



CHILD PROTECTION EBOOK



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Who we are

Community Early Learning Australia™ (CELA) is the voice for Australia’s early education and care sector. As a peak body, our vision is for all of Australia’s children to have access to quality early education, regardless of economic circumstance or where they live.

CELA supports over 1,800 members employing more than 27,000 educators and teachers nationally. Our members include community-managed not-for-profit, government, and privately owned small providers, delivering preschool, long day care, outside school hours care, and family day care services.

OUR MISSION

Deliver effective and expert support for our members, enabling them to deliver quality early education and care for all Australia’s children.

Influence policy makers and government by amplifying the voices of community based and small providers.

Promote the value and importance of community based early education.

Find out more: www.cela.org.au/about-us



Amplify!



How to recognise inappropriate discipline

Plus tips for positive behaviour guidance

BY CELA RTO MANAGER ALINE MAJADO WITH INPUT FROM CELA EARLY EDUCATION SPECIALISTS JANNELLE GALLAGHER AND KERRIE MAGUIRE

Have you observed something in your service that you think might constitute inappropriate discipline, but you're unsure of how to address it?

In this article, we unpack what constitutes 'inappropriate discipline', how to report it, and provide examples and tips for guiding positive behaviour.

Most early childhood education and care professionals are well-equipped to guide children's behaviour in a positive and constructive manner. This is a core aspect of our training and something we must demonstrate a deep understanding of to earn our early education credentials.

Understanding what constitutes 'inappropriate discipline' (as referenced in [QA5 of the NQF](#)), along with the legal obligations to report it, is also crucial for ensuring the delivery of high-quality early education and care, and for safeguarding the well-being of all children in ECEC spaces.

What is inappropriate discipline?

The word discipline comes from the Latin word *disciplina*, which means instruction or training. In its true sense, discipline is about guiding and teaching children how to understand boundaries, self-regulate, and learn the consequences of their actions in a constructive and supportive way. It focuses on helping children develop the skills they need to manage their behaviour and emotions, rather than punishing them for mistakes.

Inappropriate discipline contradicts the essence of what true discipline should be. Instead of guiding or teaching, inappropriate discipline imposes fear or negative consequences, which can have long-lasting effects on a child's emotional and social development.

Inappropriate discipline may involve physical punishment, humiliation, unreasonable restraint, or other harmful practices.

The Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) provides a fact sheet detailing examples of inappropriate discipline which include:

- ▶ hitting, pushing, slapping, pinching or biting a child
- ▶ force-feeding a child
- ▶ yelling at or belittling a child
- ▶ humiliating a child
- ▶ physically dragging a child
- ▶ locking children away (or isolating them)
- ▶ depriving a child of food or drink
- ▶ unreasonable restraining of a child (this may include restraint in a high chair)
- ▶ excluding children from events
- ▶ consistently moving children to the office or other space away from the play areas
- ▶ moving children to another room as punishment
- ▶ verbally or physically threatening a child

Tips for appropriate behaviour guidance

Behaviour is a powerful form of communication for children, especially since young children may still be developing the verbal skills to express their emotions or needs.

When a child displays behaviours that others find challenging, it is essential for educators to look beyond the surface and understand what the child is trying to communicate.

Behaviour might reflect unmet needs, such as frustration, anxiety, or feeling overwhelmed, and it often signals that something is happening to or for the child. When educators see behaviour as communication, they can foster positive relationships and help children navigate their emotions, ultimately supporting their social and emotional development in a meaningful way (and one that is not linked to punishment).

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EXAMPLES AND TIPS FOR PROVIDING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE

1 REGULATE YOUR OWN EMOTIONS

It's challenging to co-regulate with children when you are feeling dysregulated yourself. Take time to understand what triggers your emotional responses and work on managing these. It's okay to step back and let someone else take the lead if you're not in the right headspace to help. Return when you're ready to provide the support the child needs.



2 UNDERSTAND THE 'WHY'

Instead of focusing solely on the behaviour, try to understand the underlying reasons for it. Avoid labeling children negatively, as behaviour is learned and can be unlearned or redirected. Model the behaviours you want to see—thank children, appreciate their efforts, and apologise when you make mistakes. Children deserve respect and recognition just as much as adults.



3 PROVIDE SUPPORT WHILE COOLING DOWN

It's unrealistic to expect children to manage their emotions on their own. Simply telling them to 'calm down' is not effective—imagine how you'd feel in a stressful situation if someone said that to you. Stay close to the child so that they know you're in that space and ready for them when they're ready. Get to know the child and what they need in those moments.





EXAMPLES AND TIPS FOR PROVIDING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE

4 EMPOWER CHILDREN WITH OPTIONS

Giving children the ability to make decisions fosters independence and supports their growing autonomy. When children feel like they have control over certain aspects of their day, such as choosing between activities, deciding what to wear, or selecting their snack, it reduces feelings of powerlessness and frustration.



5 RECOGNISE NEURODIVERSITY AND DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

Keep in mind that certain behaviours might be particularly challenging for neurodivergent children, and some children in your care may be undiagnosed.

6 MOVE AWAY FROM REWARD-BASED SYSTEMS

These can suggest that only children who display 'desirable' behaviours are worthy of recognition. Instead, focus on intrinsic motivation, encouraging all children to feel valued for their unique contributions.



EXAMPLES AND TIPS FOR PROVIDING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOUR GUIDANCE



7 FOCUS ON ROLE MODELLING THE BEHAVIOURS YOU WISH TO SEE

Children learn by watching how behaviours are demonstrated and applied in real-life situations.

8 BE EXPLICIT IN TEACHING ABOUT BEHAVIOUR

Engage in conversations with children about behaviour and its effects on others, helping them understand that their actions can impact the feelings of those around them. This can be achieved through storytelling, role-playing, or using puppets to model real-life situations.



9 SUPPORT CHILDREN IN IDENTIFYING AND NAMING THEIR FEELINGS



Helping children understand and label their emotions is crucial for emotional development. Encourage them to talk about how they feel, and offer the language and tools they need to express themselves effectively. This can reduce frustration and build stronger emotional resilience.

A quick overview of the legal obligations surrounding this topic

Misunderstandings about what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour guidance strategies can lead to breaches of legal requirements, such as [Section 166 of the National Law](#) 'Offence to use inappropriate discipline'.

