

BODY SAFETY AUSTRALIA

Issues brief: National call to strengthen child safety through professional development

Body Safety Australia is the country's leading provider of evidence-based professional development in body safety, consent and respectful relationships education. We developed the first comprehensive body safety education program for children in 2015, well before it became part of the Australian Curriculum.

Our programs are informed by our work with children, educators and parents, a strong evidence base and ongoing evaluation. We conduct **over 100** professional development sessions a year to support educators and teachers to prevent childhood sexual abuse. This includes training on the *Reportable Conduct Scheme* and the *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* and state-based *Child Safe Standards*.

High quality professional development for early childhood workers is urgently required to increase knowledge, capacity and confidence of the sector in improving child safety.

Generalised 'child safety' training is often treated as a 'tick box' exercise, with a heavy focus on mandatory reporting and legislated requirements relating to child safety and often delivered via pre-recorded self-paced units. This form of training frequently fails to equip educators with the confidence required to take action to identify and respond to childhood sexual abuse (in person and online), report grooming behaviours (including that of colleagues) and create child safe environments.

In our experience, educators who have undergone annual mandatory reporting training are often unable to respond effectively in the moment when a disclosure does occur. Evaluation of our Reportable Conduct Scheme training, *See It, Say It*, shows that the greatest hurdle for educators is not a lack of knowledge but rather personal barriers. Before our training only 5% of educators reported having no barriers to reporting and said they would always act. However, after training, 74% felt very confident to act, while the remaining 26% reported improved confidence.

As experts in this field, we would like to emphasise that for child safeguarding training to be robust it must cover the following **5 training areas**, as supported by key child safety legislation and frameworks:

- **Body safety education**^{1, 2, 3, 4}

Body safety education empowers educators to deliver comprehensive body safety education to children. It includes ten learning objectives including assertive communication, names of genitals, their right to bodily autonomy and help-seeking strategies. It is culturally inclusive and trauma-informed.

- **Mandatory reporting**^{1, 3, 4}

Mandatory reporting training provides educators with the knowledge to identify and report child abuse or neglect. Each state and territory have its own mandatory reporting law and reporting requirements.

Contact us at (03) 9471 2247 or email info@bodysafetyaustralia.com.au
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- **Reportable conduct**⁴

Reportable conduct training supports educators in identifying reportable behaviour, understanding the process of investigation and helps them overcome barriers to reporting when they suspect a colleague of neglect or misconduct. This training supports services to work collaboratively as a team to mitigate risk of harm.

- **National Principles for Child Safe Organisations**³

Training in the *National Principles* supports professionals to go beyond knowledge of the *Principles*, but to embed them in their practice working with children and families. It moves workplaces beyond policy and procedure documents to truly embed the recommendations of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*.

- **eSafety**^{1, 2}

Training in eSafety supports professionals to understand the risks and benefits of children's use of digital technologies with specific focus on the risks the creation of child sexual abuse and exploitation material including in the home, at the centre, via the use of images taken by the centre and AI facilitated abuse material. Educators understanding how to identify and respond to technology-facilitated grooming behaviours and child sexual exploitation.

Only **expert** led training that fully equips educators to **understand** and **implement** these five key learning areas can be considered best practice and meet minimum standards for child safety training.

Policies and recommendations from government Inquiries that support this training:

1. *National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (2019)*
2. *Early Years Learning Framework 2.0 (2022)*
3. *Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017)*
4. *Recommendations from the Victorian Betrayal of Trust Inquiry (2013)*



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