



# Listening to the Voices of Children

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**Paying respect**

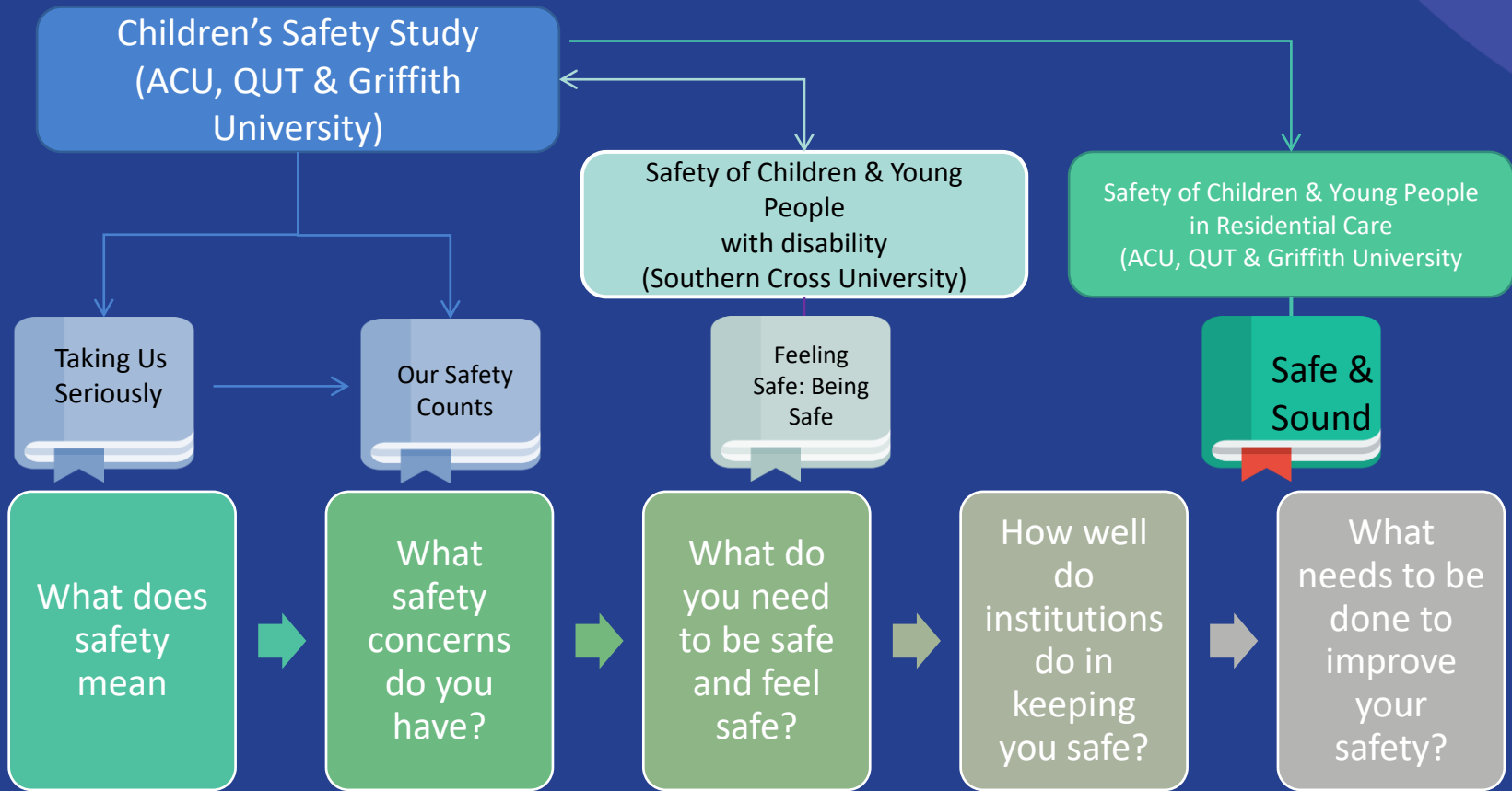




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# How do children perceive & experience safety in institutions and how do institutions respond?



1600 children and young people

(110 in focus groups, 60 in interviews, 1400 children and young people on-line survey)



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# Why children and young people want to participate

- It gave them an opportunity to learn more about safety risks and how institutions were managing them.
- It gave them opportunities to inform adults about their worries and concerns and what they need when they are unsafe.
- It gave them opportunities to build alliances with trusted adults to whom they could seek support.
- It improved their confidence in adults and institutions to adequately respond.
- It empowered them to build their skills and knowledge and ability to protect themselves and their peers.
- *‘When you’re an adult you don’t see certain things that are unsafe ...’ ‘but kids look at it differently and think it’s unsafe. Yeah it might be safe and the kids freaking out for nothing but there’s also a chance that it’s dangerous and adults should take your opinion.’ (Young people, Group 1)*





## What can we gain through children's participation?

- Fresh insights
- Responsive strategies
- Stronger alliances
- Heightened confidence
- Generativity
- Compliance

# WHERE?

- home - family, known, privacy.
- school - friends, people you know.
- Grandparents - family, comfort.