Some approved providers may be unaware of their notification and reporting obligations. Similarly, a lack of understanding of child protection policies and procedures, or their reporting responsibilities, can lead to serious oversights.

Lack of awareness of the role of the approved provider in regard to notifications to the regulatory authority, as outlined in R175 (d) and (e), can result in failure to report serious incidents. R175(d) mandates reporting any incident where the approved provider reasonably believes that physical or sexual abuse of a child or children has occurred or is occurring while under the care of the service. R175(e) further extends this to include allegations of such abuse. These requirements exclude allegations already notified under section 174(2)(b) of the National Law. Additionally, approved providers must be mindful of their role as a head of entity under the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

Some examples of how this can play out in services include:

- ▶ Educators witnessing another team member's interactions with children that breach Section 166 regarding inappropriate discipline but feeling too fearful to report it.
- ▶ Poor understanding of what constitutes reportable conduct, leading to a failure to act on or report harmful practices.
- ▶ Insufficient induction processes for new educators, resulting in a lack of awareness of legal requirements and child protection policies.

The [Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010](#) requires early childhood education and care services to prioritise children's safety and well-being.

Similarly, the [Education and Care Services National Regulations \(2011\)](#) require early childhood education and care services to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all children through clear policies and procedures (R168) and provide child positive guidance and encouragement toward acceptable behaviour (R155).

These include promoting a culture of child safety, enforcing a code of conduct for staff, ensuring respectful and supportive interactions with children. The regulations also mandate that services have a system for handling complaints, especially those involving allegations of harmful behaviour. It enforces that to be able to achieve this, all team members must have an awareness of child protection law (R84).

Reporting inappropriate discipline

Ethical dilemmas and fears of reporting are often the reasons educators hesitate to report inappropriate discipline. These barriers can stem from relationships with colleagues, power dynamics, or a lack of understanding about what constitutes inappropriate discipline.

To create a more open and supportive culture, it is essential to do the following:

- ▶ Foster a culture of safety and protection within the service.
- ▶ Reinforce the importance of child protection policies and procedures.
- ▶ Provide clear guidance on how to report inappropriate discipline.
- ▶ Offer emotional support to educators who may fear the consequences of reporting (this could be through an external service such as an [Employee Assistance Program](#) or EAP).

A robust induction process and clear codes of conduct are vital in ensuring that all educators are aware of their legal and ethical obligations from the outset. Continually reinforcing the importance of child-focused relationships and child-safe environments can support educators in making the right decisions when it comes to behaviour guidance.

Conclusion

Understanding what constitutes inappropriate discipline is not just an ethical concern—it is a legal requirement. Educators, teachers, nominated supervisors and approved providers have a responsibility to safeguard the children in their care/service, and this includes incorporating appropriate behaviour guidance strategies.

By fostering a culture of safety, providing ongoing training, and supporting educators in their roles, early education services can ensure that all children are protected from harm and given the opportunity to thrive.



FURTHER READING

- ▶ Dr Kaylene Henderson - Discipline vs punishment: www.facebook.com/watch/?v=979644882589428
- ▶ ACECQA - Inappropriate discipline: www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/inappropriate-discipline.pdf
- ▶ CELA - Behaviour guidance tip sheets: www.cela.org.au/CELA/amplify/2024/09/CELA-behaviour-guidance-tips.pdf



Child Safe Principles task cards

These task cards encourage educators, teams and service leaders to reflect on how the Child Safe Principles are evidenced throughout service practice.

This tool can be used individually or as a team to support reflective practice around the implementation of the Child Safe Principles and creating a child-safe organisation.



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What are children's rights and how do they apply in early education and care?

BY CELA

ARTICLE



This article explores the fundamental rights of children, how these rights apply in early education settings, and how educators can uphold these rights in their daily practices.

Children's rights are fundamental principles that should guide how we view and treat children in all aspects of life. These rights are enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and are deeply embedded in frameworks governing early childhood education and care.

What are the fundamental rights of children?

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) outlines children's rights, which encompass civil, political, economic, social, and cultural aspects. The UNCRC emphasises the protection of children due to their inherent vulnerability and outlines key principles that should guide all actions concerning children. These principles include:

- ▶ Respect for the best interests of the child as a primary consideration.
- ▶ The right to survival and development.
- ▶ The right of all children to express their views freely on matters affecting them.
- ▶ The right to enjoy all the rights of the Convention without discrimination of any kind.

Children's rights are grounded in the same human rights that apply to adults. However, the key difference lies in how these rights are



“The CRC is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. Australia ratified the CRC in December 1990, which means that Australia has a duty to ensure that all children in Australia enjoy the rights set out in the treaty.”

(Australian Human Rights Commission)

enacted. Children require special safeguards and care, including legal protection, before and after birth.

Viewing children as citizens today, not as developing or future citizens, places children in the here and now, being capable and resourceful able to express their opinions and participate in the civic, social, political, economic, environmental, cultural life of their family, school, community and country.

How children’s rights apply in early education and care settings

Children’s rights extend into every aspect, policy, curriculum, and environment within all early childhood and out-of-school-hours care settings.

The National Quality Framework (NQF) in Australia aligns closely with the UNCRC, ensuring that children’s rights are at the core of education and care practices. This alignment means that children have the right to:

- ▶ Be heard and have their opinions respected.
- ▶ Be free from violence, abuse, and neglect.
- ▶ Thrive in a supportive environment.
- ▶ Engage in civics and citizenship and take accountable actions.

In practice, this means that educators must create environments where children feel safe, valued, and empowered to express themselves. Educators should respect that children have the right to be consulted and listened to and their ideas considered and embraced.

Early childhood educators often draw inspiration from catchphrases that capture the essence of their daily work. An example of this is ‘children are capable and competent.’

But what does this mean, and where is this visible in the daily interactions with all children across the service?

Incorporating these statements into conversations assumes that every team member fully understands how to put them into practice across the service. This shouldn’t be assumed, and such statements should be reflected on and unpacked in order to ensure that all team members are across their true meaning and how to enact them in day to day practice.

Common misconceptions about children’s rights in early childhood education

1. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is sometimes misinterpreted in early childhood services as a tool to control or ‘manage behaviour.’

Balancing all children’s rights can create tension for educators as they navigate the daily interactions and conflicts between children.

For example, many educators can remember times when they had to deal with competing rights, like when one child, through physical actions, takes away another child’s right to play.

