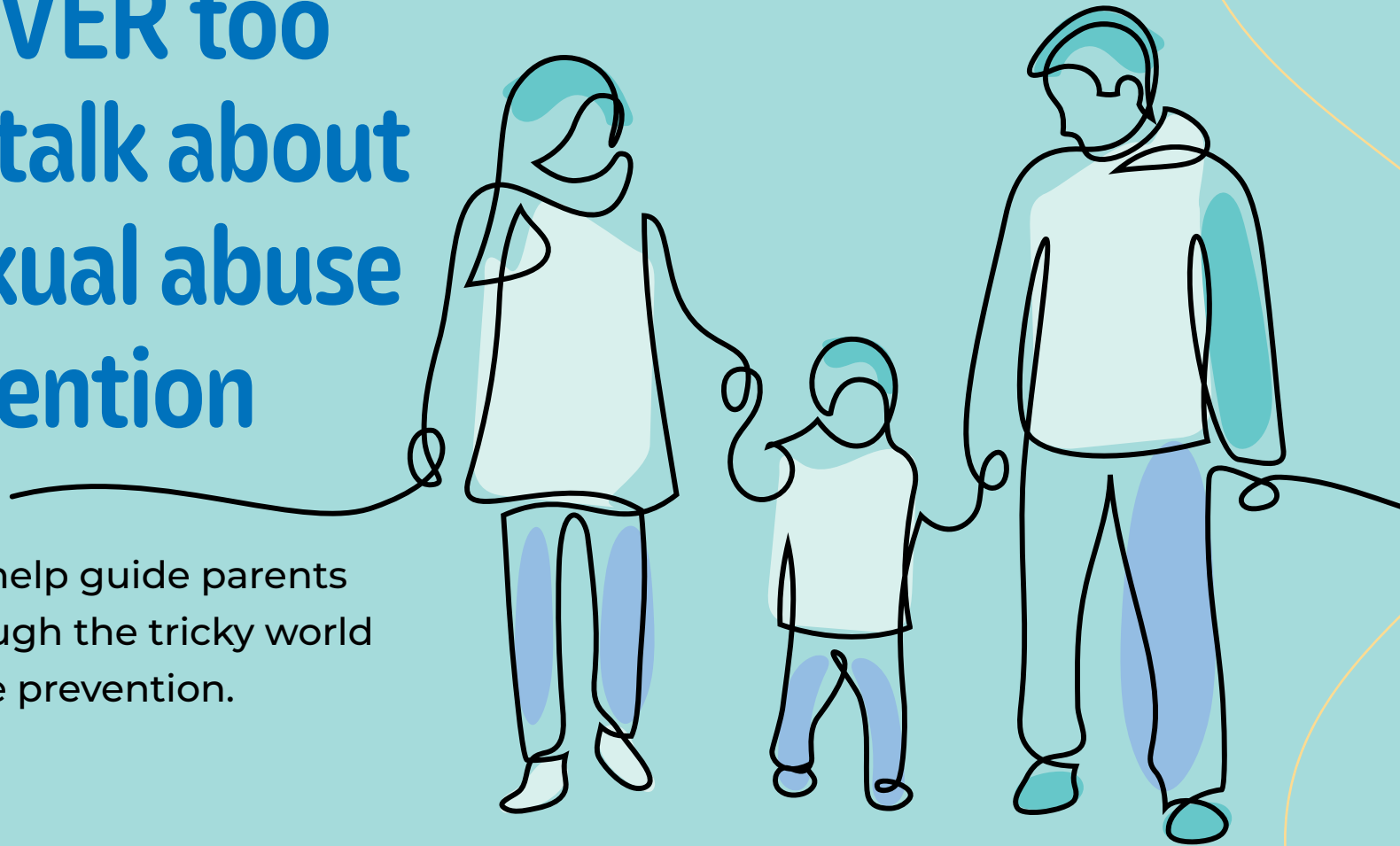


# It's NEVER too early to talk about child sexual abuse prevention

A resource to help guide parents and carers through the tricky world of abuse prevention.



## Acknowledgements and about.

In keeping with the spirit of Reconciliation, we acknowledge the Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi People, traditional owners of the lands where this guide was created. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia where this guide's use is intended.

**Project Paradigm would like to thank the following people who worked together to make this resource possible through their contribution:**

- Australian Federal Police-led Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation (ACCCE)
- ICAP
- Laura Easterbrook – Clinical Chair, Statewide Child Protection Clinical Partnership, Queensland Health
- Madeleine West – Project Paradigm Ambassador

We would also like to give a special thanks to the parents and carers within the community who were willing to share their firsthand experiences in navigating conversations about child sexual abuse prevention. Their feedback provided invaluable insights which shaped the creation of this guide.

### Authors:

IFYS Limited, Project Paradigm.



It's Never Too Early to Talk about Child Sexual Abuse: A resource to help guide parents and carers through the tricky world of abuse prevention. © 2025 by IFYS Limited is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.

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### Funding:

This resource has been generously funded by ICAP.



## Who is this guide for?

This practical guide is designed to help parents and carers, particularly expectant families, start conversations with family, friends, care providers and other adults about child sexual abuse prevention.

The guide is designed to help parents and carers advocate for their child and provides practical advice to help parents and carers start and continue conversations.

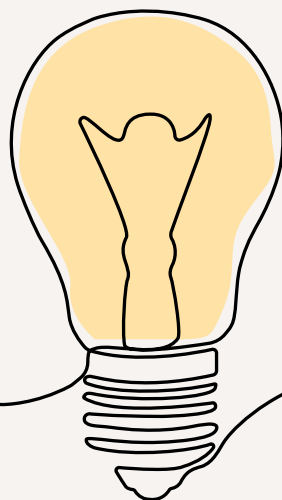
It provides information about what constitutes child sexual abuse, gives practical conversation tips, and details what to do when dealing with disclosures, seeking support or reporting abuse. Throughout the guide, resources and support services are available via QR codes.



