

Topic 10

Understanding vulnerability within education and care settings



The National Child Safety Training aims to enhance safety for children and strengthen child-safe culture across the education and care sector by introducing shared language, responsibilities, and understanding. The training was developed in partnership between Australian Centre for Child Protection (ACCP) and the Queensland Government on behalf of Australian governments.

The first level of training, Foundations of Child Safety, includes two eLearning courses:

- **Course 1:** Understanding Child Safety
- **Course 2:** Understanding and Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

To complement the mandatory eLearning courses, a suite of non-mandatory Community of Practice resources has been developed to extend learning and support the application of knowledge in education and care settings. Whilst the Community of Practice are a voluntary component of the National Child Safety Training, they provide structured opportunities for discussion, reflection, and shared learning over time, helping staff build confidence and consistency in practice.

These resources contain prompts and suggested activities aligned with each course topic. They are designed to be flexible and may be selected, adapted, shortened, or revisited to suit different service types, team sizes, and meeting formats. The intention is to support practical conversations, not to prescribe a fixed program. There is no expectation that all topics and activities will be used and it is at your discretion how you use these resources.

Child safety is everyone's responsibility in places where children learn and grow. Harm can affect a child's wellbeing, learning, and development throughout childhood, and its impacts can continue into adulthood. When child safe practices are not in place, children are more at risk of harm.

By completing the mandatory eLearning training alongside some non-mandatory Community of Practice activities, you can strengthen your understanding of your role in protecting children, responding to concerns, and supporting a child safe environment in your service.



Understanding vulnerability within education and care settings

Topic 10 reinforces that that vulnerability in childhood is not always obvious or visible and that education and care staff play an important role in reducing risk by creating safe environments for every child.

In education and care services, vulnerability can be shaped by:

- Child factors (for example age, disability, limited language, behavioural challenges, limited understanding of safety, few trusted connections).
- Situational factors (for example personal care routines, sleep/rest, many carers, transitions, secluded spaces).
- Organisational factors (for example organisational culture, policies, supervision, complaints processes, loyalty between staff, prioritising reputation over safety, children not being listened to).




Reminder

You **do not** need to run all three activities.

Select, adapt, shorten, or spread activities across sessions to suit your group and available time.

Activities can also be adapted for one-on-one supervision, mentoring conversations, or team meetings. You may choose to use a single scenario, question, or reflective prompt to guide discussion.

These activities are designed to be flexible and responsive to your service context.

| Activity 1: Building the safety shield – identifying vulnerability and protective strategies | |
|---|---|
| Objective | <p>This activity helps participants make sense of vulnerability factors by turning them into something visible and practical. It supports participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify child, situational, and organisational factors that can increase a child’s risk of experiencing abuse or neglect within education and care settings. • Connect each factor to practical protective strategies that could help reduce risk and increase safety within education and care settings, ensuring the strategies are realistic and achievable in education and care environments. • Learn from each other’s ideas in a positive, creative way. |
| Time | 45-60 minutes |
| Format |  <p>The 'Format' section contains three circular illustrations. The first, labeled 'Pair Work', shows two people sitting at a table with a notebook and pen. The second, labeled 'Small Group Activity', shows three people sitting on the floor in a circle. The third, labeled 'Whole Group Activity', shows a larger group of five people sitting on the floor in a circle.</p> |
| Materials needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set of “factors that can increase vulnerability” cards • Sticky notes • Blu-tack or tape • Pens • Markers • Optional: craft materials (coloured paper, pipe cleaners, stickers) for a “shield” shape on butcher’s paper |



Activity plan

Facilitator preamble

“We’re going to look at factors that can increase a child’s risk of experiencing abuse or neglect within education and care settings. For each factor we are going to think about strategies that could be put in place to reduce risk and increase safety. This is not about labelling or blaming children, families or services. It’s about noticing what can increase risk in education and care settings and identifying practical strategies that reduce opportunities for harm.”

Remind participants

- Focus on systems and practice, not naming individuals.
- No real cases or identifying details.
- It’s okay to feel unsure or uncomfortable.
- Take a break if needed.

