

# Institute of Child Protection Studies



## 13 Research to Practice Series

### Our Safety Counts: Key Findings from the Australian Survey of Kids and Young People

#### Perceptions of interpersonal safety and characteristics of safe institutions

*The Institute of Child Protection Studies **Research to Practice Series** links the findings of research undertaken by the Institute of Child Protection Studies, to the development of policy and practice in the area of child, youth and family welfare.*

#### About the Institute of Child Protection Studies

The Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University was established in 2005 to carry out high quality research, evaluation and professional development to enhance outcomes for children, young people and families.

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#### Our Safety Counts: Key Findings from the Australian Survey of Kids and Young People

Issue 13 of the ICPS Research to Practice Series presents the key findings from the Australian Survey of Kids and Young People (ASK-YP), an online survey of children and young people aged 10-18, which explored their perceptions of interpersonal safety in institutions. Conducted in 2015, the survey was completed by 1,480 young Australians.

The survey addressed two main research questions:

1. *What are children and young people's perceptions of safety within institutions?*
2. *What do children and young people consider is already being done to respond to safety issues and risks in institutions?*

The ASK-YP Survey was the final phase of a study conducted by ICPS, commissioned by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which examined children's experiences and perceptions of safety in institutions. Issue 13 builds on Issues 11 and 12, which presented the findings from the first part of the study. It focuses on what children and young people said they need, and how well they thought institutions are doing. Issue 14 presents further survey findings. Images from the survey have been used throughout this issue.

More information about the survey and the project is provided at the end of the issue.

### Children and young people's perceptions of interpersonal safety within institutions

Children and young people who participated in the survey were asked to think about a preferred institution upon which to base their answers: their school, church group, sporting activity or holiday camp. Most children and young people reported that they felt safe for the majority of time in their

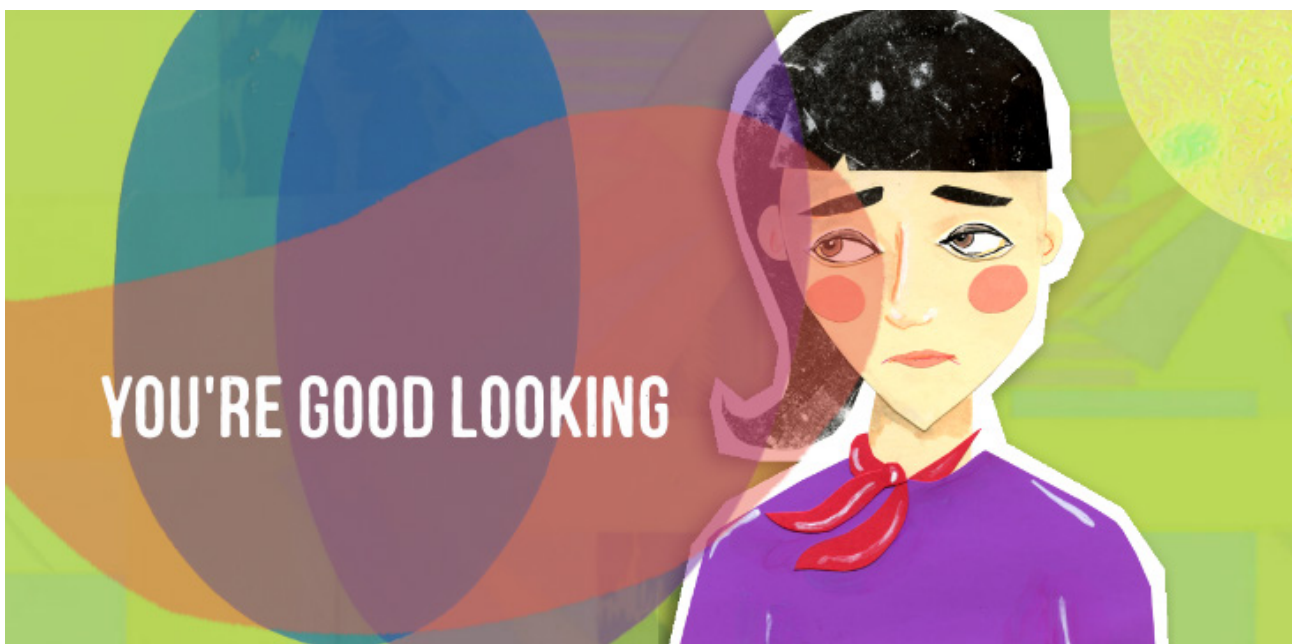
*Most children and young people reported that they felt safe for the majority of time in their chosen institution, with less than 10% of young people reporting that they never felt safe.*

