

Safeguarding and Duty of Care

04

GUIDEBOOK
SECTION

Youth Engagement
in Health Research



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**WELLBEING
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Overview

Safeguarding children and young people under the age of 18 years¹ is everyone's responsibility. Children and young people have the right to be protected from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect.

Researchers, and anyone working with young people have a duty of care to act in the best interests of young people. This includes enabling their participation in research that concerns them. It also means putting proactive measures in place to avoid exposing young people to physical, psychological and emotional harm or injury, and always upholding the principle of 'do not harm.'² Principles of participation and protection should support one another to enhance the role of young people in health research.

If you are engaging directly (e.g. recruiting young people under 18 to be co-researchers, part of a youth advisory group, or solely as research participants) or indirectly (e.g. to take part in a focus group workshop through a partner organisation) with young people under 18 years old, you have a duty of care to ensure that risks are assessed, mitigated and safeguards are put in place to ensure young people are not harmed.

As a researcher, your plan to engage young people under the age of 18 will be outlined in your ethics application and should include details on how you plan to implement free, prior and informed consent. Additionally, you need to continually assess, mitigate and put plans in place which will proactively ensure the safety and wellbeing of young people engaged in your research, as well as ensuring that any incentives cannot be interpreted as coercion.

Ensuring that your research project protects children and young people is much more than having Working with Children Checks. Policies and procedures alone are not enough to keep children safe and well in organisational settings. Please note that in the legal sense child in most countries refers to anyone who is below the legal age on consent. While most policies and procedures use the word child to cover this age group we consider it more respectful if they used child and young people. A child and young person safe organisation is one that creates a culture, adopts strategies and takes action to promote wellbeing for and prevent harm to children and young people.³

A child safe organisation

A child safe organisation consciously and systematically:

- Creates an environment where the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is at the centre of thought, values and actions. This approach takes different capacities of different people into account.
- Places emphasis on genuine engagement with and valuing of children and young people.
- Creates conditions that reduce the likelihood of harm to children and young people.
- Creates conditions that increase the likelihood of identifying any harm.
- Responds to any concerns, disclosures, allegations or suspicions of harm. Researchers under some circumstances may also be mandatory reporters.⁴



Prepare

Child safeguarding and duty of care preparation

Before engaging with young people aged under 18, there are some important steps you and your team need to take to ensure you prepare adequately to create a safe environment for young people.

Use these tools and resources as a starting point to work through key considerations around child safeguarding and duty of care.

- [Checklist: Safeguarding Young People](#)

Further information on child safeguarding in Australia

- [Child Safe](#)
- [State/Territory information](#)



Connect

Throughout your research project, it is important to continually check in and reiterate practices and processes which create a safe environment for all young people, and especially young people under 18 years of age.

Throughout your engagement with young people, you and your team need to consider your own ethical practices and responsibilities. Your institution should have standard procedures around ethics applications.

Further resources

- [Tips: Creating a Safe Environment](#)
- [Tool: Applying Duty of Care to Key Research Activities](#)
- [How to look after your wellbeing tool for young researchers](#)
- [Key Ethical Considerations for Research with Young People, CRIS Consortium](#)
- [Key Areas for Ethical Consideration, Ethical Research Involving Children](#)
- [Enabling Participation guide, Young and Well CRC](#)
- [Code of Ethics, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria](#)

Reflect



Debriefing

After any engagement activity it is important to debrief with young people (individually and/or collectively), with young people and researchers/team members together, and also separately with your research team (and other adults involved).

Consider what worked well, what you could improve and any other feedback on the experience. Allow extra time to do this.

In a scenario where a young person becomes distressed, an individual debriefing with this young person needs to occur. If this happens, also take care to think about your own boundaries and limits of expertise. Show empathy and care, but also consider what are the best supports you can connect that young person with.

Applying the WH&Y framework: reflection questions

Mutual trust & accountability

How is power balanced between young people and adults
Do all members of your team have a shared understanding of their duty of care towards young people?

Equity & responsiveness

Are there any gaps in your current policies, procedures and practice in relation to child and young person safeguarding and duty of care? If so, consider reaching out to established youth-facing organisations for advice.

Diversity & inclusion

How does the culture of your project and organisation create an environment where and young person safeguarding is regularly discussed and reflected on with young people and adults alike?



Footnotes

¹This age may vary between countries. Note that this resource has been developed with the Australian context in mind.
² P9, The Code of Ethical Practice, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, p9. Accessed 01/2023. <https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/The-Code-of-Ethical-Practice.pdf>
³ Child Safe Organisations, Australian Government. Accessed 02/2023. <https://childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/about/what-child-safe-organisation>
⁴ Child Safe Organisations, Australian Government. Accessed 02/2023. <https://childsafe.humanrights.gov.au/about/what-child-safe-organisation>
⁵ The Code of Ethical Practice, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. Accessed 01/2023. <https://www.yacvic.org.au/training-and-services/code-of-ethical-practice/>