



Child and Youth Engagement Framework

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Child and Youth Engagement Framework (the Framework) is to provide a standardised, consistent approach across the Department for Child Protection (DCP) where children and young people are actively and meaningfully involved in decision making.

The Framework defines and describes mechanisms across DCP that allow children and young people to participate, be meaningfully engaged and appropriately heard so they can inform decisions about their own lives as well as systems, programs, policies, and practices that impact them.

2. Scope

This Framework applies to all DCP staff who engage with children and young people involved with the child protection system in South Australia, and children and young people who are involved in engagement mechanisms across DCP as detailed in this Framework.

3. Authority

3.1 Legislative context

- [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017](#) (the CYPS Act)
 - Sections 8(1)(a) and 10(1)(b) - a child or young person's views should be heard and considered in the administration, operation and enforcement of the Act.
 - Section 12(2) – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – in placing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person, the object of maintaining the connection of children and young people with their family and Aboriginal culture is to apply
 - Section 24 – the co-ordinator of a family group conference must allow the child or young person to hold discussions in private or, if the child or young person is unable to attend, the co-ordinator must take reasonable steps to ascertain their views and present them to the conference
 - Section 85(3)(b)(iii) – a child or young person must be given a reasonable opportunity to make submissions to the panel undertaking an annual review
- [Children and Young People \(Safety\) Regulations 2017](#)
 - Regulation 8(2) - the Chief Executive must take reasonable steps to ascertain the views and encourage participation of children and young people in the preparation of their case plan.

3.2 Whole of Government requirements

- [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations - The Australian Human Rights Commission 2019](#)
- [Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 - 2031](#)
- [South Australia's Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People 2019](#)
- [Closing the Gap South Australia's Implementation Plan 2024 – 2026](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)



3.3 DCP requirements

- [Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in Care](#)
- [The Department for Child Protection Strategic Plan \(2022-2026\)](#)
- [DCP Practice Principles – The six pillars of our practice](#)
- [DCP Practice Approach \(Summary Guide\)](#)
- [Supporting the participation of children and young people in decision making Practice Paper](#)
- [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#)
- [Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal families Framework](#)
- [Working with cultural diversity Practice Paper](#)
- [Strengths based practice Practice Paper](#)
- [Relationship based practice Practice Paper](#)
- [Child and adolescent development Practice Paper](#)

3.4 Principles

The safety of children and young people is the paramount consideration.

This Framework builds on existing processes, practice and engagement activities and is underpinned by the following requirements, or principles, as outlined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 12*.

All processes in which children and young people are listened to, heard and participate, must be:

- **Transparent and informative:** Children and young people must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information. Throughout their time in care, children and young people must be told about their right to express their views freely, their right to have their views given due weight, how their participation will take place, how their input may be used or applied, and how their input has been used or applied.
- **Voluntary:** Children and young people must never be coerced into expressing their views against their wishes and must be informed that they can stop participating at any stage.
- **Respectful:** The views of children and young people must be treated with respect, and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults need to understand or be aware of the socioeconomic, environmental and cultural context of the lives of children and young people and should consistently acknowledge and respect a child or young person's willingness and/or capacity to participate. Additionally, consideration should be given to the environment within which a child or young person is being asked to express their views, ensuring that they feel safe to freely express their views.
- **Relevant:** The issues on which children and young people are asked to express their views must be of real relevance and importance to them and their lives. Opportunities to share their views should enable them to draw on their experiences, knowledge, skills and abilities.
- **Child and youth friendly:** Environments, processes, mechanisms, and materials used to engage children and young people should be designed to be responsive to their developmental capacity, interests and strengths. Where needed, approaches should be adapted. Children and young people should have access to resources to help them prepare adequately and to give them the confidence and opportunity to contribute their views.



- **Inclusive:** Participation must be inclusive. Children and young people are not a homogenous group, and consideration must be given to ensuring that the voices of all children and young people are heard. Children and young people should be able to enjoy equal opportunities to engage and participate regardless of cultural and social backgrounds, education, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, context, political and economic status, or other characteristics. Engagement activities should acknowledge and celebrate the diverse and intersectional lived experiences that children and young people possess and facilitate shared learning and reflection.
- **Supported by training:** For adults to facilitate active and meaningful engagement with children and young people, they need preparation, capacity building and support. Skills include active listening, effective cooperation, collaboration and knowing how to engage with children and young people's evolving capacities. Children and young people also benefit from capacity building to strengthen their skills and confidence in participating. Where appropriate, young people may be involved as trainers or facilitators of this training.
- **Safe and sensitive to risk:** In certain situations, expressing their views may put children and young people at risk. Adults must take precautions to minimise the potential risks and negative consequences associated with engagement and participation, such as violence, exploitation or re-traumatisation. Children and young people must be aware of their right to be protected from harm and know where to go for help if needed. Consideration must be given to the risks faced by some children and young people, especially those who have intersectional lived experience (an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child or young person with a disability, and the additional barriers they may encounter). Similarly, potential risks posed by digital engagement or participation also need to be considered.
- **Accountable:** Children and young people are entitled to be informed about how their views have been interpreted and used, and how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, children and young people should be provided with the opportunity to challenge and influence findings, and to be involved in follow-up processes and activities.

4. Framework requirements

The Framework outlines how DCP provides children and young people opportunities to participate in decision making and influence systems, policies, processes, projects and programs. It demonstrates DCP's commitment to connecting with children and young people and:

- supporting them to share their views
- amplifying what they tell us
- promoting the inclusion of their ideas in decision-making.

Engagement with children and young people involves proactively seeking opportunities to connect with them and providing appropriate support for them to express their views in meaningful ways. Meaningful and effective engagement is an inclusive, intentional and mutually respectful partnership between children, young people and adults whereby contributions are valued, and children and young people's ideas and perspectives are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies and processes that affect their lives.