# WHO?

- parents - have a strong connection
- teachers - can sort things out calmly
- friends - honest, comforting, won't tell.

# WHAT?

- Bed - comfy
- Blanket - secure, fluffy.



# WHEN?

- Day - not safe at night.
- when with family.



# SAFE

protection



talk about anything comfortably

comfort



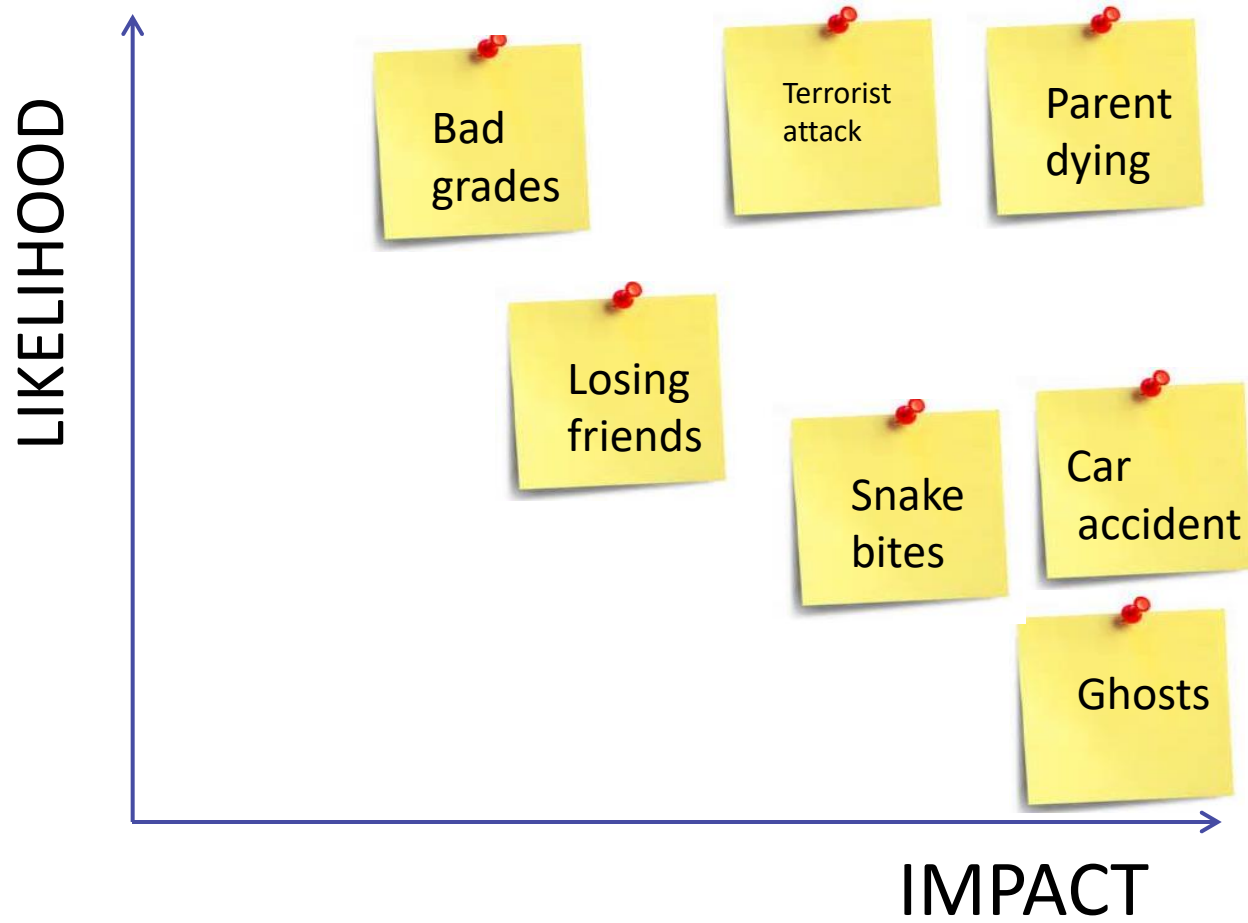


# What does it mean to be safe?

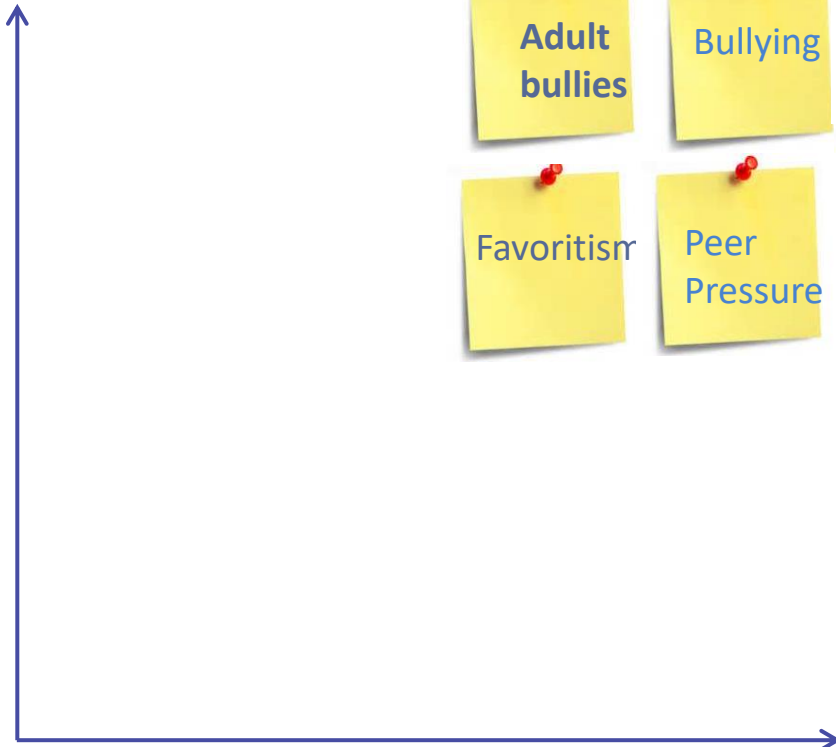
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- **Being safe and feeling safe are two different things**
    - Kids are more concerned about **FEELING SAFE** and adults are more concerned about kids **BEING SAFE** and often forget that to **BE SAFE** they need both
  - **Children tell whether they're safe or not based:**
    - On their bodies
    - On their behaviours
    - On other's behaviours
    - On what they've seen or heard
    - On what they've experienced
  - **To be safe, kids need:**
    - Familiarity, predictability and some sense of control
    - To be with those they trust
    - For adults to be adult-like, to demonstrate their respect for kids, to use their power **FOR** children, to take control, to do what they say they are going to do



- 
- When my Dad grows a mo... He thinks its safe but it makes me feel unsafe (Boy, primary school, TUS)



LIKELIHOOD



Adult bullies

Bullying

Creepy Adults

Favoritism

Peer Pressure

Adults doing bad stuff

Kidnap

IMPACT



Image sourced from:  