Step 1: Set up (5 minutes)

- Split the group into pairs.
- Provide each group with a large piece of butcher’s paper, writing material, and sticky notes.
- Provide participants to pick 4-6 vulnerability cards.

Step 2: Small group build (15 minutes)

- On the butcher’s paper, ask participants to draw a big “Safety Shield” outline.
- For each card, ask participants to write down on the sticky notes practical strategies that could be used to help reduce risk and increase safety.
- Ask participants to write down at least one strategy per sticky note.

- Remind participants that this is about building layers of safety, not finding a single solution.

Step 3: Build the shield (10 minutes)

- Ask pairs to place their card onto the shield template first, then place their strategy to increase safety over the top like a layer of protection.

Step 4: Gallery walk (10-15 minutes)

- Invite participants to walk around the room and look at each group's shield.
- Ask them to read the vulnerabilities card and the protective strategies placed over them to increase safety.
- As they move around, invite participants to add simple markers to the shields:
 - A star symbol - a strong or effective protective idea
 - A tick symbol - something that could work in their own setting
 - A question mark symbol - something they are curious about or would like to understand better in practice
- Remind participants that the purpose is to share ideas and learn from each other, not to evaluate or critique.
- Facilitator prompt (optional): *"What ideas here feel practical and achievable in everyday practice?"*

Step 5: Whole-group reflection (5-10 minutes)

- Discuss:
 - *Which strategies felt most achievable to increase safety?*
 - *Which factors felt harder to address and why?*
 - *What is one strategy we could put into practice in our service this month to reduce risk and increase safety?*



Facilitator tips

- Keep it strengths-based and practical. *E.g., focus on recognising and building on existing good practice rather than only identifying gaps or problems.*
- Encourage “small practical changes” that can reduce risk and increase safety ...





Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

This activity can be delivered online using breakout rooms and a shared digital workspace such as a PowerPoint slide, or collaborative document. The purpose remains the same: to explore how protective strategies can layer over vulnerability factors to strengthen children's safety.

Platform preparation (before the session)

- Upload digital "factors that can increase vulnerability" cards into a shared slide deck or document.
- Create one shared "Safety Shield" template per breakout group (for example, a slide with a large shield shape or circle in the centre).
- Ensure participants know how to add digital sticky notes or text boxes.
- Set up breakout rooms for pairs.

Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that vulnerability is shaped by context and systems, not by children's character.
- Reinforce that this is a strengths-based activity focused on reducing risk and increasing safety.
- Encourage cameras on if comfortable but allow flexibility.

Step 2: Set up in breakout pairs

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs.
- Share the digital "factors that can increase vulnerability" cards and ask each pair to select 4-6 cards.
- Direct each pair to their allocated Safety Shield slide or workspace.

Step 3: Small group build – Generating protective strategies

- Ask pairs to review each card they selected.
- For each card, participants add digital sticky notes to the slide, writing one practical protective strategy per note that could reduce risk and increase safety in this scenario
- Encourage realistic, everyday strategies rather than policy language.
- Remind participants that safety may be strengthened by multiple protective strategies.
- Emphasise that this is about layering safety, not finding a single solution.

Step 4: Build the digital shield

- Ask pairs to place their cards onto the centre of the shield template.
- Then ask them to place their protective strategies over or around the card, visually layering protection over risk.
- Encourage them to group similar strategies together if helpful.

