

Healing our children and young people: A framework to address the impacts of domestic and family violence



Centre of Excellence



ChildProtectionPeak

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Suggested citation

Morgan, G., Butler, C., French, R., Creamer, T., Hillan, L., Ruggiero, E., Parsons, J., Prior, G., Idagi, L., Bruce, R., Twist, A., Gray, T., Hostalek, M., Gibson, J., Mitchell, B., Lea, T., Miller, C., Lemson, F., Bogdanek, S., ... Cahill, A. (2023). *Healing our children and young people: A framework to address the impacts of domestic and family violence* (Insights 01/2023). ANROWS.



About this framework

Our framework is drawn from our own evidence and knowledge on what works to support our children and young people and their families to heal from experiences of violence.

Unfortunately our communities experience violence as an ongoing impact of colonisation. It is difficult to respond to this impact when government systems often dictate how we respond to domestic and family violence (DFV) in our communities. This includes a lack of acknowledgement that violence was embedded to control our communities during settlement and colonisation and has resulted in long-lasting intergenerational impacts that are significant contributors to the prevalence and occurrence of DFV today.

Our framework understands this history and is designed to provide practical understanding of how to respond to and heal violence in the lives of our children, to ensure that we can break the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

It is based on our belief and ancient knowledge that we can heal ourselves and our minds and bring our children, young people and families back to a place of peace. It recognises our deep kinship ties and how we act as family to collectively strengthen each other to succeed.

We were motivated to create this framework for our children, drawing on the stories of courage and resilience that were shared with us in how children and young people have protected and kept themselves safe when experiencing violence in their lives.

The framework also recognises the strength of our families who shared their childhood experiences of violence in the hope to bring about change for future generations. It is designed to elevate the voice of our children and young people not only in drawing from their experience, but it also provides the clear means and ability to continue to hear our children's voices and ensure that they are at the centre and heart of all responses going forward.

We place children at the centre which means practitioners and policy makers both need to shift from focusing on adults primarily to focusing on impacts on children and young people due to adult behaviours.

What we hope to achieve

We want to provide a strong understanding of the important processes and responses that need to be funded and supported to ensure our children have the best means to break the cycle of violence in their lives and not be consigned to more negative intervention in their lives. This includes the need for systems and policymakers to provide equitable access to resourcing and changes to policy to support this framework to be enacted fully in communities for our children and families.

This framework has been designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to decolonise practice and to be enabled to develop strong cultural practice for our children and families.

It can also be utilised to support our families and communities in having discussions around how to address DFV. The framework could also be used by any service that is working to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to heal as guidance to creating changed pathways.

Ultimately, we want to change the narrative of our children and families being viewed through a deficit lens and ensure that our collective wisdom enables a new healing narrative to prevail that recognises that healing is both restorative and preventative, that change is possible and achievable, if they are provided the right responses and resourcing.

This requires governments to change how they design and commission services to uphold our children and young people's rights to be able to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma in their lives and to live free from violence. Our children's cultural and human rights must be at the forefront of service design and investment that is re-imagined realising real change and better futures for our children.

How should you use it?

The framework provides key actions and ideas to reflect on to embed the pillars within your work. It also provides links to some resources to support people in both increasing understanding in how to respond effectively to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, but also the means to support action.

The framework is designed to be implemented locally and support a place-based response, so that each local community can ensure that cultural protocols and knowledge are used to embed the pillars within work across the community. How each place will embed the framework will be different dependent on how colonisation has impacted the community, the resources and services available to respond and the ways of working that each community has established.

Key questions are also provided for government to support their role in being able to support the implementation of this framework in both policy and systemic change required to enable it.

All these dimensions in the framework must be attended to for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to be safe. Unfortunately, child protection practice often only responds to the limited dimensions of physical and emotional safety for children and young people exposed to DFV.

Primarily the framework is based on assisting communities to construct safe and strong relationships. It is designed for us to model and provide consistency for our children and families in the ways to live their lives in healthy and sustained ways.

Embedded in the framework is trauma informed evidence that supports both a compassionate and empowering approach that is strengths based. This is driven from a deep understanding of the resilience, courage, and strength evident in our families' histories. This means that we should never approach supporting families with a deficit lens and instead models of support must identify the strengths and build from there.



Our evidence

Our research papers, *New Ways for Our Families* and *You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup*, found that to develop a culturally strong practice framework to respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experience DFV and achieve change, the following areas need to be addressed:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have to be at the heart of all decisions and practices.
- Response to DFV in regional and remote contexts must occur within a culturally strong framework that considers the cultural, spiritual, emotional and physical needs of children and their families.
- Breaking the cycle of DFV in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people requires education – education for our children and young people about healthy relationships, and education for our women, men and communities about the impact of DFV on children and young people.
- Responses to DFV in the lives of families living in regional and remote parts of Queensland must acknowledge the significant challenges that have to be overcome to secure women's and children's safety. These challenges include immense poverty, social deprivation and limited access to secure housing or food. These challenges are exacerbated by a service system that has failed over successive generations to provide adequate resources or responses to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to heal.
- We must move beyond an incident-response framework dictated to by child protection systems and be resourced to build strengths in our community to address DFV in a holistic way.
- Access to support at the right time is vital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and families to address DFV.
- Healing is central to change: an understanding of trauma informs us, but healing approaches will transform us, breaking the cycles of trauma in which our children and young people are caught.
- The safety of children and young people is non-negotiable, including the need for safe people, safe places, and safe narratives to talk about their experiences.

