

# Tools for Listening

How to engage children and young people to participate in decisions affecting them in your community

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A safe Church for all people

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This resource was collaboratively developed by the Synods of the Uniting Church and is recommended by:



# 1. Our commitment to children & young people

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The Uniting Church in Australia's National Child Safe Policy Framework provides the premise from which our conversations with children are valued and respectful:

*"The Uniting Church in Australia (The Church) believes that all people, including children, are made in the image of God. As a Christian community we believe that God reaches out to us in love and acceptance, and that our relationships with each other should express love, care and respect (Safe Place Position Statement developed by the UCA Commission on Women and Men in 1997). Central to living out the gospel is to love God and to love others. As a community of faith, we are committed to providing safe environments for all people including children, so that they may live life in all its fullness. We also acknowledge the rights of children as detailed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990, Article 49) that States shall protect children from physical or mental harm and neglect, including sexual abuse and exploitation."*

## An excerpt from the National Child Safe Policy Framework

The Uniting Church in Australia (the Church) supports and upholds a culture of inclusion and safety, in which the voices of children are listened to and responded to. This is underlined in its National Child Safe Policy Framework:

*"Children are gifts of God to be received, welcomed and to be cared for responsibly and justly. The Gospel also directs us to listen to and learn from children. In On the Way Together (1998) it is affirmed that "children in the Uniting Church in Australia are nurtured in Christian faith and discipleship, experiencing relationships which promote trust, cooperation, honesty, positive valuing of persons, responsibility and Christian service." It adds that the church "affirms the value and the rights of children as human beings as it listens to, guides, protects, advocates for, and empowers children within its own communities and the wider community."*

Where the term 'children' is used throughout this document, it refers to children and young people under 18 years.

## 2. Who is this kit designed for?

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This kit is intended to assist you in the process of consulting, involving and collaborating with children, young people and adults in any of the settings or entities of the Uniting Church – for example, schools, congregations, agencies, church councils, youth groups, presbyteries or synods.

The activity sheets and guiding documents in this toolkit are designed to be used to enable dialogues with children, either in small groups or as an individual activity, depending on age and context. They can also be used to gather information from children and parents to assist you with the planning or reviewing of programs and activities, or to seek feedback around the whole life of the "community" (congregation or school).

You can use the toolkit at any stage of your programming. For example:

- To consult with community members, families and children when you are planning a new program in your community
- To get feedback about a program or activity
- To include and consider feedback when reviewing programs or activities
- When people are new to your program or activity, to inform them about codes of conduct and the feedback process

The use of more creative ways of engaging the views of children is encouraged. The example feedback sheets provided could be used to ask children about things you would like to consult about. However, it is a good idea to look beyond the opinions of adults and invite children to tell you how they would like to be consulted/engaged and what aspects they would appreciate being asked about.

## 3. About the toolkit

### Collaborators

The *Tools for Listening* resource was developed in collaboration with members of the Church's Safe Church Framework Implementation (SCFIN) Network and the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) QLD Manager/National Manager Child Safe Organisations. This resource will assist the Church to value and hear the voices of children/young people and act on them in a meaningful way. NAPCAN commends the commitment the Uniting Church is demonstrating in prioritising child safe and inclusive practice.

Our thanks are extended to collaborators in the development of *Tools for Listening*, to:

- Sammy Bruderer (NAPCAN)
- Cheryl Lawson (Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) (TBC)
- Rev Helen Paine (Northern Synod)
- Emma Parr (NSW/ACT Synod)
- Nicole Rose (NSW/ACT Synod)
- Rev Beth Nicholls (Qld Synod)
- Peter Rose (Qld Synod)
- Terry Selva (Qld Synod)
- Rev Diane Bury (SA Synod)
- Linda Vinall (SA Synod)
- Cindy Gorton (WA Synod)
- Neil Starkie (WA Synod)
- Sue Thomas (WA Synod)
- Chris Barnett (VIC/TAS Synod)
- Rev Sue Clarkson (VIC/TAS Synod)
- Isabel Thomas Dobson (VIC/TAS Synod)
- Josh Tuhipa-Turner (VIC/TAS Synod)
- Rev John Cox (National Assembly)
- Lynette Drew (Qld Synod) *process facilitator*

### The purpose of the toolkit

In the Christian context reflected in the National Child Safe Policy framework statements of belief above, the aim of the toolkit is to put into action Jesus' lessons about restoring the scriptural, valued place of the child within the church and in community spaces.