chosen institution, with less than 10% of young people reporting that they never felt safe. Most children and young people felt safe 'some of the time' or 'all of the time'. Those who focused on a sporting activity reported higher rates of feeling safe (93.9%) than those in school (89.6%),

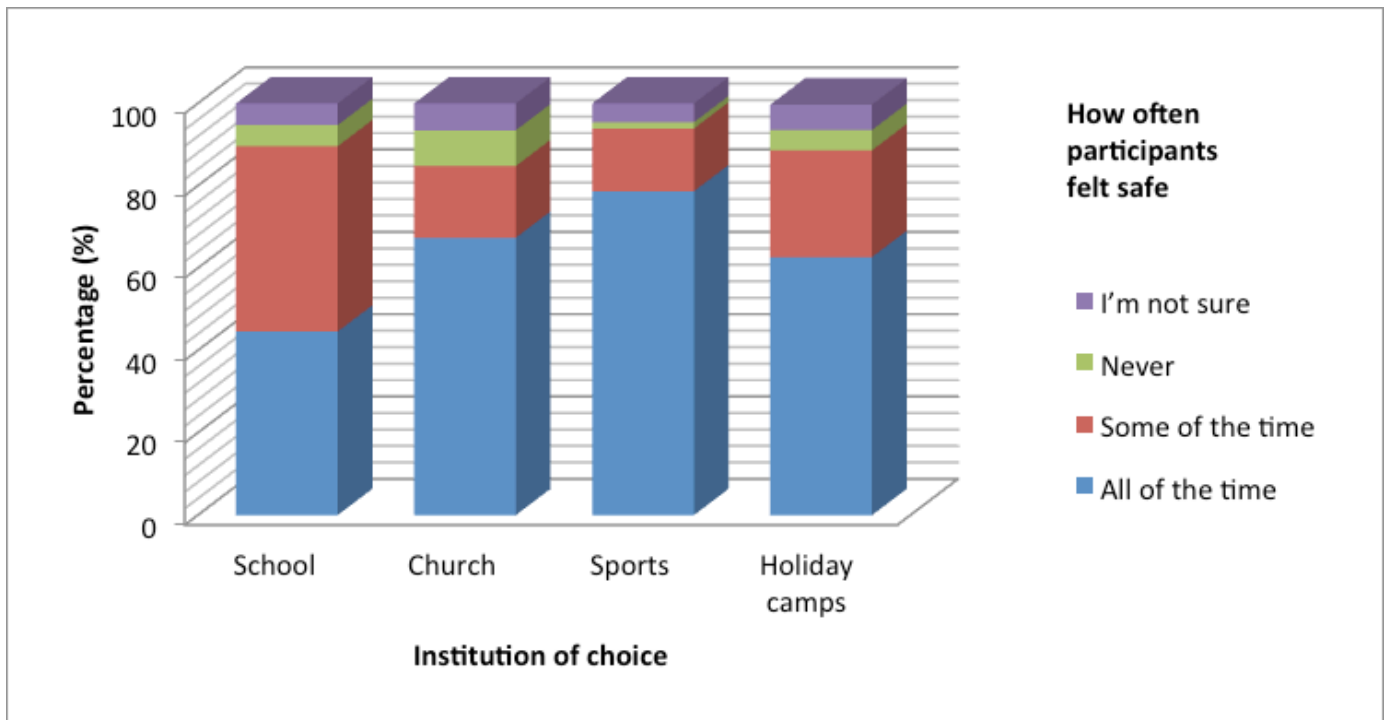
holiday camp (88.9%) or church (84.9%). More than three-quarters of participants felt that it was unlikely that someone at their school would encounter an adult or young person who made them feel uncomfortable or acted in a way that made them feel unsafe. However, 9% of young people who selected their church, 5% of young people who selected school or holiday camp, and 1.5% of young people in a sporting activity reported that they never felt safe.

