

The National Childhood Protection Initiative

A National Platform for Brave Creative Voices

EMPOWERING STUDENTS · SUPPORTING EDUCATORS · STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES

The Child Protection Foundation is a grassroots charity, founded in 2007 and endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient. We believe every child has the right to feel safe. Our directors and staff are volunteers; we are independent and non-partisan, and while we welcome support from across the community, no sponsor or political party controls our work.

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The Child Protection Foundation is a national child protection charity dedicated to prevention through education, awareness, and community engagement. Established in 2007, the Foundation works to expose and reduce the incidence and impact of child abuse by equipping communities — particularly schools — with the knowledge, confidence, and tools to act early and effectively.

The Foundation is launching a powerful new schools initiative designed to spark conversations, inspire creativity, and deepen awareness of the importance of child protection throughout local communities.

Purpose and Audience

This document is primarily written for government stakeholders and educators. It outlines the case for a national, school-based initiative that uses **age-appropriate creative expression** to build awareness, strengthen help-seeking pathways, and contribute to long-term cultural change.

Why Schools Are Essential to the Fight Against Child Abuse

Educators are Australia's frontline for child safety. In **2023–24**, school personnel were the **largest single source of child protection notifications — 28% (86,300 notifications)** — more than police or health services. This makes schools the most effective early-warning and response network we have.

A Nation Cannot Heal What It Refuses to Confront

Right now, in Australia, child abuse is still occurring at scale — often hidden behind silence. In **2023–24, 42,100 children** in finalised investigations were the subjects of **substantiated maltreatment**. But substantiations only capture what is reported, investigated, and meets thresholds; they do not represent the full prevalence of maltreatment in the community.

Landmark Australian prevalence research (the Australian Child Maltreatment Study) shows that **around 2 in 3 Australian adults (≈62%)** experienced at least one form of maltreatment in childhood. If child abuse were a more visible public health issue affecting so many young lives, it would trigger a national emergency. Instead, it is often hidden — cloaked in shame, fear, and denial — despite its deep long-term costs to individuals, communities, and society.

The Downstream Impacts Are Significant

Childhood maltreatment is strongly associated with later harms across mental health, substance use, homelessness, justice-system involvement, and intergenerational disadvantage. Recent Australian research published in **JAMA Psychiatry (2024)** estimates that childhood maltreatment makes a **causal contribution** to major mental-health burdens, including an estimated **41% of suicide attempts** attributable to childhood maltreatment.

It does not have to be this way. We believe prevention is our most powerful tool, and that schools and educators are best positioned to lead the charge — which is why The Child Protection Foundation is proud to launch this national initiative.

Evidence Snapshot (for Government and Educators)

- **Prevalence is high:** The Australian Child Maltreatment Study reports prevalence estimates of physical abuse (32.0%), sexual abuse (28.5%), emotional abuse (30.9%), neglect (8.9%), and exposure to domestic violence (39.6%).
- **Schools are pivotal:** in 2023–24, school personnel made 28% (86,300) of child protection notifications — the largest single reporting group.
- **System contact is substantial:** AIHW reports the rate of children in the child protection system has remained around **31 per 1,000** in recent years (about 1 in 31).
- **Justice-system crossover is severe:** almost **two-thirds (65%)** of young people under youth justice supervision in 2022–23 had an interaction with the child protection system in the prior 10 years.
- **Risk multiplier:** AIFS summarises evidence that young people involved in child protection were **12 times more likely** than the general population to be under youth justice supervision.
- **Economic burden is immense:** national estimates have placed the annual cost of violence against children and young people at approximately **\$34 billion (2016–17)**, underlining the value of prevention and early intervention.

Initiative Overview

The National Childhood Protection Initiative is a national platform inviting students from **Kindergarten to Year 12**, across public and private schools, to participate in an age-appropriate Australia-wide engagement that combines education, creativity, and advocacy.

The objective is to raise awareness of child abuse and protection among:

- Students
- Teachers and school staff
- Parents, guardians and authorised carers
- The wider community

By encouraging student participation and creative expression, the Initiative strengthens school cultures where safety is understood, concerns are voiced early, and support pathways are clear and compassionate.

Core Theme

‘Every Childhood. Every Voice. Heard. Valued. Safe.’™

Themes by Developmental Stage

Kindergarten to Year 4 — Safety and Support. Understanding safety, trusted adults, and reassurance that help is available.

Years 5–8 — Voice, Boundaries and Speaking Up. Recognising unsafe situations, understanding personal boundaries, and the importance of speaking up for oneself and others.

Years 9–12 — Youth Voice, Agency, and Cultural Change. Youth leadership, responsibility, and shaping safer school and community cultures.

How Entries Are Organised

Across all age groups, students may participate through either **written** or **visual** creative expression. These formats are intentionally selected to maximise accessibility and inclusion, allowing students with different strengths, learning styles, and levels of confidence to engage meaningfully. Full prompt wording and guidance are provided separately to participating schools.