<https://blog.dc4k.org/archives/category/emotions>

# Intergenerational vulnerability



- Children and young people believed that they were unsafe due to their social positioning
  - With adults
  - With organisations
  - In communities

*Because they're adults and we're kids we're always going to be in a worse off position. Everyone thinks that adults can treat kids how they want, that kids should be respectful of adults no matter what and that children should just do what adults say because their kids and adults are adults (YP-3)*

1. The organization shows that it values and takes children and young people's safety seriously



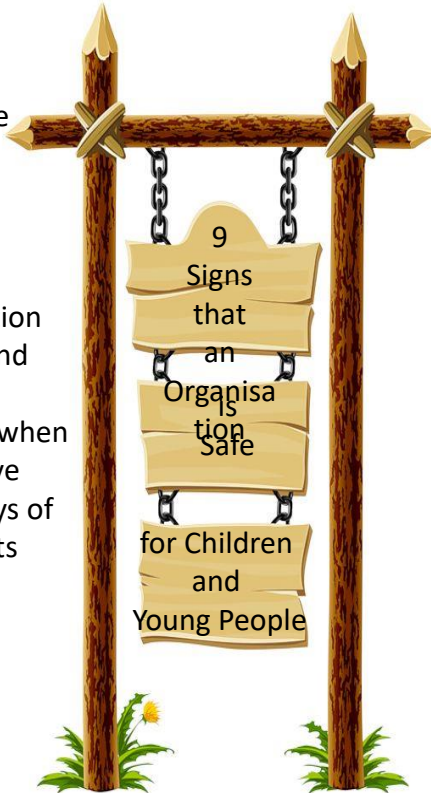
2. The organization knows who and what things might hurt children and young people & acts when they're



3. Children and young people play a role in identifying and shaping responses to abuse



Kids show they are safe there



4. The organisation is upfront about the risks to children and young people and how they're being managed



10. The organization values children and young people's feedback – even when it's bad – and have child-friendly ways of getting complaints

5. The organization recognizes children and young people's strengths and vulnerabilities and empowers them



9. The organization is happy to have someone come in to check they are doing a good job



8. When children encounter unsafe people they are given a say on what should happen and adults act on their needs and wishes