Ultimately what our research recognised was a need to *move to child-centred practice*. As detailed by Race and O'Keefe:

Child-centred practice means giving priority to the needs and welfare of the child, promoting their right to participate in the process of assessment and decision-making that consume[s] professional time and energy. It involves listening to children, building relationships with them, spending time to respond to their questions and enabling them to express their views. It is about seeing the world through their eyes, understanding what their day-to-day lived experience is really like. In complex situations in which the safety of the child may be compromised due to the problems of their parents, it means supporting the family whilst never losing sight of the needs and rights of the child.¹

Given children and young people most often experience violence within their families and communities, healing parents is a critical first step to healing children. Our research has demonstrated the need for a healing-oriented system that is both parent-focused and child-centred. This recognises both the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, as well as those primarily responsible for creating safe and strong environments: their parents, family, and communities.

Until Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's voices and experiences of DFV are heard loudly and clearly, and are continuously sought by their communities, systems and practitioners, no change will occur to support them to heal from the impacts of DFV on their lives.

¹ Race, T., & O'Keefe, R. (2017). *Child-centred practice: A handbook for social work*. Bloomsbury Publishing: 3–4.

The research outlined a means to achieve this through the design of this healing framework. The framework seeks to work across all dimensions of safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including their physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual safety, to ensure that they are holistically and developmentally cared for in their recovery. At the heart of this is the strength of cultural connection and identity.²

Principles

To support implementation of this framework we recognise that a clear principled approach is required. These principles are drawn from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values that guide our work with our children, young people, families and communities.

- We recognise the strengths of our community.
- Children and young people are at the heart of our practice and decisions.
- We commit to holistic service provision – our children and families have “no wrong door” as cultural connection is at the heart of our work.
- We know that our children and young people’s social and emotional wellbeing comes from their family so supporting families to be strong and healthy is vital.
- We act with compassion because we understand the impacts of trauma.
- We value our families’ rights including their right to privacy and safety in information sharing.
- Authenticity and honesty are at the heart of all of our work.
- Our work embodies the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placement principles – prevention, participation, connection, partnership and placement to the standard of active efforts – so it is timely, thorough and responsive.
- We provide support to children and families across the life course.
- We value relationships.
- We promote safe and respectful relationships.
- We will ensure that our children and families are able to question and review all services offered to them.
- We embrace a message of hope and optimism that healing is possible.
- We will fight to ensure our children’s and families’ rights are upheld.

What is healing?

“If we’re focused on children and we’re looking at healing children, then it’s actually listening to the children and responding and being seen to act where those children consent. I know that sounds very simplistic and basic, but it doesn’t actually happen enough.” (Cycle 4 external network)

Healing, as described by the Healing Foundation:

is not an outcome or a cure but a process; a process that is unique to each individual. It enables individuals,

2 Morgan, G., Butler, C., French, R., Creamer, T., Hillan, L., Ruggiero, E., Parsons, J., Prior, G., Idagi, L., Bruce, R., Gray, T., Jia, T., Hostalek, M., Gibson, J., Mitchell, B., Lea, T., Clancy, K., Barber, U., Higgins, D., Cahill, A., & Trew, S. (2022). *New ways for our families: Designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practice framework and system responses to address the impacts of domestic and family violence on children and young people* (Research report, 06/2022). ANROWS.

families and communities to gain control over the direction of their lives and reach their full potential. Healing continues throughout a person's lifetime and across generations. It can take many forms and is underpinned by a strong cultural and spiritual base.³

The key elements of healing are that it is:

- Led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with and for their own communities. This reflects the important principle of self-determination, which is an essential part of healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Founded in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview, and strengthens cultures. This means that healing builds familial and community connectedness, as well as connectedness to the environment and culture.
- Empowering of individuals and communities to overcome trauma and its causes, as well as its symptoms. It does so both through modern and traditional healing practices.⁴

Healing pillars

Hearts and minds engaged

Our healing framework is based on operationalising the interconnecting pillars outlined below. To support implementation of the framework we recognise that we as leaders in our community need to come with the right personal framework, with our hearts and minds engaged.

This requires a commitment to having compassion for our families and opportunities for self-reflection allowing us to understand our strengths and limitations, and how our own personal views and experiences might impact on our implementation of this work. We must understand that our own experiences of violence will shape our understanding and ensure we have good supervision and support to ensure that we are always working for our families and their needs.