Dr Vivienne Mountain, in her recent Pastoral Handbook for Ministry with Children and their Families\* writes:

*"In the face of the scandal of child abuse and the falling number of children reported as attending churches, the challenge of the Child Theology Movement stirs interest, imagination and concern. The words and actions of Jesus in Matthew 18:1-5 can be considered a "seed" in scripture, whose time has come to shoot and grow. Through his words and action, placing a child in the midst of his disciples, Jesus presents the child as a model of discipleship."*

\*Source: Dr Vivienne Mountain, *Building Emotional Health and Wellbeing – A Pastoral Handbook for Ministry with Children and their Families*. InterGen 2018 (p5-6)

In implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Uniting Church, in its National Child Safe Policy Framework, has set the requirement that we 'enable children and families to participate in decision making' and is seeking to support the implementation of this standard.

This toolkit aims to enable the implementation of Principle 2: 'Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously' from the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations as well as the following recommendations that have emerged from the Royal Commission:

- that children and young people are involved in the strategic development, design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives
- that children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously
- that families and communities are informed and involved

This toolkit provides simple and easy to access tools which can support the recommended engagement and inclusive planning. It is informed by the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP<sup>2</sup>) Public Participation Spectrum, and the NAPCAN's Children's Voices research project. IAP<sup>2</sup> is an international leader in public participation which seeks to promote and improve community and stakeholder engagement practices throughout the world. NAPCAN is the primary organisation for the prevention of child abuse and neglect in Australia and recognises the importance of listening to children and recognising that everyone has a part to play in keeping children safe. The research highlights two (2) very strong messages:

1. Children want to be involved in discussions about how to make communities good places for people of all ages to live.
2. Children have a lot to say and have great ideas.

The research also highlights the key reasons for having conversations with children about their local communities, and the church community is no different:

- Children experience the world differently from adults.
- Adults cannot guess what is important for children without asking them and listening to the answer.
- Children may have priorities that adults prefer not to think about.
- Children use community facilities in ways that are different from adults.

The Bible through Jesus highlights that *“engaging in child focused practice should be foundational to our Christian ministry. (Matthew 1-6, Mark 10:13-16). It requires us to put the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of children above our own”*.

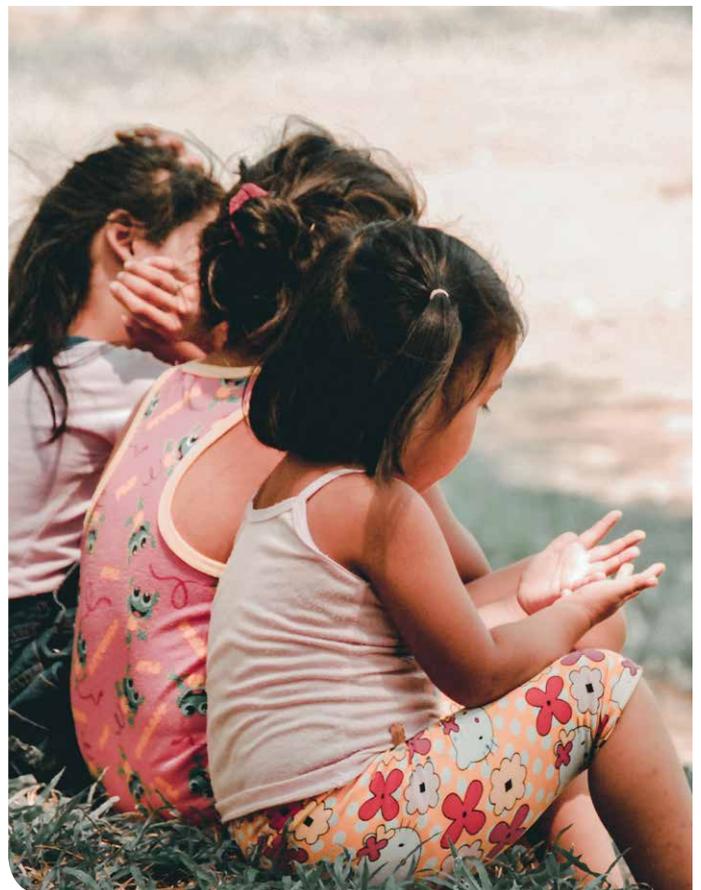
(source: Safe Ministry Resources, Safe Ministry Handbook National Edition 2015 (p 54)).

## 4. How to foster genuine engagement with this process

A participant who feels that their voice has been heard and responded to, is likely to feel a greater sense of belonging.

