


# “It takes a village”

Strengthening Safeguarding Through  
Organisational Cultural Change

## An Abuse Prevention through Culture Change Framework



# Acknowledgements

**‘Kooyoora’** means ‘Mountain of Light’ in the Dja Dja Wurrung language of Central Victoria.

Kooyoora respectfully recognises the Traditional Owners of the land where we operate, paying respect to the strength and resilience of First Nations Peoples and their Elders, past, present, and future. We honourably walk alongside them on the journey towards healing and reconciliation.

**A special thanks to our partners in this project:**



## **Australian Catholic University – Institute of Child Protection Studies**

- Professor Daryl Higgins is Director of the Institute of Child Protection Studies. His research focuses on public health approaches to protecting children, and child-safe organisational strategies. Daryl was one of the principal instigators of the partnership with Kooyoora, supporting the project development and the grant application process. Daryl was also on the Project Advisory Committee
- Jacqui Stewart is Program Manager with the Institute of Child Protection Studies. She supports the successful delivery of applied research, training, and engagement projects within the Institute. Jacqui was on the Project Working Group and developed the Evaluation Plan for the project.



## **Laura Lindsay – Glasshouse Safeguarding**

- Laura founded GlassHouse Safeguarding, established to work in collaboration with individuals and organisations to assist with safeguarding consultancy, training, partnerships and projects about child sexual abuse and exploitation. Laura was also one of the principal instigators of the partnership, supporting the project development and the grant application process. Laura was also on the Project Advisory Committee and the Working Group. In addition to her professional background, Laura also brought a lived experience lens to the project, as a survivor of institutional abuse. Laura has recently wound up her consultancy practice and has commenced working as a Counsellor at Gippsland Centre Against Sexual Assault.



We would like to thank the **National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse** for the funding of a \$35,000 grant and for all their support throughout this project.

We would also like to thank our **Project Advisory Committee** for their support and expertise.

Our Project Advisory Committee Members:

- Fiona Boyle – CEO Kooyoora
- Daryl Higgins – Director, Institute of Child Protection Studies, ACU
- Laura Lindsay – Director, Glasshouse Safeguarding
- Debra Manning – Retired University lecturer and social worker
- Ami Summer – Director, Craft Coaching and Development
- Anna Doganieri – Project Coordinator, Kooyoora

**A special thanks** goes to all the people with lived experience of harm within an organisational setting that provided their valuable insights and feedback as part the development of the Framework.

# Introduction

## Purpose of this document

This document is intended for organisations who are committed to understanding more about cultures that lead to abuse, and who want to explore an evidence-based approach to abuse prevention.

This document presents the Abuse Prevention through Culture Change Framework (“the Framework”) and explains why the Framework was developed. It provides information about cultures that enable abuse and describes the Framework’s approach to supporting organisations through a process of cultural review and change.

## Background

*“If it takes a village to raise a child...  
it also takes a village to abuse one.”*

This powerful line from the film *Spotlight* (2015) conveys an important message about collective responsibility. It suggests that harm or abuse is not solely due to the actions of individual perpetrators or ‘a few bad apples,’ but can also arise from the failure, negligence, or complicity of an institution or the broader community. Just as a community can contribute to the positive nurturing of a child, it can also, through action or inaction, contribute to the harm of a child.

Numerous high profile abuse scandals involving abuse and harm have occurred globally across various sectors like religion, education, media, charity, and sport. Patterns of institutional failure to detect, report, and confront abuse, have been documented and observed in prominent cases

within many organisations. In each of these cases, the underlying culture and structure of the organisations played a role in facilitating the abuse by prioritising the preservation of reputation over the welfare and safety of victim/survivors, leading to prolonged suffering, and a lack of justice for those impacted.

Viewed through the lens of collective responsibility and institutional complicity, the Abuse Prevention through Cultural Change Framework is aimed at assisting organisations to examine their underlying culture. It equips them to identify dimensions of their culture that enable and overlook abuse, as well as providing tools and resources to create environments that are both physically protective and psychologically safe.

The focus of this Framework is to support organisations to change their culture through identifying and addressing their underlying culture (values, norms, beliefs, and actions). The end goal is that organisations actively cultivate and sustain a culture of safety that is supported by a whole-of-organisation approach.

**It is designed to take organisations through a process of deep and honest cultural reflection, and then challenge themselves to commit to changing cultures that can cause harm.**

This Framework has been developed in partnership with Australian Catholic University Institute of Child Protection Studies and Glasshouse Safeguarding (Laura Lindsay, trainer and safeguarding consultant), as well as lived experience interviews with a range of people that have experienced abuse in organisational settings.

This project has also received support from the National Centre for Action on Child Sexual Abuse through the provision of a \$35,000 grant.

# What is the Kooyoora Abuse Prevention through Culture Change Framework?

**“What if an organisation did everything in its power to create a culture in which everyone could overcome their own internal barriers to change and use errors and vulnerabilities as prime opportunities for personal and organisational growth?”**

Keegan, Markus, Miller, Fleming and Lahey: 2023

There are many ways for organisations to reduce and work on preventing harm. These strategies include better pre-employment screening, explicit policies targeting harm reduction, clear procedures to encourage people to speak up and make complaints, independent complaints management, as well as training and awareness raising.

The Kooyoora Abuse Prevention through Culture Change Framework offers an additional approach to prevention, which targets organisational culture.

The primary aim of the Framework is to help organisations pinpoint the cultural factors (such as behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and actions) that may increase the risk of misconduct, abuse and harassment.

