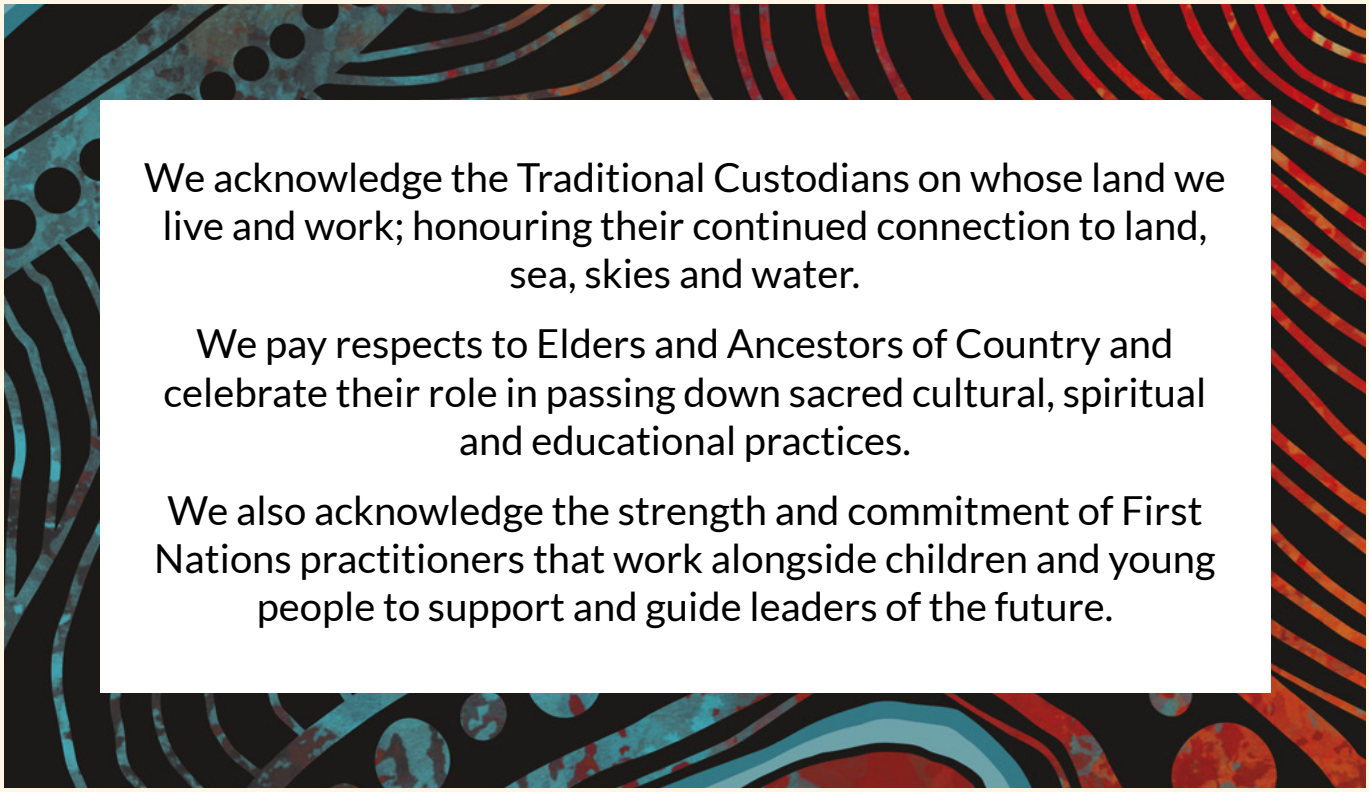
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TRUST, STABILITY AND SAFETY

Reimagining service responses to domestic and family violence through children's eyes

A summary report for young people

November 2026



Artwork: Strength Through Culture, Elizabeth Yanyi Close, 2022

Trust, Stability and Safety was commissioned by 54 reasons and written by Kate Fitz-Gibbon (2026). This youth-friendly version explains how the research was done and what it found in plain language.