7. Alliances are built and trusted staff are available when children and young people need them



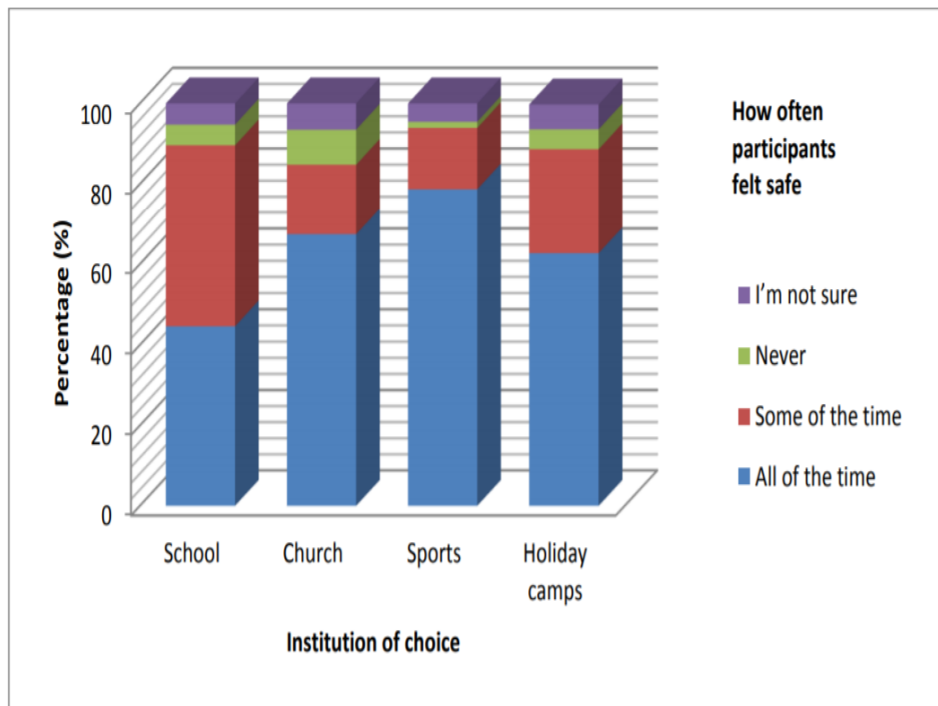
6. The organization actively protects and empowers children and young people who might need extra support

# Church: safe and unsafe

- *“Church: there are people around who you know and who cares for you” (MS)*
- *“My youth group is great because the adults really care about you and think you’re special”*
- *“Our school is Anglican. That means that teachers care about you more”*

Child safe characteristic	Institution				
	School % (n=750)	Church % (n=57)	Sport % (n=216)	Camp % (n=90)	Total % (n=1,113)
Adults care about children and young people	54.7	78.7	81.2***	78.3	62.8
Adults value children’s views and opinions	27.0	65.2***	52.8	43.9	35.0
Children and young people have at least one adult they trust	43.0	69.6	76.5***	53.0	51.4
I feel safe most of the time	57.2	67.4	78.7***	62.7	53.6

Child safe characteristic	Institution				
	School % (n=750)	Church % (n=57)	Sport % (n=216)	Camp % (n=90)	Total % (n=1,113)
<b>Adults know children and young people well enough to know if something isn't right</b>	23.8	45.7	45.5	45.7	30.7
<b>Adults talk with children and young people about things that worry them</b>	35.6	54.4***	28.9	36.3	35.2
<b>Adults pay attention when children and young people raise a concern or worry</b>	44.6	69.6	66.8	65.4	51.6
<b>I feel safe most of the time</b>	57.2	67.4	78.7***	62.7	53.6



- “Although most participants reported feeling safe, **9 per cent of young people in churches**, 5 per cent of young people in schools and holiday camps, and 1.5 per cent of young people in sports groups, **reported that they never felt safe.** These young people tended to be older and were slightly more likely to be male.”

# When is church unsafe?

- *“Church groups – some kids get forced into being in church groups and don’t have a say”*
- *“At Church when the priest says things like if you’re gay you’re going to hell”*
- *“The Good Friday mass... it freaks the little kids out”*
- *“You gotta worry about those priests – I heard that most of them are paedos. That’s what my Dad said, what that Commission found. I cant trust them now. I never want to be alone, even in reconciliation”*
- *“Its pretty clear they’re more about covering their butts and looking good than protecting kids. I mean if they say “we screwed up, we’re truly sorry” then maybe people will stop listening to them about whats right and wrong but if they don’t no one is going to take them seriously... Plus we’ll never feel safe until they say “we’re going to put kids first, no matter what, even if that means that costs them money or reputation”... and then actually do it”*