The following general principles offer navigational tools to steer adults in developing a deeper understanding and respect for children’s rights:



Nondiscrimination (Article 2)

Article 2 obligates member states to ensure that laws and actions at all levels of government are in sync with the principle of non-discrimination. This means no child should suffer from prejudices based on their or their parents' language, religion, gender, disability, wealth, heritage, and location.

The best interests of the child (Article 3)

The United Nations takes a broad view of the best interests of a child, encompassing aspects such as safety, well-being, cultural connections, and continuous development. The child's unique individuality is respected, with diverse needs and aspirations considered.

Life, survival, and development (Article 6)

The aim of UNCRC Article 6 is to create an environment where safety is second nature. This comprehensive approach includes law enforcement, community watch, policy reforms, quality education and healthcare, and of course, responsible parenting.

Respect for the views of the child (Article 12)

When adults are making decisions that affect children, they should ask them what they think. Adults should take account of children's views when making the decision and children should be supported to give their views in a way that is best for them.

2. Another common misconception about the Rights of the Child is the belief that rights are tied to privileges. In reality, children's rights, like all human rights, are unconditional.

These rights are not contingent upon fulfilling any responsibility; they cannot be granted as a reward or revoked as a consequence of unmet obligations.



Children's rights are also universal, so both adults and children should be encouraged to respect rights, but this does not mean that a child's rights are dependent on them respecting the rights of others. (UNICEF)

- ▶ Consider the situation where a child systematically removes every block from the shelves, leaves an enormous pile of blocks, and walks away.
- ▶ What is your response as an educator?

Taking a guidance approach, an educator's response may be to invite the child to return to area and navigate the situation, discussing the identified issues. For example, safety and the rights of others to build with those blocks.

Of course, there is a desired outcome and that is to repack the shelf.

Introducing the idea of the rights of others and working together collaboratively this can be achieved.

The scenario could be revisited later, using dramatisation or puppets, to help children problem-solve and reflect on the experience. These are valuable, ongoing learning opportunities that support social and emotional development.



3. Some educators and parents worry that teaching children about their rights might lead to a sense of entitlement. However, the opposite is true.

When children understand their rights in an environment that respects them, they also learn to appreciate and respect the rights of others. This deepened awareness positively influences their relationships, behaviour, and attitudes. By incorporating a rights-based approach into policies developed collaboratively with children, families, and educators, children are more likely to embrace the ethos and respect the boundaries set.

Children's rights are a vital part of early education and care, guiding how we interact with and support children in their development. A child's right to be heard and taken seriously must also be respected at all times, and all actions must be done in a way that respects children's dignity.

By understanding and implementing these rights in daily practices, educators can create environments that not only respect but also empower children, laying the foundation for a just and equitable society.

4 ways educators can uphold children's rights

1

Incorporate children's voices in decision-making processes, ensuring their opinions are heard and valued.

2

Provide a safe and inclusive environment that respects the dignity and worth of every child.

3

Reflect on their practices regularly to ensure they align with the principles of the UNCRC and the NQF.

4

Engage in ongoing professional development to deepen their understanding of children's rights and how to implement them in daily practice.





Reflections on embedding child safety at St Luke's Dapto

BY VIKKI SHAW, JENNA RUGG AND MEL FOURTOUNAS



The **National Principles for Child Safe Organisations** promote the safety and wellbeing of children in Australia. Each state and territory is responsible for implementing the principles within their jurisdiction, with **New South Wales** and **Victoria** establishing legislation in the form of the Child Safe Standards in July 2022. Other states are yet to fully implement their standards.

St Luke's Preschool Dapto's Director Vikki Shaw, 2IC Jenna Rugg, and Educational Leader Mel Fourtounas share how they integrate the Child Safe Standards into their daily practice.

The landscape of child safety in early childhood education has evolved significantly since the **Child Safe**

Standards were implemented as law in NSW in July 2022. These standards have proven to be an invaluable framework, ensuring that all those working with children are committed to protecting, advocating for, and empowering children in every aspect of their safety and well-being.

A SHIFT IN FOCUS: FROM PHYSICAL SAFETY TO DIGITAL VIGILANCE

Over the years, physical safety has been a primary focus in relation to child protection. However, as technology evolves, online safety has become increasingly important, requiring our support and advocacy.

This extends beyond the devices we use to include considerations such as who has

access to images once they are posted or shared, and the types of technology children are exposed to in preschool—whether it be games, apps, websites, or music. Now, more than ever, it's crucial that our programs and centres take proactive steps to advocate for and protect the children in our care.

EMBEDDING THE NSW CHILD SAFE STANDARDS INTO DAILY PRACTICE

We are dedicated to ensuring that the NSW Child Safe Standards is woven into our daily practice. In every staff meeting over the last few years, our team has explored a child protection scenario, covering a diverse range of issues and focal points. In small

groups, staff discuss the concerns raised and the steps they would take to protect and support the child in each situation.

The integration of the Child Safe Standards into programming has become routine. Within programming floorbooks, a dedicated section links to the standards, ensuring that they are part of the daily program, evaluations, and future planning. This ongoing reflection on the standards, in documents such as policies, child safe codes of conduct, risk assessments, and risk minimisation plans, as well as in everyday practices, has fostered a strong culture of child safety within the preschool and our entire team.

DAY-TO-DAY IMPLEMENTATION: A CHILD SAFE CULTURE

We continue to prioritise strong recruitment practices to maintain our commitment to child safety. This process involves written references, specific child safe referee questions, and detailed phone calls.

During an applicant's trial day in our preschool, the entire team provides feedback, ensuring that we select the best candidate to uphold and enhance our child safe culture. We also closely observe and value the children's responses to each applicant, considering their comments and interactions. This approach helps us maintain a strong focus on creating a safe environment for every child.

We operate an indoor/outdoor program and are diligent about ensuring that staff are never alone with a child or in areas that are out of sight or earshot of others. We always have at least two children present in any space, which reinforces our accountability and commitment to keeping all children safe and protected.

At the start of each year, we dedicate the first five weeks to focusing on child safety, guided by the Safe Series program developed by the Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG). This initiative embeds our child safe practices from day one, helping children identify their feelings, recognise safe adults, use appropriate language, and pinpoint safe places to play.

