

Listening to Children

CHILD PROTECTION INFORMATION SHEET

Children rely on adults to care for them, keep them safe and make sense of their world

- ✓ For most children who enter the statutory care and protection system, all three expectations of adults have been dashed
- ✓ Children who are assessed as being at risk of abuse or neglect have generally been harmed (whether intentionally or unwittingly) by adults FAMILIAR to them who they trusted
- ✓ Through notification and risk assessment they become reliant on a new group of adults to provide protection and care
- ✓ Generally these adults are TOTALLY UNFAMILIAR to them – be they workers, carers, counsellors, police officers, advocates or lawyers etc
- ✓ As a group we run the risk of unwittingly contributing to further 'systems' abuse of these children
- ✓ Our knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours can make a critical difference to the experience of children at risk

Children involved in the child protection system feel:

- ✓ **FEARFUL** – of the abuse continuing, of talking about it, of being blamed, of losing their family, of losing control, of being unloved
- ✓ **UNHEARD** – being disbelieved, being talked at or 'down to', being silenced, becoming 'invisible'
- ✓ **UNCERTAIN** – doubting what is right, doubting feelings, doubting experiences, losing trust and hope

Children and young people have given us this information themselves. It has been recorded by international, national and local researchers (eg Cashmore, Dolby, Brennan and Muskett etc) and used in child abuse prevention campaigns (eg NAPCAN, Australian Childhood Foundation, ECPAT).

*Children and young people in or ex care have also voiced it loud and clear through projects such as **I'm not a jigsaw puzzle**, a Tasmanian project sponsored through the CREATE Foundation.*

Children involved in the care and protection system say they want:

- ✓ **TO FEEL LIKE THEY 'BELONG'**
- ✓ **TO PARTICIPATE IN DECISIONS MADE ABOUT THEIR OWN LIVES**
- ✓ **TO HAVE MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS**
- ✓ **TO BE RESPECTED AS INDIVIDUALS, and**
- ✓ **TO FEEL SUPPORTED**

It is too easy for adult needs, views and voices to obscure those of the children who are at the centre of the process.

The expectations we should collectively have of ourselves as professionals engaged to act in their best interests should include:

- ✓ **UNDERSTANDING** of child development and resilience theory
- ✓ **AWARENESS** of the impact of trauma on child development
- ✓ **HUMILITY** in seeking out other known and trusted adults or friends of the child to help build bridges of communication
- ✓ **SENSITIVITY** in creating an environment and context where a child may feel safe when talking to a strange adult
- ✓ **PATIENCE** in allowing time for a relationship to build
- ✓ **FLEXIBILITY** in fitting in times to talk to the child which least disrupts their routine
- ✓ **CLARITY** in describing what our respective roles are in ways that are most appropriate for the child – not only words
- ✓ **HONESTY** and **GENUINENESS** (children and young people are rarely fooled!)