



Safe at early childhood education and care

A guide for parents and carers using early childhood education and care. This booklet helps you understand what good care looks like, what to ask, and how to speak up when something does not feel right.

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About the authors

Body Safety Australia promotes childhoods free from violence where children enjoy equitable and respectful relationships.

We deliver evidence-based programs to children, young people, families and communities to help prevent violence towards children in the home and school environments, offline and online.

Find out more at www.bodysafetyaustralia.com.au

GenWest works to prevent and respond to family and gender based violence in Melbourne's west.

We support people and communities to live safe and healthy lives through social and health education programs.

We also support adults and children experiencing family violence to stay safe and get the help they need.

Find out more at genwest.org.au

Types of care and safe providers

Children are safest when adults know what good care looks like. This chapter explains the types of early childhood education and care (childcare) and what you can expect.

Types of care

TYPE OF	WHAT IS IT	WHAT IT INVOLVES
Long Day	A centre your child goes to most days.	Care from morning until late afternoon. Children eat, play, learn and rest there, usually with other children of similar ages. The educators are qualified.
Family Day Care	Care in a small home setting with a registered educator.	Children are cared for in a small group, usually with mixed ages. The educators are qualified.
Sessional Programs/ Occasional Care	Care for a few hours or days, not every day.	Short term programs, sometimes at a centre or community space. Often small groups with mixed ages. The educators are qualified.
Relative Care	Care at home by a family member.	Children are cared for in a familiar home environment. Parents should make sure boundaries and expectations around safety are clear.

Three things parents can ask

Who will care for my child?

I have the right to meet all educators and know who is with my child.

How do you keep children safe?

I have the right to know what rules you follow and actions you take to protect children.

What if something isn't right?

I have the right to know what happens if something goes wrong or I have a concern.

Toileting & changing



What is appropriate

- Educators give help in a private space.
- They stay calm and gentle and talk to the child.
- They explain what they are doing and why.
- They only touch the child as needed to keep them safe, healthy and clean.
- Children are encouraged to do what they can for themselves.



What is not appropriate

- Adults should not touch the child more than necessary.
- Children should never be left unsupervised while toileting or changing.
- Children should always be in sight of at least two educators.
- Educators should not make the child feel embarrassed, scared or ashamed.
- Children should be able to use a toilet with a door or curtain if they would like privacy.
- Children should be encouraged to wipe their own bottom if they are able.

Tips for parents:

- You have the right to ask how toileting and nappy changing are done.
- You can ask to talk to the educator about routines.
- If you have a concern about an educator's behaviour, you have a right to raise that with the director.

What child safe practice looks like



A good childcare centre:

- Keeps children supervised at all times by at least two qualified adults.
- Has a Child Safety Code of Conduct and follows it.
- Has staff who are qualified, with current Working with Children Checks and up to date child safety training.
- Encourages children to speak up and listens when they do.
- Makes children's safety the important consideration: this means children's needs come first in every decision.
- Is attentive to children's non verbal communication.
- Maintains open communication with parents and is receptive to feedback.
- Displays their quality rating and what they are doing to improve care for children.
- When visiting, parents can look for: attentive staff, safe play spaces, children engaged in activities and clear explanations of routines and safety rules.

New rules to keep children safer in 2026

The National Quality Framework sets out the rules about how childcare centres should run. In 2026 new regulations were introduced to keep children safer. These were introduced in response to recent cases of harm to children in early childhood education and care, including in Melbourne.

1 Children's safety must come first in every decision

'Paramount Consideration' is a new regulation that means that every person working in or running an early childhood education and care service must put children's safety, rights and best interests first in every decision they make. This includes decisions about staffing, supervision and how concerns are responded to.

2 All staff and volunteers must complete child safety training

New regulations say that every person working with your child in childcare must undertake special training on child safety.

3 Personal phones and devices are not allowed around children

Staff are not allowed to have personal phones or devices that can take photos or videos in their possession while working directly with children. Only service approved devices can be used to take photos of children.

4 Inappropriate behaviour around a child is now a serious offence

It is now against the law for any staff member or volunteer to act in a way towards a child that a reasonable person would consider inappropriate. Approved providers and supervisors must make sure no child in their care is exposed to this kind of behaviour. Inappropriate behaviour includes things like kissing children or giving a child special attention or asking children to keep secrets. If you are not sure about an educator's behaviour you have a right to raise concern.

5 Abuse must be reported to the regulator within 24 hours

If there is any incident or allegation of physical or sexual abuse of a child at a service, the service must report it to VECRA within 24 hours. VECRA regulates the childcare sector and can act on concerns quickly.

What this means for parents

You can ask your service how they are putting these rules in place. A safe service will be able to explain.

Photography and image consent in early childhood

In Australia, we talk about consent. Consent means asking for permission before taking or sharing a photo of someone, and listening to their answer.

Children may be photographed in early childhood education and care for learning and documentation. Services must have clear rules about how photos are taken, stored and shared. Staff should use centre approved devices only to take photos of children. Personal phones or personal devices should not be used. Parents are usually asked at enrolment to give consent for photos and videos, including how they can be used or shared. Many services use secure digital platforms to share updates, learning stories and photos with families. Parents also have the right to know how images are stored and who can see them. Parents should not take photos of children in the centre, including their own, to protect all children's privacy.

Here's a quick checklist of questions to ask:

- ✓ How are photos of my child taken?
- ✓ Will you ask for my child's permission before you take their photo?
- ✓ Where are photos of my child stored, and who can access them?
- ✓ How do you make sure photos are not saved on personal phones?
- ✓ Which apps or platforms do you use to share photos and updates?
- ✓ Who can see my child's photos on these platforms?

