



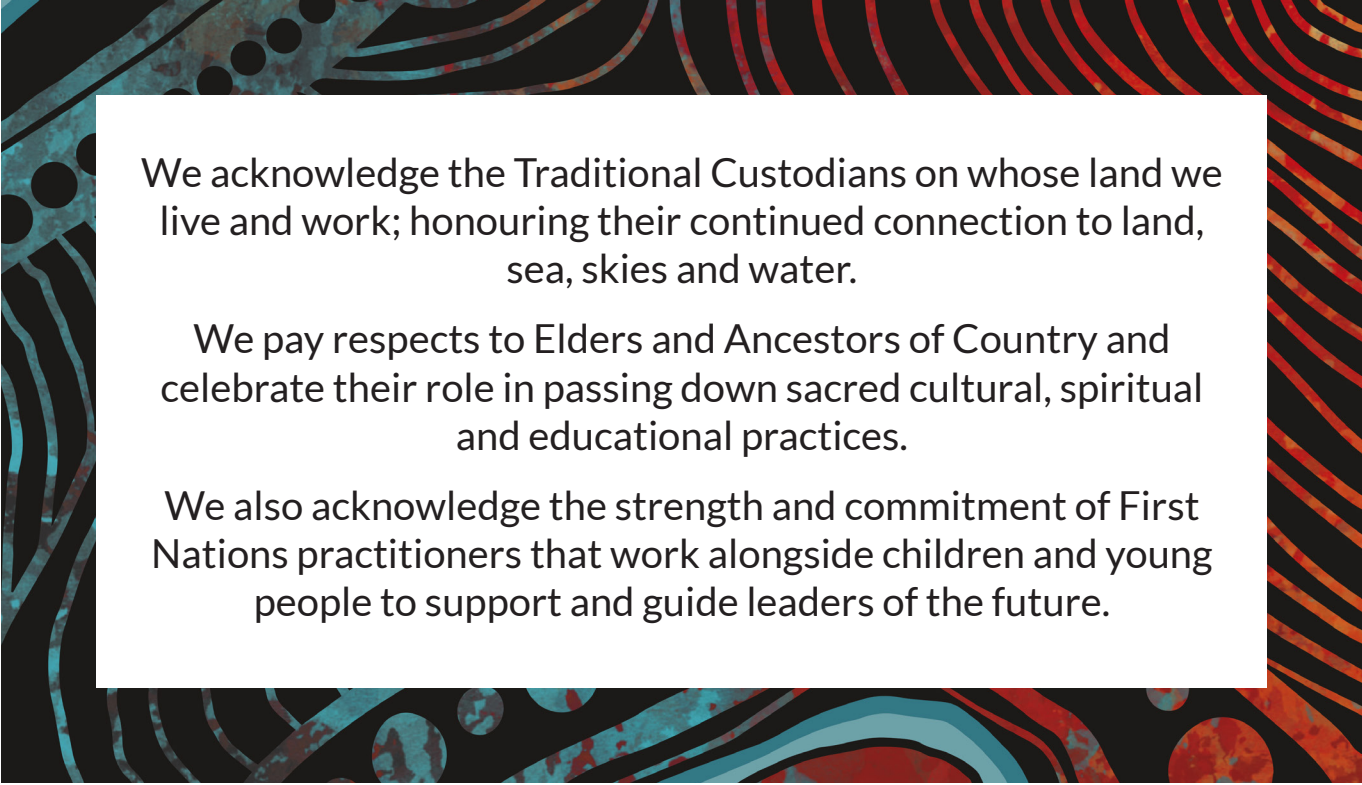
Save the Children

54 reasons

FROM RECOGNITION TO ACTION

**What needs to change for children
and young people who have
experienced violence and abuse**

A summary report for young people



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians on whose land we live and work; honouring their continued connection to land, sea, skies and water.

We pay respects to Elders and Ancestors of Country and celebrate their role in passing down sacred cultural, spiritual and educational practices.

We also acknowledge the strength and commitment of First Nations practitioners that work alongside children and young people to support and guide leaders of the future.

Artwork: Strength Through Culture, Elizabeth Yanyi Close, 2022

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to every young person who participated in this consultation, as well as those who have contributed to previous consultations, inquiries, advisory groups and ongoing advocacy. Thank you for trusting us with your experiences, insights and ideas. Know we are listening, and that we are taking what you've shared with us seriously.

We'd also like to acknowledge the many adults who took part in our consultation. Thank you for your time, and for your ongoing commitment to keeping children safe and helping them recover and heal.

This summary was commissioned by 54 reasons and written by Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Matt Tyler (2026).



A message from Vicki, Executive Director of 54 reasons

Australia should be the best place in the world to grow up. And it can be – but only if we listen to the people who know what growing up here is really like. That's you.