It uses review, improvement, and change tools that are designed to help organisation safeguard against harmful behaviours such as sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, harassment, and misconduct. Informed by a set of psychological safety principles, the Framework offers organisations a structured pathway towards a positive culture which is inherently protective and actively works to prevent harm.

Organisations that apply the Framework will be guided through a process of self-reflection and continuous improvement to cultivate a proactive approach to preventing harm. Rather than a compliance-based approach, it is for organisations genuinely interested in shining a spotlight on their internal cultural dynamics for the purpose of creating positive change.

The Framework includes a suite of tools and products designed for self-assessment and organisational development. These are intended to assist organisations in reflecting on and evaluating their own internal cultural dynamics.

The Framework aims to help organisations prioritise the creation of a culture of safety, as opposed to a singular focus on compliance. Our focus is on helping organisations to reduce the risk of a culture that enables or overlooks abuse. Accreditation and compliance are important, and have their place. However, they alone do not ensure child safety as they are focused more on systems and processes, rather than behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs. An organisation can be fully compliant and accredited but still not be safe. Implementation of the Framework is about creating child-safe cultures, and it assumes that accreditation and compliance will be a positive by-product.

# How the Framework was developed

This Framework is directly informed by a literature review, expert guidance from project partners, and most importantly, from people with lived experience of abuse within an organisational context, through focus groups and written feedback.

The literature review explored a broad range of disciplines to understand how organisational culture change could be applied as a multifaceted intervention to support existing prevention efforts. We identified risk factors and psychological safety principles around which the Framework is based.

In addition, the review found that the underlying culture of an organisation plays an important role as either a facilitator or a deterrent to abuse within organisations. A culture that values respect, equality, inclusion, open communication, and psychological safety is more likely to foster a safe environment. Conversely, an organisational culture that overlooks inappropriate behaviour, fails to address abuse or concerns, values self-preservation, lacks accountability and transparency, where power imbalances prevail and where victim/survivors are silenced, is more likely to foster an environment where abuse can occur unchecked.



# Why does the Framework focus on cultural change?

Despite research that acknowledges the role organisational culture plays in enabling abuse, and research that establishes the need to change organisational culture, there has been a lack of research specifically addressing the practical application of organisational culture change strategies to the issue of abuse. This includes the absence of a systemic framework and clear terminology to understand how culture can act as either a deterrent or a protective factor against sexual abuse. There is also an absence of a focused approach for evaluating and mitigating 'cultural risks.'

When an organisation examines their underlying mechanisms, they gain crucial knowledge for the task of tackling aspects of their culture that sustain or allow the continuation of abuse and harm. By comprehending why and how failures in protection occur within organisations, insights can be gained that are important for rectifying the cultural aspects of organisations that enable such failures and abuse.

The literature review found that problems arising within organisational culture predominantly relate to **how priorities are ranked** within organisations. The **failure to prioritise safety and ethics** is the **most recurrent cultural element associated with failure**.

Culture within an organisation is foundational for effective safeguarding practices and impact how individual organisations respond to and approach compliance requirements.

*"Cultural change in our institutions and society more broadly, is fundamental to ensuring the safety of our children."*

*"We learned that the institutional cultures and practices that allowed abuse to occur and inhibited detection and response continue to exist in contemporary institutions."*

*"Institutional cultural factors include leadership and organisational culture, which shape assumptions, values, beliefs, and norms. Leadership and organisational culture can include risk factors such as the failure to listen to children or prioritising the reputation of an institution over the safety and wellbeing of children."*

Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: 2017

The Framework underlines the importance of **a proactive, secure, and responsive communicative environment in pre-empting and mitigating organisational failures**. These 'corrective culture' issues are unique as they represent overlooked opportunities to rectify problems, thereby averting potential failures.

Our research illustrates the importance of organisational culture, specifically the prioritisation of safety and ethics and the establishment of a robust corrective culture, in preventing institutional failures, so that problems can be swiftly identified and appropriately managed.

