# Video script: Promoting the Safety of Children with Disability

## In the Context of the Victorian Child Safe Standards

### Presentation developed by Dr Deborah Absler

#### Narrated by David Moody, State Manager – Victoria NDS

Thank you for joining us for this important training regarding Promoting the Safety of Children with Disability. I’m David Moody, the Victorian State Manager for National Disability Services.

The Zero Tolerance Framework was developed by National Disability Services. Zero Tolerance is an approach for disability service providers to prevent and respond to abuse of people with disability. It uses a framework with five levels, so everyone in an organisation is clear on things they can be doing, from frontline workers to the board.

##### The five levels are:

Understanding Abuse – why, and how and what we are talking about

Preventing Abuse – through empowerment of people with disability, and organisational cultures

Considering Additional Risk for people and places that are most at risk. This work sits strongly within this level although also includes the others.

Responding to abuse to ensure safety and justice for victims

Learning from Abuse so it doesn’t happen again

National Disability Services has developed a set of resources on the safety of children with disability within the context of our commitment to Zero Tolerance. The Zero Tolerance framework and a whole range of resources can be found on the National Disability Services website.

##### Why is there a focus on the safety of children with disability?

All organisations working with children must take steps to prevent abuse. We must not assume that child abuse does not, and cannot, happen within our organisations. The Child Safe Standards are a result of recommendations of the Betrayal of Trust inquiry and evidence of what works to prevent child abuse.

There is now growing evidence that children with disability experience an increased risk of abuse across all services and locations. Providers need to have processes in place and ensure their staff know how to keep children safe and protected from abuse wherever they are.

Why is there a focus on the safety of children with disability? Because it is needed

##### Children with disability:

* Are more than 3 times at higher risk of physical violence
* Are over four times at higher risk for emotional abuse and neglect
* Nearly 3 times more likely to experience sexual abuse and;
* Are more likely to have experienced repeated incidents of sexual abuse by the time they are 18 years of age

Therefore we all have a moral, ethical and legal responsibility to actively address this situation.

##### What is happening nationally to keep children with disability safe?

A number of developments have occurred in response to these concerning facts at the National and State levels.

National initiatives include:

* The National Framework, Creating Safe Environments for Children
* The National Child Protection Framework
* Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse
* Draft National Statement of Principles Child Safe Organisations
* Signatory to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
* Other developments also include:
* NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework
* National Disability Service Standards

All these act as safeguards to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. All promote a child’s human right to be safe and a child’s right to be protected.

##### What is happening locally to keep children with disability safe?

Victoria introduced compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children. They became operational in January 2016 and are enshrined in The Child Wellbeing and Safety Amendment (Child Safe Standards) Act 2015.

The development of Child Safe Standards was one of the recommendations of the Betrayal of Trust report.

Other legislation included The Reportable Conduct Scheme 2017.

The Commission for Children and Young People oversees this scheme in addition to their other areas of responsibility, to promote safety for all children. The Commission is responsible for assisting organisations to be compliant with the new mandatory Child Safe Standards, and have developed a number of excellent documents, training material and child safety tip sheets for organisations.

There are also specialist organisations such as Child Wise and the Centre for Excellence in Child Welfare who provide extensive training, resources and support for agencies in making the transition to becoming a Child Safe organisation.

##### The Victorian Child Safe Standards consist of 7 standards. They are:

* Embedding a culture of child safety through effective leadership
* Having a Child Safe Policy or Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
* Having a clear Code of Conduct that establishes appropriate behaviour with children
* Screening, supervision, training and other human resource practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
* Clear processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
* Identifying and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
* Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children

##### We will take a closer look at each of these standards.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards aim to ensure that safety and protection of children from harm and abuse is embedded in the everyday thinking and practice of managers, staff and volunteers. The Child Safe Standards are compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children.

In applying each Child Safe Standard, organisations must embed the:

* Cultural safety of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
* Safety of children with disabilities
* Cultural safety of Aboriginal children

As children with disability have been identified as one of three priority groups, organisations are required to take specific steps to meet the safety and participation needs of children and young people with disability.

##### The new legislation requires that organisations working with children with disability are required to:

* Promote the rights and safety of children
* Actively protect children from all forms of abuse
* Establish clear processes and procedures for staff
* Provide ongoing funding for this to occur

All these actions create and maintain a child safe environment which:

* Means there is a high priority placed on protecting children with disability from any form of abuse
* Ensures everyone knows what to do when there are allegations of child abuse

##### What do the Standards mean in a practical way for organisations supporting children with disability?

Organisations must develop a culture which:

* Encourages children to “have a say”
* Listens and responds to children’s views
* Promotes and advocates children’s rights and safety and
* Encourages everyone in the organisation ‐ the Board, management, permanent & casual staff and volunteers – to ask, “Are we doing the best we can to keep children with disability safe in every action we take?”

