

Beyond Safety:

ETHICAL PRACTICE INVOLVING CHILDREN (EPIC)

Introducing an Australian Research Council funded Discovery Project (2018-2021)
led by the Centre for Children and Young People at Southern Cross University.

What is this project about?

This research aims to strengthen knowledge, policy and practice concerning 'child-safe' organisations by examining the role of ethical practice in improving children and young people's safety and wellbeing. Ethical understandings and practice are being explored in three institutional contexts – schools, residential care and disability services.

Why is this research important?

Child safety is now a national policy priority in Australia. Increased public awareness and concern regarding the treatment of children, catalysed particularly by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, have led to burgeoning policy, procedural and governance measures aimed at advancing the 'child-safe' organisation. The realisation of these policy aspirations requires greater understanding of how 'child-safe' is conceptualised and operationalised in different organisational contexts. This will help ensure current efforts are not reduced to compliance-based imperatives that protect organisations, but fail to create the cultural conditions necessary to nurture, protect and respect children.

Beyond important and appropriate governance, policy and procedural responses, little is known about what constitutes ethical practice with children and young people, nor how this contributes to cultural conditions that promote their safety and wellbeing. This research seeks to address this gap and, in so doing, help Australia's efforts at building and sustaining organisational cultures conducive to preventing, detecting and responding to poor treatment of children. The study is distinctive in that it brings together relational ethics, recognition theory and childhood studies to shed further light on the personal, relational, cultural and systemic issues that enhance and diminish the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in three critically important institutional contexts – schools, residential care and disability services.

What does the research involve?

This is a mixed methods study involving four phases:

PHASE 1:

Analysis of key child safety policy and related documents in different international jurisdictions - Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Ireland.

PHASE 2:

Qualitative fieldwork with children, young people, practitioners and managers across schools, residential care and disability organisation settings, to explore understandings and experiences of child safety and ethical practice.

PHASE 3:

Quantitative online fieldwork with children and practitioners to test the findings of Phase 2 with a larger sample in a wider range of education, out-of-home care and disability settings, and generate knowledge about any association between ethical practice and children's sense of safety and wellbeing.

PHASE 4:

Professional development and dissemination, using a well-evidenced knowledge exchange framework to guide resource and policy development and support professional learning in a range of settings.

Who is involved?

This study is being undertaken by an expert team of investigators led by **Professor Anne Graham**, Director of the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University (SCU), and includes **Professor Sally Robinson** (Flinders University), **Associate Professor Tim Moore** (Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia), **Dr Donnah Anderson** (Charles Sturt University), **Associate Professor Nicola Taylor** (Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago, NZ) and **Emeritus Professor Nigel Thomas** (Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, University of Central Lancashire, UK).

Other members of the research team include Project Officer, **Dr Antonia Canosa** (CCYP, SCU), **Dr Mary Ann Powell** (University of Edinburgh), **Dr Tess Boyle** (CCYP, SCU), **Dr Paola Castillo** (Charles Sturt University), **Dr Jenna Meiksans** (University of South Australia) and PhD candidate **Meaghan Vosz** (CCYP, SCU).

A Children and Young Person's Advisory Group is helping guide the research design, implementation, analysis and reporting of findings. They are working in close conjunction with an adult advisory group, chaired by Professor Judy Cashmore, and comprised of key leaders in related policy and service provision.

**For further information on this project please contact
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