To read the full report, visit www.54reasons.org.au/resources

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Kate's acknowledgements

A special thank you to every child and young person who participated in this study, as well as those who have contributed to previous research, inquiries, advisory groups and ongoing advocacy.

Thank you for trusting me with your experiences, insights and ideas. I know that talking about experiences of violence and abuse is not always easy. I am so grateful that you took the time to tell me what has helped you, what hasn't worked, and what you think adults and services need to do better.

Your experiences have helped us better understand what safety, trust and stability mean in children's lives. You reminded us that feeling safe is about much more than being away from violence. It's also about having people you trust, somewhere stable to live, staying connected to friends and family, and having opportunities to learn, play and enjoy being a child.

These are things every child deserves.

This report shares what I learnt from our conversations and what needs to change.

I'd also like to acknowledge the many adults who supported this study, particularly the 54 reasons practitioners who helped make these conversations possible. Thank you for your time, and for your ongoing commitment to keeping children safe and helping them recover and heal.



A message from Vicki – Executive Director, 54 reasons

Most of the systems built to help children and young people were designed without them.

Adults decide how services work, where a child or young person will live, which school they'll go to and who they'll get support from. Those decisions are almost always made with the best of intentions, but too often they're made without asking the children they affect. When that happens, even adults trying their best can miss what matters most to the young people they're meant to help.

We know that needs to change. Children and young people who experience violence are victim-survivors in their own right, with their own needs and their own rights. You deserve to be heard, believed and taken seriously, and to have a say in the decisions that affect your life. You are experts in your own lives. If we want to build services that work for you, we need to build them *with* you. And that starts with listening to you.

That's what this research is about: listening carefully, learning from what you told us, and using it to do better.

To the 17 children and young people who spoke with Kate: thank you. You shared some of the hardest parts of your life so that things could be better for other kids. That took real courage, and we are so grateful to you.

One thing a young person said has stayed with me: "Be more responsive when kids ask for help." That's a simple but really powerful message for every adult who works with children, including us.

So here's what we'll do next to make it real. We'll take what you've shared to people in government who write the policies and laws that aim to keep children and young people safe, and we'll keep asking them to show how your ideas have shaped their decisions. We'll look at how our own services can do better, because building trust starts with us. And we'll keep pushing for young people to have a real say in these decisions.

We know that for some of you, change can't come soon enough. That's exactly why we won't let what you've shared sit still. We'll keep working, we'll invite more people to be part of that work, and we'll keep you updated on our progress.

Thank you for helping adults see safety, trust and stability through your eyes.

Vicki Mau
Executive Director, 54 reasons



Why did we do this research?

Every child and young person has the right to feel safe.

That means being safe from violence and abuse, having somewhere safe to live, being listened to and believed, and getting help when you need it.

But we know that not every child in Australia experiences and can access these things.

For children and young people who have experienced domestic and family violence, getting help can sometimes be difficult. Some children don't know where to go for support. Others have tried to tell an adult what is happening but haven't been believed or helped.

Sometimes to feel safe children have to leave their home. Moving somewhere new, changing schools or being away from friends and family can be really hard, especially when a child is already dealing with difficult experiences.

We wanted to better understand what these experiences of seeking help and receiving help is like for children and young people who experience domestic and family violence. We wanted to ask young victim-survivors what adults, support workers, schools and governments could do differently to help them feel safe, supported and connected to the people and places that matter most to them.

At the centre of this work is a commitment: we believe children and young people are experts in their own lives and that means if we want to make services better for children, we need to listen to children themselves.

What did we do?

54 reasons asked researcher Kate Fitz-Gibbon to speak with children and young people who had experienced domestic and family violence and engaged with one of their services.

Kate spoke with 17 children aged 10–17 years old who had received support from 54 reasons in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. She asked about their experiences of getting help, finding somewhere safe to live, going to school, and what would help them to feel safe and supported. Some of the children Kate spoke with were as young as 10 years old. This is important because younger children don't often get asked about their experiences of violence and abuse or what they think needs to change.

She also spoke with three practitioners to learn more about their work and how services could better help children and young people.