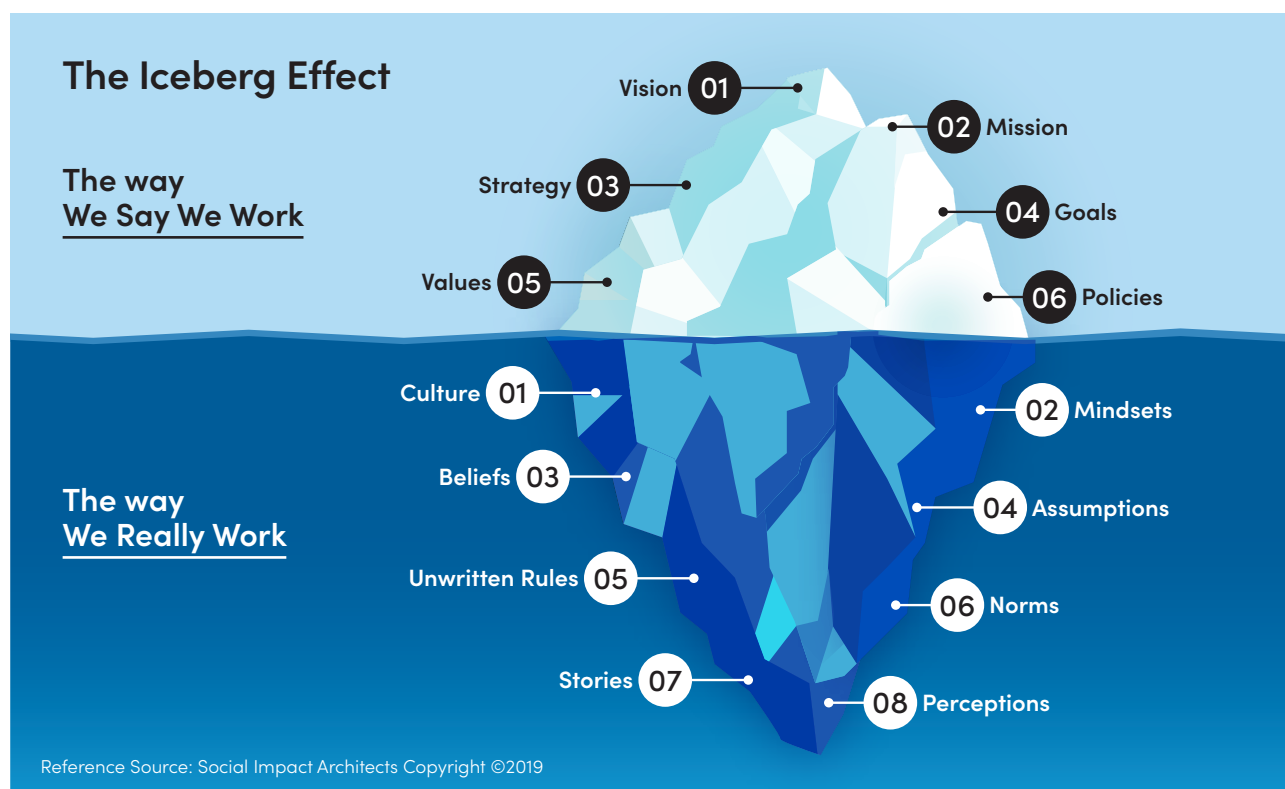


The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Australia exposed extensive and harrowing instances of child sexual abuse within organisations.

After a five-year inquiry into the mishandling of sexual abuse by institutions, the Royal Commission highlighted the need for cultural change, given the depth and breadth of **systemic issues and failures it uncovered**.

To prevent future abuse, organisations were urged to undergo cultural changes to address issues related to power imbalances, lack of accountability, and inadequate reporting mechanisms.

Organisational culture is cited as a key contributing factor in numerous enquiries into institutional child sexual abuse. According to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report, organisational culture plays an important role in either perpetuating or preventing abuse.



## The Cultural Iceberg Metaphor

The iceberg metaphor illustrates the idea that many aspects of a culture are hidden and not immediately visible. When applied to cultural understanding, **overt** aspects of organisational culture refer to **visible and tangible** elements such as physical structure, dress code, symbols, organisational rituals, mission statements, and communication patterns. These elements can be observed and identified more quickly and provide immediate clues about an organisation's culture.

The **covert** aspects are the **less visible**, underlying elements that shape behaviours and perceptions within an organisation. These include deep-seated values and beliefs, unwritten norms, shared assumptions, organisational folklore or traditions, group dynamics, and the overall emotional climate. While overt elements provide a surface level understanding, the covert ones delve deeper into the organisation's core identity and values (S. Smith, 2019 Nonprofit Trends: Shifting our Mindset).

## Organisational Cultures of Risk

The phrase ‘cultures of risk’ in this context refers to the collective attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour within an organisation that may contribute to an increased likelihood of abuse or harm. When addressing abuse within organisations, a culture of risk refers to an environment where inappropriate behaviours and actions are overlooked, ignored, or inadequately addressed, thereby increasing the vulnerability of individuals to abuse.

The first step in the journey of creating safe organisations is understanding some of the cultures of risk that enable abuse. Prior to embarking on deep organisational reflection through a self-assessment process, organisational leaders need to understand what the cultural risk factors are, that make organisations unsafe.

The following diagram summarises key cultural risks. Full descriptions are provided in Appendix A.

### Power and privilege

- Misuse of status and position, or little awareness of power imbalances

### Powerful perpetrators hidden in plain sight

- Powerful individuals within organisations using their authority and status to circumvent safeguarding policies and perpetrate abuse

### Bad apple, bad barrel

- Look beyond the actions of a bad apple and consider organisational complicity

### Fear of retaliation

- Fear of harm for reporting abuse

### Traumatic isolation and stigma

- Labelling and isolating victim-survivors to divert attention from organisational wrongdoing

### Institutional betrayal

- Organisations create hostile environments that normalise abuse

### Shame and guilt

- Tactics and experiences that inhibit identification and disclosure

### Fear of not being believed

- Lived experience that inhibits disclosure

### Institutional reputation and loyalty

- Prioritisation of reputation over care and safety

### Lack of cultural safety

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims-survivors often face additional barriers to disclosure



# Why should your organisation do this?

There are several reasons why your organisation should engage with this Framework.

Both child safety legislation and workplace safety frameworks compel organisations to act. (See Appendix B). But compliance as a mechanism for action does not, in and of itself, create safety. A compliant organisation can still be very unsafe if the underlying cultures of risk are not seen, understood and tackled.

‘Tick box’ culture can occur, if formal regulatory processes are separated from substantive organisational processes. This is where organisations primarily aim to comply with legal obligations, without internalising the values and principles the regulations stand for. Additionally, merely adhering to standards can potentially be a superficial exercise if the foundational culture of an organisation isn’t properly aligned with them.