# Protective Participation



- **R**eclaim our kids
- **A**lly with them
- **I**nformed and be informed
- **S**upport them when they are unsafe or being harmed
- **E**mpower them to be partners in their own protection





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# Protective Participation

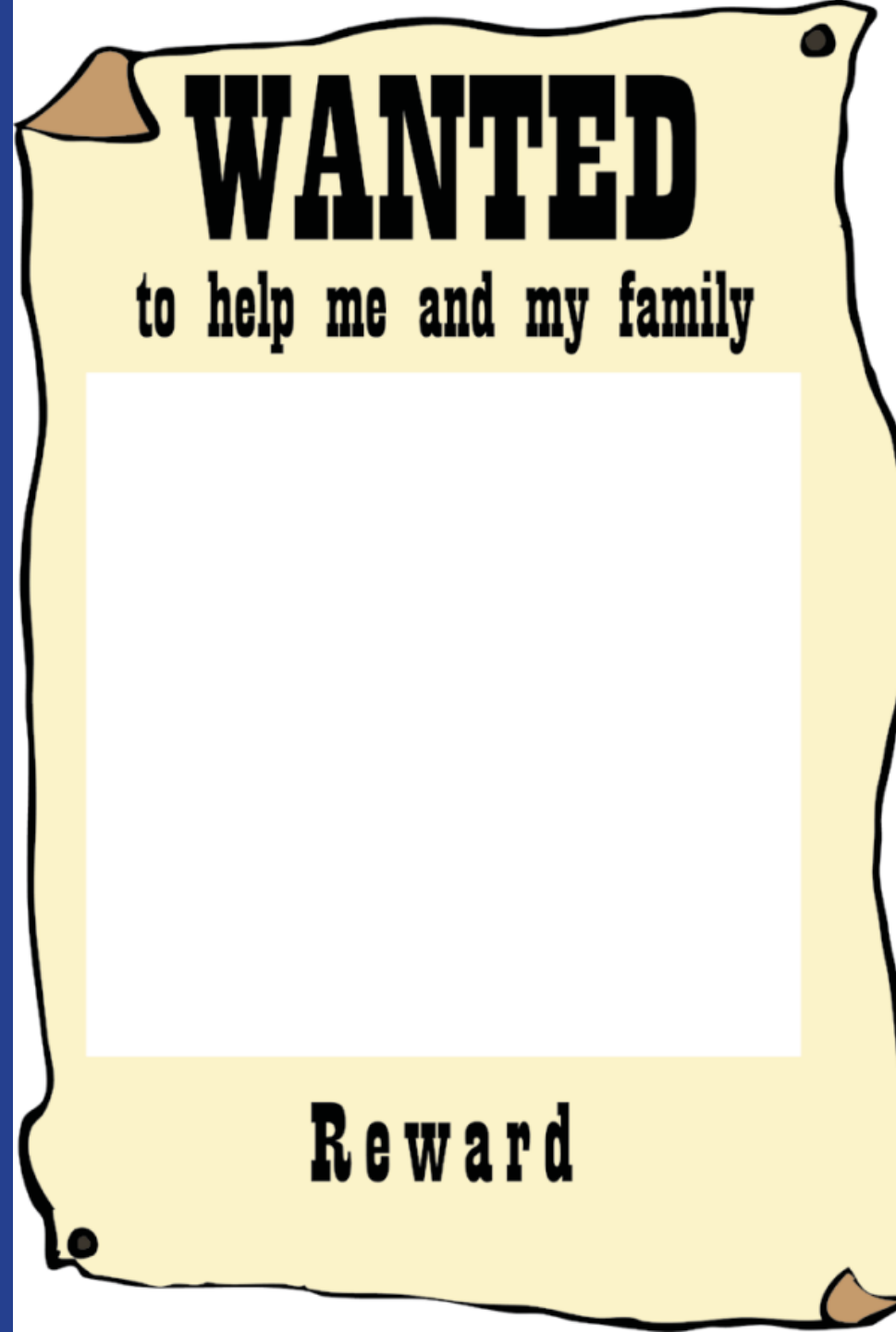


- Reclaim our kids
- Ally with them
- Informed and be informed
- Support them when they are unsafe or being harmed
- Empower them to be partners in their own protection



# Ally with children

- Safe and trusted adults see it as their responsibility to keep children safe and demonstrate this through their actions. They:
  - care about children and young people
  - See the best in children and young people
  - act like adults
  - have authority
  - are available
  - are able to talk about sensitive issues
  - prioritise children's needs and concerns
  - do what they say they will do



“As adults you’ve got a choice to connect or reject—  
I suppose so do we!”