Step 5: Virtual gallery walk

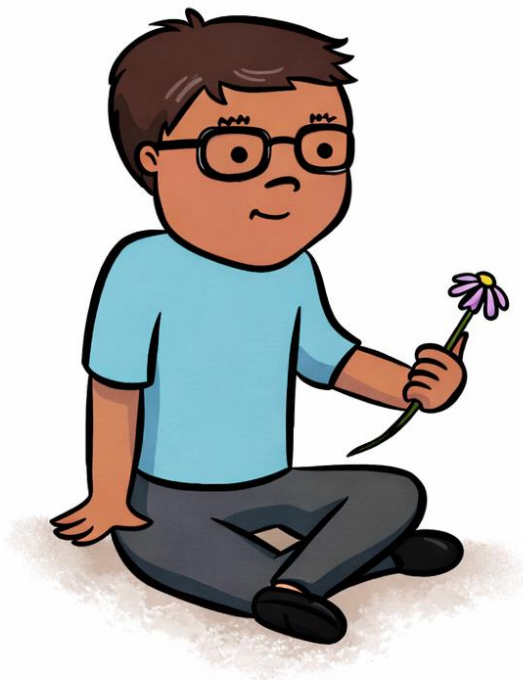
- Bring participants back to the main room.
- Share your screen and move through each group's Safety Shield slide.
- Invite participants to engage using simple digital reactions or chat responses:
 - Use a star emoji in chat for a strong or effective protective idea.
 - Use a tick emoji for something they could apply in their own setting.
 - Use a question mark emoji for something they are curious about or would like to explore further.
 - Remind participants that the purpose is to learn from one another, not to critique.
 - Optional facilitator prompt: *"What ideas here feel practical and achievable in everyday practice?"*

Step 6: Whole-group reflection

- Facilitate discussion in the main room using prompts such as:
 - *Which strategies felt most achievable in your context?*
 - *Which factors felt harder to reduce, and why?*
 - *What is one strategy we could implement this month to increase safety and reduce risk?*

Step 7: Closing reflection

- Invite participants to type in the chat or reflect silently: *“One strategy I can intentionally use to increase safety and reduce risk in my daily practice is...”*
- Pause briefly before closing and reinforce that child safety is built through multiple, small, layered actions over time.





Scenario cards: Building the safety shield

Cards for printing. These cards are provided as examples for use in this activity. They are not an exhaustive list. Facilitators are encouraged to adapt these cards or develop their own cards that reflect their service, context, or community, while ensuring all examples remain de-identified.

Very young age (infants and toddlers)

A three-month-old child attends the service regularly. They rely on adults for care, comfort and safety, and have a very limited ability to communicate their needs or seek help.

Language or communication skills

A three-year-old child attends a long day care centre regularly. They speak English as an additional language and find it difficult to communicate their needs or express how they feel.

Disability or developmental delay

A child with a disability attends a long day care service and relies on staff for physical support and personal care to access the program.

Behavioural challenges

A four-year-old child is frequently described by his parents and staff as “challenging.” Staff respond to the child’s behaviour in different ways, leading to inconsistent expectations and responses across the team.

Understanding of safety or boundaries

A child with a developmental delay finds it difficult to recognise unsafe behaviour. They have limited problem-solving skills and few trusted adult connections with staff within the service.

Trusted relationships with adults

A five-year-old child who attends an outside school hours care service has limited connections with consistent or trusted adults in the service and few friendships with other children who attend the service.

Adult support

A two-year-old child attends a long day care service. She is developing self-care skills and requires frequent one-to-one assistance from staff for feeding, toileting, dressing and support with calming and emotional regulation, increasing her reliance on adults for care and support.

Personal care routines

A six-month-old child relies on staff to meet their basic care needs including nappy changing, feeding, dressing and sleeping.

Sleep or rest time

A seven-month-old child attends the service and requires staff to settle them for three naps during the day.

Transitions between rooms or activities

At the end of the school day, children move from their classrooms to the outside school hours care program. They move freely between different rooms, activities and areas whilst at the program.

Short staffing or staff absences

A long day care service experiences a period of high staff sickness meaning an increased reliance on casual staff members and changes to usual routines and practice.

Secluded or low-visibility spaces

Children who attend an outside school hours care program have access to a number of outside and inside areas with reduced visibility.

Reliance on multiple carers

Children who attend a busy long day care service are cared for by a high number of casual staff members with limited continuity of care.

Busy or noisy environments

An outside school hours care program operating on school premises is often busy and noisy, with many activities happening at once. Different activity areas, mixed age groups, and staff members and families moving through the space creates a dynamic and fast-paced environment.