This early foundation allows our team to weave elements of the Child Safe Series into our daily practices throughout the year. The language and concepts from these books are integrated into our everyday conversations, with staff members rostered on each day to lead small group discussions on child safe practices relevant to the children's lives and the current preschool program. It's truly rewarding to see the children feel empowered to express who makes them feel safe, identify their safe spaces, and explain why.

As part of our daily routine, we have team members rostered to engage in Child Safe Series time. This includes revisiting the Child Safe Series that the children first explored at the beginning of the year, alongside

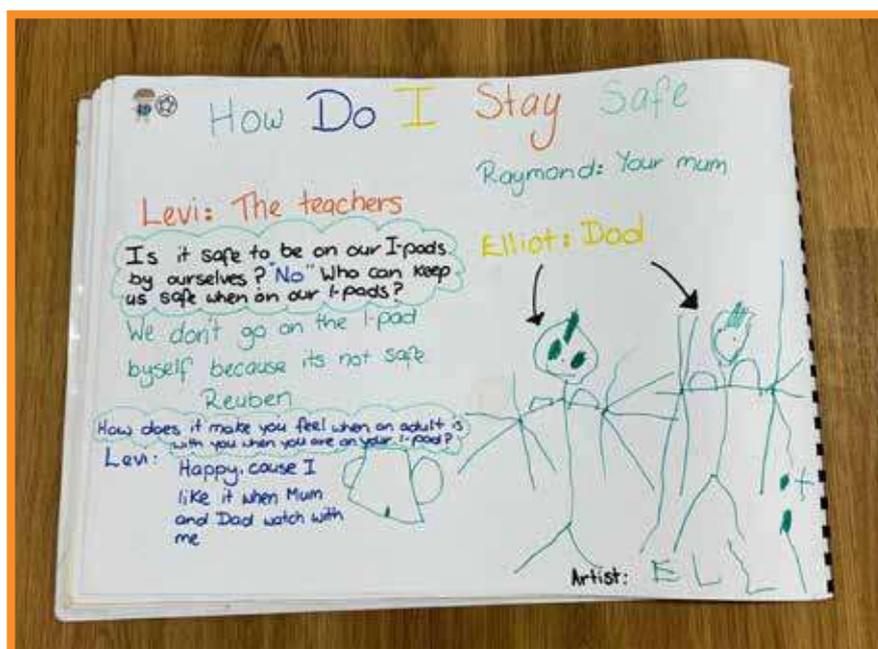


ongoing discussions about identifying safe people they can approach if they feel scared, hurt, or worried, including those within the preschool setting.

Following our recent training with the OCG, the children have assessed the environment and identified areas where they feel safe or unsafe, expressing their reasons for these feelings. This approach empowers our children to have a voice, enabling them to advocate for themselves and their peers in a way that is both heard and respected. Our program and practice displays, along with the documentation of small group times and floorbooks, provide families with the opportunity to review and understand the Safe Series program at their leisure. This transparency ensures that the language and information we embed in our daily practice are clear and accessible to everyone.

MITIGATING VULNERABILITIES AND ENHANCING SAFETY

We've implemented specific practices to address areas where children might be more vulnerable, effectively reducing risks and ensuring their safety. For example, we strictly prohibit the use of any devices in the bathroom area, whether it's staff members or when parents are present with their children. Additionally, we ensure that no students or volunteers are ever in the bathrooms; only primary contact staff are responsible for supporting the children in these spaces.



To maintain a high standard of child safety, we complete child protection refresher training annually. This year, all permanent staff have undertaken the updated [child protection certification CHCPRT025](#). We also prioritise regular in-person training with the OCG and extend this training to other early childhood centres and our church partners with whom we have significant relationships. These efforts help us stay current with best practices and ensure that the safety and well-being of our children remain at the forefront of everything we do.

REFLECTING ON THE NATIONAL MODEL CODE

We take the approach that keeping our children safe is far greater than just removing personal devices from teaching, it is also about ensuring the culture of the preschool is of such a high standard that staff intentionally promote the protection of all children in every aspect of our daily work.

Our approach to child safety goes beyond simply removing personal devices from teaching; it's about fostering a culture within our preschool where the protection of all children is ingrained in every aspect of our daily work. We've embedded practices that actively promote and respect children's rights. For instance, whenever a staff member enters the bathroom—whether to assist a child, change a nappy, or clean—we make it a point to inform other team members and show them where our electronic devices are stored. This practice ensures accountability and maintains awareness of everyone's whereabouts, further safeguarding the children in our care.

A CALL TO ACTION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

Working in early childhood education is a significant responsibility, but it also presents a wonderful opportunity to empower children to know their rights and gain confidence in using their voice. It's essential for educators and teachers to stay up to date with training from the OCG and child protection, as it equips us to ensure child safety in all aspects of our work.

For NSW services that haven't yet completed or haven't recently revisited the training modules from the Office of the Children's Guardian, we strongly encourage you to do so as a team. Collaborative training provides diverse perspectives and helps us hold each other accountable in advocating for and protecting the children in our care.

As educators, it's important to continuously reflect on the experiences we provide, the learning environments we create, and the language we use with children. By adopting a child safety lens, we can ensure that children feel safe, seen, and heard, and have the confidence to raise their concerns, knowing they will be responded to with care and respect.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Vikki has dedicated 19 years to St Luke's, serving both as an educator and teacher, and for the past 3.5 years, she has been the Director and Nominated Supervisor of the preschool. She is a passionate advocate for child protection, ensuring that the entire team is trained in child protection and the Child Safe Standards. Vikki is committed to regular refresher training and the ongoing revision of documents and practices to uphold the highest standards of child safety.

Jenna brings 23 years of teaching experience, with the last 3.5 years spent at St Luke's Preschool. As the 2IC, she plays a key role in the policy review team, ensuring that all policies, especially those related to child safety, child protection, and the Child Safe Standards, are current and deeply embedded in daily practices.

Educational Leader Mel is instrumental in ensuring that all staff understand how the service's program and practices support children's safety and wellbeing. She has thoughtfully designed the service's floorbooks format to reflect the impact of the Child Safe Standards on the program, further integrating these crucial elements into our educational framework.



ABOUT THE NATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR CHILD SAFE ORGANISATIONS AND THE CHILD SAFE STANDARDS

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations sets out a nationally consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing within organisations. The principles give effect to the child safe standards that were recommended by the Royal Commission and bring attention to general child safety and wellbeing issues.