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*What information provided to children and young people needs to:*

- Be responsive to what they already know as well as what they want and need to know*
- They want to know about risks but also about what is being done*
- Empower rather than paralyse them*
- Affirm your relationship*

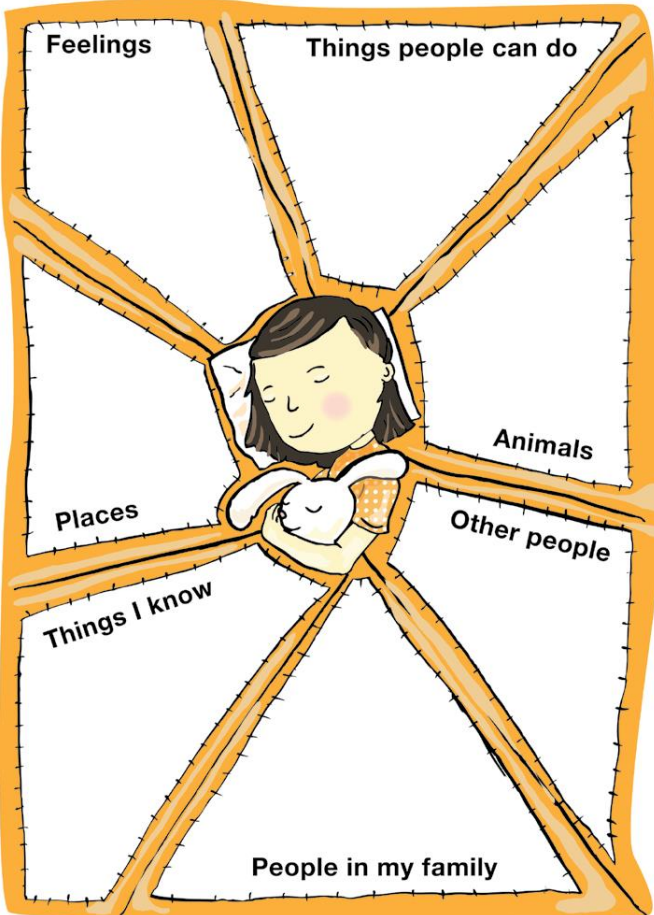
# Inform & Be Informed

- **Spend time** affirming your relationship
- **Give permission** to feel unsafe and to sometimes need help
- **Ask about safety regularly** (how are you traveling, anything on your mind, any times you haven't felt safe?)
- **Check-in:** “ I came across a guy recently who was really creepy. I couldn't put my finger on why but he made my skin crawl. Have you felt like that? Are there people who make you feel like that now?”
- **Check back** (you were worried about XX last time we spoke how are you now?)

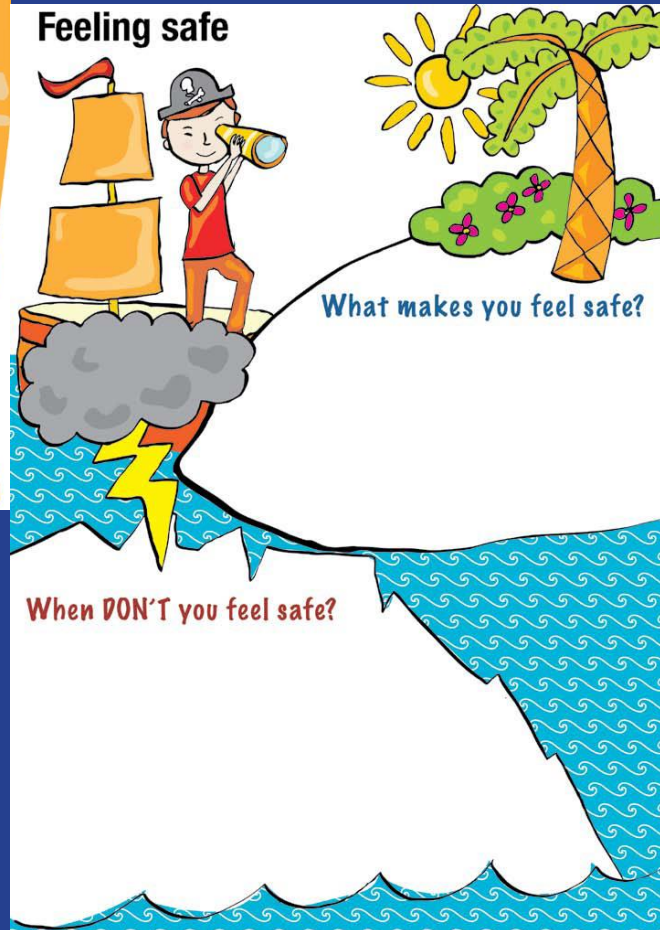
*'Get them to draw pictures like what you're getting us to do about the things that they're scared about and see if they know the things they really should be scared about and then make them draw those things and come up with ways to deal with it when it happens.*