***“Some institutions have adequate policies and codes of conduct that describe and provide examples of inappropriate behaviour and how to identify and report suspicions. If, however, these policies and procedures are ignored, not implemented, or are regarded as unimportant within the culture of the institution, it will be more difficult to detect and respond appropriately to abuse. Seeking to change such attitudes requires cultural change within a whole institution, because the attitudes of each individual will have been influenced by the behaviour of colleagues.”***

Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse: 2017

***“[S]ome NGOs have responded with system strengthening by putting safeguarding policies strategy and system measures in place. This is laudable and needed but does not necessarily get to all the culture failures. This work needs to be complimented [sic] with internal NGO culture work of a long-term, sustained and disciplined nature.”***

Bruno-van Vijfeijken: 2019

Any form of abuse in workplaces can lead to immense reputational damage. Research and numerous Royal Commissions have shown that attempts to cover up these abuses have led to further reputational harm. Open and transparent organisations that are genuinely trying to prevent abuse can boost their reputation through promoting their openness to change.

For some organisations, the path to creating child safe cultures is complex and daunting. While the primary goal of child safe regulation is embedding safety into the culture of an organisation, implementation often overlooks the pivotal task of deeply examining the culture of an organisation. This underlying culture can significantly influence how safeguarding practices are perceived, implemented, and maintained.

Many organisations currently have no clear method for identifying their cultural and organisational child safety risks, nor do they have ready access to approaches that will mitigate those risks.

This Framework offers clear strategies to mitigate risk through culture change, giving organisations a road map for change and a mechanism for measuring success.

Over time, genuine culture change will lead to reduced organisational risks as well as a reduction in costs. Safe organisations, where people are treated with respect, have much higher retention rates, leading to reduced recruitment costs for organisations. A reduction in abuse and harm will also reduce the risk of litigation and costs associated with liability claims.

***“Organisational culture is the basis for safeguarding to be practiced well in an organisation: where people are and feel safe to engage and anyone in, or impacted by, an organisation is empowered to report concerns wherever they may arise.”***

Bond Safeguarding UK

***“Within the charity sector there has been broad agreement and recognition that robust, thorough safeguarding policies are essential. However, to be utilised effectively they must exist in the right culture. If there is an organisational culture of unaccountability, indifference, bullying or aggression then even the best policies will be at best under-utilised and at worst meaningless.”***

Association of Chief Executives of  
Voluntary Organisations UK:2018

# Your Cultural Reflection Journey

Once you have decided that you are serious about preventing abuse by tackling the deep cultural drivers, then you need to start by understanding your organisation.

The Framework and associated Tools are built on a set of Psychological Safety Principles that clearly articulate the desired culture that organisations should aim for.

Your cultural reflection journey involves assessing the organisation's internal dynamics, identifying unique cultural risks and obstacles, and working towards changing cultures which may lead to abuse. Cultural change is about replacing cultural risk factors with new patterns and behaviours that facilitate more robust safeguarding. This Framework emphasises the implementation of proactive strategies and a systemic longer-term approach to cultural transformation that supports regulatory compliance.

## Psychological Safety Principles

The diagram on the following page displays the eight psychological safety principles, identified through research conducted to develop this Framework. See Appendix X for a detailed description of each principle, including the organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions and indicators associated with that principle.

The principles align to many jurisdictional standards and legislative requirements. Even so, the primary driver for the principles is to build real organisational safety, as opposed to ensuring compliance with existing standards.

***“Culture is what you see, when compliance is not in the room.”***

Bruno-van Vijfeijken:2019

## Psychological Safety Principles



## Overview of the journey

### 1. Organisational Culture Self-Assessment Tool

All members of your organisation including clients, members, and volunteers complete a feedback form.

Respondents are asked about cultural dynamics and their perceptions of the safety climate within the organisation.

### 2. Self-Assessment Tool Findings

Organisational leaders (or change champions) collate and analyse findings from the self-assessment tool.

### 3. Cultural Safety Quality Improvement Plan

Organisational leaders document actions to enhance the safety culture based on the findings. For each action, they identify a plan for monitoring progress toward desired changes and assessing effectiveness over time (i.e., whether change is observed).

### 4. Ongoing monitoring, review and learning

Organisational leaders monitor the implementation of the improvement plan and periodically review whether the organisational culture is changing, most likely by re-administering the Organisational Culture Self-Assessment Tool.

#### 1. The Organisational Culture Self-Assessment Tool

##### Hear from key stakeholders

The Self-Assessment Tool has been designed as a feedback form to understand the internal cultural dynamics and perceived safety of an organisation. It is more extensive than a staff “pulse” feedback form as it can be administered to all members of an organisation including clients, members, and volunteers. It is designed to target cultural dynamics that affect organisational safety.

The design of the Self-Assessment Tool is based on research on organisational cultures of risk; culture change models and diagnostic tools; and culture change practices and initiatives.

## Overview of the journey

### Guidance for using the Self-Assessment Tool

At a minimum, all leadership, staff and volunteers should complete the feedback form. If this is not feasible, then include a random sample of members, clients or congregants, depending on the size of the organisation. For small or medium-sized organisations, it is recommended that the feedback form is offered to all staff and clients.

The Tool has been developed for organisations to easily distribute the feedback form and collate the results. There is a standard version of the feedback form available for organisations to use with a comprehensive “how to” guide to support the implementation of the Framework.

You may wish to undergo a bespoke, guided process delivered by Kooyoora and customised to your organisational requirements. In this case, Kooyoora will work with you to develop a specific feedback form to meet your needs, and will then undertake the feedback form process and provide a report with responses. If you wish to undertake this guided process, please visit [kooyoora.org.au](http://kooyoora.org.au) for all our contact details to discuss your needs and obtain a quote for a guided cultural assessment.

