

EMPOWERING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE TO “TELL”

Reporting processes need to be mindful of the considerable power imbalance between the child or young person involved in a complaint, and the adults involved in managing the reporting process and the alleged perpetrator.

Researchers agree that a significant proportion of child abuse is undisclosed and unreported to authorities (Australian Institute of Family Studies 2014).

The decision for children and young people to speak up requires enormous courage. For some, the pain is too great and they feel unable to ever tell another person; while others may wait months, years or decades before they disclose.

Measures to empower children and young people to “tell” are required to facilitate and support the reporting of concerns, allegations or complaints.

Possible strategies may include:

- Acknowledge that children and young people have a voice and deserve to be listened to and taken seriously when they raise concerns, make a complaint or an allegation.
- Provide information in child-friendly language about how to raise concerns and where concerns should be directed.
- Explain to children and young people making a report, the steps that will be undertaken in addressing a concern or complaint.
- Remind the child or young person that it is OK to ask questions about the process or if they do not understand what is being said.
- Ensure that the child or young person has a support adult present or available.
- Ensure that the person(s) handling the report (e.g. investigator) has experience in working with children and young people, understands children’s ages and stages of development, and is able to communicate in a manner that is encouraging and supportive of the child or young person (e.g. allowing extra time, providing a comfortable environment).
- Where appropriate, with parental or carer involvement keep the child or young person informed about the progress of an investigation and its outcome.

A survivor/victim of childhood sexual abuse recently disclosed their abuse after 60 years. He had never told anyone, including his wife and children. He mentioned that he had carried his experience around with him every day of his life since he was abused.