Given the trauma evident in our communities and the long-lasting impact of DFV, we must be alert at all times to falling into the trap of victim-blaming. We must recognise the need to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of women and children are at the heart of our response.

We must look for our ways for our young men and boys to be supported to overcome their experiences of violence and ensure that they have options and pathways to healing and change.

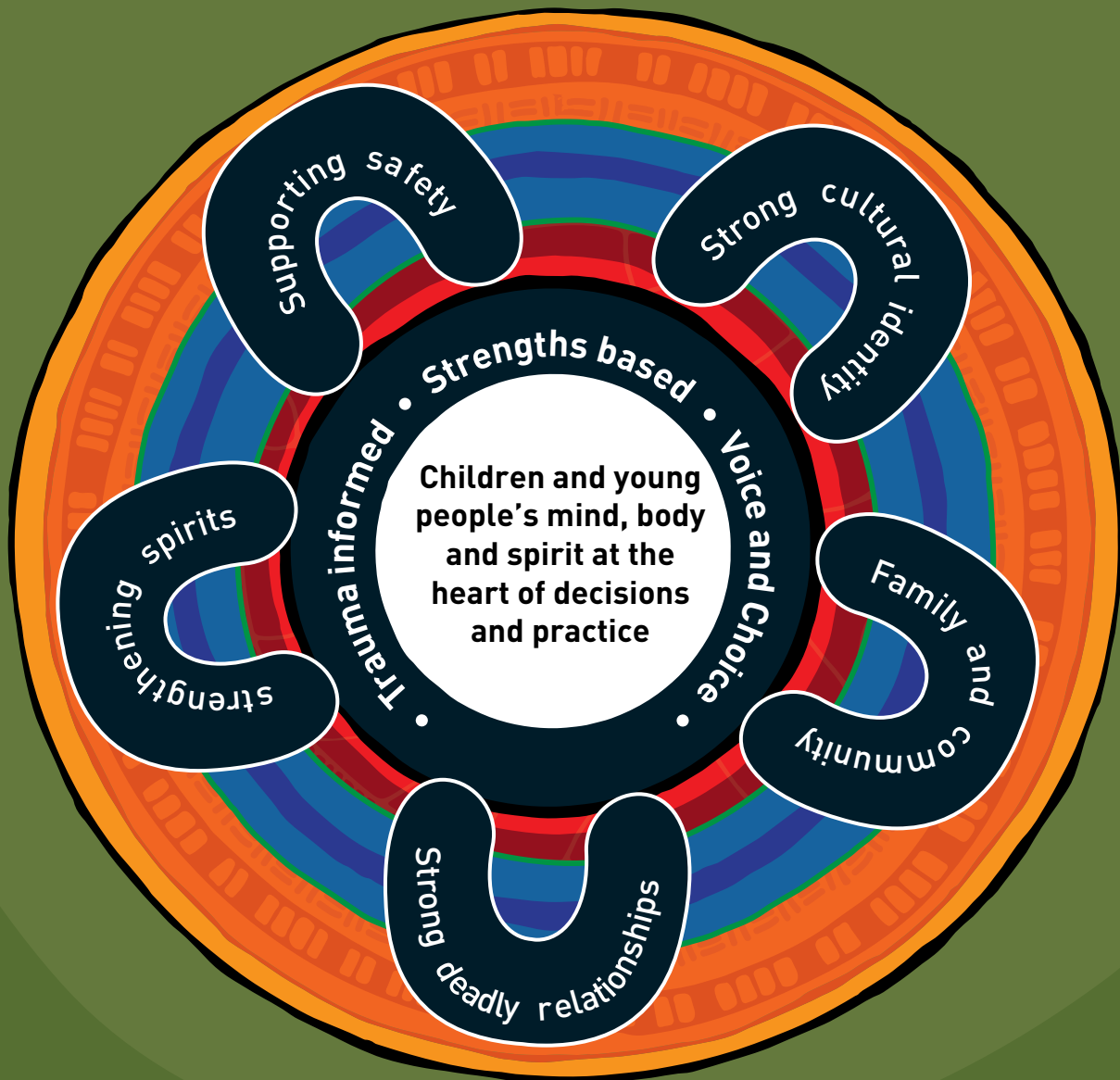
We are the holders of our own children's cultural knowledge, and we must ensure that the right cultural knowledge and skills are available to our children, young people and families to support conversations.

To support you in implementing each of the pillars of this framework we have outlined critical questions and thinking that will support you locally in building a strong network, system and practice to support our children and young people, their families and communities to overcome the legacy of trauma and build strong, peaceful places for our children to thrive.

3 Healing Foundation. (2015). *Glossary of healing terms: A guide to key terms related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing*. Healing Foundation: 1.

4 Healing Foundation. (2013). *Growing our children up strong and deadly: Healing for children and young people*. Healing Foundation.

