

IN OUR BEST INTERESTS:

CHILDREN'S VIEWS ON WHAT MATTERS MOST

54 reasons

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR PRACTITIONERS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

LEARNING FROM 54 REASONS 'IN OUR BEST
INTERESTS' CONSULTATION 2025

Children and young people across Australia have told us, in their own words, what helps them feel safe, cared for, and genuinely supported. Their insights reflect Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child - the right for adults to act in children's best interests - but they bring it to life in ways only children can.

This resource invites practitioners and service providers to slow down, tune in, and translate these insights into everyday practice. It's not about doing more, it's about showing up differently.

About Article 3: Actions and decisions that impact children should always be in their best interests.

Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) outlines children's right to have adults act in their best interests. It's a critical article in the Convention, and a topical one for our current child rights environment in Australia.

Article 3 comprises three main points (paraphrased):

- In all actions concerning children, their best interests should be a primary consideration. This includes relevant systems and services.
- The State (Australia) should make sure each child has the protection and care necessary for their wellbeing, taking into account the rights and duties of parents and caregivers.
- Services responsible for children's care and protection should be held accountable to established standards, especially relating to children's safety, health and competent supervision.

The terms "protection and care" must also be read in a broad sense ... in relation to the comprehensive ideal of ensuring the child's "well-being" and development. Children's wellbeing, in a broad sense includes their basic material, physical, educational, and emotional needs, as well as needs for affection and safety."

From the General Comment relating to bests interests of the child, CRC/C/GC/14)



Scan this QR code or visit bit.ly/accr-article3 to download *A practical guide to: Children's right to have their best interests prioritised*, from the Australian Centre for Child Rights.

Insight 1: It's all about relationships

"[MY SUPPORT WORKER MAKES ME FEEL SAFE, SHE] IS NICE AND ALWAYS HAPPY." - 6 YEAR-OLD, QLD

Children told us that safety is relational, not procedural. They feel safe when adults show up with consistency, curiosity, and genuine interest. Our professional relationship with children is not separate from their care and safety - it is central to it.

In practice, this looks like:

- being consistent - in time, energy, boundaries and presence.
- showing curiosity about what matters to children and young people.
- working alongside them toward goals that feel meaningful to them.
- noticing and responding to nonverbal cues.
- advocating for and with them, especially in adult-centric systems.



Try this in your practice:

Tune in to a nonverbal cue from a child during your work today - a gesture, a shift, a pause and gently name it. A small moment of attunement can shift the whole relationship.

Insights 2: More than talk

"MY TEACHER NOTICED MY BODY LANGUAGE AND ASKED IF I WAS OKAY... IT MEANT THE WORLD TO ME."

- 16 YEAR-OLD, QLD

Children communicate their needs through every interaction. For many, safe and welcomed physical contact and proximity is a primary language of care. Feeling safe is compromised when touch is absent, forced, or misattuned.

In practice, this looks like:

- understanding and complying with safeguarding standards
- setting clear, transparent boundaries around physical contact
- helping children articulate their needs around touch and proximity
- talking openly about what helps them feel safe, and cared for, and
- checking in regularly to ensure your attunement is landing well.



Try this in your practice:

Offer choices: "Highfive, fist bump, or no touch today?" This simple question honours agency and safety at the same time.

Insight 3: Making Space

“[ADULTS LOOK AFTER ME BY] SHOWING THAT THEY CARE, TALKING TO ME AND SPENDING TIME WITH ME. THEY LISTEN TO ME.” - 14 YEAR-OLD, TAS

Children told us that quality time is how they understand care and safety. It doesn't need to be resource heavy, it needs to be intentional. Consistent, attentive presence is one of the most effective forms of safeguarding and communicating to children they are valued.

In practice, this looks like:

- moving at the speed of trust,
- prioritising time to get to know each other,
- ensuring time together reflects their interests.
- staying present even when what's shared isn't "casework", and
- using icebreakers and connection activities intentionally.



Try this in your practice:

Create five minutes of genuine presence this week with a child - no agenda, no tasks. Just connection. Children notice this more than anything else.

Insight 4: Doing for vs doing with

“GRANDMA TAKES ME TO SWIMMING LESSONS AND THEN SHE GETS IN AND WE HAVE A SWIM TOGETHER.”
- 4 YEAR-OLD, NSW

Doing things for children offers predictability and care. Doing things with children builds agency, trust, and connection. Both matter, but they create different experiences of care and safety.

In practice, this looks like:

- ensuring children understand why they're participating in a service,
- being clear about what they can expect from us and what we expect from them,
- co-creating goals and the steps to achieve them,
- using coaching approaches wherever possible, and
- explaining duty of care in child-friendly ways.



Try this in your practice:

Choose one part of your work and hand over more agency. Ask: "How would you like us to do this together?" You'll see the shift immediately.

Insight 5: We are stronger together

“TO BE SAFE AND CARED FOR, FOR ME FEELS LIKE I AM BEING LISTENED TO.” - 17 YEAR-OLD, NT

When adults listen to children and young people we make better decisions together. How we listen to children and young people and advocate in their best interests really matters to them.

Children told us that being listened to - deeply, consistently, and with patience - is how they know adults act in their best interests. Article 12 reinforces this: children's views must be taken seriously.

Listening is not passive. It is one of the most powerful safeguarding tools we have.



Scan this QR code or visit bit.ly/accr-article12 to download *A practical guide to: Children's right to be heard*, from the Australian Centre for Child Rights.

Article 12 (children's views being taken seriously) reinforces the importance of how decision makers should listen to children and young people in ways that bolster participation in their own care and safety.



In practice, this looks like:

- prioritising time for deep listening,
- being curious, patient, kind, and calm,
- partnering with children to act on what matters to them,
- helping them understand their right to be safe and cared for, and
- bringing caregivers along on the childrights journey.



Try this in your practice:

Consider something a child has told you matters to them. If it's something that can be actioned, take a step towards this and tell them what you've done. If it's something they need you to be thinking about – share what you've been reflecting on and check in whether you have it right. This builds trust faster than anything else.



Scan this QR code or visit bit.ly/54r-nine-requirements to download the *Nine Basic Requirement Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation*.

Upholding children's right to be heard means knowing and applying the Nine Basic Requirement Requirements for Meaningful and Ethical Children's Participation in your everyday practice.



Putting Children's Rights Into Practice

Children have told us what helps them feel safe and supports their care and wellbeing.

Our role now is to take small but intentional steps that strengthen trust, safety, and agency in everyday practice.

Small moments create big change.

To learn more about where these insights came from, visit www.54reasons.org.au/resources/in-our-best-interests