Use of shared spaces by multiple roles

At a busy long day care centre, admin staff, cooks, maintenance workers, cleaners, and visitors often move through children's areas.

A culture where children's voices are not taken seriously

Leaders and supervisors at a service often minimise children's concerns and behaviours. Educators stop raising concerns or discussing behaviours with their supervisors as they feel it is pointless.

Strong loyalty between staff

A staff member raises a concern to her supervisor about a colleague's behaviour and is told "Let's keep this quiet to protect the team."

"This wouldn't happen here" mindset

A parent raises concerns about a staff member's behaviour towards her child. She is told by management "I can assure you that wouldn't happen here, we have a wonderful reputation and the highest quality of staff."

Unclear or weak child safe environment policy

Staff across a service are unsure about the possible signs of abuse or neglect, what to look for, and how to respond if they have a concern. They may also lack confidence about who concerns should be reported to and the correct reporting process to follow.

Inconsistent response to concerns

A service has a reputation among staff that reports are handled informally, delayed or not documented.

Pressure to prioritise parent satisfaction or reputation

A service has a reputation for minimising concerns to avoid complaints or conflict.

Limited induction or training for non-educator roles

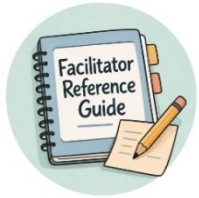
Admin staff, cooks, cleaners, maintenance workers, and volunteers are not clearly trained in child safety expectations.

Lack of clear supervision expectations for all roles

A service has unclear boundaries about staff being alone with children.

Workplace culture that discourages speaking up

Staff fear being judged, blamed, or ignored by management if they raise concerns so they have stopped speaking up



Facilitator reference guide: Building a safety shield




These strategies to reduce risk and increase safety are intended as prompts rather than a complete list. Participants may suggest alternative strategies based on their experience, and these should be acknowledged and explored. Facilitators may also add factor cards or protective strategies relevant to their own organisation.

