

# Supporting children and young people experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence

This practitioner resource has been adapted from *In their own right: Actions to improve children and young people's safety from domestic, family and sexual violence* (Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024). *In their own right* (2024) synthesises over 130 policy and practice recommendations from more than 20 ANROWS research reports (2019-2024).

This resource offers practice prompts to help domestic and family violence (DFV) practitioners strengthen safety and recovery responses for children and young people (CYP). The actions are grounded in the voices of children and practitioners captured in ANROWS research, which emphasise the need to see children as victim-survivors in their own right, rather than only in relation to adults (Gillfeather-Spetere & Watson, 2024).

1

## Treat every contact with a child as a safety opportunity

- Name and record the child explicitly in case notes, assessments and safety plans, not only the adult victim-survivor.
- Use every encounter, where safe and appropriate, to ask one small question or make one gentle observation about the child's wellbeing.
- Observe, without assumption, who speaks for the child; how the child responds to different adults; and if there are signs of fear, withdrawal or hypervigilance.
- Record child-specific risk and protective factors separately from adult case files if your system allows.
- Regularly check immediate safety basics: safe handovers, travel routes, access to communication, and safety in school or care settings.

### PRACTICE REFLECTION

How could you use everyday moments (such as drop-offs, calls or school coordination) to check small but critical aspects of a child's safety?



## 2

## Ask age-appropriate, choice-based questions

- Explain the purpose before asking questions: "I want to make sure you're safe and understand what happens next."
- Offer choices for how CYP can communicate (talking, drawing, writing, pointing to visuals, scaling questions).
- Use simple, concrete language and avoid "why" questions that may sound blaming or confusing.
- Seek assent and respect agency: "Is it okay if I ask you about what helps you feel safe?"
- Notice distress cues; pause, ground and return to safety when necessary.

### PRACTICE REFLECTION

How do your current assessments offer real choice and control to children and young people?



## 3

## Include children in safety planning

- **Safe people:** Help CYP name adults they can go to for help, including school staff, family friends and neighbours.
- **Safe places:** Identify where CYP can go if they feel unsafe (e.g. a specific room, school office, nearby home).
- **Communication safety:** Create agreed code words, safe contact points and storage for important numbers.
- **Transitions and changeovers:** Plan in detail for handovers, transport and contact during court-ordered visits.
- **Digital safety:** Review device access, location settings and social media visibility to reduce monitoring risks.

Including CYP in their own safety planning reflects *In their own right's* recommendation to strengthen **child-centred, developmentally informed** approaches that respect the CYP's right to participate and be heard.

### PRACTICE REFLECTION

How can you balance developmental appropriateness with genuine participation in safety planning?



## 4

## Be consistent and follow through

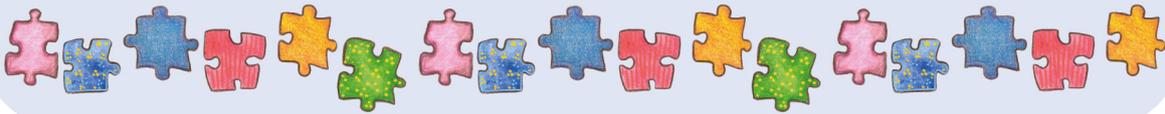
- Be transparent about what you can and cannot do.
- Follow through on commitments; if plans change, explain the new plans quickly and clearly.
- Set clear expectations about timeframes and next steps, and who is responsible for these.
- Reduce the need for retelling trauma: share information purposefully and with consent.
- Offer continuity even when staff changes occur. Ensure warm handovers and detailed case summaries.

### REGIONAL AND RURAL REALITIES

- When service options are limited, consistency might mean reliably scheduled check-ins and clear communication.
- Small, predictable actions build trust where system gaps exist.

### PRACTICE REFLECTION

What structures can your service put in place to maintain trust if staff turnover or distance affects continuity?



## 5

## Work with other services with shared accountability

- Develop a shared, child-focused understanding of risk and protective factors.
- Agree on one coordination lead where possible to avoid duplication.
- Establish clear professional boundaries and referral pathways.
- Use ethical, purposeful, trauma and violence-informed information sharing and prioritise safety.
- Include the child's voice in joint meetings or planning processes when safe and appropriate.

### REGIONAL AND RURAL REALITIES

- Practitioners often know one another personally; confidentiality and boundaries require extra vigilance.
- "Everyone knows everyone" can support coordination but also heightens privacy risks and the need to ensure informed consent.

### PRACTICE REFLECTION

How do you maintain shared accountability for safety while safeguarding confidentiality in small communities?



## ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH  
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY  
*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

This resource  
is delivered in  
partnership with



Art by Amani Haydar, an  
award-winning author, artist  
and advocate for women's  
health and safety, based on  
Dharug Land.

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) was established by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments under Australia's first National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010-2022). As an ongoing partner to the National Plan, ANROWS continues to build, strengthen and translate the evidence base that informs the current National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022-2032).

With more than 150 research projects led, commissioned or contributed to, ANROWS delivers targeted evidence to inform practice, policy, and systems reform. We engage closely with victim-survivors, communities, service providers, governments and researchers to ensure our work reflects lived experience and supports collective action.

ANROWS is a not-for-profit company jointly funded by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments. We are a registered harm prevention charity and deductible gift recipient, governed by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

### **For further information please contact:**

Emmagness Ruzvidzo  
Head of Communications and Media  
[emmagness.ruzvidzo@anrows.org.au](mailto:emmagness.ruzvidzo@anrows.org.au)  
0468 322 800

## REFERENCE

Gillfeather-Spetere, S., & Watson, A. (2024). *In their own right: Actions to improve children and young people's safety from domestic, family and sexual violence* (ANROWS Insights, 01/2024). ANROWS.