



INTRODUCTION

'Taking us seriously' is a study premised on the view that children and young people understand and experience safety in different ways to adults. The study acknowledges that although better practice approaches to protecting children in institutions have been identified in other studies; without an appreciation of what children and young people need to be and feel safe, responses may fail to adequately respond to their concerns.

The study was also designed to inform the Royal Commission's work by assessing the effectiveness of current prevention programs by directly hearing children and young people's views and knowledge of safety issues, as well as how they think these issues can and should be addressed (ICPS, 2015, p.6).

KEY LEARNINGS

The study specifically sought to gain deeper insight into how children conceptualise and perceive the extent to which they are safe in institutions; their views on what gives rise to these perceptions; what they consider is already being done to respond to unsafe situations in institutions; and what else they think might lead to children being and feeling more safe. The key responses reported by participants are highlighted below.

How do children conceptualise and perceive safety and a lack of it? (ICPS, 2015, p.7-9)

Children and young people who participated in the focus groups demonstrated the ability to differentiate between feeling safe and being safe, and defined safety in relation to how they felt and how they behaved, as well as the things that surrounded them.

Children and young people of various ages reported that they assessed safety differently to each other and that this further differed to adults. Children for example often based their assessment on 'gut feelings' towards a person or situation and were more cautious in their response. Young people reported that their perception of safety was more informed by past experience and they were more likely to put themselves at risk.

The children and young people also shared a common belief that adults primarily assessed risk based on their experiences as a child. They also believed that it led to adults minimising children's concerns about their safety as it did not recognize that what children experience now is different to the past.

"Lots of adults don't care enough about kids and this stuff is going to keep happening until they see us having good ideas and believe us (when things go wrong) nothing will change"- MX-2 (ICPS, 2015, p.6)

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

TITLE

'Taking us seriously: children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns'

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KEY FOCUS

This report presents an understanding on how children perceive safety and consider it within institutional contexts.

KEY OBJECTIVES

The study identifies the need to consider children and young people's views on what they need to be safe and how they would like institutions to respond when safety concerns emerge.

DOWNLOAD REPORT AT

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/33a95fc9-0e8d-41da-ac9f-31f625794d4f/Taking-Us-Seriously>



What are children and young people's perception of safety in institutions?

Most participants reported feeling safe in their schools but talked about past experiences in other settings that were unsafe. They also generally believed that institutions were not effective in dealing with bullying or harassment issues but could identify supports that were in place to help them.

In general, children and young people also shared the belief that institutions should side with children and young people in the first instance, take their concerns more seriously, and act on their wishes until the investigation process is complete (ICPS, 2015, p. 10).

Characteristics of a safe institution

Children and young adults generally agreed that it was crucial for institutions to demonstrate certain conditions that helped them not only be safe but also feel safe such as (ICPS, 2015, p.10):

- Focusing on helping children and young people
- Valuing children and young people and their participation
- Providing a safe environment for children and young people
- Proactively protecting children and young people from unsafe people and experiences
- Employing safe and trusted adults
- Openness to external monitoring of the institution

Advice to adults on how to best support children and young people

Children and young people gave examples of times when adults helped them to manage their safety concerns and when they stepped in to protect them from harm. However, participants reported that when adults intervened it was important that they (ICPS, 2015, p.11):

- Actively listen to children and young people to ensure their thoughts, feelings and needs are appreciated
- Help children and young people determine the nature and seriousness of the situation
- Help children and young people build their skills to manage unsafe situations and how to respond to them when adults are not available
- Offer solutions to children and young people that are realistic and respond to their concerns

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The authors of the study conclude with a key finding that emerged in the study: how to help children and young people build the knowledge and skills to protect themselves without sending a message to children that they are primarily responsible for keeping themselves safe. They argue that institutions need to find a mid-ground, where adults: (a) actively protect children and young people and responds to their issues, and (b) support children and young people to understand and manage safety issues in the context of a supportive relationship (ICPS, 2015, p.70).

The "Taking us seriously" study argues that to achieve this two-pronged approach there is a need for:

- Adults to understand how children conceptualise, experience and deal with safety issues;
- Adults to understand the dynamics of sexual abuse and other safety concerns;
- Adults to help children and young people better understand the dynamics of sexual abuse and other safety concerns, and how adults and institutions are managing risks;
- Adults to develop trustworthy relationships to enable children and young people to raise their concerns;
- Adults to take children and young people's concerns seriously;
- Institutions to engage children and young people in participatory processes (ICPS, 2015, p.70).