### Trigger warning

This guide contains information about sexual abuse and harm. Consider this before reading on.

**Consider sharing this resource with trusted adults and the community around you to increase child sexual abuse prevention awareness and to take action together.**



# Contents.

What is child sexual abuse? .....	<b>5</b>
What are the signs of possible sexual abuse that I should be looking out for? .....	<b>5</b>
Keeping children safe, advocating for your child.....	<b>6</b>
Things to consider before having a conversation about child sexual abuse prevention.....	<b>7</b>
Concerning behaviours of adults and/or other children.....	<b>8</b>
Advocating for your child & having the conversation .....	<b>9</b>
Care arrangements .....	<b>9</b>
Supervision when out and about .....	<b>10</b>
Nappy changing .....	<b>10</b>
Babysitting .....	<b>11</b>
Online privacy .....	<b>11</b>
Parent & Carer Support/Activities + websites you can visit with your child .....	<b>12</b>
Childcare providers .....	<b>13</b>
Playdates .....	<b>14</b>
Sleepovers .....	<b>15</b>
Prompt card resource .....	<b>16</b>
What is a disclosure and what do I need to do? .....	<b>17-18</b>
What should I do if a child has disclosed, or I suspect child sexual abuse has occurred? .....	<b>19</b>
Additional resources about disclosures.....	<b>20</b>
After having a conversation about child sexual abuse prevention.....	<b>21</b>
Adapting the conversation.....	<b>22</b>
When the conversation doesn't go to plan.....	<b>22</b>
Supports for you.....	<b>23</b>

# What is child sexual abuse?

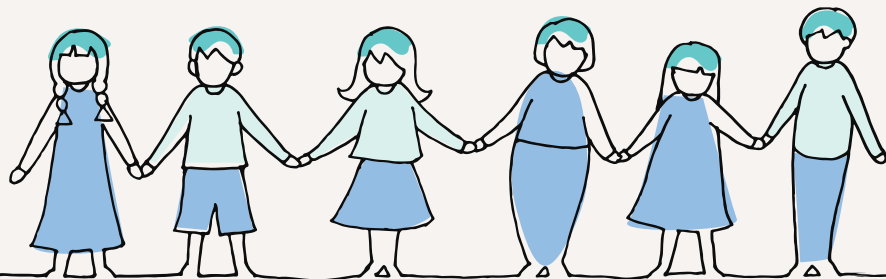
Children can be sexually abused by adults or by other children who are in a position of power or authority over the child. It can be perpetrated in person, via phone or online.

## Child sexual abuse includes but is not limited to:

- ✓ Kissing, holding or fondling a child in a sexual way
- ✓ Exposing genitals to a child
- ✓ Talking in a sexual way that's not appropriate for a child's age
- ✓ Making obscene phone calls, text messages or remarks
- ✓ Persistently intruding on a child's privacy
- ✓ Showing pornographic videos or images to a child
- ✓ Forcing a child or young person to watch a sexual act
- ✓ Child exploitation (see definition below)\*
- ✓ Sex or sexual activity with a child

(Queensland Government, 2022)

*\*The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse defined child sexual exploitation as occurring "when a child is manipulated or coerced to participate in a sexual activity in exchange for, or on the promise of, rewards including affection, attention, gifts, food, accommodation, clothing, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or money. Child sexual exploitation is a distinct form of child sexual abuse because of the notion of exchange or reward."*



# What are the signs of possible sexual abuse that I should be looking out for?

Please note these may vary dependent on age and development of child.

## Emotional and behavioural signs

- ✓ Speaking out or knowing more about sexual activities than other children at a similar age/development
- ✓ Playing or acting in a sexual way
- ✓ Refusing to undress for activities or wearing additional layers of clothing
- ✓ Afraid of being alone with a particular person/group
- ✓ Afraid of going to a particular place
- ✓ Changes in personality or temperament
- ✓ Expressions of despair - worry, anxiety, fear, etc
- ✓ Change of behaviour – withdrawn, outbursts
- ✓ Creating stories or artwork about the abuse
- ✓ Change of sleeping habits, starting to have nightmares
- ✓ Being secretive

## Physical signs

- ✓ Bruising, bleeding, swelling, tears or cuts on their genitals or anus
- ✓ Itching or pain in the genital area
- ✓ Difficulty going to the toilet, walking or sitting
- ✓ Starting to wet the bed or soil themselves
- ✓ Chronic stomach pain
- ✓ STI's or chronic thrush or unexplained repeated concerns
- ✓ Early onset of puberty (under 10's)

(Queensland Government, 2022)

**Raising Children** - If you have more questions about what sexual behaviours are developmentally appropriate, take a look at this resource: Childhood Sexual Development and Sexual Behaviour 0-3 years. [CLICK HERE](#)



# Keeping children safe, advocating for your child.

Advocating for your child and their safety means speaking up for their rights, needs, and interests with friends, family and professionals who care for and are involved with your child.

**There are many ways you can advocate.**



## Communicate

- Stay informed and address any concerns promptly.
- Be proactive.
- Use clear and concise language, be sure your message is clear and easy to understand.



## Gather information

Document changes and gather information that's relevant.



## Seek advice and external support

Don't hesitate to talk with professionals.



## Stay informed

Understand your child's rights and the available resources.

**United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

► [CLICK HERE](#)



## Seek support from others

Don't be afraid to ask for help from family, friends, or organisations.