QATSICPP HEALING FRAMEWORK PILLARS AND ELEMENTS



Trauma-informed

- Safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment
- Trauma-informed practice does not blame our families and children for their efforts to manage their traumatic reaction
- Embrace a message of hope and optimism that healing is possible
- Our children and families are seen as unique people who have experienced extremely abnormal situations caused by colonisation, and have coped as best they could

Strengths-based

- Strengths-based approaches recognise that our children, families and communities have amazing strengths. Many of them have displayed these strengths in keeping themselves safe
- Sometimes our children and families find it hard to find their own strengths
- We need to help our families, and children and fathers, to find their strengths that they can build on to create change
- Sometimes life has beaten families down and they struggle to identify their strengths. Understand the strengths they have, and locate them
- This includes locating our children's and families' cultural strengths – important foundational strengths to identify

Voice and choice

- Families and communities should be the leads in driving change in DFV
- Our community organisations should be resourced and supported to provide the safety and supports to assist our children and families to respond to DFV, using their cultural knowledge and skills to create safe places and spaces to support our people
- Our communities are strongly committed to safety for our children and young people. That commitment and knowledge should be the first point of call in responding to DFV. It is about us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having voice and choice about the decisions about our children and family

Safety

I think safety is the children being able to feel safe in whatever environment they're in ... comfortable, protected, being able to be themselves, not feel worried, feel like they can have a voice, feel like they can express themselves and know who they can go to if they ever are feeling unsafe, yeah. (Cycle 3 ATSI/CCO practitioner)

Our focus

The safety of our children is non-negotiable – they need safe approaches, including safe people, safe places and safe language to support them in accessing safety.

Our children's safety is more than just their physical safety. It is also their emotional, cultural, spiritual safety.

Supporting our children to have happy childhoods free from experiencing violence is our goal.

When our children's social and emotional wellbeing is strong, they thrive.

This includes ensuring our children do not have too much responsibility too soon, allowing our children to participate in childhood.

Our aunties, uncles, grandfathers, grandmothers and Elders have a critical role in supporting our children to grow and must be supported to take this role. For our children and young people to be supported to address safety we must provide the following:

- love
- education
- health
- house free of violence
- calmness and routine
- good role models
- food
- money
- stability
- trust
- healthy communication
- healthy behaviours
- healthy intimacy.

Actions

Step 1: Safe spaces

- How are you creating safe spaces for children and young people to talk? Do you have hubs and places for our children and young people to go that they can seek out support? Do they cater for all age groups and are they age-appropriate?
- Do we have child-centred ways to bring children and young people into these safe spaces?
- If children or young people were to disclose about violence or abuse in their lives, would the staff and/or community members at the space know how to respond?
- Have we prioritised building relationships with children and young people to promote opportunities for them to talk?

Asking children and young people

- Have you checked with children and young people that they find these spaces safe?
- Do children and young people know about these spaces?
- Have we got a number of ways to check with children and young people that are developmentally and age appropriate and inclusive for example play-based?

Step 2: Access to support

- Having the ability to get help or ask for help easily is really important – have we cut down the barriers to children and young people seeking help?
- How can services overcome barriers to ensure that children and young people get timely and positive support?
- Do we have policies or practices that are making it difficult for children and young people to get support without consent, recognising that it can be their parent or family member harming them?
- Do we have the right people employed with the relevant skills in engaging our children and young people and can listen and respond?
- Do you have a dedicated response for children and young people at your organisation? Are they clients in their own right – with their own case plan and support system?

Asking children and young people

- Have we provided our children and young people access to information and support to create their own safety plan that is meaningful to them – including ensuring we have asked them and heard their thoughts?
- Have we ensured that we have the right processes that are developmentally appropriate so that all children, including young children and children with disability, can be supported to contribute to safety planning?
- Have we asked our children and young people who their support people are? Do we advise children and young people that we might need to tell someone if they disclose they are being harmed as part of our legal obligations?
- Where can children and young people go to seek support if they are frightened and need action?

Step 3: Creating safe networks around the children and young people

- Have we had conversations with our community about safety in the community?
- Creating safe communities for young people – have we talked with our community aunts, uncles and grandparents about who is watching out for children and young people?
- Do we have a community strategy for our young people who might be engaging in risk-taking behaviours that will support them back to a place of safety?
- Have we supported our grandparents to know how to take action if they are worried about their children and young people?
- Who are our community leaders who are the eyes and ears of our children and young people – who might assist us to know who might need help? Are we supporting them to be pillars of support?
- Have we created safe spaces for our children, young people and families to participate in positive activities together to support them to have fun – bringing back joy to family life?

Asking children and young people

- Do we have resources/posters that enable children and young people to know that they should not be shamed in experiencing violence in their own home? Have we involved children and young people in age-appropriate ways to create any resources to support them to ensure they make sense and increase usage?
- Are we having these conversations in places and spaces that make sense to children and young people and that are developmentally appropriate?