You'll read more below about what this report is and how we put it together. But first, I want to tell you why we did it.

We did this work because your experiences matter. You have your own feelings, strengths, needs – and your own rights. You deserve to be believed, to be taken seriously, and to have a say in the decisions that affect your life. So, as the government is making big decisions about how they best keep children and young people safe over the next five years, we wanted to make sure you were a big part of them.

You are experts in your own lives. What you know – about what helps and what doesn't, and what needs to change – matters. It should be the starting point for any decision that affects you.

That's what we're standing up for. And here's what you can count on from us:

We'll keep listening (really listening) to what you tell us. We'll stand up for you in every way that we can when big decisions are being made, and we'll always push for you to be an active part of the process. And we won't stop until every child in Australia can get help when they need it, and has every possible chance to grow up safe, healthy and happy. The government has set a goal to end violence against women and children within one generation. That's their promise – and we'll keep reminding them of it.

Standing up for your rights isn't just about reports, meetings and policy. It's about being accountable to you – listening deeply, acting on what you tell us, and reporting back on what we've done. This summary report is part of that commitment.

To everyone who shared their story with us: thank you for your courage and your trust. We're proud to stand with you, and to keep your voices leading the way.

Vicki Mau
Executive Director, 54 reasons

“I believe we have a whole lot of young people out there, like me, who are facing challenges, but they don't really know where to seek help. So, I feel a whole lot could be done.” – **Scott, 18 years old**

What needs to change for children and young people who experience violence and abuse

In 2022, the Australian Government made an important commitment.

For the first time, Australia's National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children recognised children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right.

This means recognising that children can experience violence and abuse themselves. They have their own experiences, needs and rights, which can be different from those of adults. They deserve support that is designed for them.

It also means remembering that children and young people are not only affected by violence – you also play a big part in stopping it. Every time you look out for a friend, support someone you care about, or speak up about what needs to change, you're helping to make things better. Children and young people can be one of the most important parts of the solution, but you're not always given the chance to be. Adults are the ones who usually get to make the big decisions, so it's on them to share that power: to invite you in, make room for you to help decide, and keep you safe while they do.

They also need to hear from lots of different children and young people. Because you are not all the same!

What a child or young person who has experienced violence needs depends on who they are, where they live, and what their life looks like. That's why it's especially important to listen to and work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities; children from different cultural backgrounds; disabled children and young people; LGBTQIA+ children and young people; and other children and young people whose experiences may be overlooked. Support only works when it fits the person it's for.

Recognising all of this is important. But it's only a first step, and words on their own don't make anyone safer. We wanted to find out what actions governments could take now to turn the recognition of children and young people into real change.

What children and young people are asking for

In research we have done, and other research across Australia, children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse have been clear about what they need.

Children and young people have told us they want:



Adults who know how to talk with them about difficult things



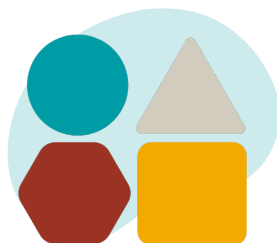
Adults they can trust who notice when something is wrong



To be listened to, believed and taken seriously



Services that are easy to find and access



Help that is designed around their needs



To have a say in decisions that affect their lives



Adults who do what they say they will, and keep young people informed



Barriers removed when they try to get help

None of these things should be too much to ask. But right now, services do not always deliver them. And that is impacting a lot of children across Australia – nearly two-thirds have experienced at least one form of child abuse, violence, or neglect.

Young people have also told us that their online world matters. The internet and social media are often where young people go first to find out if something happening to them is wrong and where they can get help.

What did we do?

54 reasons asked researchers Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Matt Tyler to find out what governments could do to better prevent and respond to violence and abuse experienced by children and young people.

We heard from more than 200 people across Australia, including youth advocates, Children's Commissioners, people working in services, researchers and other experts.

We also looked at what children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse have already told researchers about what they need.

We listened and brought this information together to identify the actions governments can take now.

“For me personally, I'd struggled [to find a service] ... it wasn't there in my face ... it was hard for me ... I didn't really know of any solely family violence or domestic violence support services ... anything that I could reach out to ... I wish they were more accessible and visible.” – **Amy**

What did we find?

Australia has made progress by recognising children and young people as victim-survivors in their own right. But there is still a big gap between saying children matter and responding to their needs in a way that helps their safety and wellbeing.

Too many services are still designed mainly for adults. Children and young people can struggle to find adults they can trust and rely on, or find the help they need – things like safe housing, therapeutic support and other services. Some also experience systems like child protection, family law and youth justice in ways that don't recognise their experiences of trauma or provide the support they need.