Core individual categories (six age bands)

Kindergarten to Year 2 · Years 3–4 · Years 5–6 · Years 7–8 · Years 9–10 · Years 11–12. Each individual category includes both a **student prize** and a corresponding **school grant** — recognising student contribution while investing directly in school-level child-protection capability.

Two national self-selected doors

Alongside the individual categories, the Initiative offers two **national entry doors** that a **student and teacher choose together** as the lens that best reflects the child's experience. These doors are **never assigned or defaulted by the Foundation** — the choice sits with the people who know the child, and it is an act of the child's own expression:

- **The First Nations door** — for the child whose truth runs through culture, community and Country. Judged nationally, across the same six age bands, in both written and visual formats, with the same prize values and school grants as the individual categories. Designed and refined on the advice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies.
- **The All Abilities (Accessibility) door** — open to any student who benefits from adjustments, in any school, mainstream or specialist. Judged nationally across the same six age bands and both formats, with the same prize values and school grants. Entry formats are designed to be genuinely accessible, and specialist schools are warmly invited into the whole Initiative.

All doors carry **equal prize value**. A First Nations or disabled student who prefers to enter through any other category may do so; the doors widen the ways a child can be heard, they do not narrow them.

Two national senior categories

Two national senior categories encourage collaboration, leadership, and broader cultural impact. Both are judged nationally as a single shared pool (no age bands), open to **Years 10–12**, and awarded **1st \$1,500 · 2nd \$750 · 3rd \$500**:

- **Senior Student Group Initiative** — teams design and implement a school-based initiative (a programme, policy, or campaign) that measurably improves safety culture.
- **Senior Video / Animation / AI Category** (minimum three students) — a 3-to-10-minute original piece (short film, animation, drama, or music video) exploring child protection from a young person's perspective. Generative-AI assistance is permitted in this category and must be declared. Entries must be suitable for a whole-school audience — no higher than a PG standard — and abuse or harm may be referenced or implied but never depicted graphically. Full content and safety rules are set out in the Addendum and published at www.cpf.org.au/schools.

Transparency and Governance

Award categories, prize values, judging criteria, and geographic distribution are clearly defined and applied consistently. Detailed category descriptions, prompts, prize amounts, and submission guidelines are provided in the accompanying **addendum**, allowing this brief to remain focused on purpose and impact.

Vision and Future Direction

The Initiative is conceived not as a one-off programme, but as the foundation for a recurring, trusted moment within the school year — a time when conversations about safety, community, and support are deliberately opened, and when students are reminded that they are not alone.

Launched initially as a national pilot, it is designed to establish a shared annual touchpoint across schools: a visible, age-appropriate moment that signals to students that their experiences matter, their voices are welcome, and support is available through their peers, teachers, and school community. Over time, the Initiative is intended to grow in ways that amplify student participation rather than institutional messaging — through evolving annual themes shaped by student insight, showcasing selected student work, and creating pathways for older students to contribute leadership and advocacy.

As participation builds, the Initiative can be supported through carefully aligned philanthropic and corporate partnerships to extend reach, national profile, and sustainability, without compromising its school-led, prevention-first ethos. The long-term vision is a lightweight but enduring national platform that helps normalise safe dialogue, strengthens school culture year on year, and gives young people confidence that when they speak, someone is listening.

Conclusion

Childhood maltreatment is not an isolated or temporary harm. Its impacts echo across lifetimes and systems, shaping mental health outcomes, educational attainment, justice involvement, and the wellbeing of future generations. The Initiative responds with a proactive, school-centred approach that prioritises early awareness, safe dialogue, and age-appropriate empowerment.

This national platform does not replace existing child-protection frameworks; it complements them by operating upstream, where prevention is most effective. We invite schools, government partners, and communities to work together to help build a future in which every child feels protected, heard, and valued.

Thank you for your time, and for all the work you do for our children and communities.

Sincerely,



Kerry Fozzard

Director, The Child Protection Foundation
0414 653 954 · kerry@cpf.org.au

The Child Protection Foundation · Suite 14, Level 2, 51–53 Spring Street, Bondi Junction NSW 2022
0421 822 576 · info@cpf.org.au · schools@cpf.org.au · www.cpf.org.au

Addendum

Categories, Prompts, Prizes and Structure

This initiative is more than a showcase of creativity and issue awareness; it is a national commitment to safer environments for children and young people. All students from Kindergarten to Year 12 are invited to submit entries in one of two formats — **visual artwork** (drawing, painting, poster) or a **written piece** (poem, essay, or short story).

One student winner is selected from each category per geographic segment (and, for the two national doors, one winner per age band Australia-wide). Each winner receives the prize — awarded as a **gift voucher or equivalent** — in recognition of their contribution and advocacy. In addition, the winner's school receives a dedicated grant to enhance child-protection resources, support systems, or school wellbeing initiatives.

Individual Category Prizes

The same ladder applies to each of the six geographic segments, and to each of the two national doors (First Nations, All Abilities):

Age band	Written prize	Visual prize	School grant
Kindergarten – Year 2 (Ages 5–7)	\$100	\$100	\$200
Years 3–4 (Ages 8–9)	\$150	\$150	\$300
Years 5–6 (Ages 10–11)	\$200	\$200	\$400
Years 7–8 (Ages 12–13)	\$250	\$250	\$500
Years 9–10 (Ages 14–15)	\$300	\$300	\$600
Years 11–12 (Ages 16–18)	\$500	\$500	\$1,000

All student prizes are awarded as gift vouchers or equivalent.