These participants tended to be older young people, and were slightly more likely to be male. Although the percentages of young people feeling safe some or all of the time were not substantially different across age groups, 15 year olds were significantly more likely to report 'never' feeling safe, than those aged 12 and under.

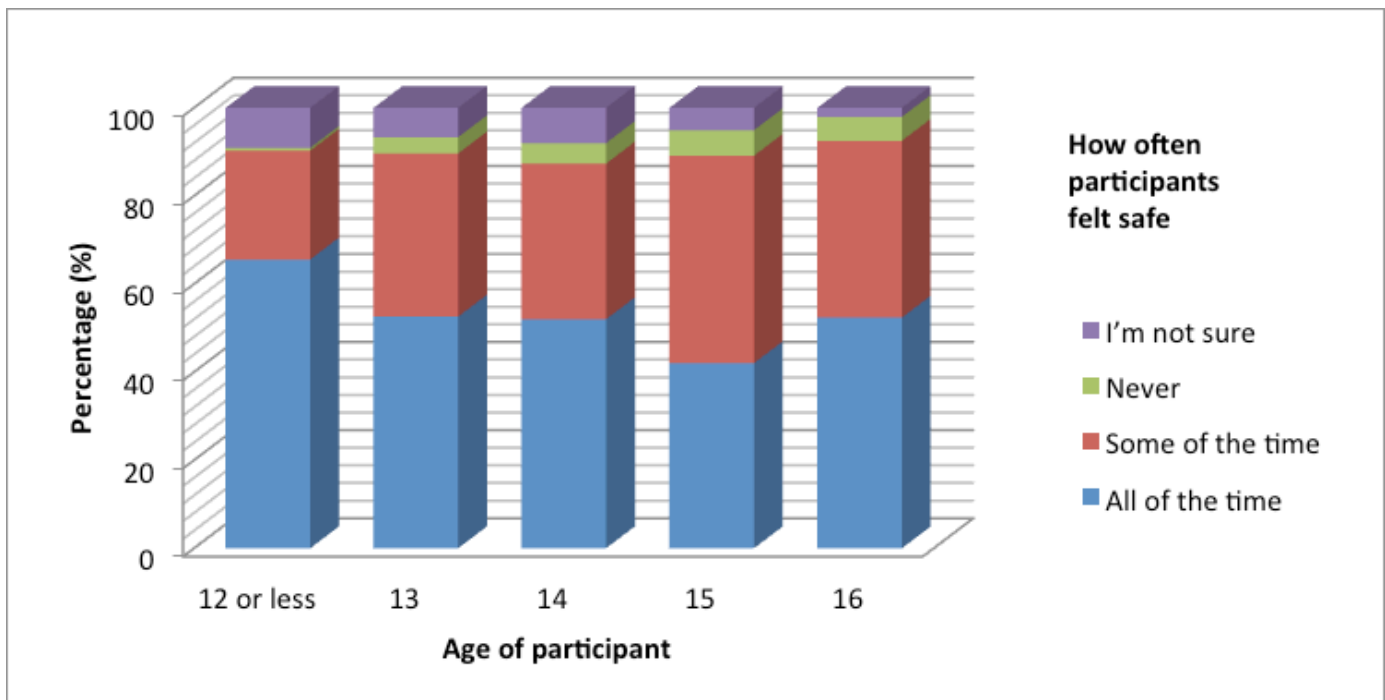
*However, 9% of young people who selected their church, 5% of young people who selected school or holiday camp, and 1.5% of young people in a sporting activity reported that they never felt safe.*



