

# Understanding sexual behaviours displayed by children and young people – National principles and terminology

## – yourtown's advocacy submission



## What is it about?

The National Office for Child Safety have released a draft document – Understanding sexual behaviours displayed by children and young people: National principles and terminology (the national principles). The draft sets out principles to guide a national approach for supporting children and young people in their sexual development. They will guide future work on children displaying concerning or harmful sexual behaviours, ensuring there is a focus on prevention and promoting early responses and intervention when concerning or harmful sexual behaviours have been identified to prevent escalation or future harm.

## Why is it important?

**yourtown** supports the development of foundational principles to underpin a national policy approach in preventing, identifying, and responding to harmful sexual behaviours displayed by children and welcomes the right-based approach that underpins the draft principles. We welcome the approach of ensuring that children who have displayed concerning or harmful sexual behaviours should obtain a proportionate and supportive response, including therapeutic support. We also concur with the intent of the national principles to not minimise the impact of harmful sexual behaviours, nor negate the need for criminal justice, support for survivors of sexual abuse, child protection, and other statutory interventions.

## Some of **yourtown's** key messages:

### **1. The national principles will need to be accompanied by future specific work for for organisations to effectively implement the principles**

Future specific work includes national workforce, sector and population specific guidelines/standards for preventing, intervening early and responding to concerning and harmful sexual behaviours; and a National Clinical and Therapeutic Framework for responding to children and young people who have displayed concerning and harmful sexual behaviours. Organisations will need to take responsibility for how the principles translate into their organisational context and to adhere to upcoming guidelines/standards and frameworks.

### **2. yourtown supports the addition of a principle that focuses on culturally accessible and safe support**

**yourtown** believes it is important to recognise the diversity of cultures in Australia by adding a principle that focuses on culturally accessible and safe support. The Royal Commission found that children from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds were more likely to encounter circumstances that increased their risk of abuse in institutions, reduced their ability to disclose or report abuse and, if they did disclose or report, reduced their chances of receiving an adequate response. The Royal Commission noted that it is imperative for assessment tools and interventions to consider cultural context for children and young people from CALD backgrounds and for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people. These findings should be reflected in the national principles.

### **3. The principles should include reference to the physical and psychological health of the young person, as well as to their safety and wellbeing**

While a public health approach underpins the principles, there is no express reference to health or mental health under the principles (except under Principle 5 and reference to culturally competent sexual healthcare). It is recommended that given the detrimental immediate and long-term impacts of harmful sexual behaviours upon a young person's physical and mental health, Principle 2 should also include reference to the physical and psychological health of the young person, as well as to their safety and wellbeing.

**READ YOURTOWN'S FULL SUBMISSION**