Tools available to support you

Keeping our kids safe: Cultural safety and national principles for child-safe organisations

<https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SNAICC-VACCA-OCS-ChildSafeReport-LR-with-alt-tags-May2021.pdf>

Strong cultural identity

... getting them back out on country and healing and just being involved in in their cultural upbringing and having a bit of freedom out bush with other families or theirs and that would help and start changing the line of progression. (Cycle 5 community member – Elder)

Our focus

- Cultural identity, connection, country and spirituality are central to healing of children and young people.
- We know the strength of cultural identity and the power of cultural knowledge and wisdom to helps to heal
- We know that experiencing DFV and the impact of this effects how you think, act and behave. It can hamper your ability to see your strengths and access your inner resources.
- Culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is central to identity and belonging.
- “Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us.” We now know that “fostering cultural identity is in the best interests of the child”.⁵ (Bamblett & Lewis, 2007, p. 49)
- In fact, we know cultural connection is essential in life.
- Culture is also an important protective mechanism for our children and young people.
- It is important to remember, when working with children and young people, everybody is on their own timeline in building their cultural connection, so this should be kept in mind as you support them on their journey.

Actions

Step 1: Connection

- Have children and young people been provided opportunities to learn about their culture?
- Have our children and young people had positive opportunities to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who can provide leadership, mentoring and connection?
- Have our children – especially those who may be in out-of-home care – had opportunities to be around other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?

Ask children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people, including young children, what they want to know about their culture?
- Have we asked children and young people about the important people they want to connect with who make them feel proud and deadly?
- Have we talked with children about what opportunities help them to feel proud of their culture such as sport, music, being with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at school or after school?
- Have we identified who are the right people to help our children and young people to build their cultural connections?

⁵ Bamblett, M., & Lewis, P. (2007). Detoxifying the child and family welfare system for Australian Indigenous peoples: Self-determination, rights and culture as critical tools. *First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 3(3): 49.

Step 2: Strong and proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

- Have we helped families to understand there are many different ways to connect to culture?
- Have we helped families to understand their own cultural knowledge – where they come from and the history of their own struggle, and the strengths they can take from this?
- Have we helped families to understand how important their cultural identity is to their children's?
- Have we helped families to participate in cultural activities and share their cultural knowledge?
- Do we have activities that will help families enjoy time in the context of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and have fun together, feeling strong in connection to community?

Asking children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people about what activities they would like to participate in with their family?

Tools available to support you

A resource from SNAICC that helps identify children's cultural needs across multiple domains

<https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Childrens-Cultures-and-Cultural-Needs-.pdf>

Strong and deadly relationships

I think an education program is needed, like how we teach children like very young about “my body belongs to me” and all that safe stuff. And so, we should have programs that are teaching like little people, all this good stuff, and teaching young, young, young girls from primary school, about a healthy relationship. Let’s get them when they’re still in preschool and just keep following them. (Cycle 3 ATSI/CCO practitioner)

Our focus

- Many of our children and young people have seen and witnessed violent ways of relating to each other. These include sometimes people hitting, shouting, breaking things, using power and control, jealousy, not allowing people free movement, and name-calling.
- Modelling of behaviour is how our children learn how to treat each other and how they learn to be men and women.
- Negative ways of interacting transmit negative pathways for our children.
- We have a community obligation to help our children to have strong and good relationships – all community members have a special role to play in helping our children to have healthy and happy relationships.
- We want to give our children and young people a strong starting point.
- We need to provide them early opportunities to challenge stereotypes.
- We want to help them build the pathway to strong and healthy relationships throughout their life.

Actions

Step 1: Understanding healthy relationships

- To support our young people to have healthy relationships, we need to understand what healthy relationships are. Have we asked ourselves the questions about what that is and what we want our children and young people to know?
- What are our ways to support our children to understand how we respectfully communicate?

Ask children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people what is important to them in communication?
- Have we thought of ways to include children in learning important communication skills from very young ages, including in playgroups?
- Do we know what relationships are important to children and young people?

Step 2: Helping our children to build good relationships early

- Have we got processes that assist our young people to understand good healthy relationships in general, such as being a good friend, sibling, cousin?
- Are we listening to and supporting our children and young people by modelling healthy relationships?
- Do we have processes that support children and young people to understand how to have positive relationships early when they are starting to couple up?

- Have we taught our children about good conflict resolution?
- Have we as a community understood how to help children and young people to use social media in good ways?
- Have we helped children and young people understand the impacts of trauma on themselves?
- Do we have processes in our organisation that support our families to foster good positive relationships in their families and communities, increasing our children's experiences of positive belonging, unconditional positive regard and connection?

Ask children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people what a healthy relationship is in their own words?
- Have we asked children and young people about what would support them to have healthy relationships?
- Do we know what information children and young people want when it comes to having healthy and positive relationships with each other?
- Have we talked with children and young people about how to leave an unhealthy relationship?
- Have we talked about how to recognise unhealthy relationships and how to seek help?
- Have we made sure we have good strategies for young children that include supporting healthy relationships activities in playgroups and early childhood programs?