## How often participants felt safe in their chosen institution, by institution



## How often participants felt safe in their chosen institution, by age



## Section 2

### How well do institutions demonstrate the characteristics of safe institutions?

A set of characteristics of safe institutions were developed in Phase 1 of the project, which conducted focus groups with children and young people (see Issues 11 and 12). These were used in the survey, and included:

- A focus on helping children and young people
- Valuing children and young people and their participation
- Providing a safe environment for children and young people
- Pro-actively protecting children and young people from unsafe people and experiences
- Employing safe and trusted adults
- Being open to monitoring by an external agency

Overwhelmingly, children and young people believed their chosen institution demonstrated the characteristics of a safe institution, although there were some differences across institutions. More than 50% reported that they believed that adults in their nominated environments cared about children and young people 'all of the time', with 75% reporting that adults cared in their church, sport or holiday camp environment. Participants who selected church reported a higher rate of adults valuing children's views and opinions, and talking with children and young people about things they were worried about. Those who chose a sporting activity reported higher rates of adults caring about children and young people, having at least one adult to talk to, and feeling safe most of the time.

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**Table 1: Percentage of children and young people whose chosen institution demonstrated characteristics of a child safe organisation 'all the time', by institution**

Child safe characteristic	Institution				
	School % (n=750)	Church % (n=57)	Sport % (n=216)	Camp % (n=90)	Total % (n=1113)
Adults care about children and young people	54.7	78.7	81.2***	78.3	62.8
Adults value children's views and opinions	27.0	65.2***	52.8	43.9	35.0
Children and young people have at least one adult they trust	43.0	69.6	76.5***	53.0	51.4
Adults talk with children and young people about things that worry them	35.6	54.4***	28.9	36.3	35.2
Adults know children and young people well enough to know if something isn't right	23.8	45.7	45.5	45.7	30.7
Children and young people are more likely to rely on their friends than adults if they are worried about something	55.0***	26.1	38.6	37.0	49.1
Adults pay attention when children and young people raise a concern or worry	44.6	69.6	66.8	65.4	51.6
I feel safe most of the time	57.2	67.4	78.7***	62.7	53.6

Note: Percentages determined by calculating the number of respondents per institution who answered 'all of the time' and 'some of the time' to the presented statement. To examine institutional differences in responses to presented statements, chi-square analyses were conducted.

\*\*\*p <.001

Of those young people who believed their chosen institution 'never' demonstrated characteristics of a child safe organisation, 14 year olds were the most likely of all age groups to perceive that adults never valued children's views and opinions; and to report that they did not have an adult they trusted within their institution. Fifteen year olds reported a higher rate of perceiving that adults never care about children and young people, and never pay attention when a concern is raised.

*Fifteen year olds reported a higher rate of perceiving that adults never care about children and young people, and never pay attention when a concern is raised.*

By institution, 22% of young people who selected 'sporting activity' believed that adults never talked to them about the things that worry them, and 10% of young people at school believed that adults did not know them well enough to know if something was not right. 11% of young people at church did not believe that children and young people had a trusted adult to turn to and 7% did not believe that adults valued children and young people's opinions.

**Table 2: Percentage of children and young people who reported that institutions ‘never’ demonstrate characteristics of a child safe organisation, by institution**

Child safe characteristic	Institution			
	School % (n=750)	Church % (n=57)	Sport % (n=216)	Camp % (n=90)
Adults care about children and young people	2.0	2.1	0.0	2.4
Adults value children’s views and opinions	4.3	2.2	4.1	7.3***
Children and young people have at least one adult they trust	2.9	10.9***	3.1	3.6
Adults talk with children and young people about things that worry them	6.6	0.0	21.8***	13.8
Adults know children and young people well enough to know if something isn’t right	10.5***	0.0	5.1	3.8
Children and young people are more likely to rely on their friends than adults if they are worried about something	1.3	6.5***	5.1	3.8
Adults pay attention when children and young people raise a concern or worry	5.1***	4.4	4.1	4.9
I feel safe most of the time	5.3	6.5***	4.6	62.7

Note: Percentages determined by calculating the number of respondents per institution who answered ‘never’ in response to the presented statement. To examine institutional differences in responses to presented statements, chi-square analyses were conducted.