"I know my child, they know me. I'm a good advocate for my child."

# Things to consider before having a conversation about child sexual abuse prevention.

Before engaging in a conversation with another adult about child sexual abuse prevention, consider the following things:

## ENVIRONMENT

Consider where you would like to engage in a conversation. Where would be an appropriate place to meet? Is it private? What environment will enable the conversation to flow without disruption?

## TIME

Consider what you would like to discuss and how much time the conversation requires. Is it an appropriate time for you and the other person to chat?

## MENTAL STATE

Check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Do you feel like you can have the conversation today? It is important to go into this with curiosity and an open mind.

## COMMUNICATION

Be open and honest in the conversation, whilst communicating your expectations and boundaries in a clear, direct and specific way.



*"I don't love having difficult conversations, but I love my child."*



Trust your gut.

## Concerning behaviours of adults and/or other children.

Below are some examples of concerning behaviours. Each example is accompanied by an example of a suggested response.

- **Not respecting boundaries.**

Example response: "I notice you encourage/allow my child to watch MA15+ movies that we don't approve of.

You need to check with me first to see if it's okay."

- **Encouraging or engaging in touch where a child's parent/carer has indicated the attention is unwanted.**

Example response: "I notice that you encourage my child to kiss/hug/touch to say goodbye. That's not okay with me.

We can have a conversation about alternatives."

- **Not having age-appropriate relationships.**

You can ask the person in contact with your child questions about their work, family, friends, hobbies, and interests to gain more context and understanding about who they are and who is in their circle.

- **Talking about personal problems or intimate relationships with a child.**

Example response: "I understand you spoke to my child about your relationship worries/personal problems. That's not appropriate.

You will need to seek some alternative support. Perhaps you can speak to..."

- **Spending time alone with a child outside of their role in that child's life or making excuses to be alone with the child (for example, if a childcare worker wants to spend time with your child outside of work hours).**

Example response: "I notice that you want to spend a lot of time with my child. I feel this is inappropriate. Please stop."

- **Expressing unusual interest in your child's sexual development.**

Example response: "I notice you made comments about my child's development. I think this is inappropriate. Please stop."

- **Giving gifts without occasion or reason.**

Example response: "Thank you for the gift, but on this occasion, we can't accept it."

- **Restricting your child's access to other trusted adults (for example, at a family gathering/function).**

Example response: "It's come to my attention that you are discouraging my child from spending time with other trusted adults.

That's not okay and needs to stop."

(Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, 2025)



## Advocating for your child & having the conversation.

There are many different environments where you can have conversations with other adults to prevent child sexual abuse.

Your boundaries and advocating for your child can change over time. You're allowed to change your mind!

Here are some things to think about and some ideas of how you might have a conversation in specific situations. Consider reshaping these into your own words and/or practice out loud to build confidence.

### Care arrangements (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Making care arrangements involves establishing a network of safe people in your child's circle who can provide care for them. Care can look like changing outfits, cleaning, bathing, or feeding your child.

On occasion, you might find yourself in social settings where there are additional people around who are outside of your safe circle (e.g., extended family and friends). It can take time to figure out who you are comfortable with participating in care activities for your child.

To enforce your boundaries whilst figuring out what you and your child are comfortable with, here are some things you might say:


*"My child may not feel comfortable being hugged or kissed."*

*"Please ask before passing my child to anyone else."*

*"Please tell me if you think my child needs to be changed."*



**Resource: Safe 4 Kids** - In this story Matilda learns that if you feel unsafe, you need to tell an adult you trust and seek help from them. (This can be purchased) [CLICK HERE](#)



You already have the tools to engage in difficult, but necessary conversations to protect your child.

### Things to consider



Dating or a new partner. Be ready to talk about how this impacts care arrangements e.g. nappy changing, babysitting.

## Supervision when out and about (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Going out and about is a great way for your child to socialise and for you to have some adult interaction. Everyone has different levels of supervision and expectations of these outings. Be open and clear about your expectations before the outing and clarify who is supervising your child.

### **You could say things like:**

*"Would you mind if we met at a park where I can see the whole space?"*

*"I would love to talk to you, but I'm going to stand so I can see what my child is doing."*

*"Just so we don't assume that we are both watching my child, I'm watching them at the moment."*