Kate brought together what the children and practitioners shared to identify ways that services and governments could do better to meet the safety and recovery needs of young victim-survivors of domestic and family violence. The findings reflect the experiences of the children she spoke with. Other children and young people may have different experiences and needs, and their voices matter too.

What did children and young people tell us?

Feeling safe is about much more than being away from violence. Children and young people talked about wanting somewhere safe to live, adults they could trust, friends and family they could stay connected to, and opportunities to go to school and enjoy everyday life.

Turn the page to explore the seven big themes that came out of what they shared with us.

Research findings

1 FEELING SAFE IS ABOUT MORE THAN HAVING A SAFE PLACE TO LIVE

Everyone deserves somewhere safe to live. But children told us that feeling safe isn't only about having a roof over your head or being somewhere that violence can't happen. It is also about the people around you, how they treat you, and whether you feel comfortable and cared for.

One child described a safe home as: *"With a mum that keeps you safe and playing in the backyard with a high fence so no one can get in."*

Another described it as, *"A place where it's a safe environment and you get support."*

For some children, moving somewhere new helped them feel safer. But others found it difficult being surrounded by people they didn't know or being away from the people they trusted.



WHAT WE LEARNED

A safe home should be somewhere children feel protected, supported and cared for. Adults need to think about how a place feels to a child, not just whether it is physically safe.

2 BEING LISTENED TO AND BELIEVED REALLY MATTERS

Children and young people told us how important it is to have adults they can trust.

Some children described trying to tell an adult about the violence they were experiencing and not being believed or taken seriously. One young person told us: *"They didn't believe me because I was young."*

Another said: *"I think sometimes police don't take kids seriously, especially when they're very distressed … I feel like police should trust kids more."*

When adults don't listen or take action, it can make children feel alone, like what they have experienced doesn't matter and it may make them less confident to ask for help again.

Children also told us that trust is built when adults do what they say they will do, explain what is happening and involve children in the decisions that impact their lives.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Listening is important, but it isn't enough on its own. Adults need to believe children, take their concerns seriously, explain what will happen next and importantly, to take action to help keep them safe.

3 HAVING STABILITY MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE

Imagine having to move house again and again, not knowing how long you'll be staying or where you'll be going next. Some of the children we spoke with described experiences like this.

One young person told us: *"You better get used to moving a bunch … get prepared for it – if it's temporary housing."*

Children talked about how difficult it can be to keep moving between different places, especially when it means changing schools, losing touch with friends and family, or getting used to new support workers. Some children also described feeling like they didn't have much say in decisions about where they lived.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Children need more than somewhere safe to stay for a few nights or weeks. They need stability, familiar people, predictable routines and to be informed about the decisions that affect their lives.

4 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW WHERE TO GET HELP

Some children told us that they didn't know where to go or who to ask when they needed help following their experience of domestic and family violence.

Others said that when they were younger, they didn't always understand that what they were experiencing was violence or abuse. One young person explained: *"I was young, I didn't fully know what was happening."*

Children also told us that information about support should be easier to find. Some thought that information on social media or other online platforms could have helped them find support earlier.

Others spoke about the importance of having trusted adults at school or in their community who could help connect them to the services they needed earlier.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Children shouldn't have to work everything out for themselves. Information about violence, safety and where to get help should be easy to understand and available in places children already use and trust.

5 SCHOOL CAN BE A REALLY IMPORTANT PLACE

For many children, school is about much more than learning. It's where they see friends, spend time with adults they know outside of their family, and have routines that help everyday life feel more predictable. But children who have experienced violence and abuse can find it difficult to keep going to school, particularly when they have to move house.

One young person told us: *"I've been to about 13 schools … because I moved houses."*

Another said: *"I haven't really settled into any school."*

Some children described teachers and school counsellors who helped them feel safe and supported. Others told us that they tried to ask for help at school but didn't get the response they needed.

When we asked one child what they wished their school had done differently, they said: *"Help me feel safe."*



WHAT WE LEARNED

Schools can make a big difference in children's lives. Teachers and other school staff need to know how to recognise when something is wrong, listen to children and help them get support. Children who have to move houses and schools because of violence should receive help to stay connected to learning and to support continuity of their friendships.

