



A brief guide to the Final Report: Children and young people

The Final Report contains information about child sexual abuse that may be distressing. We also advise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers that information in the report may have been provided by, or refer to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are deceased.

About this guide

This guide explains how information is organised in the 17-volume Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. It is designed for those working with children and young people, to explain the work of the Royal Commission and help them quickly find relevant information. This guide focuses on our conclusions about making institutions child safe.

A complete list of volumes and related reports is on page 12 of this guide.

LANGUAGE GUIDE

Victims and survivors

We use the words ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ to describe someone who has been sexually abused as a child. We recognise that some people prefer ‘survivor’ because of the resilience and empowerment associated with the term while for others the term ‘victim’ is more appropriate.

Institutions

An ‘institution’ refers to any entity that provides activities or services, through which it has contact with children. An ‘institutional context’ could be anything from foster care, a school or a childcare centre to a church youth camp or a sports club.

Grooming

Grooming occurs when a person tries to form a bond or a friendship with a child, to gain their trust and create opportunities to start, maintain and hide their sexual abuse of the victim.



About our inquiry

All children are vulnerable to sexual abuse in institutional contexts. This Royal Commission looked at institutions' responses to such abuse. We heard from thousands of people who had been sexually abused as children while in an institution. We also heard from experts, governments, services and other interested people.

The Final Report brings together what the Royal Commission has learned during our five-year inquiry. It sets out what we heard, our conclusions and our recommendations to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in institutions.

We received information for our inquiry from three main sources – private sessions, public hearings and our policy and research program.

Private sessions

In private sessions, survivors spoke confidentially to one or more Commissioners about their experience of child sexual abuse in an institution. Survivors were offered counselling and other forms of support before, during and after their private session.

By listening to survivors, we heard about lifelong impacts of child sexual abuse as well as about sources of strength and resilience. We also gathered information about how institutions responded when they received information about abuse.

Between May 2013 and May 2017, we heard about the experiences of **6,875** survivors in private sessions.



FURTHER DETAIL

Throughout the Final Report, we use survivors' own words to give real-world examples of some of the concerns we have identified. To make sure private sessions remain confidential, we do not use survivors' real names or any information that could identify them.

Volume 5, *Private sessions* summarises key themes from the information survivors gave us in private sessions. Chapter 4 'Children and young people' focuses on what we heard from survivors aged under 25 years at the time of their private session.

Public hearings

We held 57 public hearings, each focussing on particular institutions' response to allegations of child sexual abuse. Case studies were carefully chosen for public hearings so that our inquiry covered a variety of institution types – including schools, sports clubs, church organisations, out-of-home care providers – in cities and towns across Australia.

Information about our public hearings is available online, including lists of witnesses, the documents we examined as well as our case study reports. Visit www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Policy and research

The Royal Commission also gathered information through its policy and research program.

For our policy work, we consulted widely with many people including survivors and their supporters, governments, institutions and experts, inviting them to express their views at roundtables and contribute to issues papers and consultation papers.

Young people participated in our policy roundtables and in consultations we held across Australia, including some in youth detention and out-of-home care settings. From these, we were better able to understand what young people think about safety, including online safety and what institutions need to do to make them feel safe.

We also commissioned the following four studies where researchers spoke directly with children and young people about safety in institutions:

- *Taking us seriously: Children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns* conducted by the Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
- *Safe and sound: Exploring the safety of young people in residential care* conducted by the Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
- *Our safety counts: Children and young people's perceptions of safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns* conducted by the Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University
- *Feeling safe, being safe: What is important to children and young people with disability and high support needs about safety in institutional settings?* Conducted by the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University.

The Royal Commission's published research and policy papers are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au



FURTHER DETAIL

Volume 1, *Our inquiry* contains information about how we conducted private sessions, public hearings, and our policy and research program.



What we learned from survivors

Of the **6,875** survivors we heard about in private sessions up to and including 31 May 2017, **285** were aged under 25 years. In some cases, parents, carers and support people attended a private session to tell us about a young person's experience.

About survivors aged under 25 years at the time of their private session

Of the **285** children and young people we heard about in private sessions:

- almost the same proportion were male (**50.2** per cent) as female (**49.8** per cent)
- **15.4** per cent identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander survivors
- **15.8** per cent had disability at the time of the abuse
- over half (**50.5** per cent) were under 18 at the time of their private session.



Key themes

Experience of abuse

In private sessions we often heard about the type of abuse experienced, the institutions where it happened and the roles held by the people who abused the child. Of those who gave us information:

- **86.7** per cent said they were abused by males
- **78.0** per cent said they were abused multiple times
- more than one-third (**35.4** per cent) told us they experienced sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care
- more than a quarter (**27.4** per cent) said they were sexually abused in a school
- one in five (**20.6** per cent) described being groomed for sexual contact
- **5.5** per cent described experiences of sexual exploitation, where they were made to engage in sexual activity in return for things such as money, drugs or accommodation.

