years.

2. About the toolkit

The purpose of the toolkit

In implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Uniting Church, in its National Child Safe Policy Framework, has set the requirement that we ‘enable children and families to participate in decision making’ and is seeking to support the implementation of this standard.

This toolkit aims to enable the implementation of the following recommendations that have emerged from the Royal Commission:

- that children and young people are involved in the strategic development, design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives
- that children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
- that families and communities are informed and involved

and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations,

specifically Principle 2: ‘Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously’.

In the Christian context reflected in the National Child Safe Policy framework statements of belief above, the aim of the toolkit is to put into action Jesus’ lessons about restoring the scriptural, valued place of the child within the church and in community spaces.

Dr Vivienne Mountain, in her recent Pastoral Handbook for Ministry with Children and their Families writes: “In the face of the scandal of child abuse and the falling number of children reported as attending churches, the challenge of the Child Theology Movement stirs interest, imagination and concern. The words and actions of Jesus in Matthew 18:1-5 can be considered a “seed” in scripture, whose time has come to shoot and grow. Through his words and action, placing a child in the midst of his disciples,*

Jesus presents the child as a model of discipleship.”

*source: Dr Vivienne Mountain, Building Emotional Health and Wellbeing – A Pastoral Handbook for Ministry with Children and their Families. Intergen 2018 (p5-6)

The Bible through Jesus highlights that *“engaging in child focused practice should be foundational to our Christian ministry. (Matthew 1-6, Mark 10:13-16). It requires us to put the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of children above our own”.*

*source: Safe Ministry Resources, Safe Ministry Handbook National Edition 2015 (p 54)

This kit is intended to assist you in the process of consulting, involving and collaborating with children and adults in any of the settings or entities of the church – for example, schools, congregations, agencies, church councils, youth groups, presbyteries or synods.

The activity sheets and guiding documents in this toolkit are designed to be used to enable dialogues with children, either in small groups or as an individual activity, depending on age and context. They can also be used to gather information from children and parents to assist you with the planning or reviewing of programs and activities, or to seek feedback around the whole life of the “community” (congregation or school).

You can use the toolkit at any stage of your programming. For example:

- To consult with community members, families and children when you are planning a new program in your community
- To get feedback about a program or activity
- To include and consider feedback when reviewing programs or activities
- When people are new to your program or activity, to inform them about codes of conduct and the feedback process

The use of more creative ways of engaging the views of children is encouraged. The feedback sheets provided, may be helpful, but it would also be good if within your local context, you could expand the imagination of adults, perhaps by inviting children to tell you how they would like to be consulted/engaged and what aspects they would appreciate being asked about.

This toolkit provides simple and easy to access tools which can support the recommended engagement and inclusive planning. It is informed by the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP²) Public Participation Spectrum, and the NAPCAN's Children's Voices research project. IAP² is an international leader in public participation which seeks to promote and improve community and stakeholder engagement practices throughout the world. NAPCAN is the primary organisation for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in Australia and recognises the importance of listening to children and recognising that everyone has a part to play in keeping children safe. The research highlights two (2) very strong messages:

1. Children want to be involved in discussions about how to make communities good places for people of all ages to live.
2. Children have a lot to say and have great ideas.

The research also highlights the key reasons for having conversations with children about their local communities, and the church community is no different:

- Children experience the world differently from adults.
- Adults cannot guess what is important for children without asking them and listening to the answer.
- Children may have priorities that adults prefer not to think about.
- Children use community facilities in ways that are different from adults.

3. Steps to get you started

Use the Levels of Engagement (see Tool 1: Foster Genuine Engagement and Tool 2: Plan for Safety) to help with this process.

1. Get support from decision makers:

- Meet with your decision-making body (eg Church Council) before you start.
- Help them understand the importance of equalising the balance of power between children and adults.

2. Decide what you want to ask about:

- Refer to **'Goal of Participation' in Tool 1: Foster Genuine Engagement** to determine a list of questions to ask.
- Identify who you want to ask.
If you're responsible for Sunday school, you would ask families and children about activities they would like to see happening in the Sunday school.

3. Choose the right level of engagement:

- Refer to **Tool 1: Foster Genuine Engagement** and decide if you need to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower in your conversation.
- Refer to the **'Promise to Participants' in Tool 1: Foster Genuine Engagement** to decide a level of participation ranging from information to implementation.
- Make sure you have the capacity to deliver on the promise. If not, review your choices.

4. Plan for success by gathering information:

- Refer to **'Example Techniques' in Tool 1: Foster Genuine Engagement** to find out how you'll gather information and their appropriateness to the age group you're asking.
- Include your target audience in the planning stage so it is designed to suit their needs.
- Refer to **Tool 2: Plan for Safety** when planning to assess risks, their likelihood and consequence, and how you will make the experience safe and inclusive.
- Inform parents about any activities you are conducting with children.
- Consider passing around a pretend microphone to 'interview' children about the topic or use disposable cameras with young adults to make photo submissions of their feedback.

5. Introduce & facilitate the process:

- Inform participants about the purpose of the consultation, details of what the process involves, the intended use of information and who the information will be shared with.
- Educate children and young adults about why their voices are important and why the organisation values their feedback.

6. Incorporate your learnings into programs & activities:

- Include children and young adults in the planning and approval processes, encouraging participation, skill sharing and development.

7. Provide feedback to all parties:

- Plan how you will keep participants and decision-makers informed.
- Present your findings back to the people you asked during the process.



Tools to assist you:

1. Foster Genuine Engagement
2. Plan for Safety
3. Tips for Listening
4. Posters
5. Feedback Sheets

Document version history

Version Number	Date	Reason
1.0	24.10.2018 Launched Universal Children's Day	To provide tools for best practice in ministry as per the National Child Safe Policy Framework and to address the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
1.1		To incorporate feedback from testing and consultation of the toolkit.

For more information

For further information/resourcing in your area please contact the National Safe Church Unit.

Collaborators

The Tools for Listening resource was developed in collaboration with members of the Church's Safe Church Framework Implementation (SCFIN) Network and the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) QLD Manager/National Manager Child Safe Organisations. This resource will assist the Church to value and hear the voices of children/young people and act on them in a meaningful way. NAPCAN commends the commitment the Uniting Church is demonstrating in prioritising child safe and inclusive practice.

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