Aboriginal Cultural Safety

Understanding cultural safety in lutruwita

What is cultural safety?

Cultural safety can be understood as an environment or relationship where:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people feel safe to be themselves

- their Aboriginality is respected

- their sense of self and identity is nurtured and encouraged.

Cultural safety begins with an appreciation of the historical context of colonisation, racism at individual and institutional levels, and the impact of this on Aboriginal people's lives and wellbeing, both in the past and present.

> **From a young Aboriginal Tasmanian:**
>
> **I feel safe and loved when my family is all together.**
>
> — Aged 11 years old.

Why is cultural safety important?

Following invasion, Tasmanian Aboriginal people experienced massacres, dispossession, the abduction of women and children, exile, assimilation, and the denial of existence and identity. The invasion of Aboriginal land put in place a Western society, where Aboriginal people were not represented or appreciated, and their needs were very rarely considered of importance.

This undervaluing and dehumanisation of Aboriginal individuals, and Aboriginal culture more broadly, created myriad problems for Aboriginal communities that have resulted in a largely disadvantaged Aboriginal population in Australia today. The cultural rights of Aboriginal people are not always upheld which has created a distrust in mainstream services.

The Final Report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlighted that Aboriginal children are at higher risk of abuse within institutions due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation.

Research for the Royal Commission also found Aboriginal children's connection to culture is a protective factor for their wellbeing, as it strengthens their sense of identity, self-esteem and attachments.

It is for this reason it is essential that organisations that engage with children are culturally safe.

Aboriginal Cultural Safety

> **From a young Aboriginal Tasmanian:**
>
> I feel safe when I am practising and celebrating my Aboriginal heritage.
>
> — Aged 12 years old.

How can my organisation work to be culturally safe?

Cultural safety is felt in environments that celebrate and understand Aboriginal culture and promote the strength of the community.

An organisation that is culturally safe will be a place that gives Aboriginal children a positive message about their Aboriginality, and the Aboriginal community to which they belong.

Under each Standard in this document there is information on what actions and processes organisations can enact to show they are complying. This information can be drawn upon to embed cultural safety within organisations.

It is important to understand that cultural safety is a journey of understanding and truth telling and that the organisations policies and practices will need to change to reflect this.

The presence or absence of cultural safety cannot be determined by the organisation. It can only be determined by Aboriginal children who access the organisation.

> **From a young Aboriginal Tasmanian:**
>
> I feel valued when I contribute to conversations: when people ask me for input. I like to be involved.
>
> — Aged 14 years old.

How do young Aboriginal Tasmanians describe cultural safety, in their own words?
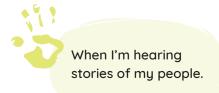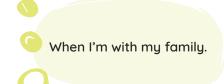
The artwork pictured below was created by a group of young Aboriginal Tasmanians who were asked to create something that responded to the prompt:

An artwork created by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's youth group in October 2023 that expresses what their culture means to them.

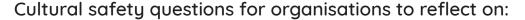### 'I feel safe and connected to my culture when . . .'

When I'm hearing stories of my people.

When I'm with my family.

When I'm by the water, I like the sounds.

Aboriginal Cultural Safety

How does the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework speak to Aboriginal Cultural Safety?
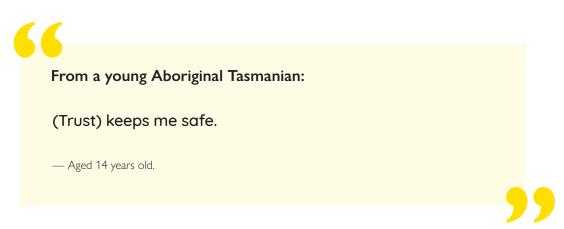
In putting the Child and Youth Safe Standards into practice, organisations must also give effect to the Universal Principle for Aboriginal Cultural Safety.