Source: <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/resources/national-principles-child-safe-organisations>

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (National Principles) are high-level principles that set out a national approach to creating organisational cultures and practices that promote the safety and wellbeing of children in Australia. Each state and territory is responsible for implementing the National Principles or equivalent standards within their jurisdiction.

Source: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/child-safe-standards/being-a-child-safe-organisation/>

The Child Safe Standards recommended by the Royal Commission provide a framework for making organisations safer for children. They have been accepted by the NSW Government and the Child Safe Scheme requires certain child-related organisations to apply them.

Source: Page 6: https://ocg.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-12/g_CSS_GuidetotheStandards.pdf

CHCPRT025

LOOKING FOR HIGH QUALITY CHILD PROTECTION TRAINING?

Gain your child protection certification with the course that sets the standard for the sector.

CELA's CHCPRT025 Identify and Report Children and Young People at Risk (RTO ID 90842) covers everything your team need to know in order to feel competent and capable with it comes to child protection in early education spaces.



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WWW.CELA.ORG.AU/CHILD-PROTECTION



Creating safe spaces for children

Every child has a right to be protected and feel safe in their early and middle childhood learning environments.

Through reflecting on your environments, educators can thoughtfully create spaces that offer children ample opportunities to fulfil a sense of safety and security. Here are some prompts to provoke your reflections.



Intentionally designed spaces

Spaces that facilitate small groups can support conversations between peers and educators. Do the environments have designated quiet areas? Think about small, intimate areas to gather, retreat or yarn in.



Enclosure

Some children will be drawn to create physical boundaries around them, seeking out nooks, creating forts, or enveloping themselves in hammocks. This sense of enclosure provides children a sense of control and security. Does your environment offer shelter and spaces where children can feel like they can hide without compromising adequate supervision? Think about soft furnishings, positioning of furniture and ways to 'lower the ceiling'.



Visual cues

Resources such as emotion cards, posters, and books promote a child safe environment and support children to communicate verbally and non-verbally. What visual cues are present that help to establish consistent boundaries and expectations?



Atmosphere

Welcoming, safe and inclusive indoor and outdoor learning environments reflect, respect, affirm the identities, and enrich the lives of children and families (AGDE, 2022, pg 23). What planning decisions can you make to create a warm and calm atmosphere?



Natural elements

All children benefit from learning on Country and from Country (AGDE, 2022, pg 23). Access to natural environments support emotional, psychological and physical health. Are there any areas you could bring natural elements into?



Sensory and tactile aspects

Materials enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar, and introduce curiosity and wonder (AGDE, 2022, pg 23). Sensory play allows children to meet their sensory needs, promoting self-regulation and comfort. What affordances for sensory experiences are available in your environments? Can you think of any other tools that could be made available?



Accessibility

How accessible are spaces and resources to children? Do children have a sense of agency and autonomy over their learning environments? How can children be involved in the design?





Amplify!

How ECEC leaders can build a safe reporting culture

BY CELA RTO MANAGER ALINE MAJADO



ARTICLE

This article explores how leaders can foster a child-safe culture in early childhood education and care by making reporting concerns a normal and supported practice. It outlines why leadership is critical in overcoming barriers to reporting and offers practical strategies to build a workplace where children's safety is always prioritised.

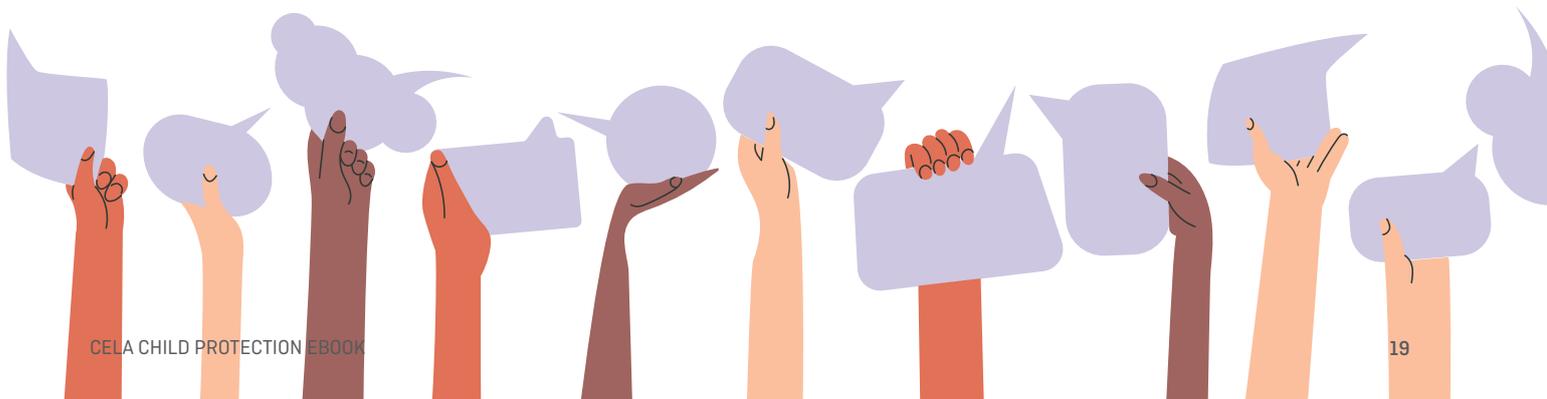
Creating a child-safe culture in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is not just about having the right policies. It is about the everyday actions of educators and, crucially, the leadership that supports them. A culture of reporting begins with leaders who listen, model ethical decision-making, and empower their team to act when something doesn't feel right.

As leaders, you have the opportunity to shape a workplace where speaking up is not only accepted but expected. Staff must feel psychologically safe to report concerns about children's wellbeing or professional conduct.

Why reporting matters in practice

Reporting concerns, whether about a child's wellbeing or the conduct of an adult, is a vital part of keeping children safe. However, research shows that barriers such as fear of getting it wrong, fear of backlash, or lack of confidence can discourage educators from reporting suspected abuse or neglect (AIFS, 2023; Kaufman et al., 2016). This is where leadership becomes critical.

When educators trust their leaders to listen without judgement and act with integrity, they are far more likely to raise concerns early. Early reporting allows for early intervention and helps ensure that children are supported before harm escalates.



What does a culture of reporting look like?