Category Prompts

Kindergarten to Year 2 (Ages 5–7)

Written: “What are some things you can do to keep yourself safe? How can talking about being safe help your friends feel happy and safe too?”

Visual: “Draw a picture of a place or person that makes you feel safe.”

Years 3–4 (Ages 8–9)

Written: “How can you keep yourself safe at home, at school, or in the community? How can talking about safety help your friends feel safe too?”

Visual: “Create a drawing showing what you do to stay safe at home, at school, or when you're out and about.”

Years 5–6 (Ages 10–11)

Written: “What steps can you take to keep yourself safe, and who can you talk to if you feel unsafe? Why do you think speaking up can make a difference?”

Visual: “Make a poster that shows how kids your age can stay safe and who they can talk to if something feels wrong.”

Years 7–8 (Ages 12–13)

Written: “What does staying safe mean to you, and how can you protect your safety in different situations? How might starting a conversation help you or a friend?”

Visual: “Design a visual message or poster that shows how young people can protect themselves and support friends who may need help.”

Years 9–10 (Ages 14–15)

Written: “How can young people take action to protect their own safety and support others? How can conversations create real change?”

Visual: “Create a visual artwork that represents what personal safety means and why it's important to speak up.”

Years 11–12 (Ages 16–18)

Written: “What role do you play in your own safety, and how can your voice help to create a safer community for others? Why is it important to speak up, even when it is difficult?”

Visual: “Use visual art to share a powerful message about child safety, the importance of consent, or standing up for what's right.”

National Senior Categories

Senior Student Group Initiative (Years 10–12)

Prompt: “Design and implement a school-based initiative that addresses bullying, abuse prevention, or student wellbeing.” Teams design a programme, policy, or campaign that measurably improves safety culture — e.g. peer-support programmes, awareness campaigns, anonymous reporting systems, or student-led workshops. Judged on relevance, innovation, student leadership, and long-term impact.

National prizes: 1st \$1,500 · 2nd \$750 · 3rd \$500 (shared among each group, regardless of size or number).

Judging criteria:

- Relevance and identified need
- Innovation and design
- Implementation and evidence of impact
- Student leadership and collaboration
- Sustainability and lasting change

Senior Video / Animation / AI Category (Years 10–12, minimum 3 students)

Prompt. Create an original short piece — film, animation, drama, or music video — that explores child protection from a young person's perspective. Strong entries inspire empathy, challenge stigma, and point toward positive action. Themes might include breaking the cycle of abuse, finding hope and support, or the ways a community can protect and uplift its children.

Content and safety rules. Entries must be suitable for a whole-school audience — no higher than a PG standard. The subject can be handled with honesty: abuse and harm may be referenced or implied, but never depicted graphically. Generative-AI assistance is permitted and must be declared.

Entries must not contain:

- sexual or explicit content of any kind;
- graphic or realistic depictions of violence, abuse or injury;

- depiction of suicide or self-harm methods, or content presenting either as a solution — distress and help-seeking may be explored, but must follow safe-messaging principles and carry help-seeking information;
- abuse dramatised by, or enacted upon, a student;
- re-enactment of a participant's own experience, or anything that identifies a real person as a victim or perpetrator.

Entries should focus on hope, safety, support and change rather than on the depiction of harm. Full content and safety criteria — including the required help-seeking messaging — are published at www.cpf.org.au/schools.

National prizes: 1st \$1,500 · 2nd \$750 · 3rd \$500 (shared among each group, regardless of size or number).

Judging Criteria

- Creativity and emotional impact
- Relevance and clarity of message
- Artistic execution and storytelling
- Collaboration, student voice, and leadership
- Cultural impact

Geographic Segmentation

Geographic segments

One set of individual-category prizes is awarded per geographic segment:

- New South Wales
- Victoria
- Queensland
- Western Australia
- South Australia
- Northern Territory, Tasmania & the Australian Capital Territory (combined)

Note: smaller jurisdictions are combined into a single segment based on population, so that a child there is neither advantaged by a tiny pool nor starved of recognition.

National segmentation

- The **First Nations** and **All Abilities** doors are judged **nationally** (Australia-wide), not per state segment.
- The two **national senior categories** are judged **nationally** (Australia-wide), not per state.

Teacher Engagement and Recognition

To recognise the critical role educators play as frontline protectors of children, the Initiative includes a **Teacher Engagement and Recognition Award**. This acknowledges teachers and school staff who demonstrate leadership in fostering safe dialogue, encouraging student participation, and embedding the Initiative's themes into everyday school culture. Rather than adding burden, this recognition affirms and celebrates the often-unseen work educators already do to keep children safe, alongside a modest wellbeing or professional-development prize.

The Child Protection Foundation · Suite 14, Level 2, 51–53 Spring Street, Bondi Junction NSW 2022
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