\*\*\*p <.001

Having adults pay attention when children and young people raised concerns or worries was a significant predictor of children and young people’s sense of safety; whereas other characteristics were not strongly associated. This highlights the critical importance of adult responses to children and young people’s concerns.



*Having adults pay attention when children and young people raised concerns or worries was a significant predictor of children and young people’s sense of safety*

## Section 3

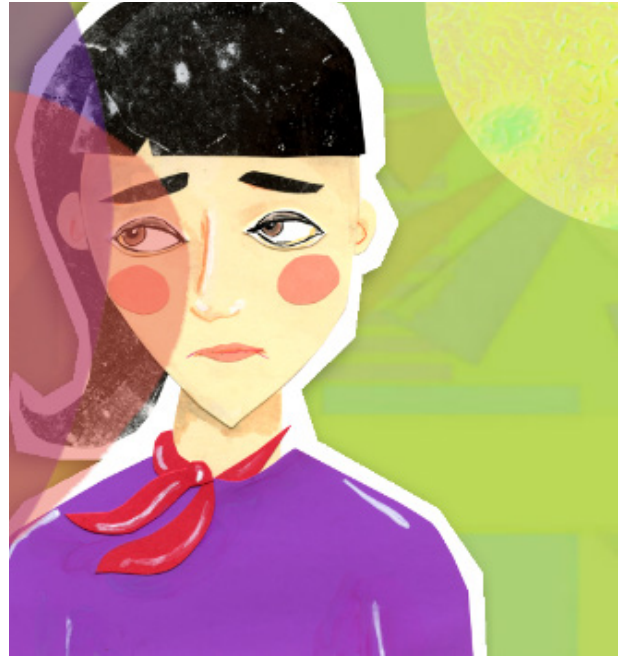
### Implications for institutions that engage children and young people

While children were more likely to feel safe all of the time in their chosen institution, and believed their school was doing enough to keep them safe; those aged 13 and above gradually became more and more likely to believe their school was doing nothing, or not enough, to keep them safe.

This finding is concerning, as a student's assessment of their school's capacity to keep them safe, is inversely related to their sense of belonging, participation and security at school.

The finding that older participants were more likely to have less confidence in adults, and to assess their safety as being low, is consistent with other studies. It suggests that older young people are more likely to have experienced unsafe situations (such as violence, harassment and bullying), and unhelpful responses from adults and institutions. They are more likely to be cynical about adults and their capacity to deal with the issues experienced by young people. This suggests that adults and institutions must spend time with older adolescents, as well as other children and young people who do not feel safe in their chosen institutions, and develop strategies to improve their confidence in adults.

A concerted effort is needed to assist teachers and other 'caring adults' to build children and young people's confidence in adults, and adults' ability to respond to issues. Identification of issues and problem-solving should also occur early and in more proactive ways, rather than only when a young person discloses their concerns.



*Those aged 13 and above gradually became more and more likely to believe their school was doing nothing, or not enough, to keep them safe.*

### About the Study

This research project was commissioned by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and explored what children and young people experience and think about safety in institutional contexts.

The first part of the study held 10 focus groups with 121 children and young people aged 4 – 18 years in the ACT, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, about their perceptions and experiences of safety, including in institutions. The second part of the study conducted a national online survey of children and young people aged 10-18 about their views and experiences of safety in institutions, which was completed by 1,480 people. The report presenting the focus group findings was published in 2015, and the report presenting the survey findings was published in September 2016.

More information about the project, along with links to associated publications, is available at [www.acu.edu.au/icps](http://www.acu.edu.au/icps)

### References

Moore, T., McArthur, M, Heerde, J., Roche, S., & O'Leary, P. (2016). *Our safety counts: Children and young people's perceptions of safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns*. Melbourne: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University.

Moore, T., McArthur, M, Noble-Carr, D., & Harcourt, D. (2015). *Taking us seriously: children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns*. Melbourne: Institute of Child Protection Studies, Australian Catholic University.

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