In Volume 2, *Nature and cause* we examine how and why institutional child sexual abuse occurs. Some of the main discussions relate to:

- **extent of abuse in institutions** – while limitations on data exist, we have gathered information from a wide range of sources
- **institutional risk factors** – including the types of activities and services provided, leadership and organisational culture, and approaches to governance and day-to-day operations
- **factors that reduce risks to children** – including supportive adults and peers, strong community connections, and an adequate understanding of appropriate sexual behaviour.



FURTHER DETAIL

Volume 2, *Nature and cause* includes a recommendation to conduct regular national prevalence studies about child maltreatment in institutional and non-institutional contexts.

Wellbeing

In private sessions, children and young people said that as a result of the sexual abuse they had gone from being happy or independent to being frightened, angry and anxious. Of the **76.8** per cent of children and young people who described at least one impact of being sexually abused:

- **90.9** per cent told us they experienced mental health issues
- almost half said that their education was affected, for some this was temporary and for others, more long term.

In Volume 3, *Impacts* we discuss what we learned about the effects of child sexual abuse and institutional responses on victims, their families and the broader community. From private sessions, public hearings and research, we identified impacts for survivors of all ages, including:

- **ongoing mental health issues** – which may occur over the short or long term and include low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and alcohol and drug abuse
- **difficulties with interpersonal relationships** – survivors may be less willing to trust others and struggle to form and maintain relationships as a partner, parent or friend
- **lower education, employment and economic outcomes** – impacts on education and mental health may influence future job prospects.



FURTHER DETAIL

Chapter 2 'Understanding impacts' in Volume 3 describes how impacts can be different for each individual, and can change over time. This chapter also describes the sources of strength and resilience that survivors draw on to help them to cope with, and manage, these impacts.

Chapter 5 'Ripple effects' in Volume 3 discusses the broader impacts of child sexual abuse on victims' families, communities and, ultimately, the nation – socially and economically.



Disclosing the abuse

In private sessions we heard about children and young people's experiences of disclosure, including how disclosure was facilitated and the barriers they faced. Survivors and their families also described institutional responses to disclosures.

Many survivors said that speaking up about what happened to them was a gradual process that often involved a number of smaller disclosures rather than a one-off event.

In private sessions about children and young people, **70.9** per cent mentioned the person they first told about their abuse. Of these:

- **53.5** per cent told us they first disclosed to a parent
- **23.3** per cent said they told a person in authority inside the institution where the abuse had occurred
- **21.8** per cent said they told police.

In Volume 4, *Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse* we discuss factors that influence disclosure and barriers to disclosure. Early disclosure is important – it can mark the end of the abuse and the beginning of recovery. It may also reduce the ongoing risk to other potential victims.

This volume looks at ways to support children to speak out about sexual abuse, including the importance of:

- **educational support** – including access to sexual abuse prevention programs and appropriate tools to communicate abuse
- **safe, accessible support networks** – including adults and peer groups where children and young people feel able to openly discuss sexual abuse.



FURTHER DETAIL

Chapter 3 'Recognising disclosure and identifying abuse' in Volume 4 discusses disclosures made in childhood, including indirect or accidental disclosures, and identifying signs that a child may be subject to sexual abuse.

What we learned about making institutions safer

We discuss what we learned about how to make institutions safer for children in Volumes 6, 7 and 8. Together, these volumes explain how institutions could better prevent, identify, respond to and report institutional child sexual abuse. They recognise that protecting children is everyone's responsibility, and look at the role that communities, institutions, governments and individuals should play to create child safe institutions.

Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe* makes recommendations covering:

- **creating child safe communities** – a national strategic approach to preventing child sexual abuse
- **online safety** – improving children's digital safety and the way institutions respond to online abuse
- **improved regulation and oversight** – introducing a national approach to monitoring and enforcing child safe standards
- **Child Safe Standards** – introducing 10 standards to provide benchmarks for institutions that work with children (see diagram on page 7).



FURTHER DETAIL

Section 3.4 'Understanding Child Safe Standards' in Volume 6 describes how we developed each of the 10 recommended standards. The discussion of Standard 2: Children's participation and empowerment, looks at ways to better listen to children's concerns and facilitate their contribution to institutional decision making.

Chapter 5 'Preventing and responding to online child sexual abuse in institutions' in Volume 6 focuses on the more recent challenges to child safety posed by the online environment.



Volume 7, *Improving institutional responding and reporting* examines how children, families, staff and volunteers make child sexual abuse complaints to institutions and how institutions report these complaints to external government authorities. In this volume, we propose measures to improve institutional responses in relation to:

- **complaint handling policies and procedures** – to empower individuals to raise complaints and for these complaints to be taken seriously
- **external reporting** – by increasing education and training on reporting requirements and introducing nationally consistent mandatory reporting schemes
- **complaint handling oversight** – introducing independent nationally consistent schemes to oversight institutional complaint handling.



