

Tips for establishing a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal children and young people

There are many ways to create a culturally safe environment - below are some tips and ideas to help you.

Tips for physical spaces

- Display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. For guidance about using the Aboriginal flag, its colours, or the Torres Strait Islander flag refer to the [Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet](#).
- Involve members of your organisation in making your space more culturally safe, so everyone has a chance to learn and participate in this process.
- Display an Acknowledgment of Country and Traditional Owners of the land your organisation sits on.
- Hang Aboriginal artwork and designs sourced from Aboriginal artists local to your organisation.
- Show the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (AIATSIS) [map of Indigenous Australia](#), or the Victorian Corporation for Languages [Victorian Aboriginal Languages map](#). You could ask members of your club or organisation to use coloured pins to mark places they're from or have visited.
- Display posters that promote inclusion and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation.
- Create a self-reflection wall that shows your organisation's journey to becoming more culturally safe.
- Promote the achievements of Aboriginal peoples, particularly those who might be significant to your organisation. For example, if you're a sporting club, are there Aboriginal athletes whose picture you could have up? What about Aboriginal musicians, actors, or other famous people that might be from the Country your organisation is on or connected to the sector you work in?
- Create a space and time for Aboriginal children and young people and their families who come to your organisation or club to visit and meet staff and volunteers.
- Display your organisation's commitment to cultural safety in a public area. You could work out the wording with children and young people in your organisation and ask them to decorate it using colours from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.
- Hang posters that show your club or organisation's zero tolerance approach to racism.



Tips for online spaces

- Visit the [eSafety Commissioner's website](#) to find some good resources about tackling racism online. The resource 'Cool, beautiful, strange and scary' talks about the online experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their parents and caregivers.
- Display an Acknowledgement of Country and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on your website home page. Think about doing the same for your email sign-off's.
- If you have social media platforms, make sure these are being monitored for any hate speech. Make it clear that such language is not tolerated and will be reported through the platform's official complaint channels.

Tips for engaging with families and the broader community

- Consider doing an Acknowledgement of Country as a regular part of meetings, events and club or organisational activities. Encourage many different people to do this, not just people in senior positions. Invite a child or young person to do this. Remember that anyone can do an Acknowledgement of Country.
- You might invite Traditional Owners to do a Welcome to Country for important events, like presentation nights or conferences, and ensure they are remunerated appropriately.
- Celebrate any important dates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in online and print communication, such as newsletters and posters.
- Make sure people in your club or organisation know what to do if they are a target of racism, witness racism or wish to make a complaint about any form of racism.
- Use language that is inclusive of all types of families, such as 'your important adults and carers' rather than 'mums and dads'. This recognises a diversity of family structures.
- Create opportunities for the important people in a child or young person's life to be involved in family events at your organisation or club.
- Contact a local Aboriginal organisation to undertake some training or learning that will help your staff, members and volunteers understand why engagement is important.
- Invite Aboriginal community members to your organisation to share knowledge and do activities with children and young people, such as artwork, storytelling and singing.
- If you're a sporting club, think about inviting Aboriginal athletes to meet your children and young people and take part in training or coaching.



Tips for engaging with Aboriginal children and young people

- Have a look at [Wayipunga](#), a great youth participation resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people published by the Koorie Youth Council.
- The Commission has also published [Empowerment and participation: A guide for organisations working with children and young people](#)
- Encourage and provide opportunity for children and young people to tell you about their identity. Have a look at our [frequently asked questions](#) for more information.
- If you know you have Aboriginal children and young people in your organisation or club, consider asking them if there's anything you can do differently to help them feel safe and welcome. There might be things the club or organisation, or specific individuals, have done to make them feel particularly welcome.
- Engage with Aboriginal children and young people on the things that they are interested in. Are they wearing a particular t-shirt that reflects their culture? Do they listen to a particular type of music? The list is endless!
- Take the time to listen when children and young people are telling you something about themselves. Make them feel you are interested in them, and they are important.



More tips for establishing a culturally safe environment

When your organisation engages with Aboriginal children and young people, it is important to consider how your engagement might look and feel to them, and what actions you might take to help them feel respected, supported and heard.

Some ideas are:

- Invite Aboriginal children and young people and families to be involved in developing and reviewing your child safe policies and processes.
- Consult children and young people about decisions that affect them (this could be anything from informal conversations or meetings, to emails or regular surveys etc.).
- Create child-friendly and culturally safe opportunities for children and young people to express themselves and to raise complaints.
- Take what Aboriginal children and young people tell you into account before you make decisions and inform them of outcomes.
- Ask children and young people to create artwork for an Acknowledgement of Country display.
- Consider cultural needs when engaging with Aboriginal children and young people. For example, they may feel more relaxed outside, in a park, or going for a walk.¹
- Create a space that feels private so that Aboriginal children and young people feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings. This can be especially important when talking about people close to them, like their parents, siblings or carers.²
- Spend extra time building trust and rapport with Aboriginal children and young people.
- Follow through and report back to children and young people after they share information with you. That way they will know their voice matters and that your engagement is not tokenistic.
- Provide support to children, young people and families if they experience racism.
- Remember that questioning a person's identity is offensive. Be aware of stereotypes about how Aboriginal people look and act. Remember that many Aboriginal people have mixed ancestry, but this does not make them less Aboriginal.³
- Just like other parts of a person's identity, be aware that although a child or young person may identify as Aboriginal, they may not wish for this to be shared with others, including their peers. Respect their privacy and ask before sharing this information with other people.



1 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), 2009, Children's voice: Our children have the right to be heard, https://www.vacca.org/content/Document/Childs_Voice_Booklet.pdf

2 Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), 2009, Children's voice: Our children have the right to be heard, https://www.vacca.org/content/Document/Childs_Voice_Booklet.pdf

3 Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), 2018, Aboriginal cultural rights: What you need to know, <https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/resources/aboriginal-cultural-rights/>

Culturally safe policies and procedures

The Child Safe Standards are a set of mandatory requirements that ensure organisations have systems, policies, and practices in place to keep children safe from abuse and harm. [Child Safe Standard 11](#) requires your organisation to document how your organisation is safe for children and young people. This includes the specific safety needs of Aboriginal children and young people.

Some ideas are:

- Review organisational documents (including your policies, procedures, protocols, and Code of Conduct) to ensure they support and encourage cultural expression and enjoyment of cultural rights.
- Ensure your organisation's policies and procedures are accessible and available to your whole organisation's community.
- Consider including an optional field on your enrolment form that asks if the person identifies as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.
- Ensure your organisation's documents clearly reflect a zero-tolerance approach to racism.
- Provide information for children and young people about their cultural rights in accessible formats, such as a poster. Include information about how to make a complaint if their cultural rights are being breached.
- Focus on the language that is used in your documents – is it based on the resilience, capability and strengths of Aboriginal peoples, or does it only focus on vulnerability and weakness?
- Where appropriate, seek advice from local Aboriginal organisations, Elders or leaders when developing your policies and processes.