## Nappy changing (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

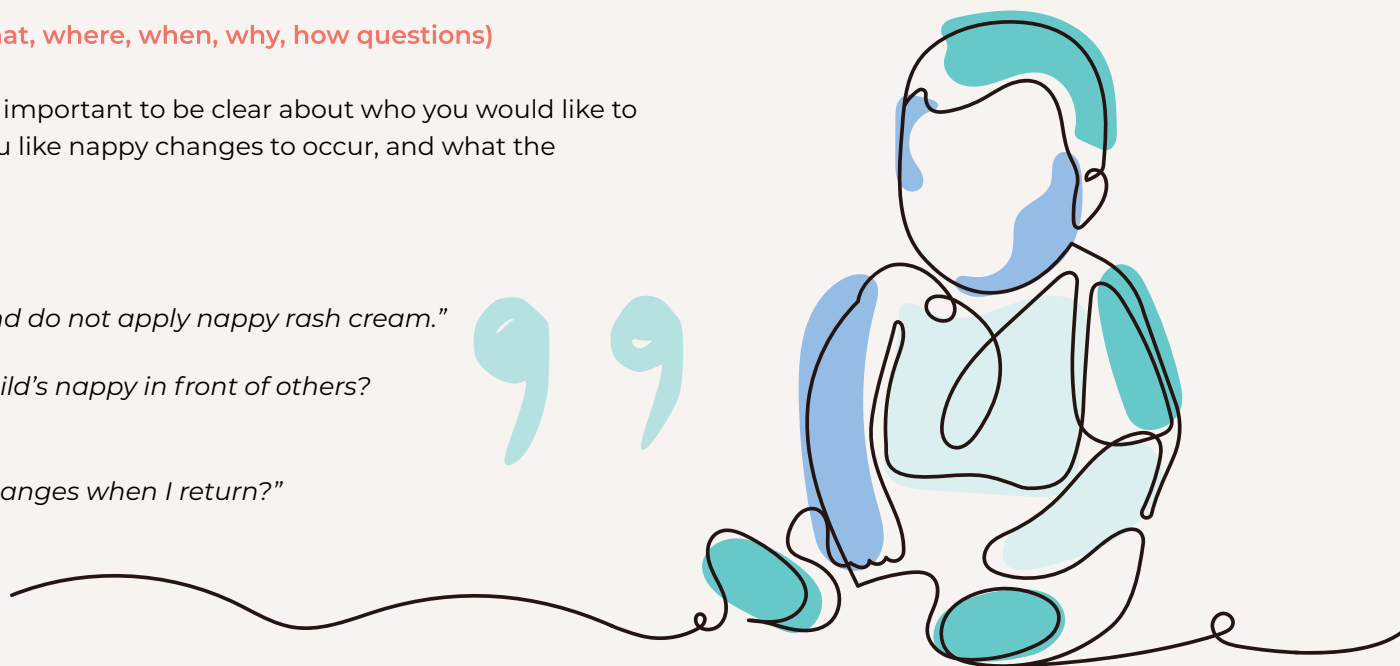
Nappy changing is a vulnerable time for your child. It is important to be clear about who you would like to change nappies if you are not present, where would you like nappy changes to occur, and what the change looks like.

### **Here are a few suggestions that you could try:**

*"When you change my child, please use a wipe only and do not apply nappy rash cream."*

*"Could you please ensure that you don't change my child's nappy in front of others?  
Please do this in the bathroom."*

*"Could you please give me an update on any nappy changes when I return?"*



## Babysitting (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Babysitting involves the care of a child while the parents are not present. Before babysitting occurs, clarify who will be present and who else will be supervising your child when you or the primary babysitter are not around. Also consider what activities your child will be participating in and if the babysitter will be leaving the house with your child, what new environments they may encounter.

Be clear about what your boundaries are. For example, what tv shows/devices will my child be exposed to? Will you be taking my child out in public (e.g., toilets, what happens here?).

### Here are some ideas for what you could discuss:

*"Who is going to be home? Is anyone else coming over?"*

*"Will you be able to watch my child the whole time I'm gone?"*

*"I'd appreciate it if you only play G rated films while my child is visiting."*



Remember, you aren't being difficult; you are taking important steps to create a safe world for your child.



## Online privacy (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Online privacy refers to the level of privacy and protection an individual has while being connected to the internet. Be clear about your social media boundaries and what you are comfortable sharing about your child online and who is allowed to share photos of your child. Consider checking your own social media privacy settings.

It is recommended that photos of your child are not publicly posted online or on social media.

### Here are some ways you could navigate online privacy:

*"Could you please check with me before posting any photos or videos of our child online?"*

*"Could you please keep any photos of our child off social media?"*

*"Let's create a family group chat so that we can share photos, instead of putting them on social media or your profile."*



**ThinkUKnow** - Parental advice for posting images.

[CLICK HERE](#)



## Parent and Carer Support

## Activities & websites you can visit with your child

**Project Paradigm** - *The Online Risks of Child Sexual Exploitation.*

► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation.**

► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Australian Federal Police book -**

*'Jack Changes the Game'*

(Free to access) ► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Carly Ryan Foundation App -**

*They have a range of fact sheets that provide safety sheets and guidance for parents and carers.*

► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Playing IT Safe** - *Helping parents, carers, and educators teach young children how to stay safe online.* ► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Daniel Morcombe Foundation -**

*Keeping kids safe resources have been created in memory of Daniel Morcombe to help keep other children and young people safe.* ► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Raising Children** - *The Australian parenting website, provides ad-free parenting videos, articles and apps backed by Australian experts.* ► [CLICK HERE](#)



**Safe 4 Kids book for children around online harm** - *'Someone Should Have Told Me.'* (This can be purchased) ► [CLICK HERE](#)



**National Office for Child Safety resources -** ► [CLICK HERE](#)

*Little BIG Chats readings. Take a few moments to explore the other resources available.*



### Tips

- Educate yourself
- Supervise and regularly monitor
- Report prohibited or inappropriate content to



eSafety



► [CLICK HERE](#)

AFP



► [CLICK HERE](#)

## Childcare providers (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Childcare refers to the supervision of a child that is provided during the day by an organisation. When visiting childcare centres to discuss care arrangements, there are a range of questions you could ask the centre around your child's safety. Consider taking your child along for a play to see how they respond to the environment and how educators interact with your child.