| Vulnerability Card | Why this increases vulnerability | Examples of Protective Strategies |
|---|---|--|
| Very young age (infants and toddlers) | Reliance on adults, limited communication, high care needs. | Consistent relationships; Visibility in care routines; Shared responsibility for noticing; Predictable routines. |
| Limited language or communication skills | Child may struggle to disclose or be understood. | Child voice taken seriously; Calm, respectful language; Strong handovers and documentation; Child safety training for everyone. |
| Disability or developmental delay | Dependence on adults to access the program, risk of being misunderstood or not believed, limited communication. | Clear boundaries for all roles; Visibility in care routines; Reflective supervision and support; Two-adult awareness (where possible). |
| Behavioural challenges | Risk of punitive responses or labelling risk of child not being believed. | Clear behaviour guidance approaches; Calm, respectful language; Reflective supervision |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| | | and support; Shared responsibility for noticing. |
| Limited understanding of safety or boundaries | Child may not recognise unsafe behaviour. | Predictable routines; Child safety training for everyone; Clear boundaries for all roles; Child voice taken seriously; personal safety education. |
| Few trusted relationships with adults | Isolation; fewer opportunities for disclosure. | Consistent relationships; Shared responsibility for noticing; Leadership modelling child-safe behaviour. |
| High need for adult support | More one-to-one time increases power imbalance. | Visibility in care routines; Clear supervision expectations; Two-adult awareness (where possible); Regular environment checks. |
| Personal care routines | Privacy and isolation can increase risk. | Visibility in care routines; Clear supervision expectations; Clear boundaries for all roles. |
| Sleep or rest time | Reduced awareness and fewer adults present. | Planning for high-risk moments; Regular environment checks; Clear supervision expectations. |
| Transitions between rooms or activities | Distraction, movement, reduced supervision. | Planning for high-risk moments; Clear supervision expectations; Strong handovers and documentation. |
| Short staffing or staff absences | Rushed practice; reduced oversight. | Shared responsibility for noticing; Leadership modelling child-safe behaviour; Clear reporting pathways. |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Secluded or low-visibility spaces | Opportunities for isolation. | Regular environment checks; Visibility in care routines; Clear supervision expectations. |
| Reliance on multiple carers | Inconsistent supervision and relationships. | Consistent relationships; Strong handovers and documentation; Predictable routines. |
| Busy or noisy environments | Subtle signs are easily missed. | Shared responsibility for noticing; Reflective supervision and support; Predictable routines. |
| Shared spaces used by support roles | Increased adult access without clarity. | Clear boundaries for all roles; Child safety training for everyone; Clear supervision expectations. |
| Children’s voices not taken seriously | Concerns dismissed or ignored. | Child voice taken seriously; Leadership modelling child-safe behaviour; Open culture for raising concerns. |
| Strong loyalty between staff | Reluctance to report concerns. | Open culture for raising concerns; Clear reporting pathways; Reputation never outweighs safety. |
| “This wouldn’t happen here” mindset | Complacency and blind spots. | Leadership modelling child-safe behaviour; Regular environment checks; Reputation never outweighs safety. |
| Weak or unclear child safe environment policy | Uncertainty about roles and action. | Clear reporting pathways; Child safety training for everyone; Leadership modelling child-safe behaviour. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Inconsistent response to concerns</p> | <p>Harm may continue unaddressed.</p> | <p>Clear reporting pathways; Open culture for raising concerns; Reflective supervision and support.</p> |
| <p>Prioritising reputation over safety</p> | <p>Concerns minimised or hidden.</p> | <p>Reputation never outweighs safety; Leadership modelling child-safe behaviour; Open culture for raising concerns.</p> |
| <p>Limited induction for non-educator roles</p> | <p>Unclear expectations and boundaries.</p> | <p>Child safety training for everyone; Clear boundaries for all roles; Clear supervision expectations.</p> |
| <p>Workplace culture discouraging complaints</p> | <p>Fear of speaking up.</p> | <p>Open culture for raising concerns; Clear reporting pathways; Reflective supervision and support.</p> |

| <h3>Activity 2: Spot the organisational risks and rewrite the response</h3> | |
|---|--|
| <p>Objective</p> | <p>This activity focuses on organisational factors that can increase the risk of abuse or neglect within education and care settings (organisational culture, loyalty between staff members, reputation of the service, weak child safe environment policy or complaints processes, ineffective disciplinary processes). It supports participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise organisational factors that can increase risk, minimise concerns and prevent people from speaking up. • Identify child-safe responses that encourage taking concerns seriously and speaking up early. |
| <p>Time</p> | <p>45-60 minutes</p> |
| <p>Format</p> | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Individual Work</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Pair Work</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p>Whole Group Activity</p>  </div> </div> |
| <p>Materials needed</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational risks and rewrite the response worksheet • Pens |



Activity plan

Facilitator preamble

“Sometimes vulnerability in education and care services increases not because people do not care, but because factors within the organisation can minimise concerns or make it harder for people to speak up.

This activity helps participants recognise those factors that can affect safety and identify stronger, child-safe responses that support taking concerns seriously and speaking up early.”

Remind participants

- Keep discussion de-identified and respectful of others.
- We are looking at organisational factors that can increase risk and identifying child- safe responses.
- Anyone can opt out of role-playing and be an observer.

Step 1: Individual read (5 minutes)

- Give each person one Culture Detectives worksheet.
- Allow participants 2 minutes to read the worksheet.

Step 2: Independent rewrite (10 minutes)

- Ask participants to rewrite the statement into a child-safe response that supports speaking up and taking concerns seriously.
- Prompt: *“What would a child-safe leader or colleague say instead?”*



Facilitator tips

If groups struggle to engage, remind them: *“These statements are not about placing blame on people or services. They reflect common factors that can exist within organisations. The task is to practise stronger, child-safe responses.”*

Step 3: Pair share (10 minutes)

- In pairs, compare rewrites and choose the strongest version.
- Ask: *“Why does this response help increase safety?”*

Step 4: Small group role-play (15 minutes)

In groups of 4-6, act out a 2-minute staffroom moment:

- One person reads the original culture clue.
- Others respond using the rewritten child-safe language or response.
- Observers note what made the response helpful (tone, clarity, child focus, next steps).