A culture of reporting is visible when:

- ▶ Educators feel confident identifying and reporting concerns
- ▶ Reporting systems are clear, accessible, and used consistently
- ▶ Team members know they will be supported, not judged

Leaders are the drivers of this culture. It is not enough to have policies in a folder. Those policies must live in the daily language, training, and expectations of the team.

Practical strategies for leaders

Here are five evidence-informed ways you can build and sustain a culture of reporting in your service:

1. Model ethical practice and boundaries

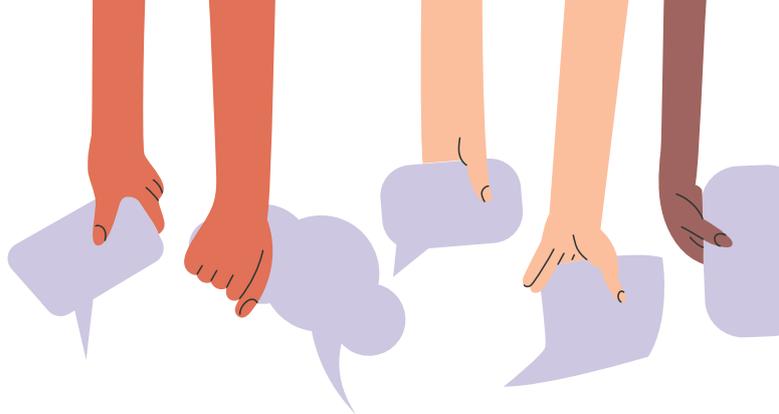
Children learn from observing adults. Educators do too. Leaders who model ethical behaviour and uphold professional boundaries show that integrity is a non-negotiable value. Consistently reinforcing these expectations sets the tone for the whole team.

Example: At team meetings, take time to reflect on scenarios involving boundaries. This might include one-on-one supervision or physical comfort strategies. These conversations help to clarify expectations and reduce grey areas.

2. Normalise conversations about concerns

Educators may hesitate to raise concerns because they worry about being wrong or creating conflict. Leaders can normalise these conversations by inviting reflective dialogue and using language that removes blame.

Example: "Let's talk through this together. It's always okay to ask if something doesn't feel quite right."



3. Use supervision as a protective practice

Supervision is more than compliance. It is a space for building confidence and ethical judgement. Use supervision sessions to check in on child safety practices, documentation, and staff wellbeing.

Example: "Is there anything you've noticed lately that's been sitting with you? Sometimes it's the small things that matter."

4. Make reporting pathways clear and practical

Even experienced educators can forget the steps under pressure. Display clear, accessible reporting flowcharts and revisit them regularly during professional development sessions.

Example: Include the ACECQA reporting and responding template in your induction pack and revisit it each term: www.acecqa.gov.au/media/45561

5. Support, don't scrutinise, when a concern is raised

How you respond to the first report sets the tone for every report after that. When educators raise concerns, listen first, ask questions, and affirm that taking action was the right thing to do. Even if the outcome is inconclusive, the act of reporting is an act of protection.

Example: "Thank you for letting me know. You've done the right thing by raising this. I'll support you through the next steps."





Creating systems that protect

National resources such as the AIFS mandatory reporting guide and ChildSafety.gov.au provide clarity on jurisdictional requirements. However, it is the day-to-day leadership that makes those systems effective. A policy alone doesn't protect a child. People do.

Invest in team capability

Leadership is not about knowing all the answers. It is about fostering a team culture where people feel safe to ask questions, raise concerns, and stand up for children. When leaders create space for professional reflection and act with integrity, they empower their teams to become the trusted adults every child deserves.

By embedding child safety into everyday practice and leading with clarity, care and courage, we move from compliance to culture. In doing so, we create services where children not only learn and grow but feel deeply protected and valued.

Thousands of early education professionals choose CELA for child protection training. As the leading provider of ECEC-specific child protection training and a trusted not-for-profit peak body, we deliver nationally recognised and state-specific programs that are practical, research-informed and tailored to real-world challenges. From accredited certification to refreshers and topical courses, our flexible training options equip teams with the skills and confidence to uphold child-safe practices and strengthen a culture where children's safety and wellbeing always come first.

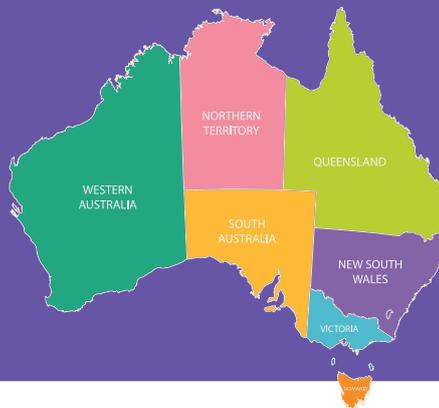
**“A policy alone doesn't protect a child.
People do.”**

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Reporting obligations

State by state guide



NSW

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to NSW Police immediately

Child protection agency Department of Communities and Justice – Child Protection Helpline as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme NSW Office of the Children’s Guardian, within 7 business days of becoming aware, final report within 30 days

ECEC regulator NSW Department of Education within 24 hours

VIC

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to Victoria Police immediately

Child protection agency Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – Child Protection as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme Commission for Children and Young People, CCYP, within 3 business days, investigation outcome within 30 days

ECEC regulator Victorian Department of Education and Training within 24 hours

QLD

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to QLD Police immediately

Child protection agency Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs – Child Safety as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme Queensland Human Rights Commission, as soon as practicable

ECEC regulator Queensland Department of Education within 24 hours

SA

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to SA Police immediately

Child protection agency Department for Child Protection as soon as practicable

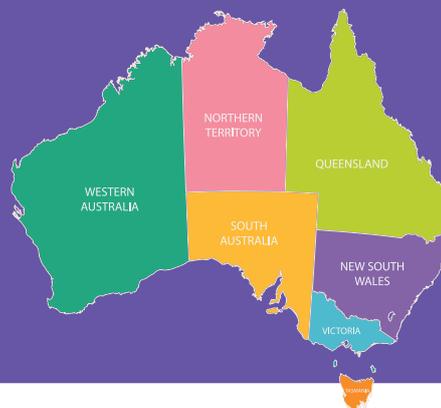
Reportable conduct scheme Not in place

ECEC regulator Education Standards Board (SA) within 24 hours



Reporting obligations

State by state guide



TAS

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to Tasmania Police immediately

Child protection agency Child Safety Service (via Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line) as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme Not in place

ECEC regulator Department for Education, Children and Young People within 24 hours

WA

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to WA Police immediately

Child protection agency Department of Communities – Child Protection as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme Ombudsman WA, as soon as practicable

ECEC regulator Department of Communities – Education and Care Regulatory Unit within 24 hours

NT

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to NT Police immediately

Child protection agency Territory Families, Housing and Communities – Child Protection as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme Not in place

ECEC regulator NT Department of Education – Quality Education and Care NT within 24 hours

ACT

Criminal offence Criminal offences must be reported to ACT Policing immediately

Child protection agency Child and Youth Protection Services as soon as practicable

Reportable conduct scheme ACT Ombudsman, within 30 days

ECEC regulator ACT Education Directorate within 24 hours

Amplify!