FURTHER DETAIL

In Chapter 3 'Improving institutional responses to complaints of child sexual abuse' in Volume 7 we discuss the role of Child Safe Standards in improving complaints processes and the importance of child focused complaint handling policies.



- 1 Child safety is embedded in institutional leadership, governance and culture.
- 2 Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.
- 3 Families and communities are informed and involved.
- 4 Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account.
- 5 People working with children are suitable and supported.
- 6 Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused.
- 7 Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through ongoing education and training.
- 8 Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.
- 9 Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.
- 10 Policies and procedures document how the institution is child safe.



What we learned about supporting survivors

Volume 9, *Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services* discusses the barriers children may face when seeking help and how services can be more responsive to the needs of victims and survivors. It includes discussion about the importance of:

- **meeting children's individual needs** – treatment and support should be trauma-informed, appropriate for a child's age, development and culture, and delivered by qualified professionals
- **working effectively with caregivers** – by engaging parents, carers and family members in the child's treatment and support
- **improving understanding of trauma in children's everyday contexts** – so that the institutions children use every day offer supportive environments.

This volume recommends that Australian governments fund support services for victims and survivors and establish a national centre to reduce stigma, promote help-seeking and support good practice.



FURTHER DETAIL

In Chapter 2, 'The need for advocacy and support and therapeutic treatment services' and Chapter 4 'Barriers to help-seeking and effective service responses' in Volume 9, we provide information about the particular support needs of children who have experienced sexual abuse and the difficulties they may face when seeking help.

Volume 8, *Recordkeeping and information sharing* looks at records, recordkeeping and information sharing of institutions that care for or provide services to children. It describes how these practices can be improved to better protect children from sexual abuse in institutions.

This volume includes recommendations for:

- **best practice records and recordkeeping** – to address the need to keep and maintain full and accurate records on matters relating to child safety and wellbeing
- **strengthening information sharing** – developing a national approach to help better identify, prevent and respond to incidents and risks of child sexual abuse across institutions and jurisdictions.



FURTHER DETAIL

In Chapter 2 'Records and recordkeeping' in Volume 8 we examine the role of records in promoting child safety.

In Chapter 3 'Improving information sharing across sectors', also in Volume 8, we look at ways to strengthen information sharing to better protect children.



What we learned about children with harmful sexual behaviours

Volume 10, *Children with harmful sexual behaviours* looks at harmful sexual behaviours in children. The term ‘harmful sexual behaviours’ covers a broad spectrum of behaviours, from developmentally-inappropriate behaviours to criminal behaviours such as sexual assault. This volume discusses:

- **differing treatment needs** – children with harmful sexual behaviours are different to adult perpetrators of child sexual abuse and require specific, tailored responses
- **information from private sessions** – of all survivors under 25 at the time of the private session who provided information about the person who abused them, 42.9 per cent told us they were sexually abused by another child.



FURTHER DETAIL

Chapter 4 ‘Improving responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours’ and Chapter 5 ‘Tertiary interventions for children’s harmful sexual behaviours’ in Volume 10 contain our recommendations about children with harmful sexual behaviours including the need for early intervention and specialist assessment and treatment services.

What we learned about different types of institutions

In Volumes 11 to 16 we describe what we learned about child sexual abuse and responses to it, in six institutional settings:

- historical residential institutions
- contemporary out-of-home care
- schools
- sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups
- contemporary detention environments
- religious institutions.



FURTHER DETAIL

Volume 11, *Historical residential institutions* looks at the experiences of children in residential institutions prior to 1990.

Volumes 12 – 16 look at what specific types of institutions should do to implement Child Safe Standards to better protect children.



Beyond the Royal Commission



Since we started our inquiry, community awareness has grown about the failure of many trusted institutions to protect children from sexual abuse.

With the handover of the Final Report to government, our work is complete.

Governments and institutions are now responsible for responding to the Royal Commission's recommendations and delivering the changes that the community has come to expect.

We have asked the Australian Government and state and territory governments to respond to this report within six months of its release. In their response, governments should tell the community which of our recommendations they plan to act on and which they do not.

As real change will take some time, we have also asked that every year for the next five years all Australian governments submit a report to their parliaments that shows their progress towards implementing our recommendations.



FURTHER DETAIL

Volume 17, *Beyond the Royal Commission*, describes the impact of the Royal Commission and processes to implement our recommendations.

Why words are important

Those who have experienced child sexual abuse have told us that language matters. The words used to describe the abuse and its victims can silence survivors and invite shame or guilt. When used well, words can help survivors feel understood and more powerful.