Step 5: Whole-group set of “team phrases” (10–15 minutes)

- Bring the group back together and explain that this step is about turning reflection into practical language and child-safe action that can be used in real workplaces.
- Invite participants to share short phrases or sentences that came up during their rewrites and discussions that felt:
 - Child-focused.
 - Calm and non-blaming.
 - Realistic to use in meetings, handovers, or difficult conversations.
- Write three headings where everyone can see them:
 - What children should see and feel.
 - What staff should do and say.
 - What the service should have in place.

- As facilitator, record these phrases on butcher's paper, a whiteboard, or a shared document.
- Explain to the group that these phrases can help:
 - Pause or redirect conversations that minimise concerns.
 - Support staff to speak up with confidence.
 - Bring discussions back to child safety and professional responsibility.
- Examples might include:
 - *"Let's bring it back to the child's safety and wellbeing."*
 - *"We don't need certainty to consult and document."*
 - *"It's okay to raise a concern. That's protective practice."*
 - *"Let's follow our process and get guidance."*



Facilitator tips

- Keep it light and practical.
- Emphasise that organisational culture is built in everyday moments and conversations.



Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

This activity works well online using breakout rooms, chat, and a shared document or whiteboard. The focus remains on identifying organisational factors that can impact child safety and practicing child-safe responses that support speaking up.

Platform preparation (before the session)

- Upload the Culture Detectives worksheet as a PDF or share via screen.
- Prepare a shared slide, whiteboard, or collaborative document with three headings:
 - What children should see and feel.
 - What staff should do and say.
 - What the service should have in place.
- Ensure breakout rooms are set up for pairs and small groups.

Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with the facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that sharing is optional.
- Reinforce that the purpose is to identify organisational factors that can impact safety and practise stronger, child-safe responses.
- Participants can step away from the computer if needed.
- Encourage cameras on or off based on comfort.
- Remind participants support pathways are available (e.g., EAP, supervision etc.).

Step 2: Individual read

- Share the worksheet on screen or via link.
- Invite participants to read the worksheet silently for two minutes.
- Encourage them to notice their initial reactions.

Step 3: Independent rewrite

- Ask participants to rewrite the statement into a child-safe response that supports speaking up and taking concerns seriously.
- Invite them to type their rewrite into a private note, personal document, or direct message to themselves.
- Prompt: *“What would a child-safe leader or colleague say instead?”*
- If engagement feels low, remind participants that these statements reflect factors that can exist within organisations. The task is not to place blame, but to recognise these factors and practise stronger, child-focused responses.

Step 4: Pair share in breakout rooms

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs.
- Invite them to share their rewritten responses and choose the strongest version together.
- Ask them to discuss: *“Why does this response help?”*
- Encourage focus on tone, clarity, child focus, and practical next steps.

Step 5: Small group role-play in breakout rooms

- Move participants into breakout groups of 4-6.
- Ask one person to read the original culture clue aloud.
- Other group members respond using their rewritten child-safe response.
- Encourage short, natural responses rather than scripted dialogue.
- Observers in the group note what made the response helpful, such as calm tone, clarity, child focus, or naming next steps.

- Remind groups to keep role-plays brief (around two minutes) and realistic to workplace conversations.

Step 6: Whole-group creation of shared “team phrases”

- Bring everyone back to the main room.
- Share your screen with the prepared headings:
 - What children should see and feel.
 - What staff should do and say.
 - What the service should have in place.
- Invite participants to type short phrases into the chat or unmute to share language that felt:
 - Child-focused.
 - Calm and non-blaming.
 - Realistic for meetings, handovers, or difficult conversations.
- As facilitator, capture these phrases live on the shared document or whiteboard.
- Explain that these phrases can help pause or redirect conversations that minimise concerns, support staff to speak up with confidence, and bring discussions back to child safety and professional responsibility.