Understanding the new model code for taking images

BY CELA EARLY EDUCATION SPECIALIST KERRIE MAGUIRE AND CELA RTO MANAGER ALINE MAJADO



The National Model Code addresses the use of service-issued electronic devices and personal electronic devices while providing children's education and care, including taking images or videos of children.

Providers of centre-based ECEC under the National Quality Framework (NQF) are strongly encouraged to adopt the National Model Code as a further support to promote a child safe culture. The National Model Code is a voluntary, interim measure while future legislative reform is being considered by governments.

Background

In May 2024, the Australian Children's Education & Care Authority (ACECQA) released a discussion paper to obtain comments from interested individuals and organisations on the development of a national Model Code and Guidelines for taking images or videos of children while providing early childhood education and care, specifically in relation to the use of personal devices to capture these images.

The code was developed in response to a review of child safety arrangements under the National Quality Framework undertaken by ACECQA in 2023.

CELA gathered input from our members through a survey to aid in the development of the code. The survey results, supplemented by insights from our early education specialists, were then submitted for consideration.

Why there is a need to address the use of personal devices

Digital photos and videos are now the primary tools for documenting children's learning and engagement. Many education and care services share this documentation with families via social media apps, allowing them to see their child's participation through regular posts and updates.



The Review of Child Safety Arrangements under the National Quality Framework (ACECQA, 2023) points out that there is “a significant risk of unscrupulous individuals within a service using personal devices to take inappropriate images of children, potentially sharing them with unauthorised persons, including those outside the educational or parental context,” and that this risk is heightened in cases of physical or sexual abuse, where the provider cannot monitor or control the images being taken or shared. (ACECQA, December 2023, P.32)

The Review highlighted the need to embed prevention and early intervention to ensure a child-safe environment. It recommended using only service-issued devices for recording images and prohibiting personal devices for taking images or being on staff. These strategies aim to minimise risks and enhance child safety across all staff roles and organisational levels.

It emphasised the need for providers to safeguard children’s privacy and personal data to protect their rights, wellbeing, and autonomy in the digital environment and highlighted opportunities to improve educators’ practices in obtaining informed consent from children for using their images.

What it means for your service and team members

Australia’s National Principles for Child Safe Organisations collectively illustrate that a child-safe organisation is one that creates a culture, adopts strategies, and takes action to promote child wellbeing and prevent harm to children and young people. “It also provides an opportunity to reflect on the rights of children within the service, with a focus on the right to privacy .” says CELA Early Education Specialist Kerrie Maguire.

Principle 8, which focuses on physical and online environments, promoting safety and wellbeing, and minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed, is particularly relevant to taking images and videos of children.

While the model code is currently voluntary, it sets a strong foundation for best practices that all services can adopt to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children.

“The National Principles provide a clear framework for services to assess their child-safe practices,” says CELA RTO Manager Aline Majado. “Considering how personal electronic devices are being used in your organisation is only one way to assess if your service’s practices align with child-safe practices.

“Think about children’s right to privacy and the digital footprint children now have without knowledge. Think about how vulnerable they may be by having their images and videos taken and shared without consent. And even when children consent to have their pictures taken, it’s important to reflect on the level of maturity and the complexities that we now have to navigate in our digital world and if this is really informed consent. Above all, reflect on how limiting the use of personal devices in the classroom can prevent the misuse of children’s images and add another layer of protection to children in your care.”



Key steps your service can take

Policy updates

If you are in NSW and Victoria, include the National Model Code in your Child Safe Standards Self-Assessment, or improvement plan. If you are in other states and territories, this is a good opportunity for you to assess your service's child safe practices against the National Principles for child safe organisations and the National Model Code, ahead of new legislative requirements. In Queensland for example, complying with the child safe standards will become mandatory on the 1st of January 2026: www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/node/522

Staff training

Provide comprehensive training for educators and staff on the new guidelines, focusing on the appropriate use of service-issued devices and the prohibition of personal devices for capturing images or videos of children.

Parental communication

Inform families about the new policies and obtain their consent regarding the use of images and videos of their children. Ensure they understand the steps taken to protect their children's privacy and safety.

Monitoring and compliance

Regularly monitor the use of service-issued devices and enforce compliance with the new policies. Implement strict controls for the storage and retention of images and videos to safeguard children's personal data.

Risk assessment

Conduct thorough risk assessments to identify and mitigate potential risks associated with the use of electronic devices in your service.

Continuous improvement

Stay informed about potential legislative changes and be prepared to adapt your practices accordingly. Engage with stakeholders, including educators, families, and the wider community, to continually improve child safety measures.

By adopting the National Model Code, your service can take proactive steps to ensure a safer environment for children, fostering trust and confidence among families and staff and upholding the rights of every child at your service.

View a video from ACECQA to start the conversation [here](#)



Access the National Model Code [here](#)





Where to start when embedding child safety in your organisation

BY CELA

Principle 1 of the National Child Safety Principles is “Child safety and well-being is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.”

Embedding child safety within organisations is crucial, particularly in the early education and care sector. While many organisations have implemented important initiatives, some may feel unsure of where to begin, or what to do next. This article offers practical steps for both leaders and educators, with guidance around how to initiate the right conversations and where to seek further information.

As part of the Child Safe Organisations project, the Australian Government commissioned the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop practical tools and resources to help

organisations implement the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations.

The National Principles aim to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and well-being across all sectors in Australia. This will help to keep children and young people safe and reduce future harm in organisational settings.