## 2. Self-Assessment Tool Findings

### Identify key problem areas for improvement

Once the feedback form is completed and results have been collated, an organisational leader needs to analyse the Self-Assessment Tool results. The following list shows a structure for presenting findings (the numbered items), along with questions and issues to consider as you make sense of the available data.

#### 1. Key Findings:

- What significant patterns, trends, or issues have the self-assessment survey results revealed?
- How well does the organization align with the Psychological Safety Principles?

#### 2. Expectations vs. Reality:

- Compare the results to your initial expectations.
- Identify any surprising or unexpected findings.

#### 3. Areas of Strength:

- Highlight aspects of the organizational culture viewed positively (cultural strengths).
- Identify effective policies or practices.

#### 4. Priority Areas for Improvement:

- Address aspects of the organizational culture viewed negatively (cultural risks).
- Identify the most concerning issues highlighted by the survey.
- Explore specific areas (e.g., departments, teams) where these issues are more prevalent.

#### 5. Feedback Patterns:

- Look for recurring themes or common threads in the responses.

#### 6. Perceptions of Response to Abuse/Harassment:

- Evaluate how employees perceive the organisation’s response to sexual abuse or harassment incidents.
- Assess feelings of safety and support when reporting incidents.
- Consider trust and perceived fairness in the reporting process.

### 3. Create a Cultural Safety Quality Improvement Plan

#### A strategic approach to improving the organisation's safety culture

The next step is to develop a plan based on what you have learned through analysing your self-assessment tool findings. A Cultural Safety Quality Improvement Plan Template has been developed that will support you to do this. Using the tool will help you understand which key areas of culture your organisation must tackle to improve your safety culture.

As highlighted in the above safety principles, creating psychological safety involves establishing clear norms, encouraging open communication, setting clear expectations, inviting input, showing appreciation, admitting fallibility, encouraging diverse perspectives and ideas, ensuring that everyone feels heard and valued, and responding productively. Common misconceptions about psychological safety include thinking it is about being nice and feeling comfortable all the time. Psychological safety is more about 'candour' – acknowledging mistakes and limits and taking risks in a safe environment.

There are a number of measures that organisations can take to change and improve safety culture over time. Promoting a psychologically secure culture should place special emphasis on being person-centred, listening, and learning. This will make sure that staff and client voices are heard, that ideas and issues are discussed for enhancements, that mistakes are openly dealt with, and that errors contribute to failure-based learning.

#### Guidance for developing and implementing the Cultural Safety Improvement Plan

The Cultural Safety Improvement Plan template provides sample strategies to assist you in developing your plan. It is important, however that your plan is tailored specifically to your organisation's identified risks and challenges, and that it is not too onerous. A long and complex plan with too many strategies will be difficult to implement and is highly unlikely to succeed. A good plan will set some organisational challenges, and will be ambitious in its commitment to change, but will be deliverable.

Key considerations when completing the plan are as follows:

- **Outline Actions and Implement Strategies and Initiatives** for improving and enhancing organisational safety culture based on feedback from results findings and identified priorities. *You may wish to consider actions for managing power dynamics, safe and open communication, accountability and transparency measures, reporting mechanisms, inclusive support measures, awareness raising strategies and programs, additional training, development for recognising and reporting abuse or harassment, diversity and inclusion training, respectful communications.*
- **Roles and Responsibilities** for budget allocation, leadership roles, departmental responsibilities, employee involvement.
- **Timelines and Milestones** including a schedule for when different aspects of the plan will be implemented, including key milestones to track progress.

### 4. Ongoing Monitoring Review and Learning

It is important to monitor the implementation of the plan for ongoing review and improvement. This includes safe mechanisms for ongoing feedback, allowing employees to continuously share their thoughts on areas needing more attention. Include how and when the effectiveness of the implemented changes will be reviewed.

#### Culture Change is a Long-Term Commitment

Even if this process has been completed correctly, there will be some aspects of your culture that will require long term commitment to change. This is normal for all organisations that have a true commitment to honest self-assessment, with many organisational cultures reflecting social norms.

Invariably, some of the longer-term strategies will require organisations to invest time, resolve, energy and possibly resources to creating sustainable cultural change.



# Training and Development Resources

Kooyoora has a range of training and development resources available to your organisation once you have completed the self-assessment and improvement planning process and have a clear understanding of your organisation's culture change requirements.

We are also working with project partners to develop a resource library to support you with implementing your strategies for change. This will include a written, online and other training resources delivered by other organisations.

# References

This document utilises research gathered from the extensive literature review and lived experience feedback conducted to gather an evidence base for the development of this Framework. Further information and detailed references can be found in the literature review. This is available on Kooyoora's website at [Kooyoora.org.au](https://kooyoora.org.au)

Specific references cited in this document are listed below.

Association of Voluntary Organisations. (2018) 'Leading with Values: Creating a Safe Organisational Culture'. Accessed: Sep. 22, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.acevo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Leading-with-values.pdf>.

Bond Safeguarding UK, "Understanding Effective Safeguarding Culture." Accessed: Sep. 22, 2023. [Online]. Available: [https://bond.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/bond\\_understanding\\_effective\\_safeguarding\\_culture.pdf#:~:text=Organisational%20culture%20is%20the%20basis%20for%20safeguarding%20to,to%20analyse%20or%20critique%20their%20own%20organisational%20culture.](https://bond.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/bond_understanding_effective_safeguarding_culture.pdf#:~:text=Organisational%20culture%20is%20the%20basis%20for%20safeguarding%20to,to%20analyse%20or%20critique%20their%20own%20organisational%20culture.)