*No one really talks to kids about what really could happen or tell them not to worry when the thing they're scared about ain't gonna happen. So kids are all stressing about the wrong things and they don't know what to do if something real bad happens, because no one talked to them about it.'*  
(YP-4)

## Things That Make Me Feel Safe



## Finding out what concerns kids



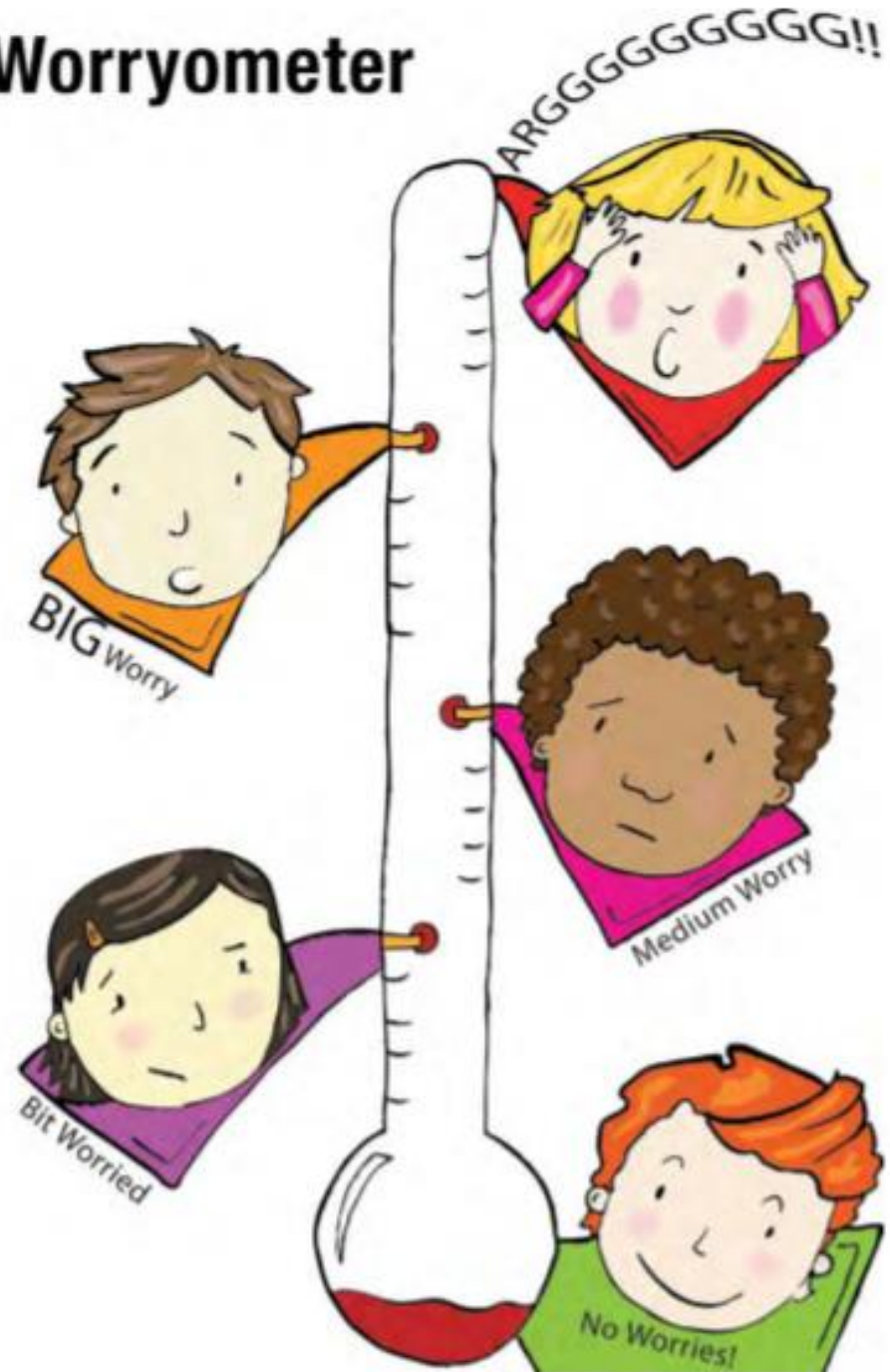
- “Ummm... you can just ask them!”
- Q: when was the last time an adult asked you if you *felt* safe?
- A: Gee whiz... I cant remember. Maybe never?