Step 7: Closing reflection

- Invite participants to type in the chat or reflect silently: *“One phrase I feel confident using to support child safety is...”*



Worksheet: Spot the organisational risks and rewrite the response

Spot the organisational risks and rewrite the response

This worksheet helps you notice how organisational culture, language, and leadership responses can increase or reduce child safety.

The task is to practise rewriting common workplace messages into child-safe, responses.

This is not about blaming individuals. It is about strengthening systems and culture.

Instructions

Read each culture clue carefully.

- In the space provided, rewrite the statement into a response that:
 - keeps the child's safety and wellbeing central
 - supports speaking up and following process
 - is calm, respectful, and professional
- You do not need perfect wording. Focus on intent and direction.

Culture Clue 1**What someone might say or imply:**

“They’ve been here for years and are a great educator. I can’t imagine them doing anything inappropriate.”

Rewrite as a child-safe response:**Culture Clue 2****What someone might say or imply:**

“Let’s not overreact. We don’t have enough information yet.”

Rewrite as a child-safe response:**Culture Clue 3****What someone might say or imply:**

“We don’t want to cause trouble or upset the family.”

Rewrite as a child-safe response:

Culture Clue 4

What someone might say or imply:

“Let’s keep this in-house and not escalate it unless we really have to.”

Rewrite as a child-safe response:

Culture Clue 5

What someone might say or imply:

“Our service has a good reputation. This kind of thing doesn’t happen here.”

Rewrite as a child-safe response:

Culture Clue 6

What someone might say or imply:

“That child is always challenging. It’s probably just behaviour.”

Rewrite as a child-safe response:

Reflection (optional)

Which rewrites felt easiest?



Which felt hardest?

What do these moments tell us about how culture shapes safety?

Gentle reminder

Strong child-safe cultures:

- Take concerns seriously, even when information is incomplete.
- Focus on behaviour, policies and processes, not reputations or individual personalities.
- Support staff to speak up early and follow process.

| Activity 3: Organisational factors and child safety | |
|--|---|
| Objective | <p>To help participants explore how organisational culture, policies and decision-making can influence child safety in education and care settings, and to identify ways services can strengthen child-safe practices.</p> <p>It helps participants to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how organisational factors can impact child safety. • Identify ways services can strengthen child-safe practices. |
| Time | 15-20 minutes |
| Format | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Small Group Activity</i></p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><i>Whole Group Activity</i></p>  </div> </div> |
| Materials needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “List of organisational factors” (this could be provided to participants as a printed hand out, written on a whiteboard or written onto individual palm cards). • Paper or a whiteboard to record group insights and themes (optional). |



Activity plan

Facilitator preamble

“Child safety is influenced not only by individual behaviour, but also by the culture and systems within an organisation. Sometimes vulnerabilities increase not because people do not care, but because certain organisational factors make it harder for concerns to be recognised, taken seriously or acted upon. This activity encourages participants to reflect on how organisational culture and decision-making can impact children’s safety and how services can strengthen child-safe responses.”

Remind participants

- Keep discussion respectful and focused on learning.
- Speak in general terms rather than referring to specific services or individuals.
- The aim is to reflect on organisational factors, not to criticise individuals.

Step 1: Introduce the activity: Understanding organisational factors that can increase risk (5 minutes)

- Explain that participants will work in small groups to explore how certain organisational factors may influence child safety in education and care settings. Emphasise that the goal is to identify how these factors might create risks and what child-safe responses can strengthen practice.

Step 2: Small group discussions- Taking a closer look at organisational factors (10-15 minutes)

- Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people. Ensure groups are small enough for everyone to contribute.
- Provide each group with one or two organisational factors from the list. If using cards, give each group a card. If using slides or a handout, ask each group to select or assign them a factor.