Bruno-van Vijfeijken, T. (2019) 'Culture Is What You See When Compliance Is Not in the Room: Organizational Culture as an Explanatory Factor in Analyzing Recent INGO Scandals', <https://www.degruyter.com/journal/key/npf/html>. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1515/npf-2019-0031>.

Death, J. (2015) 'Bad Apples, Bad Barrel: Exploring Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse by Catholic Clergy in Australia', *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, vol. 4, pp. 94–110, 2015, [Online]. Available: <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:142416002>.

Erooga, M., Kaufman, K. & Zatkin, J. (2019) 'Powerful perpetrators, hidden in plain sight: an international analysis of organisational child sexual abuse cases', *Journal of Sexual Aggression*, vol. 26, pp. 62–90, [Online]. Available: <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:202258390>.

McCarthy, T. (2015) *Spotlight*, Film, USA.

Muccillo, A., 2023. "It Takes a Village" – Strengthening Safeguarding Through Organisational Cultural Change – A Narrative Literature Review

Palmer, D. A., Feldmen, V. & McKibbin, G. (2016) 'The role of organisational culture in child sexual abuse in institutional contexts', [Online]. Available: <https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Research%20Report%20-%20The%20role%20of%20organisational%20culture%20in%20child%20sexual%20abuse%20in%20institutional%20contexts%20-%20Causes.pdf>.

Kegan, R., Markus, I., Miller, M., Fleming, A. & Lahey, L., "The Deliberately Developmental Organization," 2014. Accessed: Oct. 01, 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://orghacking.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/thedeliberatelydevelopmentalorganization.pdf>.

Rossiter, A. (2000) 'The professional is political: An interpretation of the problem of the past in solution-focused therapy', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70, 2: 150–161.

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, "FINAL REPORT Preface and executive summary," (2017). [Online]. Available: [https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2021-08/final\\_report\\_-\\_preface\\_and\\_executive\\_summary.pdf](https://www.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2021-08/final_report_-_preface_and_executive_summary.pdf).

# Appendix

Appendix A – Cultural risk factors

Appendix B – Safeguarding requirements

Appendix C – Psychological Safety  
Principles explained

## Appendix A – Cultural risk factors

Organisational leaders need to understand what the cultural risk factors are, that make organisations unsafe, and why these cultures create risk of harm. When reading through these cultural risks, think about your organisation and honestly appraise if you can identify any of these cultural risks within your organisation.

### Power and Privilege

Power is described as “the ability to force others to comply with one’s requests, often overriding other imperatives like rational assessments and normative proclivities” (Palmer:2016). Formal power, derived from an organisation’s chain of command, operates through the norm of obedience to authority, which is the felt obligation of subordinates to obey superiors:

*“Little attention is given to the ways in which the positioning of the professional worker may embody class, race, gender and sexual privilege...workers need to be aware of how their own power and privilege are maintained or challenged in their encounters with both clients and other staff”*

Rossiter:2000

It is important for all of us to reflect upon our experiences of socialisation, and how that is represented through our positions or status, our behaviours and conduct, our thinking, and how these place us in relation to ‘the other’.

### Powerful Perpetrators Hidden in Plain Sight

There are numerous instances where powerful individuals within organisations have used their authority and status to circumvent safeguarding policies and perpetrate abuse. These individuals can include leaders, board members, high-status professionals, major donors, and celebrities. Becoming a powerful perpetrator is not solely determined by job title, but rather by attaining power through position, celebrity status, or self-created/charismatic authority. They can be articulate, well-networked, ‘caring professionals’, who are usually part of the leadership of the institution:

*“Ascribed, hierarchical or positional authority – in this case, “power” is organisationally bestowed on the individual as a function of their position”*

Erooga, Kaufman & Zatzkin: 2019

The propensity to obey authority figures without question has been ingrained in many social structures. Research on the role of culture in perpetuating sexual abuse found that the stronger the norm of obedience, the more motivation and opportunities staff will have to sexually abuse children in their charge.

## Bad Apple, Bad Barrel

According to the Bad Apple approach (Death:2015), unethical behaviour can be seen as acts committed by individuals with bad intentions. To combat unethical behaviour, compliance measures such as regulation and punishment are often used. Consequentially, the Bad Apples are removed through dismissal.

The Bad Barrel approach rejects the above-mentioned as too individualistic and limited. Organisational complicity can be passive, where the institution is aware of the misconduct but overlooks and fails to address it. Or it can be structural, where the prevailing organisational practices or cultural norms implicitly enable such misconduct, often to prioritise the organisations' reputation over wellbeing.

## Fear of Retaliation

Fear of retaliation is where victim/survivors may fear that the abuser or others will harm or threaten them if they report the abuse. The risk of perceived professional retaliation is higher when the perpetrator has authority over the victim/survivors within organisational hierarchies.

## Traumatic Isolation and Stigma

Stigmatisation results from social relations intertwined with bureaucratic authority. Organisations can deliberately use social marginalisation to protect their power and assets. This protection can involve both passive compliance from other staff, congregants or members, and active manipulation by leaders. Marginalising victim/survivors stigmatises them and effectively diverts unwanted scrutiny away from organisational wrongdoings.

## Institutional Betrayal

Institutional betrayal occurs when, following victimisation, organisations create hostile environments that normalise abuse. This makes it difficult to report the incident, and organisations can mishandle the complaint, attempt to conceal the incident, or retaliate against victim/survivors.