Step 3: Helping our children and young people to deal with their emotions

- Do we have available ways to support our young people to learn the skills to regulate their emotions?
- Do we have processes that support our children and young people anger management skills and how to deal with our anger more productively?
- Are we addressing issues of bullying for children and young people in schools and sporting clubs?
- Are we supporting our parents to build skills in helping their children and young people to deal with issues that arise in their lives positively, and assisting families to have a plan to manage distress?
- Have we assisted our children and young people to develop their own safety plan to support them in managing their distress positively to prevent outbursts?

Ask children and young people

- Have we helped children and young people learn skills to name their emotions and identify what and how they might feel in different situations?
- Have we helped children and young people to understand good ways to express their emotions, including anger?
- Have we asked children and young people about what they want to know about managing anger?
- Have we asked children and young people about their own experiences of bullying and what would work to address this?
- Have we talked with children and young people about their peer groups and what are the strengths and challenges they face in these?
- Have we talked with children and young people about the actions they can take to bring themselves back to a place of calm?

Tools available to support you

Work from the Northern Territory that includes young people in videos talking about respect

<https://talkingrespect.com.au/>

Love Bites program from NAPCAN that supports children and young people to learn healthy relationships

https://www.napcan.org.au/Programs/love-bites/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMly4nNturR-AIVmJlmAh3ubQCeEAAYASAAEgLpe_D_BwE

Family- and community-centred

Sometimes the parents themselves will be carrying intergenerational trauma. So, the healing will start from inside, the home itself. You must put that support mechanism in place. Elders now were some of the parents, a couple of generations ago, that were still wrapped up in all this as well. So, if we haven't healed, who's going to be the generation that heals? And who's going to do the healing? So if you're missing out on the community Elders, who is going to do the healing? How do we do that with the breakdown of the cultural respect and responsibility, structure? (Cycle 3 ATSI/CCO practitioner)

Our focus

- Our children's cultural identity exists in their families and communities. It is at the heart of their wellbeing and important to sustaining the cultural continuity that is essential to them to building strong futures.
- Healing our children requires healing their families – having a strong family system to support our children will be critical to their safety and social and emotional wellbeing.
- Violence that was used as a part of colonisation has had pervasive impacts in the lives of families and communities – they experienced real harm as a result, and it has penetrated their lives.
- For many families and communities there has not been the opportunity to heal from these wounds.
- Intergenerational impacts of trauma are far-reaching, with many of our men and women having had childhood experiences of DFV that have also not been healed.

Actions

Step 1: A narrative around DFV with families

- Have we had discussion about DFV with families and helped them to understand the nature and impact of this on themselves and their children?
- Healing childhood wounds – have you asked parents about their own experiences as children of DFV and the desire to heal these wounds as a pathway to address violence?
- If our men have been victims of childhood violence, have we talked with them about how this might make them feel and respond? Do we have men's groups and services available they could access?
- Have we discussed with our men, if they are overwhelmed by their emotions and feeling angry and unsure in their family home, do they have a plan to assist them to get back to a place of safety?
- Have we ensured that women and children understand their right to be and feel safe, emotionally and physically?
- Have our women got access to healing approaches that will enable them to be strengthened and supported to be respected and empowered? Are there women's groups that our women could access to grow their support?
- Do women and children have a safety support plan to ensure any issues of safety can be addressed and their plan enacted with the support of family, friends, neighbours, services?

Ask children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people what the impact of living with violence has been for them and do they understand the behaviours around them that impact on them?
- Have we helped children to understand their mum's safety plan and what impact it might have for them if it needs to be used?
- Have we talked with children about where they might go to seek help if their safety is at risk?
- Have we ensured that every single child in the family has their own safety plan that is determined by them?

Step 2: Building a family-based response

- Are all members of the family engaged in processes to address violence – women in women's groups, men attending men's groups, children and young people accessing support?
- Does the family need to work towards a stronger family plan to ensure the safety of their children and young people – if so, have they been engaged in a family-led process to support them in decision-making?
- Have we ensured our women have access to healing services that empower and support them? Can we increase their linkages and address their isolation?
- Do we have responses available for our men to support them to be accountable for their violence? Can we develop and design this response if we do not have it?
- Do we have cultural healing responses available for our men/fathers to support them to be strong fathers and holders of cultural knowledge? Can we develop and design this response if we do not have it?

Asking children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people about the type of support they would like?
- Have we identified positive activities that children and young people might like to attend that could support their recovery such as sport, art, cultural camps?
- If the family are having a family-led decision-making process, have children's views been sought and a means to have them present at the meeting?