# Advice on asking

- Be formal sometimes but mostly include it in day-to-day interactions
- Use language and games that are familiar to children and young people
- Be open and honest

## Worryometer



# What are the no-go zones?



- Secrets
- Things that would get you, your friends or your family into trouble
- Stuff about your body
- Things that would be upsetting
- Things that would be embarrassing
- Things that you don't know enough about
- Things you've been told not to talk about

*You might get in trouble ... You don't know what's going to happen ... People might laugh at you ... It's a bit inappropriate, rude ... Make you upset ... Silly to talk about things you're not old enough for. (CYP.4, aged 10–12 years)*

*Maybe start by asking. Yeah, ask them what they are happy to talk about or not. It will be different for everyone. Like I want to talk about this stuff because I've been through it and want to get it off my chest but others [for] it will be too hard (Male, aged 16, Safe & Sound Study)*



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# Support and Empower

- To identify what they want and need done
- To decide what they would like to do
- To be supported to be involved in solutions
- To be empowered through the reporting ‘journey’
- To ‘hang in there’

- *‘You need that to feel safe, to feel comfortable’, ‘just being able to know that even if something goes wrong or anything that you can ... get out of it, support yourself financially or emotionally, that you don’t have to rely on others.’ (YP-2)*
- *Some things make it worse. They need to know that.’ ‘It’s about knowing what to do and feeling confident in that.’ ‘It’s about knowing what not to do: like blaming the kid or asking questions like: “Did you do something for them to act in this way?”, “Is it something that you said, something that you did?”’ ‘If you do the wrong thing you can really affect the kid. Make it worse. Like they don’t trust anyone anymore ... It changes the kid.’ (YP-3)*
- *“When it [abuse] happened to me they were good at talking to me, helping me, but then when child protection didn’t do anything, everyone left. They wouldn’t look me in the eyes – when I needed help most I was the most alone”*



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# You told us that adults can keep children and young people safe by:



## Respecting

children and young people: their abilities, observations, needs and wishes

## Asking

children and young people what they're thinking, feeling and seeing and what they need

## Watching

what other adults are doing and how children are behaving

## Listening

to what children and young people are really saying

## Standing up and speaking out

when children and young people are being hurt, bullied or treated badly

## Doing

what they're supposed to do, what they say they'll do and what children and young people need them to do

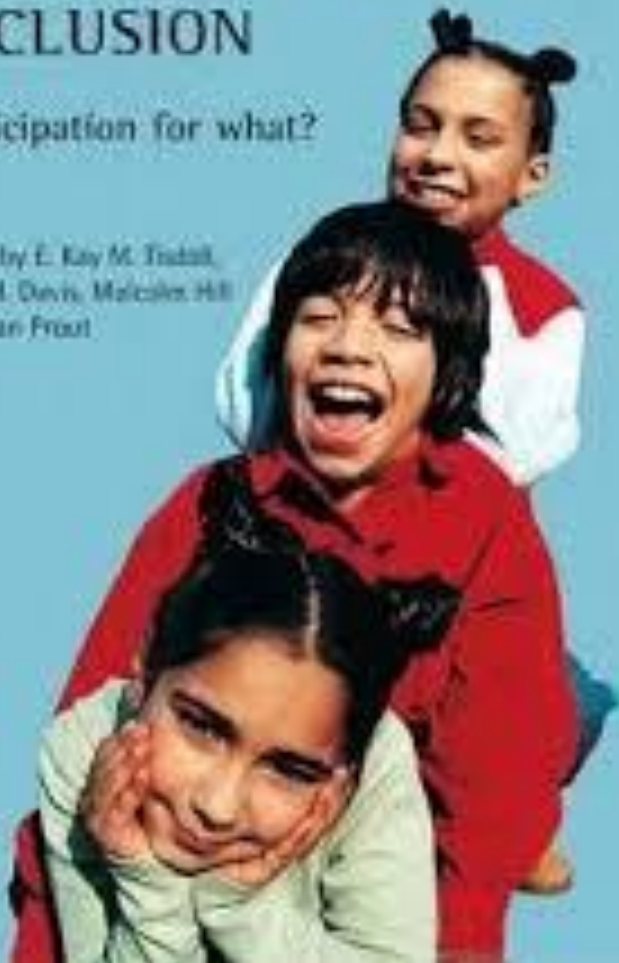
## Informing

children and young people about the dangers, what's being done and how they'll do what kids have asked them to do

# CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

Participation for what?

Edited by E. Kay M. Tisdall,  
John M. Davis, Malcolm Hill  
and Alan Froot



*The lesson to be learned is that effective protection of children can only be achieved by listening to and taking them seriously.*

*The conventional view of protection has been a one-way process, with adults as agents and children as recipients.*

*What is now needed is a more sophisticated approach, in which it is understood as a dynamic process in which adults take responsibility for keeping children safe by listening to and respecting their perspectives, while empowering them to contribute to their own protection (Kay Tisdall, p149)*

# Let's keep talking!

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Check out @timbomoore on twitter: I'll post a few resources and tip-sheets and encourage you to do the same using the #playyourpart or #involvekids

Previous work can be found at:

<http://safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au>

**Improving the lives  
of vulnerable children.**