## Shame and Guilt

Perpetrators can use grooming and other tactics to enable and conceal the abuse. The power and status of perpetrators within the institution can inhibit identification and disclosure. Perpetrators often isolate the victim/survivor and may blame them or cultivate a shared sense of responsibility.

Many victim/survivors do not disclose because they feel responsible, or believe it is their fault.

## Fear of Not Being Believed

The power and authority of perpetrators within institutions can make it difficult for abuse to be identified and disclosed. Perpetrators can use their position and authority to establish a special relationship with the victim/survivor, making them feel vulnerable and less likely to disclose. Our research shows that the more status and power the perpetrators have, the harder it is for victim/survivors and observers to have their disclosures heard and believed.

In the case of children, they are often taught not to challenge adults and may feel guilty or confused if they engage in sexual activity with them. Perpetrators exploit their power to pressure victim/survivors into not disclosing by making them fear not being believed. They can also threaten the victim/survivor with negative consequences in work, school or status, or convince the victim/survivor that disclosing abuse will jeopardise their future opportunities.

## Institutional Reputation and Loyalty

The prioritisation of reputation over care and safety in some organisations creates barriers for victim/survivors to disclose abuse, and for bystanders to report concerns. Some victim/survivors feel inhibited from disclosing abuse due to the prestigious nature of the institution or its emphasis on reputation. This focus on protecting reputation also hinders adults in the institution from identifying and responding to abuse. Some organisations view threats to their public image as issues to be managed.

Victim/survivors may fear the consequences of identifying and disclosing abuse, believing that the organisation will prioritise its own interests over their welfare. Loyalty to the organisation can prevent victim/survivors from speaking out, as they may feel they are betraying the organisation. The pervasive culture of these institutions can lead members to protect their institutional identity in the face of threats. Institutions often contribute to this barrier by fostering dismissive cultures towards allegations of abuse.

## Lack of Cultural Safety/Mistrust

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim/survivors and survivors face additional barriers in institutions where their cultures are not recognised, respected, or acknowledged.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors of child sexual abuse may experience heightened feelings of shame due to the cultural abuse they endured under 'protectionist' and assimilation policies. This shame is interconnected with the shame they were encouraged to associate

with their Indigenous identity. The use of sexual exploitation as a tool of collective humiliation during colonisation adds further complexity to the shame experienced by these survivors when trying to disclose or seek help (Muccillo:2023).

## Appendix B – Safeguarding requirements

All organisations are required to provide a safe workplace under various health and safety legislation. In addition to this, the newly introduced Respect@Work legislative reforms have introduced a positive duty in the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* that requires all employers to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate certain forms of unlawful discrimination. The Act strengthens the legal and regulatory frameworks relating to sex discrimination and shifts the system to focus more on preventative efforts to eliminate sexual harassment in Australian workplaces.

Most Australian jurisdictions have introduced their own Child Safe Standards that are aligned to the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. The Kooyoora Framework offers organisations the opportunity to genuinely comply with all requirements through tackling abusive cultures and demonstrating commitment to authentic compliance through prevention.

## Appendix C – Psychological Safety Principles explained

These Principles are based on research Kooyoora conducted that identified important aspects of culture that can enable organisations to be safe. They also align to a number of jurisdictional standards and legislative requirements. However, it is important to emphasise that compliance to standards was not the primary driver in the development of these principles. The primary driver was to build genuine cultures of safety.

### PRINCIPLE 1. FOSTER OPEN SAFE COMMUNICATION

**Children and adults *feel safe, informed, and empowered* about their rights and *feel included* in decisions that affect them.**

**Desired Culture:** Every individual – regardless of their age, role, status, or background – feels secure and empowered to voice their concerns about potential problems or malpractices within the organisation. In addition, they feel they can openly share their thoughts and ideas without fear of retaliation, blame, or other negative consequences. They feel valued and heard in response to their concerns, thoughts, and ideas, including acknowledgement of issues and appropriate action to resolve them.

An organisational culture that values the voice of its members provides access to safe systems

or platforms for both expressing concerns, reporting abuse, misconduct, or harassment, and suggesting improvements for preventing potential issues. These systems are policy-backed, well-communicated, accessible, user-friendly and ensure confidentiality.

### **Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Respect and acknowledge the rights of children and adults across the organisation, value differing opinions by inviting input, and encourage diverse perspectives on safety related matters.
- Value and encourage a 'speak up culture' to address and 'call out' inappropriate behaviour, safety concerns, insufficient protections or to advocate for change.
- Protect and reward people who 'speak up', thereby demonstrating commitment to honest, ethical, and respectful behaviour.
- People trust that reports [disclosure] of inappropriate behaviour, misconduct, or safety concerns will be listened to, believed, taken seriously, validated, and acted upon promptly with a clear process that is consistently applied.
- Value empowerment and autonomy throughout the resolution processes. This includes the opportunity and choice to be involved, and

being able to contribute to decisions that affect their safety and wellbeing.

- Use feedback loops: individuals who raise concerns are kept informed about the status of reports and action taken.
- Normalise and encourage open discussions about workplace safety and respect, including open dialogue to promote awareness of sexual abuse and harassment issues, rights, and responsibilities.
- Model respectful interactions, including establishing norms of mutual respect and dignity in all interactions.
- Cultivate a culture where empathy and understanding are fundamental attitudes in all interactions.
- Enact culturally safe and trauma informed practices.
- Foster a sense of individual and collective responsibility to maintain a safe workplace.
- Proactive reporting. There is often an increase in reported concerns due to heightened openness and trust.
- Employee feedback on feeling heard and respected.
- Establish safe processes that enable everyone to express their voice.