Step 3: Building community responsiveness

- Have we had discussion with our broader community about DFV and how we can support safe and healthy relationships in our community?
- Can we identify strong cultural mentors and leaders who can provide support to our women and men in tackling violence? Will our families feel safe using these community networks – can we build good trusting and confidential relationships? Have we checked that these networks are safe for them?
- Has the community identified any community-level issues and violence that may impact on the ability of

families to keep their children safe? Have communities identified a means to resolve these issues to increase safety for children and young people?

Asking children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people about community issues that impact on their safety and what they would like to see happen?
- Have we asked children and young people about cultural mentors they would like to engage with?

Tools available to support you

Resources from the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency to help promote discussion with families and communities about DFV, including videos

<https://www.vacca.org/page/services/family-violence/what-is-family-violence>

Counselling resources from the Northern Institute on Family Violence to support practitioners in building new skills in talking with families about DFV

<https://www.nifvs.org.au/resources/nifvs-family-violence-resources/>

Flip charts and question prompts from leading DFV practitioners in New Zealand to support skill development in leading DFV discussions with families

<https://www.hma.co.nz/resources/family-violence/>

Strengthening children and young people's spirits

We would see a lot of change; we would see changes in our children's behaviour in the way that they present themselves. Yeah, our children would come back feeling really refreshed. And, and knowing that they're not alone, there is help out there for everyone. (Cycle 3 ATSI/CCO practitioner)

Our focus

- Many of our children and young people experience deep wounds because of DFV that require a significant healing response for them.
- Our children and young people have the right to access culturally safe therapeutic support to strengthen their mental health and social and emotional wellbeing if they need it.
- Our children and young people do better when they are provided the right healing supports when they need them. Acting early prevents our children and young people from experiencing greater pain in the future and helps them learn new skills that will support them.
- Healing groups for children and young people strengthen their voice, enable them to receive help, and allow them to be spiritually and emotionally renewed, cutting down their isolation and providing opportunities for them to connect and feel empowered.
- Our children's healing is grounded in their cultural identity and belonging.

Actions

Step 1: Identifying community resources to help our children heal

- Do you know who is available in your community that can provide culturally safe therapeutic support if needed?
- Have you worked with your local child and youth mental health and social and emotional wellbeing teams to ensure they have an understanding of DFV and how to support children and young people?
- Have you formed a community of practice with other child and youth counsellors, support services, Elders, and women's and men's groups to identify how you can support children and young people in your community?

Ask children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people about the services, community group or people they have most found helpful when they have been sad or overwhelmed?

Step 2: Supporting our children and young people to access help

- Do we have appropriate referral mechanisms in place to help our children access social and emotional or mental health support if they need it?
- Do we know how to identify if our children and young people are displaying behaviours or saying things that we should be worried about?
- Do you have groups, help lines, familiar people, friends available for our children and young people to access who will help them process their experiences and yarn up about their worries to keep their spirits

and wellbeing strong?

- Do you have a range of spaces and places for children and young people to be provided support that suits them, feels comfortable and provides them a feeling of belonging?

Ask children and young people

- Have we asked children and young people about how they support each other when one of them is feeling overwhelmed and sad?
- Have we asked our young people if they know where to go if they need help to strengthen their spirit?

Step 3: Supporting our families to respond

- Have we helped our families to understand the impact of DFV on the behaviours of their children and young people and their social and emotional wellbeing?
- Have we helped families to acknowledge the presence of DFV in their family?
- Have we checked in with our families about our children and young people's behaviours and any concerns they may note or see?
- Have we supported our families to identify ways that they can help their young people to process their experiences at home?
- Have our families got good strategies to manage their own social and emotional wellbeing that can be triggered by their children's behaviour?
- Have we ensured our families have access to resources and materials they understand that could support them to grow their understanding of their children and young people's mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, and how to support this?

Tools available to support you

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fact sheets, courses and video webinars to support understanding of how to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's wellbeing, includes specific resources about responding to DFV

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/in-focus-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-wellbeing/>

Skills and attributes

We'll go in as workers thinking about from what we think, yeah, it's not actually listening to that young person on their story, which is a really important thing that we need to do. (Cycle 3 ATSICCO practitioner)

This section identifies that to be enabled to meet the challenge of implementing this healing framework that there are important skills and attributes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners have to support healing for children, young people, families and communities.

As a result, this section provides support for your professional development, allowing you to identify your current strengths and work with your peers, managers and organisations to build a training and development pathway to increase your practice strengths into the future. This list is not exhaustive: it is designed as a starting point to support you to begin and maintain a reflective practice and ensure that you have the right supports in looking after yourself and keeping strong.

Foundation skills

- Understanding what DFV is and how children and young people experience it, including how it impacts children and young people's minds, bodies and spirits
- How children display distress is an important skill, especially for younger children who often provide information on how they are feeling through their behaviour
- Communication skills
- Engagement strategies for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, knowing the right ways to talk with families and children
- Cultural knowledge and processes that are respectful of the local community within which you work and reside
- How to talk with children and young people about respect and activities you can engage them in
- How to talk with children and young people in age-appropriate ways, including using play-based methodologies
- How to talk with children and young people about managing their emotions
- Understanding of how to help parents manage when their children and young people are experiencing big emotions.