This toolkit aligns with principles recommended by the IAP<sup>2</sup> and refers to their Public Participation Spectrum which provides awareness of the importance of genuine communication. The following considerations should be part of your processes as you plan your listening activity:

1. When you ask people what they think and feel, you are implying that you will do something with the information. (see **section 5** for more information).
2. When you seek people's feedback, be sure to let them know what you intend to do with the information.
3. When you invite participation, always let people know what level of participation you're seeking from them.
4. Keep participants informed and provide feedback so that they know how their input was valued and used.
5. Ensure that the feedback reaches and is considered by decision makers, and that the input of children and adults is celebrated and acknowledged within the context of the group and if appropriate, more broadly.



# 5. Levels of engagement

Increasing level of public impact



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<b>Goal of participation</b>	to provide participants with balanced and objective information which helps them understand	to obtain feedback from participants	to work with participants to ensure their thoughts and concerns are understood and considered	to partner with participants in all aspects of development	to place the final decision-making power in the hands of participants
<b>Implied promise to participants</b>	'we will keep you informed'	'we will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge your thoughts and concerns, and provide feedback about how participants have influenced the decision'	'we will work with you to make sure your thoughts and concerns are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how participants have influenced the decision'	'we will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions. We will incorporate your recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible'	'we will implement what you decide'
<b>Example techniques</b>	flyers, posters, fact sheets, face book pages, information sessions	surveys, public meetings, focus groups, sausage sizzles	workshops, working groups, circles of interest, focus groups	advisory committees, participant representatives, consensus building, photo journaling, key informant interviews	ballots, delegated decision, participant juries

Table 1. an adaptation of IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum



## 6. Steps to get you started

Use the Levels of Engagement (see **section 5**) to help with this stage.

### 1. Get support from decision makers:

- Meet with your decision-making body (eg Church Council) before you start.
- Help them understand the importance of equalising the balance of power between children and adults.

### 2. Decide what you want to ask about:

- Refer to **'Goal of Participation'** to determine a list of questions to ask.
- Identify who you want to ask.  
*If you're responsible for Sunday school, you would ask families and children about activities they would like to see happening in the Sunday school.*

### 3. Choose the right level of engagement:

- Refer to **'Levels of Engagement'** and decide if you need to inform, consult, involve, collaborate or empower in your conversation.
- Refer to the **'Promise to Participants'** to decide a level of participation ranging from information to implementation.
- Make sure you have the capacity to deliver on the promise. If not, review your choices.

### 4. Plan for success by gathering information:

- Refer to **'Example Techniques'** to find out how you'll gather information and their appropriateness to the age group you're asking.
- Include your target audience in the planning stage so it is designed to suit their needs.
- Refer to **Section 7** when planning to assess risks, their likelihood and consequence, and how you will make the experience safe and inclusive.
- Inform parents about any activities you are conducting with children.
- Consider passing around a pretend microphone to 'interview' children about the topic or use disposable cameras with young adults to make photo submissions of their feedback.

### 5. Introduce & facilitate the process:

- Inform participants about the purpose of the consultation, details of what the process involves, the intended use of information and who the information will be shared with.
- Educate children and young adults about why their voices are important and why the organisation values their feedback.

### 6. Incorporate your learnings into programs & activities:

- Include children and young adults in the planning and approval processes, encouraging participation, skill sharing and development.

### 7. Provide feedback to all parties:

- Plan how you will keep participants and decision-makers informed.
- Present your findings back to the people you asked during the process.



# Document version history

Version Number	Date	Reason
1.0	24.10.2018 Launched Universal Children's Day	To provide tools for best practice in ministry as per the National Child Safe Policy Framework and to address the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

## For more information

For further information/resourcing in your area please contact the appropriate person in your Synod or Congress as listed below.

Northern Synod	<a href="mailto:safechurch@ns.uca.org.au">safechurch@ns.uca.org.au</a>
NSW/ACT Synod	<a href="mailto:safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au">safechurch@nswact.uca.org.au</a>
Qld Synod	<a href="mailto:Safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au">Safeministrywithchildren@ucaqld.com.au</a>
SA Synod	<a href="mailto:calledtocare@sa.uca.org.au">calledtocare@sa.uca.org.au</a>
Vic./Tas. Synod	<a href="mailto:cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au">cultureofsafetycontact@victas.uca.org.au</a>
WA Synod	<a href="mailto:Janine.mcdonald@wa.uca.org.au">Janine.mcdonald@wa.uca.org.au</a> <a href="mailto:Cindy.gorton@wa.uca.org.au">Cindy.gorton@wa.uca.org.au</a>
UAICC	<a href="mailto:cheryl.lawson@wa.uca.org.au">cheryl.lawson@wa.uca.org.au</a>



# Printable resource

## Risk assessment preparation, process and matrix

### Risk assessment preparation

The best way to have a successful activity is to plan so that risks are identified and avoided or minimised. These initial checklist questions will help you to move through the planning process, identify risks in advance, and take the necessary actions for the success of the activity.