6 FRIENDS, FAMILY AND CONNECTION MATTER

Children and young people told us how important it is to stay connected to people they love and trust. For some young victim-survivors, friends and family are an important source of comfort and support during difficult times. But moving house or changing schools sometimes meant losing these connections.

One young person told us: *"You make really good friends and [then] they got to not be friends anymore because you move ... it gets annoying after some time."*

Others talked about how they used their phones or online messaging to stay in touch with friends after they moved but that they often experienced physical isolation.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Feeling connected and having a sense of belonging are important parts of feeling safe and healing after experiencing violence or abuse. Adults and services should help children to stay connected to friends, family and other important people wherever it is safe to do so.

7 RECOVERING AND HEALING LOOK DIFFERENT FOR EVERYONE

We asked children and young people what they thought would help them recover and heal from their experiences of violence and abuse. Some found this a difficult question to answer.

But when we asked what would help them feel better or what they wanted for their future, children talked about things like feeling safe, being happy, having people they trusted, seeing their friends and enjoying everyday life.

This taught us something important.

Recovery and healing aren't only about going to counselling or talking about difficult experiences. They can also be about having a safe home, going to school, spending time with people you care about, having fun and being able to enjoy being a child.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Different children will need different kinds of support, and what helps can change over time. There is no one journey to recovery and healing, our service system needs to reflect that.

What needs to change?

The children and young people interviewed for this study described different ways that adults, services and governments can do better. **Based on what we learned, we think there are six important changes that need to happen.**

1. LISTEN TO CHILDREN AND TAKE ACTION

Adults need to believe children when they talk about violence or abuse, take their concerns seriously and help them feel safe. Children should be kept informed about what is happening and, where safe to do so, have a say in the decisions that affect their lives.

2. MAKE SURE CHILDREN HAVE SAFE AND STABLE PLACES TO LIVE

Children escaping violence should have access to housing that is safe, comfortable and suitable for them. Governments and services should work to reduce how often children have to move, and to ensure that safe housing is designed and delivered to meet children's distinct safety and recovery needs.

3. MAKE IT EASIER FOR CHILDREN TO FIND HELP

Children need clear information about where to go for support, including online and in the places they spend their time, including schools. There should be more services designed specifically for children and young people who have experienced violence and abuse.

4. HELP CHILDREN STAY CONNECTED TO SCHOOL

Young victim-survivors should receive support to keep learning when they have to move house or change schools. This could include having education support workers who help children and families with school enrolment, staying connected to learning and returning to school.

5. HELP CHILDREN STAY CONNECTED TO THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER MOST TO THEM

Services should recognise how important friends, family, community and trusted adults are to children's wellbeing. Wherever it is safe, children should be supported to maintain these relationships.

6. SUPPORT CHILDREN TO RECOVER AND HEAL IN WAYS THAT WORK FOR THEM

Children need different kinds of support at different times. This might include counselling, a trusted support worker, opportunities to play, help with school or simply having a safe and stable place to live. Support should be available for as long as it is needed.

These changes are not too much to ask.

Every child deserves to feel safe, be heard and get the support they need to be safe, and to recover and heal from the violence they have experienced.

What happens next?

We don't want this research to be just another report. We want what children and young people shared to help change the way adults, services and governments respond to children who experience domestic and family violence.

54 reasons and Kate Fitz-Gibbon will use these study findings to inform conversations about how services can better support children and young people.

We want the Australian Government to consider what children told us as it develops its Second Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. The Second Action Plan will help guide what governments do between 2027 and 2032 to address domestic, family and sexual violence in this country. We think it is very important that there are actions within this plan which make sure children have access to safe housing, education, trusted adults and support that is designed to meet their needs, and to support their recovery and healing.

And we want children and young people to be involved in shaping the decisions that affect them. Listening to children should lead to action. We hope this research helps more adults understand what children need to feel safe, supported and connected.

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





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