Risk and safety planning

- Safety planning and understanding how to create these with children and young people that are valid and legitimate – and ensure the voice of children and young people guide this plan?
- Risk and safety plans for addressing violence – understanding the DFV practice standards and risk assessment.

Working collectively

- Networking skills and regular conversations about what help, resources or supports are available
- Community engagement and understanding how to restore peace and harmony in your community
- Group work – knowing the value of working and spending time collectively and the change this can bring,

including how to create safety in a group setting

- Group work skills with children and young people.

Responding to trauma

- Trauma training to support our women and men, children and young people to understand the impact of trauma but the means to recover – understanding that cultural practice is restorative – it is rhythmic, repetitive – need to understand on mind, body and spirit
- A good understanding of how to provide trauma-informed care
- Knowledge about identifying mental health risks and concerns in children and young people
- Skills in talking with families about their worries and concerns for their children and young people, and how to support them to access help.

Attributes

- **People who listen, respect, believe children and young people**
- Ability to be reflective throughout the whole process
- Ability to keep safety at the forefront of our practice and response
- Good communicators.

System responses needed to support implementation of the healing framework

This section recognises that practitioners and communities alone cannot make all the necessary changes that are needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to overcome their experiences of DFV. All human services organisations have a role to play in ensuring they are equipped in their policies and practices to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to respond effectively to DFV and build strong foundations for their children's future.

This will include challenging your own knowledge and understanding to ensure you can partner effectively to achieve the ambitious goals that are outlined in this framework. The following questions are provided as a means to support policymakers and managers of human services organisations in this endeavour. They have been designed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership group who have developed this resource to ensure that the right preconditions exist for First Nations communities to lead change effectively.

Policy

- Does your organisation fully understand the impacts of violence and its origins in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – including the impact on systemic racism and daily distress that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have to experience as part of their broader daily life?
- Have you ensured that you have policies that ensure your staff have cultural competency to increase access to support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?
- Do you have the cultural capability in your teams and the capacity to work alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to embed into work that is existing to enable people to overcome the impacts of trauma?
- Strong cultural connection is both central to building healthy social and emotional wellbeing for children and young people and is a protective factor. Do you have policies that ensure strong cultural connection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is at the centre of your decision-making?
- Have you got policies that recognise that cultural connection can only be best decided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that only they are involved in creating cultural connection plans?
- Do you have policies that enable children and young people to access social and emotional wellbeing support easily?

Procurement and contracting

- Do your contracts and systems value relational ways of working and not put in place barriers to services, preferencing building and maintaining relationships?
- Do your service delivery contracts recognise supportive safe relationships as critical to success including the need for time to build and maintain these?
- Are you supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to be funded to provide holistic services, including for men and perpetrators of violence, to help them heal?
- Are you supporting services in contracts and resourcing to be flexible in their service delivery and to be able to provide after-hours and flexible service delivery?
- Has your department/organisation genuinely consulted community prior to advertising tender to give community members a choice of service providers in their community?
- Does your organisation have First Nations and community representation on the procurement and contracting panel?

- Have you discussed with communities how they might use resources to ensure they can support the right responses?
- Have you worked with the community to support a process to enable sustainability of funds and resources?
- Are you flexible in the resources you provide, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations can support families to build cultural connection and strength as a primary tool in supporting healing?
- Do you ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are supported to access additional resources to enable families to enjoy being part of cultural activities, such as family camps?
- Have you created the right conditions to ensure that children and young people can be resourced to attend cultural activities they find most important to them?

Service design

- Have you addressed the barriers that prevent women and children, especially young men, in seeking support, including age restrictions on service access?
- Have families and communities been involved in the design of services delivered and provided by your organisation to ensure these meets their needs?
- Does your service seek feedback from families and community about the services you provide to ensure accountability to families and communities? Do you make this feedback available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and children, young people and families so they feel empowered to create change?
- Do you have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who focus on supporting engagement with the community to ensure that children and families have access to activities and events that can support their cultural engagement and pride?
- Are you able to work with your local schools, sporting groups and children's activity sites to embed healthy relationship discussions or groups?
- Do you have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who focus on helping children and young people to access mental health support?
- Have we ensured we have a network of referring agencies and partners that can provide intense therapeutic support if our children and young people need this?

Education

- Education systems: have your staff got a good understanding of DFV and acknowledge and know that how they respond is critical?
- Do they as educators understand that where they respond punitively to children and young people's pain-based behaviours such as suspending them from school rather than supporting them creates more harm to children and may prevent them seeking help?
- Does your school have a DFV support plan that is developed with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation to respond effectively and ensure children and young people have access to support?
- Do you have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who focus on helping children and young people and families to build strong healthy relationships?

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