



# Responding and taking action

This resource focuses on the sexual abuse of children by adults.<sup>1</sup> When we talk about a *child*, we mean a person aged **under 18 years**. We recognise and acknowledge the diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, abilities, and genders of children.

Whether you are a parent, carer, family friend, professional, person with responsibility for caring for children or any other person in a child's life, everyone has a role to play in protecting children from sexual abuse. What children need most is **safe and trusted adults** in their lives to provide protection and support.

Here are some general ways adults can help.

## Learn & Act

- Learn about [child sexual abuse](#) and [online safety](#) for child sexual abuse
- Have hard, brave conversations with your family and friends about how you expect them to behave towards children
- Learn about [healthy sexual development](#)
- Learn about ways to [support and have conversations](#) with children with cognitive disability
- Call out inappropriate sexual discussions and behaviours
- Role model appropriate and safe behaviours, establish boundaries and rules with children
- Challenge myths and stereotypes about perpetrators of child sexual abuse and recognise that most child sexual abuse happens in families.

# Notice

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- Get curious about what's going on in children's lives
- Let children know you notice and care what is going on in their lives
- Look out for signs that a child is being [groomed](#) or harmed like changes in behaviour, such as becoming [secretive](#), avoiding certain people or places, having unexplained money or gifts, sleep problems, mood changes, becoming detached or struggling to focus and pay attention
- Supervise and pay attention to children's interactions with others – in person and online
- Trust your instinct, don't wait for 'proof' if you think a child is at risk or is being harmed

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# Listen & Ask

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- Listen to children and make sure they know you value their input
- Have honest age and developmentally appropriate conversations with children about consent, respectful relationships and online safety
- Ask children about who and what contributes to their feelings of being safe or unsafe
- Listen without judgement - remember that if a child doesn't feel safe to talk to you about the little things, they won't talk to you about the big things
- If a child discloses sexual abuse, believe the child and take action
- Be alert to a child's non-verbal communications and behaviours, especially for children with disability



# Protect

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- Child sexual abuse is a crime and needs to be reported to [police and the relevant child protection agency in your state or territory](#)
- If you have concerns about a child's immediate safety, call 000
- Report [online](#) child sexual abuse including child sexual abuse material to the [Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation](#)
- If the abuse is happening online, discuss strategies such as removing devices at bedtime or only using devices in shared rooms
- Work together with children to identify and put into action strategies to support their safety like using buddy systems and identifying trusted adults
- If you are a mandatory reporter, follow your [state or territory's legislation](#)
- If you are a parent or carer, take actions to protect your child from further harm even when the perpetrator is a family member or family friend. Carefully supervise interactions or consider stopping contact if you can
- Ask schools, sports clubs, child-care, local councils and other similar bodies for their child safety policies and practices and discuss any concerns with them

# Support

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- If a child is or has been sexually abused, offer support in whatever way is needed
- Be a safe and trusted person in the child's life
- Connect the child with support services, continue to listen, acknowledge their feelings and emotions, and protect the child from further harm
- Talk to trusted people, such as family and friends, and seek professional support if needed so you can manage your own emotions and reactions
- Be open to and explore different ways to help children process difficult feelings and emotions and heal from child sexual abuse, like art therapy, and using books to support conversations with children
- There are also a range of helplines and online services to support children who have been sexually abused and the adults who support these children.
  - [Australian Human Rights Commission - Support services](#)
  - [Raising Children Network - Child sexual abuse helplines & services](#)
  - [National Office for Child Safety, Get Support Helplines List](#)
  - [Australian Institute of Family Studies - Helplines, telephone and online counselling services for children, young people and adults](#)
  - [Stop it Now Australia Helpline](#)

# Find out more

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The National Centre has a range of resources designed to support you to understand and respond to child sexual abuse. You can access these at: [Resources](#) - [The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse](#).

Other resources to support you as a professional, parent, carer, family friend or any other person with responsibility for caring for children include:

- [National Office for Child Safety](#)
- [Raising Children Network](#)
- [Emerging Minds](#)
- [Australian Childhood Foundation](#)
- [Bravehearts](#)

## If you need support, please contact:

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**Lifeline** - 13 11 14

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**13YARN** - 13 92 76

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**1800RESPECT**  
1800 737 732

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**Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service**  
1300 657 380

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**Kids Helpline**  
1800 55 1800

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