## **PRINCIPLE 2. ENCOURAGE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

**All individuals are valued and appreciated for their uniqueness, thus encouraging an environment where everyone feels they belong and are safe to be themselves.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations embrace and value diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and lived experiences, ensuring broad representation and participation in decision-making processes. Promote cultural awareness and responsiveness to the needs of different groups, including First Nations people, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities, and other diverse populations.

### **Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Listen to and value diverse voices including children, victim/survivors, and other relevant stakeholders. Unique perspectives are sought.
- Respect and value lived experience contributions.
- Conduct inclusion and diversity training programs. There is supervision to reflect on and mitigate unconscious biases and discriminatory behaviours.
- Include diverse representation in dialogues and decision-making, and positive feedback on inclusivity initiatives.

## **PRINCIPLE 3. EMPOWER THROUGH PARTICIPATION**

**All stakeholders are involved in shaping organisational safety policies and strategies, where organisations recognise and value the active participation and contributions of all members, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations are adaptable, able to listen, and willing to evolve in response to internal and external feedback and changes.

### **Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Promote active involvement, value collaborative decision-making, and empower relevant stakeholders to contribute.
- Provide platforms and opportunities for active participation in policy/strategy formation.

## **PRINCIPLE 4. PRIORITISE ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY**

**Strong ethical standards of behaviour are upheld, and everyone is answerable for their conduct, promoting a culture of responsibility, honesty, and integrity.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations value and embody honesty, responsibility, and accountability and reflect on issues of integrity.

### **Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Value and embody honesty, responsibility, and accountability.
- Ensure the rights of all stakeholders are respected and upheld. Reflect on organisational integrity and values.
- Regularly review and refine accountability and transparency practices. External oversight over handling issues in-house
- Disclose relevant information transparently, reflected in policies and codes of conduct.
- Immediate and appropriate response to any misconduct, reflected in policies and code of conduct.

## **PRINCIPLE 5. PROMOTE CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT**

**A strong culture of continuous learning and reflective practice to enhance knowledge, skills, and awareness of how to keep adults and children safe, including online.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations encourage capacity building, in order that everyone feels



confident in their ability to address safety issues appropriately.

**Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Encourage a learning mindset, value feedback, learn from experiences and demonstrate a commitment to continual improvement and development.
- Regularly review and refine policies and strategies, incorporating feedback and learning to identify and implement improvements.

## **PRINCIPLE 6. CHALLENGE POWER STRUCTURES**

**Actively questioning power structures and norms to promote an equitable environment where people feel safe to challenge the status quo.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations question and re-evaluate existing power structures and norms, analyse power dynamics in the organisation and programs, address power imbalances, recognise situations where children and adults may be vulnerable to abuses of power.

**Organisational Values, Norms, Behaviours Actions:**

- Encourage discussions and initiatives aimed at addressing and rectifying unsafe power imbalances within the organisation.
- Adaptable and willing to evolve in response to internal and external feedback and changes.

## **PRINCIPLE 7. ESTABLISH CLEAR AND FAIR COMPLAINTS PROCEDURES**

**All procedures for responding to and addressing sexual abuse, misconduct and harassment complaints and concerns are clear and fair so that individuals feel a sense of stability and justice.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations maintain consistent, transparent, impartial, and equitable processes in addressing and resolving issues, fostering a sense of justice and fairness.

**Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Value fairness, maintain clarity, timeliness in responses, procedures, and ensure impartiality in all dealings.
- Clearly outline and communicate procedures in accessible formats,<sup>†</sup> which promote understanding and reflection on the fairness and clarity of processes.
- Encourage employee, stakeholder feedback and reflections on the fairness and effectiveness of procedures, continually striving for improvement.
- Integrate trauma-informed approaches into complaint resolution processes, ensuring that they are sensitive to the experiences of complainants.

## **PRINCIPLE 8. ENHANCE SUPPORT AND WELLBEING**

**Organisations prioritise wellbeing in response to incidences of harm and safety concerns. Resources are allocated to wellbeing support services as a priority, support needs are understood and people feel cared for, valued and safe.**

**Desired Culture:** Organisations offer relevant wellbeing support systems in response to incidences of harm and safety concerns, which are informed by the lived experiences of victims/survivors, First Nations people, the LGBTQIA+ community, people with disabilities. Resources are allocated to wellbeing support services.

**Organisational values, norms, attitudes, actions, and indicators:**

- Establish support systems and services that are culturally safe, trauma informed, victim/survivor centred and sensitive to unique and diverse individual needs and experiences.
- Offer relevant support, referral, and resources to alleged perpetrators.
- Offer opportunities for people to reflect on their wellbeing and seek support when needed and offer feedback on services and programs.
- Promote awareness of the availability and utilisation of support services.

<sup>†</sup> Ensure all individuals including children, ESL, and people with disabilities have equal and fair opportunities to understand, participate in, and benefit from the complaint handling process. For example, this includes documents that are free of jargon, available in multiple languages, and adapted for children. In addition, where possible use sign language interpreters for the Deaf, and braille or audio description for people who are blind or have low vision. This ensures everyone, regardless of educational or cultural background, understands how to report an incident, and what the subsequent steps are.







**www.kooyoora.org.au**

**Phone** 1800 135 246

**Office** 613 9416 1008

**Enquiries** [enquiries@kooyoora.org.au](mailto:enquiries@kooyoora.org.au)

**Mail** PO Box 329, Canterbury, VIC 3126