Compliance indicators for the Universal Principle have been developed for each Child and Youth Safe Standard, summarised in the below table:

Child and Youth Safe Standard	Compliance Indicator for the Universal Principle
Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.	The organisation publicly demonstrates a commitment to cultural safety, and embeds cultural safety into governance structures and strategic planning.
Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.	Aboriginal children understand their cultural rights and feel safe to practise their culture.
Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing	The organisation provides cultural safety by prioritising Aboriginal self-determination.
Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice	The organisation understands the needs of Aboriginal children, and policies and practices of the organisation are responsive to inequities.
People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.	The organisation employs Aboriginal staff or meaningfully involves Aboriginal people in recruitment processes to increase cultural safety for Aboriginal children.
Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.	The organisation has meaningful processes that encourage and support Aboriginal children to raise complaints and concerns that are related to their safety.
Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.	Staff and volunteers' knowledge of Aboriginal history and the ongoing impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma on the Aboriginal community is reflected in their practice.
Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.	The physical and online environments show respect for Aboriginal people.
Implementation of the Child and Youth Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.	The organisation acknowledges that cultural safety is a journey of understanding and truth-telling.
Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.	Policies and procedures address all 10 Child and Youth Safe Standards, and the Universal Principle for Aboriginal Cultural Safety is included.

Cultural safety questions for organisations to reflect on:

- Has my organisation publicly demonstrated a commitment to cultural safety?

- Is cultural safety embedded into governance structures and strategic planning?

- Are Aboriginal children supported to understand their cultural rights, and feel safe to practise their culture?

- Are Aboriginal children offered opportunities to engage, share and ask questions about their culture?

- Does my organisation prioritise Aboriginal self-determination by involving Aboriginal families and communities in decisions that affect the children in their community?

- Does my organisation understand the needs of Aboriginal children, and create policies and practices that are responsive to these needs?

- Does my organisation employ Aboriginal staff and/or meaningfully involve Aboriginal people in recruitment processes to increase cultural safety for Aboriginal children?

- Does my organisation's complaints handling policies and procedures encourage and support Aboriginal children to raise complaints and concerns that are related to their safety?

- Are staff and volunteers supported to grow their knowledge of Aboriginal history and the ongoing impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma on the Aboriginal community? Is this knowledge reflected in their practice?

- Does my organisation's physical and/or online environments show respect for Aboriginal people?

- Does my organisation regularly review and improve its culturally safety practices, and prioritise the timely implementation of any suggested changes?

- Is the Universal Principle for Aboriginal Cultural Safety included in my organisation's efforts to implement each of the 10 Child and Youth Safe Standards?

> **From a young Aboriginal Tasmanian:**
>
> (Trust) keeps me safe.
>
> — Aged 14 years old.

Aboriginal Cultural Safety

Useful key terms that relate to Aboriginal Cultural Safety:

Term	Definition
Truth Telling	Telling the truth about what has happened in the past, which brings to light colonial conflict and dispossession, whilst acknowledging the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture.
Mob	A group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples associated with a particular place or Country.
Lore	The customs and stories learned from the Dreamtime. Lore is passed on through generations through songs, stories and dance and governs all aspects of life.
Country	Encompasses everything within the landscape including landforms, water, air, sky, trees, rocks, plants, animals and special places. Country also includes cultural practices, knowledge, songs, stories, art and people past, present and future.
Self-determination	In this context, refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people being able to make their own choices and live according to their own values and beliefs.

About this resource:

We acknowledge and thank the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for contributing their expertise to the development of the Universal Principle and compliance indicators, to support Aboriginal children and young people's right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment with connections to community, culture, and identity. We also sincerely thank the young artists who created the artwork featured in this resource.

This resource mirrors interim compliance guidance developed by the Department of Justice in consultation with local subject matter experts and interstate counterparts.

It is to be taken as interim guidance only, published to help organisations begin the process of complying with the Child and Youth Safe Standards and Universal Principle for Aboriginal Cultural Safety, and will be followed by formal compliance guidance from the Independent Regulator of the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework.

While this guidance references elements of the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Act 2023, it is not intended to replicate the entirety of the legislation or replace independent legal advice. No responsibility is accepted for any errors or omissions it may contain. For precision, reference should be made to the Act.