- Ask groups to discuss the factor they have been given and consider the following questions:
 - Why might this factor create risks for children in an education and care setting?
 - How might it make it harder for staff, children or families to raise concerns?
 - What actions or practices could help reduce this risk and strengthen a child-safe culture?
- Encourage groups to think about everyday service practices, team culture, leadership decisions and communication processes.

Step 4: Whole-group discussion- Invite groups to share key insights (5–10 minutes)

- Bring the group back together and invite each group to briefly share:
 - *The organisational factor/s they discussed.*
 - *One way it could impact child safety (providing real world examples).*
 - *One strategy that could help reduce this risk and increase child safety.*
- Highlight common themes that emerge, such as the importance of listening to children, clear reporting processes, transparent leadership and creating a culture where concerns are taken seriously.
- Reinforce that strong child-safe organisations actively reflect on their culture, systems and decision-making to ensure children’s safety and wellbeing remain the priority.



Facilitator tips

- Encourage participants to focus on systems and culture rather than individual blame.
- If discussion slows, prompt groups to consider how the factor might appear in everyday service practice.
- Remind participants that strong child-safe cultures support open communication, clear processes and early action when concerns arise.





Online adaptation (MS Teams or Zoom)

This activity works well online using breakout rooms, shared documents, and chat reflection. The focus remains on exploring leadership decisions through different role lenses and identifying practical safety improvements.

Platform preparation (before the session)

- Upload or share the List of Organisational Factors as PDF.
- Set up break out rooms for small groups.
- Prepare a shared white board or document for capturing whole group insights.

Step 1: Create psychological safety

- Begin with a short facilitator preamble.
- Provide a wellbeing reminder.
- Remind participants that this is a reflective activity, not about placing blame on individual services or staff members.
- Reinforce that sharing is voluntary and examples should remain de-identified.
- Encourage cameras on or off based on comfort.

Step 2: Introduce the activity: Whole group discussion

- Share the list of organisational factors in the chat or on screen.
- Explain that participants will work in small groups to explore how certain organisational factors may influence child safety in education and care settings. Emphasise that the goal is to identify how these factors might create risks and what child-safe responses can strengthen practice.

Step 3: Break out room discussion – Taking a closer look at organisational factors

- Place participants into breakout rooms in pairs or small groups.
- Provide each group with one or two organisational factors from the “list of organisational factors”.
- Ask groups to discuss the factor they have been given and consider the following questions:
 - Why might this factor create risks for children in an education and care setting?
 - How might it make it harder for staff, children or families to raise concerns?
 - What actions or practices could help reduce this risk and strengthen a child-safe culture?
- Encourage groups to think about everyday service practices, team culture, leadership decisions and communication processes.
- Encourage groups to identify a scribe to take notes.

Step 4: Whole-group discussion – Invite groups to share key insights

- Bring the group back together and invite each group to briefly share:
 - The organisational factor they discussed.
 - One way it could impact child safety (providing real world examples).
 - One strategy that could help reduce risk and increase child safety.
- Highlight common themes that emerge, such as the importance of listening to children, clear reporting processes, transparent leadership and creating a culture where concerns are taken seriously.
- Reinforce that strong child-safe organisations actively reflect on their culture, systems and decision-making to ensure children’s safety and wellbeing remain the priority.

Step 5: Closing Reflection

- Remind participants that strong child-safe cultures support open communication, clear processes and early action when concerns arise.





Prompt card: Organisational factors

Below is a list of organisational factors that can increase risk in education and care settings. These factors are provided as examples to support Activity 3. They can be printed and provided to groups as handouts or written on a white board.

Groups may also identify additional factors based on their own experiences or reflections. This should be welcomed and encouraged, as recognising a wider range of influences can help strengthen understanding of how organisational culture and systems impact child safety.

- A culture where children are not listened to or taken seriously.
- Longstanding or close relationships between staff.
- Services with a strong reputation.
- A workplace culture that discourages complaints.
- Ineffective internal disciplinary processes.
- Weak or unclear child safe environment policy or complaints processes.
- Prioritising the organisation's reputation over safety.
- Prioritising financial decisions over safety.