### Some questions you could ask childcare providers include:

*"What are the qualifications and training of educators?"*

*"What is the ratio of children to educators?"*

*"When attending to my child's personal needs, are the educators alone with my child?"*

*"What is your policy on staff using their phones or cameras?"*

*"What is your child protection policy?"*

*"What is your centre's quality rating?"*

*"What are your policies on sleeping, toileting and social media?"*



*"I have the right to ask questions about my child's safety"*



Asking these questions helps to highlight how serious your potential childcare center is about child sexual abuse prevention and how clear they are in responding to concerns from parents and carers. If you are not satisfied with the response to any of your questions and you have concerns, consider speaking to the relevant regulatory authority. The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) have contact information for your state or territory regulatory authority. [▶ CLICK HERE](#)

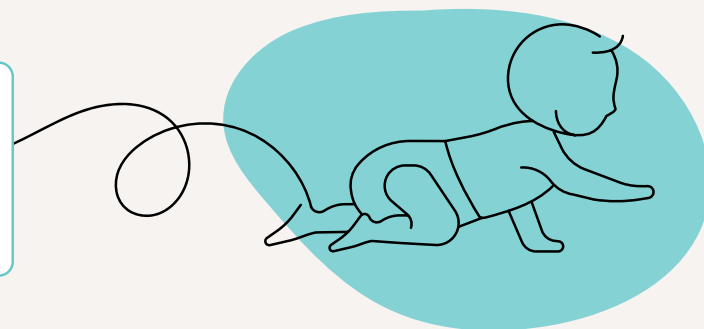


## Resources

**Bravehearts** - Childcare Checklist for Parents have a range of questions you can ask your childcare centre about their safety both on and offline. [▶ CLICK HERE](#)



Australia's free Government website for families and communities to find and compare services by quality ratings [▶ CLICK HERE](#)



# Playdates (Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Playdates are a fun way for your child to explore within a different home environment. It is important to remember that everyone has different levels of supervision and expectations. Before the playdate, have an open and honest discussion with the other parents/carers about your expectations for the playdate. Consider where the playdate is occurring, who lives in the home, the activities your child will be participating in, who is supervising your child and whether there will be internet or device usage during the play. Don't hesitate to ask questions to find out more details.

## Before the playdate, you could mention things like:

*"We are excited about coming over for a playdate! What activities are you planning?"*

*"Would you like me to bring along some screen-free activities for the kids? Any suggestions?"*

*"Who else lives in the house?"*

*"Perhaps we can grab a coffee while the children play?"*

*"Are you expecting any visitors?"*



## Things to consider

*Consider the layout, if you have been there before.*

*Will there be water play, will the child need a change of clothing?*



## Important note!

*If you receive a response that makes you uncomfortable, consider rescheduling, cancelling, meeting at a different location, or insisting that you are present for the duration of the playdate.*



# Sleepovers

(Be ready to ask who, what, where, when, why, how questions)

Before your child attends a sleepover, either with friends or family, there are a few things to consider. Reflect on how well you know the supervising adult/s. Consider things like who will be in the home, how your child will be supervised, arrangements for toileting, bathing, and sleeping, use of devices and the internet, and what comforting your child looks like. Be clear about your expectations for physical boundaries (e.g., who helps with toileting and dressing) and rules around physical comfort (e.g., child's comfort items). The needs of the child will depend on their age and preferences. Reiterate that you are always available to be contacted or if your child needs to be picked up.

## You might try saying things like...

*"Who will be at home and who is supervising the kids? Are there any older siblings around?"*

*"What do the sleeping arrangements look like?"*

*"If my child wakes through the night, ask them if they would like..."*

Please see page 22 for adapting the conversation.

**Child Abuse Prevention Service –  
Sleepover Safety Checklist**

▶ [CLICK HERE](#)

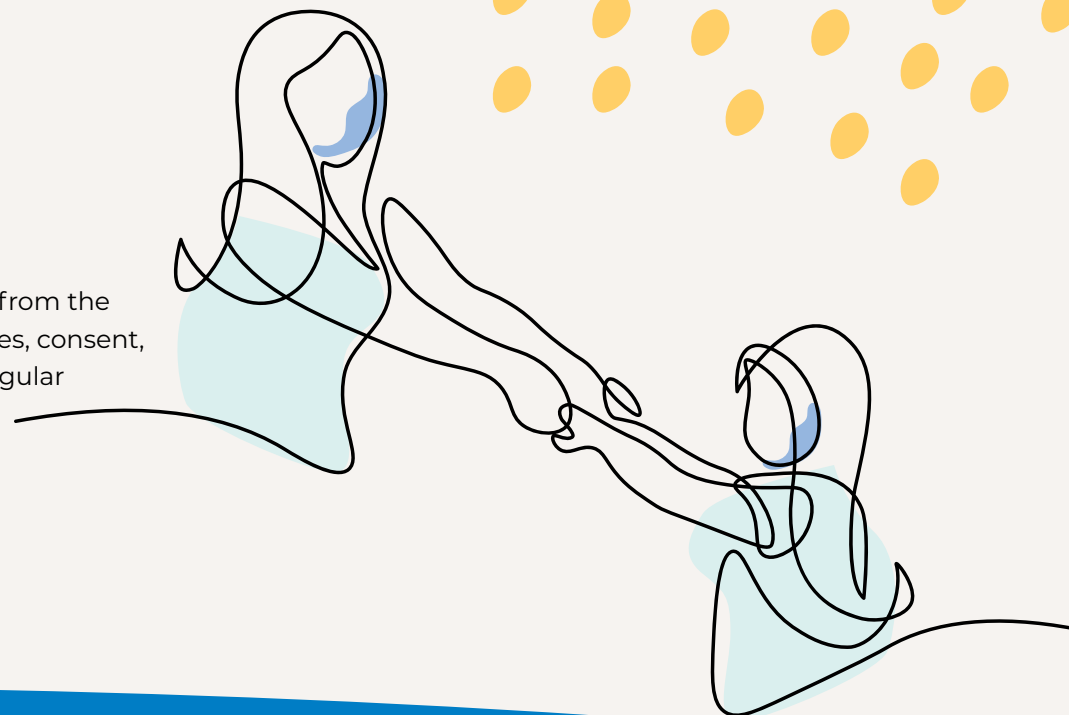


## Keeping Kids Safe Resources

When speaking to your child, conversations could begin with or include, themes from the Daniel Morcombe Foundation's Keeping Kids Safe Resources, especially body clues, consent, boundaries, secrets and surprises. Take a look and consider weaving them into regular discussions with your child.