Parent Script

"When someone wants to take your photo, they should ask you first. You can say yes or no. Your body belongs to you, and photos and videos of you belong to you."



Child sexual abuse material online

Sometimes a person may take or share photos or videos of children that are sexual or harmful. This is a serious crime. It is called child sexual abuse material, or CSAM. When a person tries to get or send these kinds of images of children online, this is also a crime. It is called child sexual exploitation material, or CSEM. If you are worried that something like this has happened to your child, or that someone is trying to do this, you can get help from the eSafety Commissioner at esafety.gov.au, or contact the police.

Male educators

Children are safest when all educators follow clear, respectful routines. Some parents worry about male educators. Safety depends on what adults do, not their gender. This section shows what safe behaviour looks like and what parents can watch for.



Three observable practices



1. Calm and respectful behaviour

- The educator speaks in a calm voice.
- They explain to the child what they are doing.
- Children look comfortable and not scared.



2. Clear boundaries and supervision

- The educator stays where other adults can see them.
- They do not take children to hidden or closed spaces.
- They only touch a child when needed for care or safety, or if the child asks for a hug.
- They do not use personal devices around children.
- They only ask children to do things that are age appropriate.



3. Supporting the child's choice

- The educator helps the child do things on their own.
- They ask or tell the child before helping.
- They ask for consent before taking photos.
- They listen if a child says "no" or shows they are uncomfortable.

Scenarios

Appropriate behaviour

- An educator helps a child wash their hands. He says 'Let's wash your hands now' and stands beside the child. Other children and staff are nearby. The child follows along and seems calm.
- A child is upset at drop off. The educator kneels at the child's level and says 'It is okay to feel sad. Mum will come back later.' He offers the child choices for an activity. The child slowly settles.

Behaviour that may prompt a question:

- An educator picks up a child and carries them to another area without explaining. The child looks upset and tries to get down.
- An educator gives one child a lot of special attention. He often takes this child to a quiet area away from others, brings them toys from home, and gives the child frequent hugs even when the child is busy playing with friends. You notice this and feel unsure.

Unsafe behaviours to watch for



Sometimes adults may try to build 'special' relationships with children. This is not safe.

Parents can watch for:

- Asking a child to keep a secret.
- Giving one child special gifts or much more attention than other children.
- Taking a child away from other adults or children.
- Not following normal rules or routines for a child.
- Seeking the child out for affection.
- Taking excessive or inappropriate photos of children.
- Dismissing other adults' concerns about their behaviour.

Parent Scripts

If something does not feel right, you can ask questions and get support.

"I want to understand how all educators care for children. Can you tell me your rules about touching and supervision?"

"I noticed something today that did not feel right to me. Can you help me understand what happened?"

CHAPTER 3

Speaking up

Children are safest when adults speak up. It can feel hard to ask questions or raise concerns. You may worry about causing conflict. Speaking up is your right. It can keep you, your child and other children safe.

Four steps to raise a concern

1. Notice when something doesn't look or feel right.
2. Speak to an educator about what you noticed.
3. Ask questions and listen to the answer.
4. If you still feel unsure, speak to the director.



DO

- Stay calm and respectful
- Say what you saw or heard
- Choose a quiet time to talk
- Choose a child-free space to talk
- Escalate to the director if needed



DO NOT

- Do not accuse or blame
- Do not raise your voice
- Do not ignore your concern
- Do not forget that child safety comes first
- Do not assume someone else will speak up



Parent Scripts

Speaking to an educator

"I noticed something today that did not feel right to me. Can you help me understand what happened?"

Speaking to a director

"I spoke with an educator about a concern I have, but I still feel unsure. Can we talk about this together?"

If you do not want to be identified you can raise concerns without sharing your name by email or phone and ask to stay anonymous

"Hello, I would like to share a concern about how children are being cared for. I prefer to stay anonymous but I would like you to look into this."

"I am calling to share a concern. I do not want to give my name."

If other parents share the same concern

"A few of us have noticed something and feel unsure. Can you explain how this is usually handled?"

"Some parents have seen children being taken to an area alone. Can you tell us what your rules are for this?"

CHAPTER 4

Norms in Australian early childhood education and care

Children are safest when parents know what is allowed and not allowed in early childhood education and care. Australia has strong rules to keep children safe. These rules may be different from other countries.

Four things parents should know

1

Children must be supervised at all times

3

Parents have the right to ask questions and get clear answers

2

Educators must follow clear standards for how they care for children

4

Children's images and privacy must be protected at all times

Physical affection in childcare

DO

- Gentle care like helping, guiding or comfort hug is okay when a child needs it.
- Educators should ask or check if a child is okay with touch.
- Children with disability might need extra support. They still have a right to agency and safe, respectful touch.

DON'T

- Kissing a child or giving unwanted touch is not okay.

Discipline in childcare

DO

- Educators use calm words, guidance and safe ways to support behaviour.

DON'T

- In Australia, smacking or physical punishment is never allowed in early childhood education and care.
- If you see or hear about smacking or physical punishment, you can speak to the director and ask for an explanation. You can also take the concern further if needed.



Questions parents can ask

- Can you explain your rules about touching children?
- Can you explain how you manage children's unsafe behaviour?
- Can you explain your rules about photo taking and sharing?



GenWest and Body Safety Australia recognise that the land on which we work and provide our services always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

We proudly acknowledge the First Nations communities across Naarm, Melbourne's west, the Wurundjeri and Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their rich diversity, cultures, histories and knowledges, and the deep contribution they make to the life of this region.

We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation, as well as the strength and resilience of First Nations people, and express solidarity with the ongoing struggle for land rights, self determination, sovereignty, and recognition of past injustices.