Before you complete the Risk Assessment, you need to consider the following:

- Have we defined broadly what we want to achieve and gained the backing of decision makers?
- What do we want to ask, and who are we asking?
  - What is the age/demographic of the group?
  - What level of engagement is appropriate for this group?
  - What is the implied promise attached to this level of engagement?
- What information is required for parents to be informed and give consent?
- What information is required for children to be properly informed and give consent?
- What tools are required for this engagement?
- How will we gather the information, and how will we make this a safe activity for all?
- Who will be involved in gathering the information?
  - Have they been screened, trained and approved to work with children in the church?
  - What additional briefing and/or training is needed so that these people are well prepared to introduce and conduct the conversation with participants?
- How do we intend to use the information we gather, and who will it be shared with?
- How will we keep participants and decision makers informed, during and after the consultation?

### Risk assessment process

1. Use the example risk assessment to list potential risks and determine what could go wrong.
2. Check the **Likelihood Descriptors** and decide how likely the potential risk will happen.
3. Check the **Consequence Descriptors** to identify the consequences of the potential risk.
4. Check the **Risk Matrix** to identify the levels of risk.
5. Check the **Actions to Take** to find what you need to do to keep the activity safe.
6. Have an emergency response prepared if something does go wrong.

Feel free to seek guidance and support from the Risk Team in your Synod, or in another Synod if there is no one available at the time. (See page 8 for contact details)



## Example risk assessment for engagement with children

**Activity:** face-to-face conversation with 9 – 11-year-old children attending a Church activity about what they think and feel about the activity.

<b>Risks</b> <i>What could go wrong?</i>	<b>Likelihood</b> <i>Check the 'descriptors'</i>	<b>Consequence</b> <i>Check the 'descriptors'</i>	<b>Risk level</b> <i>Check the 'risk matrix'</i>	<b>How to reduce risk</b> <i>Check the 'actions to take' before completing this section</i>
Person conducting conversations is not safe to work with children	Possible	Major	High risk	All volunteers are screened (including Working with Children checks) and approved
Person/s conducting conversations acts inappropriately towards children	Possible	Major	High risk	All volunteers are trained, work in pairs, sign code of conduct (acknowledging the Church's zero tolerance to harm approach) and overseen
Person/s conducting conversations does not listen to what the children's points of view are	Possible	Negligible	Low risk	Volunteers are skilled for the task and well briefed on the purpose (see <b>Tips for using this listening approach with children</b> )
That a child discloses in group setting, that they are being sexually abused	Possible	Moderate	Medium risk	Volunteers are aware of how to do 'Protective Interrupting' (see <b>Tips for using this listening approach with children</b> )

**Use additional rows to work through other risks in your setting, or for different activities**


# Risk assessment matrix

## Likelihood descriptors

1. RARE	May occur only in exceptional circumstances. It is theoretically possible but increasingly unlikely.
2. UNLIKELY	Is not likely to occur in normal circumstances. You have heard of it happening somewhere once.
3. POSSIBLE	Could occur at some time. You have heard of it happening from time to time.
4. LIKELY	Will probably occur in some circumstances. It might happen on a handful of occasions in your experience.
5. FREQUENT	Can be expected to occur with some frequency. It is not a surprise when it happens.