**Daniel Morcombe Foundation –  
Body Safety Resources**

▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



## Prompt card

### It's NEVER too early...

You can use this resource to make a checklist of the things you'll do to start a conversation about child sexual abuse prevention.

You can cut this prompt card out and stick it to the fridge or put it in a visible place to help remind you who you need to have a conversation with about child sexual abuse prevention.

Here are some examples:

*"What questions do I need to ask to help keep my child safe?"*

*"Talk to Grandma about upcoming sleepover."*

*"Ask daycare what their policies are around nap time and supervision."*

*"Make time to read online safety resources."*

*This is also available as a fridge magnet.*

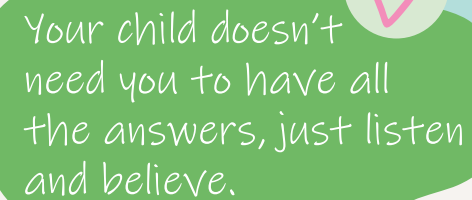
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☐☐☐☐☐☐☐



## What is a disclosure and what do I need to do?

Disclosing abuse can be very challenging for a child and parents and carers receiving the disclosure. It is common for children to experience fear and anxiety about the potential consequences of speaking out, even at a very young age.



*Your child doesn't need you to have all the answers, just listen and believe.*

Younger children are more likely to 'indirectly' disclose being sexually abused through 'indicators' in their behaviour. For example, they might show noticeable changes in their behaviour around toileting or bedtime, or draw pictures about the abuse. They might also say things like "I don't like" a certain person or "I don't want to go" to a certain place. Consider if these behaviours are unusual or out of character for the child.

It's okay if your child says "I don't know" or "I can't remember." Avoid pressuring your child for details or responses.

Take a break and let your child know they can talk to you anytime. It is important they feel safe and they have control about what they share and who they share it with.

There are some simple steps to follow to best support your child disclosing.

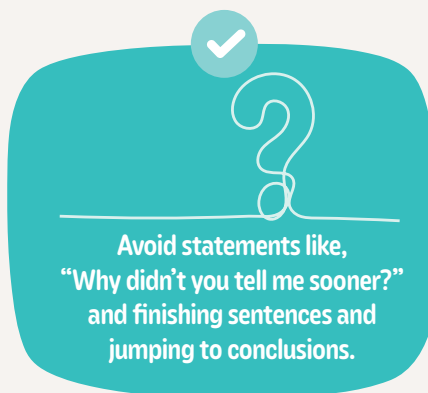
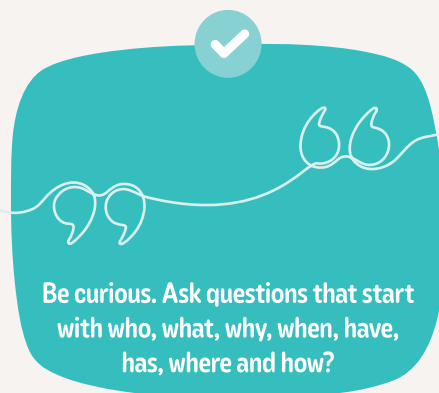
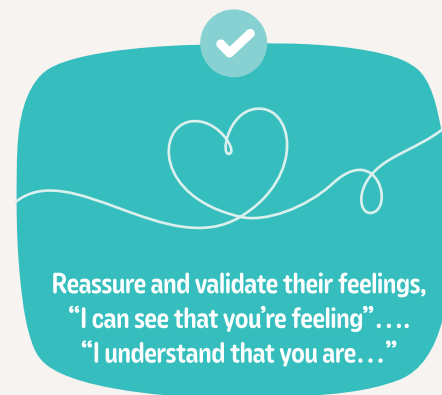
### Setting the scene:

- Find a quiet place, a child should feel safe and secure.
- Give your child your full attention.

**The National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse** - If you would like to learn more about how children might disclose sexual abuse, take a look at this resource: Understanding children's disclosure of sexual abuse.

▶ **CLICK HERE**





In the case of indirect disclosures, remember that you know your child best. Record changes, talk to family and close friends, look at calendars and explore where, when and who your child was with prior to the behaviour change. Where possible, ask questions and be curious with your child about changes and feelings observed.

**For example,** "I have noticed that you have been angry and throwing your toys, can we chat about why you are feeling like that?"



### Important note!

Encourage opportunities to connect with your child.  
Be accessible to the child so they can talk whenever they are ready.

# What should I do if a child has disclosed, or I suspect child sexual abuse has occurred?

## Reporting the abuse

If you believe a child is in immediate danger, or you have immediate concerns for the welfare of a child, call **"000"**.

If the child is not in immediate danger, report your concerns to your local police. Call **131 444**.

If your concern is about online child exploitation and abuse you can report directly to the Australian Centre to Counter Child Exploitation at [www.accce.gov.au/report](http://www.accce.gov.au/report)

If you would prefer to report in confidence visit Crime Stoppers at [www.crimestoppers.com.au](http://www.crimestoppers.com.au) or by phoning **1800 333 000**.