For most organisations, thinking about children with disability being at risk is a confronting and challenging issue because it is a very distressing subject. Children being at risk challenges some of the core values and long established practices of our organisations, and organisations have not been as safe as they need to be. Making changes to how we work can feel hard – but this is also a valuable opportunity to create safe places for children.

It is important to address this issue in a thoughtful and respectful way and on a repeated basis.

We suggest that organisations use the Standards as a lens to look at Child Safety.

##### Let’s ask ourselves

* “How well is our organisation doing in each of these areas to make sure it is a safe environment for the children & young people with disability that attend our organisation?”
* “How can we involve children & young people in making our organisations safe for them?”
* “What can we do in our organisations to make sure our work is informed by these standards – what needs to change? “ and;
* “How can we tell its working and making a difference for children?”

##### It can be very useful for organisations to look at each Standard and reflect:

* “What does each Standard mean for our organisation?”
* “What does it mean for the children & young people with disability that attend our
* organisation?”
* “What can we do in our organisations to make sure our work is informed by these standards? How can we tell its working and making a difference for children?” And;
* “How can we involve children & young people in making our organisations safe for them?”

##### On the next slides we will look at each Standard in more depth and ask you to consider the questions listed above as you think about each Standard.

###### Standard One: Embedding a culture of child safety is achieved through effective leadership

Boards and management need to understand that safety and cultural change does not just happen, but requires deliberate steps to change how things are done. They need to demonstrate an active commitment to child safe culture, and champion child safety across all levels of the organisation. Senior management and boards need to clarify what is unacceptable behaviour; they need to encourage disclosure, and take action and support those who do disclose. It is also important to foster participation and the voice of your people in your organisation.

We need to always reflect on what can we do to achieve a culture of child safety, and ensure responsibility for taking action is understood and accepted by everyone.

Let’s take a look at some of the practical steps senior managers and boards can take to ensure a child safe culture, such as:

* Have a Board Standing Committee about Child Safety that addresses action for the Board and the organisation
* Have a Child Safety Standing Committee within the organisation
* Have a person with Child Safety as a specific portfolio – a Champion who reports on achievements and raises concerns
* Promote cross department training, discussions, presentations
* Have a standing item on Child Safety within committees including a focus about training, new developments and resources
* Encourage child and family involvement within ongoing committees
* Encourage hearing the children and young people’s voices about their experience of the service

Actions such as these directly impact children and families, by letting them know that the organisation’s leaders take deliberate steps to protect children. They know that the organisation demonstrates openness in a variety of ways to promote a culture in which everyone (staff, volunteers, parents, carers and children) feel welcome, heard and treated with respect. An open child safe culture requests the input of children and families in decision making at the individual and organisational levels. A child safe culture means that children, families and staff feel confident, enabled and supported to speak up, to feel safe to disclose concerns, and know that actions will be taken.

###### Standard Two: Making a commitment to child safety with a policy or statement

What does that involve? All organisations need to develop a clear and visible public statement stating that we are committed to being a child safe organisation and what that involves. The statement needs to be prominently displayed and included in all branding, internal and external communication. It also needs to be accessible for children and presented in a child friendly format. The policy should include details about what will be done to maintain the organisation’s focus on child safety.

###### Standard Three: Having a Code of Conduct that establishes appropriate behaviour with children

A Code of Conduct outlines in an easily understood and accessible format, the expected work behaviours required by all employees, contractors, volunteers (including Board members) and casual staff. They can include privacy issues, complaints procedures and reporting guidelines if breaches of the code occur. Each person involved with your organisation in one of these roles needs to sign a copy of the Code, which can then be stored in their personnel files. Codes of Conduct should also be publicly available to those outside of the organisation; it should be provided to children, young people and their families in an accessible format, and discussed with them.

###### Standard Four: Screening, supervision, training and other human resource practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel

Having the ‘right’ workers in organisations begins with their selection for the job, and ensuring that your advertising stresses being a Child Safe organisation.

Employment screening should be geared to assess a person’s suitability to work with children with disability, and this can be done through a number of methods, including formal checks like Working with Children and Police checks, viewing evidence of background experience, two forms of identity, qualification and contacting referees. It’s important to remember that these checks need to apply to all staff, including casual workers, volunteers and contractors.

During the interview process, discuss different scenarios to identify attitudes, values and preferred styles. Where possible, observe the potential employee with children, and include the input of children and families’ feedback about new staff.

Finally, your organisations need to be clear about what information would rule out someone from working with children with disability.