We have provided definitions for some key words and phrases that are used in the Final Report on page 1 of this guide. A more detailed list is provided in the Glossary in Volume 1, *Our inquiry*.

Reading the Final Report

How the Final Report is structured

The Final Report includes a preface and executive summary and 17 volumes.

Each volume is designed to be read on its own. To help readers understand how each volume relates to the rest of the Final Report, every volume points to relevant information in other volumes. For example, a reader of Volume 13, *Schools* will come across references to other volumes such as Volume 6, *Making institutions child safe*.

Each volume provides an overview of the entire report, including:

- a complete list of all volumes and their titles
- a brief summary of the main topics covered in each volume.

Also in the Final Report

Terms of Reference

In our Terms of Reference, the Australian Government set out the Royal Commission's task. They are published in full in Volume 1, *Our inquiry* and are also available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Preface and executive summary

The Preface and executive summary provides an outline of the Final Report and features a summary of the main themes of each volume. It also includes a complete list of the Royal Commission's 409 recommendations.

Survivors' accounts

With permission, we have published a selection of narratives based on survivors' accounts as told to us in private sessions as an online appendix to Volume 5, *Private sessions*. These narratives do not contain any information that could identify individual survivors.

Accessing the Final Report

The Final Report is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au
Printed copies of the report may be viewed in a number of libraries across Australia.

Our other final reports

Our *Working With Children Checks* report (2015) makes recommendations to strengthen the Working with Children Checks schemes in Australia.

Our *Redress and civil litigation* report (2015) makes recommendations about a national redress scheme for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

Our *Criminal justice* report (2017) examines criminal justice responses to child sexual abuse and recommends ways the criminal justice system can be more effective for victims and survivors.

Four fact sheets covering the key themes of our *Criminal justice* report are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Other guides in the series

This guide is one of four developed to meet the interests of different audiences. The other guides are:

- *A brief guide to the Final Report*
- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*
- *A brief guide to the Final Report: Disability.*

All guides are available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

ABOUT THE USE OF PRIVATE SESSIONS INFORMATION IN THIS GUIDE

When writing this guide, we used information from private sessions that were held between May 2013 and May 2017.

The Final Report has been published with a separate fact sheet with updated information from private sessions held between May 2013 and November 2017.

The fact sheet is available online at www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au

Complete volume list

	<i>Preface and executive summary</i> – includes a summary of each volume and a complete list of all recommendations.
Volume 1	<i>Our inquiry</i> – introduces the Final Report and describes the establishment, scope and operations of the Royal Commission.
Volume 2	<i>Nature and cause</i> – describes what the Royal Commission learned about the nature and cause of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts.
Volume 3	<i>Impacts</i> – explains the impacts of child sexual abuse in institutional contexts on survivors and often their family members, friends, and entire communities.
Volume 4	<i>Identifying and disclosing child sexual abuse</i> – describes what we learned about survivors’ experiences of disclosing child sexual abuse.
Volume 5	<i>Private sessions</i> – describes survivors’ experiences of child sexual abuse as told to Commissioners during private sessions.
Volume 6	<i>Making institutions child safe</i> – outlines a national strategy for child sexual abuse prevention and proposes child safe standards including how institutions may implement them.
Volume 7	<i>Improving institutional responding and reporting</i> – looks at institutions’ responses to complaints of child sexual abuse and how they report these matters to external government authorities.
Volume 8	<i>Recordkeeping and information sharing</i> – examines the records, recordkeeping and information sharing of institutions that care for or provide services to children.
Volume 9	<i>Advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment services</i> – looks at what we learned about survivors’ needs in terms of advocacy, support and treatment and offers recommendations for improving service systems to better respond to survivors’ needs.
Volume 10	<i>Children with harmful sexual behaviours</i> – examines what we learned about institutional responses to children with harmful sexual behaviours.
Volume 11	<i>Historical residential institutions</i> – describes what we learned about survivors’ experiences of, and institutional responses to child sexual abuse in residential institutions, pre-1990.
Volume 12	<i>Contemporary out-of-home care</i> – examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary out-of-home care.
Volume 13	<i>Schools</i> – describes what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in schools.
Volume 14	<i>Sport, recreation, arts, culture, community and hobby groups</i> – looks at what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in sport and recreation contexts.
Volume 15	<i>Contemporary detention environments</i> – reviews what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in contemporary detention environments.
Volume 16	<i>Religious institutions</i> – examines what we learned about institutional responses to child sexual abuse in religious institutions.
Volume 17	<i>Beyond the Royal Commission</i> – describes the impact and legacy of the Royal Commission and discusses monitoring and reporting on the implementation of our recommendations.
Other reports	<i>Working With Children Checks</i> <i>Redress and civil litigation</i> <i>Criminal justice</i>

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