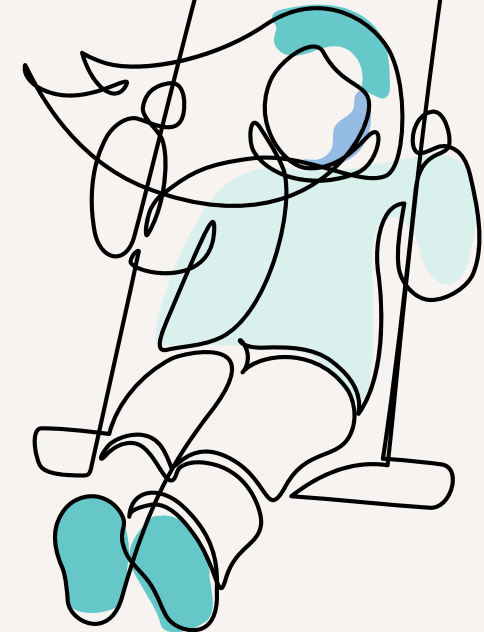
## Additional supports for your child

Support can look different for everyone. When seeking support for your child, ensure you listen and consider their preferences. It is also important to be mindful of the relationship dynamics between your child and other individuals. Could they be involved in the harm of your child?

The help and assistance that people give each other day-to-day are called informal supports. These may include friends, family, school or sporting networks.

There are also a range of formal supports which are provided by professionals such as General Practitioners, Community/ Neighbourhood Centres, school staff, psychologists and counsellors. Culturally safe care should also be considered to meet the cultural needs of each child.

Did you know that in some States and Territories it is an offense for an adult to fail to report child sexual abuse.



Kids helpline 24-hour support is also available for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years old at Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**



► [CLICK HERE](#)

## Additional resources

As a parent or carer, dealing with disclosures can be difficult. Here are some additional resources which could help with dealing with disclosures.

**Project Paradigm** - *Dealing with a Disclosure of Abuse.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



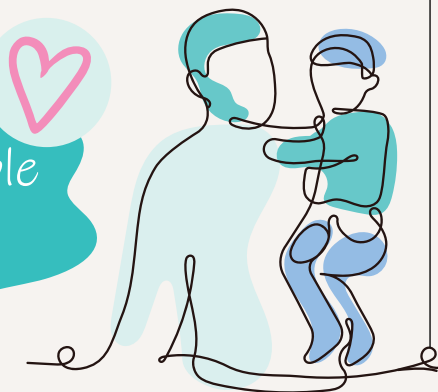
**Kids Helpline** - *Responding to disclosures of child abuse.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



**Bravehearts** - *Responding to disclosures of sexual abuse.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



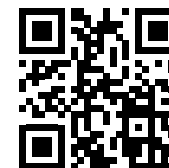
"I am resilient and capable of overcoming obstacles."



## Supports for you

- Dealing with disclosures can be difficult with lots of different emotions that can be hard to process whilst also supporting your child.
- Don't forget to reach out and speak to family, friends and community for support.
- Consider reaching out to professional support services.
- Help is always available.

**Blue Knot Foundation** - *Empowering recovery from complex trauma.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



**1800 RESPECT** - *Confidential information, counselling and support service.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



**Lifeline** - *National charity providing all Australians experiencing emotional distress with access to 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention services.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



**13YARN** - *If you, or someone you know, are feeling worried or no good, we encourage you to connect with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Crisis Supporter.* ▶ [CLICK HERE](#)



# After having a conversation about child sexual abuse prevention...

A.

## Check in with yourself

How do you feel after having the conversation? What went well and what might you do differently next time?

C.

## Revisit the conversation

It's important to remember that these conversations can feel distressing and may trigger certain emotional reactions for some people. It can be helpful to re-visit the conversation and de-brief with the other person at a later time. **Being clear with other adults about your expectations and boundaries shows love and care, not distrust.**

B.

## Reflect on the response

How did the other person respond to the conversation? Were your boundaries respected? The other person's response may affect your decision about whether they are involved in the care of your child.

D.

## Celebrate your courage

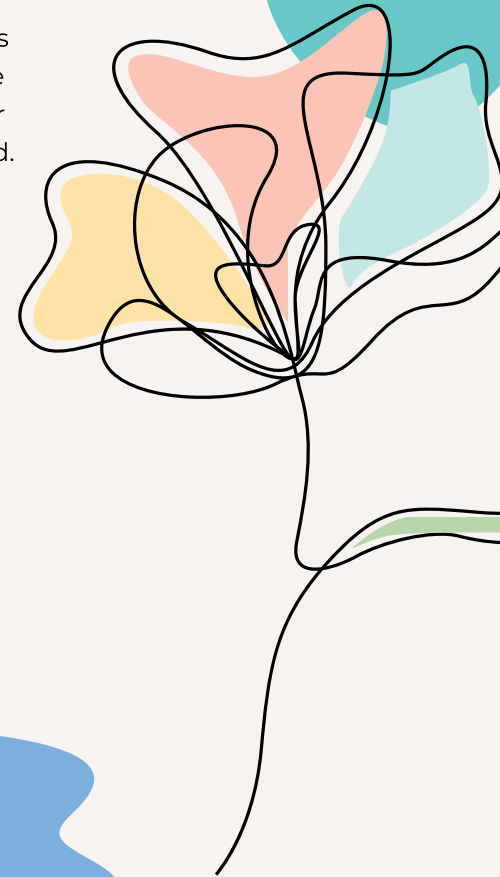
It's important to acknowledge that although it can feel uncomfortable to engage in these conversations, each one is a powerful step to create a safe world for your child. Recognise your courage and be proud of yourself!



### Important note!

*This conversation isn't a one off.*

Conversations about child sexual abuse prevention are ongoing and will evolve alongside your child as they develop and experience new situations.



## Adapting the conversation...

Although you may not feel comfortable having conversations about sexual abuse prevention, it is still important to take steps to advocate for your child's safety.