These are supported in Quality Area 2 in the National Quality Standards (NQS) where children’s safety is promoted by minimising risks and protecting children from physical or psychological harm.

“ Each child has a right to be protected in early learning and middle childhood services,” says CELA RTO Manager Aline Majado. “It is the role of approved providers, managers, educators, and staff to identify their roles and professional responsibilities to achieve this outcome.”

As Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professionals, it is paramount to embed child safety into your organisational leadership, governance, and culture. ECEC leaders and educators play distinct roles in implementing a child-safe culture in their organisations. However, these roles must work in tandem for safety to actually be embedded into the culture.

STEPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE LEADERS



1. Incorporate child safety in your mission and philosophy:

Embedding child safety into your organisation’s mission statement, values, and Statement of Philosophy demonstrates a commitment to fostering a child-safe culture.

The service philosophy is the overarching document that guides the pedagogical practices of educators and staff. It is visible to the families and community you serve, showing that you have made a commitment to child safety throughout the organisation.

Note: The Australian Human Rights Commission has created a child safety self-assessment tool. This tool can help organisations reflect on their child safe practices and identify priority areas for improvement, in line with the National Principles. The tool gives examples of what some aspects of each principle might look like when implemented in practice and prompts organisations to commit to taking concrete actions to improve their child safe practices.

Source: <https://childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/learning-hub/organisational-self-assessment>



STEPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE LEADERS



2. Develop comprehensive policies and procedures:

Develop and consistently update and review policies and procedures that emphasise the service's commitment to child safety.

Policies and procedures should be readily available and accessible to families, educators and the community. It is important they are clearly written in an easy to understand format. When policies are reviewed, it is essential the changes are communicated to all educators, families and children. Policies must be implemented and embedded into the service's daily practices.

- ▶ Does your organisation have a Child Safety and Well-being Policy?
- ▶ Do you ensure staff, students and volunteers sign a Child Safe Code of Conduct?

Templates for these items, which you can adapt to your own service, are available [here](#).

Note: serious breaches of child protection legislation often occur when policies and procedures are up-to-date, but team members are unaware of or have not been implementing those changes.

Tip: Consider how your service embeds the voices of children in its operations, and how your organisation encourages a culture which teaches children that they have a right to feel safe.

3. Stay informed about legislative requirements and educate on mandatory reporting:

Ensure staff across all levels know mandatory reporting requirements and understand their role in keeping children safe. Regular training, including refresher courses like our **Child Protection Refresher** can help maintain this knowledge.

Remain up-to-date with all legislative and reporting requirements related to child safety. This ensures compliance and demonstrates your organisation's dedication to protecting children.

The government is currently reviewing the future use of personal digital devices, such as phones, in education and care settings. Be proactive and take steps now to ensure educators can document children's learning using service-owned devices.



STEPS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE LEADERS



4. Promote collective responsibility and integrate child safety in meetings:

Communicate the collective responsibility for child safety within your service and organisation. Make it a regular discussion topic to keep it at the forefront of everyone's mind.

Include child safety as an agenda item in templates for monthly meetings with committee, staff and educators. This will ensure it is consistently discussed, reviewed, and prioritised. Risks to child safety and wellbeing should be documented, and strategies to manage these risks should be implemented and monitored.

Remember that all serious incidents must be reported to your regulatory body and your approved provider.

“ Child safety principles need to be embedded in your organisation”, says CELA Early Education Specialist Janelle Gallagher. “Through consistent and frequent discussions with educators, a culture of accountability will be established within the service ensuring a child safe environment is developed, nurtured and maintained.

5. Implement rigorous recruitment and induction and strengthen HR processes:

Your recruitment strategies, induction and HR processes should communicate what is expected of staff in providing a child-safe environment. This establishes the tone from the beginning of their employment and gives educators clear expectations of their roles and conduct. It also gives leaders important documentation that can be reassessed if any issues of conduct arise.





NEW SELF-PACED SERIES

Engaging with families in early education

A research and professional learning project in collaboration between University of NSW, University of Sydney, Western Sydney University and Griffith University.

This evidence-based professional learning series will help you build a deeper understanding of the complexities families face and equip you with the tools to engage effectively with families from all backgrounds.



COURSE 1

Introduction to working with families experiencing poverty



COURSE 2

A funds of knowledge approach to supporting children's learning, development, and wellbeing



COURSE 3

Using effective communication to build and maintain relationships with families



COURSE 4

Strengthening mainstream ECEC service engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



COURSE 5

Rethinking behaviour – strengths-based approaches to inclusion



Find out more:
www.cela.org.au/engaging-families

This series consists of five self-paced online courses that can be taken individually or as a complete series. All courses are APST aligned.

How CELA supports ECEC professionals

ADVOCACY

CELA influences government and policy makers to act on the issues that affect our members and the wider sector. Our advocacy is grounded in our mission to amplify the value of early learning and ensure all children and families have access to quality, affordable early childhood education and care (ECEC), no matter their economic circumstances or where they live.

www.cela.org.au/advocacy



EVENTS

CELA hosts a range of online and in-person conferences, professional learning and networking events throughout the year. Each event is designed to support professional growth and provide an ability to connect with peers and a range of sector experts.

www.cela.org.au/events



LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

CELA builds the professional capability of educators and teachers with all levels of qualifications, through training programs led by sector experts. We offer APST aligned and RTO accredited courses, self-paced e-learning and micro credentials, and an Approved Provider and Governance Program for NSW providers and employees.

www.cela.org.au/training



MEMBER SUPPORT

Members can access expert guidance and operational resources, such as policies, guides and toolkits, to improve quality practice and service delivery. The CELA helpline is staffed by sector specialists, connecting members with the latest information.

www.cela.org.au/membership



APPROVED PROVIDER

We support new and existing providers through membership, resources, publications, professional learning and mentoring.

www.cela.org.au/how-we-help/approved-provider



PUBLICATIONS

CELA publishes Rattler, the leading education journal, and Broadside newsletter. Our Amplify! Blog reaches over 20,000 subscribers. www.cela.org.au/publications



CONSULTANCY

CELA provides broad sector expertise for a diverse range of projects – from guiding the service approval process, quality program and practice, governance such as Approved Provider roles and responsibilities, and strategic planning. Projects span from developing regional community-based service delivery to advising a national museum on designing exhibition spaces for children. www.cela.org.au/how-we-help/consulting



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