We also heard something important: We already know a lot about what needs to change.

Children and young people, researchers, services, inquiries and reviews have been identifying many of the same problems and solutions for years.

But too many of these solutions still haven't happened. We need governments to act on them.

“I didn't quite realise how important it would be for me to even just hear someone say, ‘I believe you,’ ... It feels like a weight has kind of been lifted.” – **Dylan**

What do we think governments should do?

Our report identifies 20 actions governments can take now. They fall into six areas:



1. Stop violence before it happens

Every child has the right to grow up free from violence. We want governments to:

- create Australia's first national guide on what causes violence against children and young people, and what is needed to prevent it from happening in the first place
- make Respectful Relationships Education in schools more relevant to what children and young people experience today, including how they engage online, and better reflecting the diversity of young people's lived experiences
- change laws so physical punishment of children is no longer allowed, while also giving parents and carers better support.

The aim is simple: do more to stop violence against children from happening in the first place.

“Before it happened, I was quite clueless. I think if I had known about these things, maybe I would have known how to handle it properly ...” – **Fern**



2. Make it easier to get help early

Children and young people should not have to wait until things become really unsafe before someone helps them.

We want governments to look at changing laws that currently make it harder for young people to ask for help. This includes rules about when parents need to give permission before a child accesses a service, and what adults must do when a young person tells them about violence or abuse.

We also want more early supports for young people in their communities, including support for boys who have experienced violence and abuse.

Getting the right supports in place early can prevent more harm and help young people begin to heal.

What do we think governments should do?



More services designed just for children & young people

If you experience violence or abuse, there should be somewhere you can go that knows how to help you.

We want every state and territory to have a service specifically designed for children and young people who experience domestic, family and sexual violence.

We also want adults who work with children, including teachers, doctors and community workers, to know how to recognise when something might be wrong, listen safely when a child tells them about their experience of violence, and connect them with the right support.

And governments need to put enough money into these services so children can get help when they need it. Currently too many children and young people seeking help are put on waiting lists.



“Every single person that works with children... they all need to have some kind of training in being trauma informed. I have noticed that a lot of them – especially police ... they are disconnected a lot of the time with what they are saying and how it might impact a person who has an experience of trauma.” – **Sarah, 17 years old**



4. Support recovery and healing for as long as it takes

Experiencing violence and abuse can affect many parts of a child's life. Healing takes time.

We want children and young people who have experienced violence to be able to get long-term therapeutic, mental health and wellbeing support when they need it and for as long as they need it.

Young people in or leaving out-of-home care should also have consistent supports, and young people escaping violence should have access to safe and stable housing.

Support should not disappear just because the immediate crisis has passed.

What do we think governments should do?



5. Make sure someone is responsible for change

Children's safety is the responsibility of lots of different parts of government. When responsibility is spread everywhere, it can be hard to know who is actually responsible for making things better.

Australia should have a Federal Minister for Children whose job includes making sure children's rights, safety and wellbeing are taken seriously across government. We used to have one, and we think it's important to have one again.

We also want governments to work better together, to particularly deliver on commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and communities, and to show whether their actions are actually making children's lives safer.



6. Make children's rights real

Children and young people have rights. These include the right to be safe from violence and the right to have a say in decisions that affect them.

We want children's rights to be built into Australian laws, policies and government decisions.

We want governments to:

- involve children and young people safely and meaningfully when designing policies and services that affect them
- include children and young people in overseeing government's plans related to violence and abuse
- explain government commitments in language young people can understand
- show how young people's views have influenced decisions.

There has been progress in recent years with more young people engaged in discussions related to violence and abuse. However, decisions about children and young people should not keep being made without them.

What happens next?

The Australian Government is now developing the Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. The Second Action Plan will set out what governments promise to do over the next five years to address domestic, family and sexual violence.

We do not need to start from scratch. There have already been many studies, inquiries and reports about how Australia can better protect and support children and young people. Our project found strong agreement about many of the changes that are needed.

We have shared the findings of this report with the Australian Government. We will also be working with others involved with this work to communicate what we have found through the media and other forums.

Now governments need to act.

That means investing for the long term, listening to children and young people from different communities and backgrounds, and making sure promises lead to real changes in their lives.

Every child has the right to be safe, to be heard, to get help when they need it, and to have the opportunity to thrive.



Feedback and support

If you have other ideas, or want to talk about anything in this report, reach out to 54 reasons: call 1800 76 00 11 or email info@54reasons.org.au.

If you are experiencing violence or abuse, or you are worried about something that is happening to you, you do not have to deal with it alone. You can talk to a trusted adult or contact Kids Helpline for free and confidential support.

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800
WebChat: [kidshelpline.com.au](https://www.kidshelpline.com.au)





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