## Consequence descriptors

1. NEGLIGIBLE	<p><i>The consequence is negligible if any of these factors apply:</i></p> <p><b>Child:</b> Very little impact to the emotional wellbeing or safety of the child, with the child feeling only a bit worried, temporarily upset, and/or very minor or no injury.</p> <p><b>Organisation:</b> There is a very limited chance of reputational impact. It does not make the news.</p>
2. MINOR	<p><i>The consequence is minor if any of these factors apply:</i></p> <p><b>Child:</b> Minor impact on the emotional wellbeing or safety of the child, with the child feeling minor anxiety, requiring first aid, follow-up and/or support.</p> <p><b>Organisation:</b> There is only a low reputational impact. There is only very limited news coverage.</p>
3. MODERATE	<p><i>The consequence is moderate if any of these factors apply:</i></p> <p><b>Child:</b> Moderate impact on the emotional or physical wellbeing or safety of the child, with the child feeling moderate anxiety, requiring follow-up support and/or medical treatment.</p> <p><b>Organisation:</b> It may have some reputational impact. This may include public embarrassment and moderate news coverage.</p>
4. MAJOR	<p><i>The consequence is major if any of these factors apply:</i></p> <p><b>Child:</b> Significant impact on the emotional wellbeing or safety of the child, with the child feeling overwhelmed, requiring police intervention, paramedic or comparable medical/hospital treatment, child is separated from primary care provider, and/or child might be traumatised.</p> <p><b>Organisation:</b> May have major reputational impact. This may include public embarrassment, high news profile and third-party actions.</p>
5. SEVERE	<p><i>The consequence is severe if any of these factors apply:</i></p> <p><b>Child:</b> Hospital admission is required, or significant, severe and ongoing impact on the emotional wellbeing or safety of the child.</p> <p><b>Organisation:</b> May have very severe reputational impact. This may include public embarrassment, high widespread multiple news reports and third-party actions. A fatality or permanent disability to one or more people.</p>

## Risk matrix

		Consequence				
		Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major	Severe
Likelihood	Frequent	Medium	Medium	High	Extreme	Extreme
	Likely	Medium	Medium	High	High	Extreme
	Possible	Low	Medium	Medium	High	High
	Unlikely	Low	Low	Low	Medium	High
	Rare	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium

## Actions to take

<b>Extreme risk</b>	Activity must not proceed as planned. Final approval must be provided by the appropriate Executive responsible for Child Safety Implementation within the Synod after steps are taken to reduce the risk. Identify additional risk control measures then contact Risk and Insurance team for guidance and to request approval to proceed.
<b>High risk</b>	Activity can only proceed if more risk control steps are taken to reduce risk. All steps taken must be documented and review of effectiveness of the controls should happen after the event.
<b>Medium risk</b>	Activity can proceed with risk control steps in place. All steps taken must be documented and review of effectiveness of the controls should happen after the event.
<b>Low risk</b>	Activity can proceed. Routine management procedures should still be in place to minimise the risk of even a minor incident occurring.



# Printable resource

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## Tips for listening

### Listening approach with children & young people

Creating an environment where children feel safe to express what they want, how they feel and what's affecting them is an essential part of creating a culture of safety.

- Your main role is to LISTEN and recognise that children are experts of their own lives
- Work with children in small groups, being mindful of their age
- Start a conversation about your chosen topic, one topic at a time:
  - Explain 'I want to understand how things are for you and your hopes and wishes in the future'
  - Ask the children to write or draw to describe how the topic area is right now for them
  - Encourage them to talk about good things and what they'd change
  - Collect the children's views and keep them informed about how their input has been used, and how it has impacted the planning and/or programming of future activities
- See also the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency's [Child's Voice booklet](#) for more tips
- Be prepared to ensure children's safety and prevent a child disclosing in front of other children by providing them with the opportunity to disclose in a safe and confidential manner.  
The West Australian Department of Education provides these steps for Protective Interrupting:
  - Interrupt the child by acknowledging them and preventing further disclosure e.g.
    - Be supportive and gently indicate that the child can talk privately.
    - Arrange to see the child as soon as possible.
    - Listen attentively in a private location and reassure the child that disclosing was the right thing to do.

- If abuse is disclosed, explain to the child that because they are being harmed you need to make sure they are safe and gain some help for them. Do not promise the child you will keep it secret.
- Reassure the child that the abuse was not their fault.
- Explain what is likely to happen next.
- Report the abuse as soon as possible.
- Keep them informed about ongoing processes, and outcomes.

### Listening approach with adults

Adults working with children also need to ensure feedback processes are in place for parents and guardians. Feedback collection needs to be quick and accessible, so that parents can be actively engaged in their child's experiences.

- Your main role is to LISTEN and gather the opinions and feedback of participants. Understanding that parents play a significant role in their children's lives, respect the views of participants.
- Work with participants in small groups and start a conversation about your topic
  - Inform participants about why you're seeking their feedback, and what you intend to do with the information they give you
  - Ask the participants to either write or talk about their suggestions
  - Be as creative as you like and encourage participation and innovation
  - Collect the participants' views
  - Provide feedback to participants about the outcomes of the consultation.

***Please make use of the poster & flyer overleaf in your Church environment with children to reassure them that it's okay to express themselves.***

# Printable resource

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## Poster

# Printable resource

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## Flyer

# Printable resource

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## Example feedback sheet for children & young people

# Printable resource

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## Example feedback sheet for adults