You can go about the conversation differently and in a way that you are open to.

Perhaps there is someone else that can take the lead and have this conversation for you (e.g., your partner or friend).

Consider how you could adapt the conversation into something you're comfortable with. For example, you could send a text to your support network that explains your boundaries around posting images of your child online.

You could also consider having the conversation in a different environment. For example, whilst doing an activity, going for a walk, or in the car where people aren't facing each other.

You've got this! This may feel overwhelming, but take this step by step.

## When the conversation doesn't go to plan...

In the event that the conversation does not go the way you expect, here are a couple of suggestions on how to finish the conversation and move forward:

*"I've heard what you've said, but I respectfully disagree"*

*"Let's agree to disagree"*

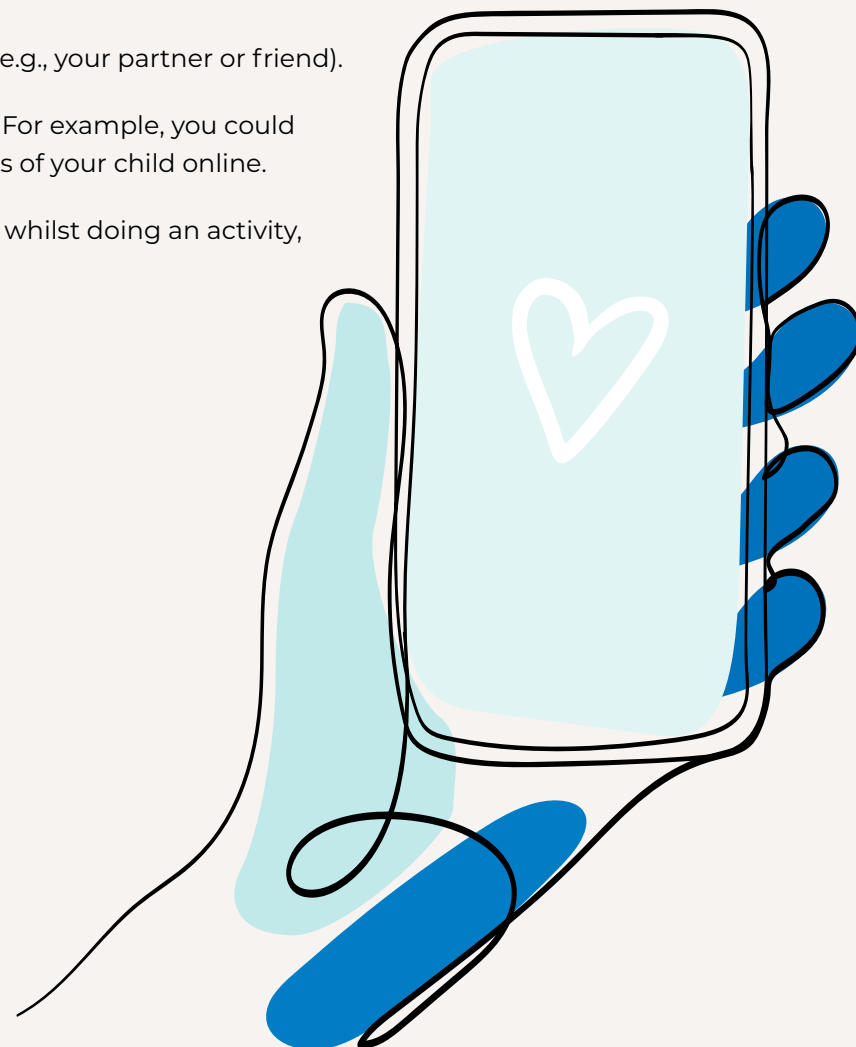
Finish by repeating your position, decision, or boundary.

Don't hesitate to include firm, decisive language like:

*"Please stop doing this"*

*"I don't like it"*

*"It makes me uncomfortable, and this is not what I want"*



## Supports for you

Reading this resource may have brought up uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. Getting help for yourself is an important part to being able to provide support for your child.

You may have someone that you feel comfortable speaking to, or you may feel more comfortable speaking to a professional support service.

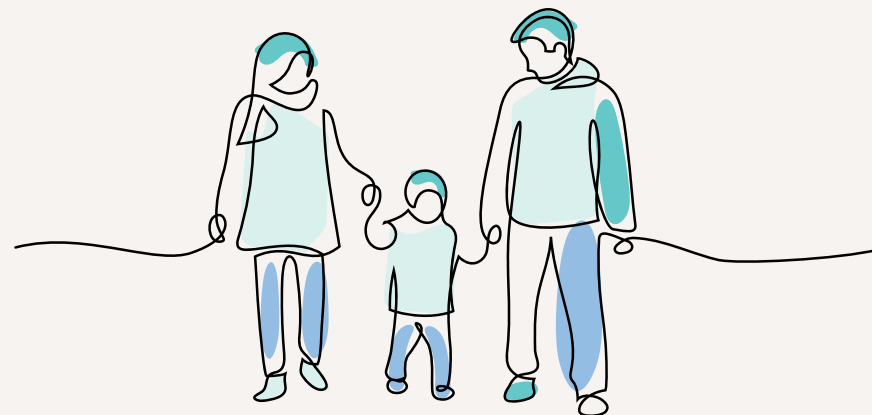
Beyondblue, provides 24/7 brief counselling **1300 22 4636**

Lifeline, provides 24/7 crisis support **13 11 14**

Blue Knot Foundation, empowering recovery from complex trauma **1300 657 380**

1800 Respect, support for you, or someone you know is experiencing sexual assault or domestic and family violence **1800 737 732**

# It's NEVER too early to talk about child sexual abuse prevention



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