Standard Four also includes training and professional development. Training on child safety needs to be provided to all staff, volunteers, (including the board) management and casual staff.

Suggested topics include:

* How to promote children’s safety
* Explanation about the different forms of abuse – emotional, physical, sexual, financial and neglect ‐ and how to recognise them
* What the risk factors are for children with disability
* How to talk about abuse with children
* A focus on understanding the differences between child and adult safety
* A focus on trauma, developmental stages, resilience
* How to support children and parents and;
* How to support workers – disclosures can be very traumatic for all involved

Our final slide for Standard Four discusses supervision. Quality supervision is critical to developing a Child Safe culture which encourages staff to reflect on practice, and consider potential risks to children and young people. Regular individual or group supervision needs to be provided to all staff to monitor and address staff performance, progress, issues, monitor compliance and provide professional support.

Keep in mind that supervision is an active commitment to maintaining quality and safety for children and staff, and it needs to be monitored to ensure that it is happening on a regular basis. Remember too that supervisors also need to be trained and supported.

###### Standard five: Clear processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse.

Organisations need to provide clear procedures for all staff and volunteers to follow if there are concerns about a child’s safety, and/or if a child discloses abuse – who do staff report it to and what needs to be done? Staff also need to be clear on what obligations they have under the Reportable Conduct Scheme.

It is vital that when a child or family has a concern, complaint, or grievance to ensure that they will be heard and responded to.

Keep in mind that children can show us in many ways when something is wrong and they have felt unsafe, or experienced harm or abuse. Always trust your instinct and take the situation seriously. Let the child know that they did the right thing by telling you and ensure that you take the required actions to protect them. You need to ensure they are safe – do not let them have further contact with the person who may have caused the harm to occur.

This will be a stressful situation for everyone involved. Make sure that all involved receive the support and debriefing they need.

###### Standard six: Identifying child abuse risks for children with disability and ways to reduce them.

“It takes many components to build a Child Safe organisation”. Each organisation needs to undertake a risk analysis ‐ what is our climate, culture and norms? Is it a safe place for everyone to raise concerns? Do we listen to children’s views and include them in what we offer? Are there physical care activities with minimal level of observation and supervision? Are there factors in the physical environment that need to be addressed? Are there factors in the staffing model/ratios?.

Environment risk factors in organisational culture include children with disability spending a great deal of time with adults away from the public eye. Organisations that are not empowerment focussed, and/or with a culture where there is a strong power differential between staff and children breeds risk. Other factors to look for are where loyalty between staff prevents them from reporting, and where whistle blowers are not protected.

Some of the risk factors for children with disability include:

* The severity of the disability
* Children with multiple disabilities and particular combinations of disabilities, for example physical and intellectual disability
* Children requiring frequent intimate personal care
* Children with communication needs, who cannot communicate verbally or have other sensory challenges.
* The increased likelihood of social isolation for children with disability.

There is also the risk of ‘between children’ abuse, and the potential limited access to developmentally appropriate sexual and relationship information. Keep in mind that children and parents may be reluctant to complain.

Children with a disability are at risk of abuse due to some myths and assumptions, but we know that children with disabilities can have the same physical, emotional and sexual feelings, responses and development as other children, and go through the same developmental stages. Talking about bodies, sexuality and relationships will be helpful to children and young people because they think about these areas the same way as all children. Talking about ways to keep safe is important and can be done – just use different methods matched to their needs.

‘Grooming’ is the criminal activity of becoming friends with a child in order to persuade them to enter into a sexual relationship. It is a criminal offence. It can also involve grooming adults in the child’s environment so that they become “desensitised to perceive potentially risky behaviour as harmless”. It is important to learn the signs and to feel empowered to act on your concerns.

###### Standard seven: Empowering children to share their feedback and experiences about feeling safe

“Creating awareness among children is one of the best ways to protect them”. A Child Safe organisation actively elicits, welcomes and embraces the voice and involvement of children and young people.

Ensure children are informed of their rights, receive education, and have resources available to assist them such as books, posters and videos. There are many resources developed for children with disability, which promote and communicate that ‘it is ok to complain and to raise concerns’.

Have a number of resources developed to identify and report abuse available in methods that match the child’s disability and strengths, for example, resources in simple language, in braille, and online.

Communicate directly with children – ask for their thoughts, ideas, and feedback about all aspects of their care.

##### A final thought.

Talking about feeling safe to children with disability is an important conversation and is supported by having many other conversations that need to happen as stepping stones. Don’t start with the hard topics – create an environment where you talk on a regular basis about everyday topics; their interests, friends, family; what they do and don’t like. It’s worth it. Thanks for listening.

END TRANSCRIPT