It is important to recognise that children and young people are experts in their own lives. How the child or young person views and articulates their experiences, needs and interactions can be impacted by their experience of trauma, but this does not take away from their right to express themselves, or the need for DCP practitioners to listen.



When engagement with children and young people is initiated to understand their perspectives and involve them in decision making processes, DCP is enabled to make decisions that are more responsive and appropriate to their needs and interests.

Within DCP, engagement should offer children and young people:

- continuous opportunities to express themselves - their needs, ideas and wants, in a range of diverse, age and developmentally appropriate ways
- choice in which forums they participate in, what their participation looks like and who is involved in supporting them to participate
- knowledge and consistent affirmation that their voice and their thoughts are important
- space to make an informed decision about their participation, including opting out and opportunities to revisit involvement in decision-making
- the right to be treated and heard with equity
- an understanding of the significance of their lived experiences in contributing to more responsive decisions within the child protection and family support sector
- opportunities to build their evolving capacity, including developing life skills such as communication, leadership or problem solving, at every stage of development
- opportunities to make and maintain connections and genuine friendships with other children and young people, who may or may not also have a care experience
- support in building cultural awareness, connections and literacy, regardless of background, identity and lived experience
- reliable sources of information
- access to tools to build and develop self-agency, self-esteem and confidence in advocating for themselves.

DCP benefits from child and youth engagement through:

- improved quality and effectiveness of policies, programs and services, through engagement with and feedback from children and young people
- appropriately informed decision making that considers the lived experiences of children and young people in care
- building trust and transparency with children and young people, leading to greater involvement and engagement from children and young people, and others in their care team, including their carer and birth family.

4.1 Engagement mechanisms in DCP

Mechanisms for supporting meaningful engagement with children and young people can include:

- informal or indirect participation through sharing their views with their DCP case worker or other care team members
- formal and direct participation such as attendance and participation in case planning and annual review meetings
- group consultation and activities through membership and participation with a youth advisory group.

4.1.1 Informal engagement

Informal engagement refers to the interactions that DCP case workers have with children and young people outside of structured meetings or mandated processes. This is primarily achieved through regular face to face contact with the child or young person.

For further guidance about practice requirements for regular face to face contact, refer to [‘Maintain regular face to face contact with the child or young person’](#) in the Supporting children and young people in



care chapter of the Manual of Practice. For guidance about strategies for engaging children and young people and seeking their views, refer to the [Supporting the participation of children and young people in decision making Practice Paper](#).

Regular face to face contact is critical to informal engagement as it helps build rapport and trust in the relationship. This supports children and young people to feel more comfortable sharing their views and enables DCP case workers to regularly obtain current information about the child or young person's strengths and support needs.

4.1.2 Formal engagement

Formal engagement includes ensuring that children and young people are invited and enabled to participate directly in formal meetings, such as care team meetings, case plan review meetings or annual reviews.

Case plans

Case plans support purposeful, transparent, culturally responsive and outcome-oriented planning to meet children and young people's needs and to enable them to meet their full potential. It is vital that DCP case workers work in partnership with the child or young person and consider a range of strategies to engage them in the development, implementation and review of their case plan. This means appropriately preparing, informing, listening to, and following up with the child or young person.

For further guidance about engaging children and young people in case planning and review, refer to the [Case planning, review and annual review](#) and [Transition to adulthood](#) chapters of the Manual of Practice.

Annual reviews

Under section 85 of the [CYPs Act](#), all children and young people under long-term guardianship must undergo an annual review. Annual reviews are an opportunity to review the child or young person's case plan and to capture the child or young person's views about their care.

For guidance about the requirements for convening an annual review, including seeking the views of the child or young person, refer to '[Conduct an annual review](#)' in the Case planning, review and annual review chapter of the Manual of Practice.

My Voice Our Views

My Voice Our Views (MVOV) is a digital, interactive, self-interviewing tool used by DCP to collect and record the perspectives of children and young people aged five to 17 years across several life domains. There are two versions of the MVOV that exist, with one specifically for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

For further guidance refer to the [Seek the views of the child or young person](#) section of the Manual of Practice.

4.1.3 Youth advisory groups and regional youth councils

To increase the opportunities for all children and young people in care to have their voices actively and meaningfully heard and engage in decision making across DCP, DCP has established youth advisory groups (YAGs) and councils (YACs). These groups provide young people in care with opportunities to connect with one another and platforms for them to advocate about matters that are important to them.

Groups tailor their engagement model to suit the membership cohort of children and young people. Some prioritise social engagement, while others focus on skill development or cultural connection. These groups enable young people to formally be consulted on topics of interest from internal DCP project teams and,



where possible, may participate in external consultations to inform decisions affecting wider state and national decisions affecting the sector.

The advice and feedback provided by children and young people during these meetings informs DCP's decision making, practice, policy, projects and change initiatives. These groups also support continuous improvement for existing mechanisms, such as case planning, care team meetings and annual reviews.

More information about DCP's YAGs, including contact details, is available on [the intranet](#) to assist staff with engaging different cohorts of children and young people.

Youth Advisory Reference Group

The Youth Advisory Reference Group (YARG) is a centralised working group for staff who are involved with the facilitation of regional YAGs or who work as YEOs in the DCP residential care space, to connect and collaborate.

No Capes for Change

DCP's peak youth advisory group, No Capes for Change, was established in 2020. The group provides feedback about DCP projects, programs and policies. Membership includes up to ten young people aged between 15 and 25 years of age.

Ministerial Youth Advisory Council

The Ministerial Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) was established in 2025 and provides direct advice and lived experience guidance to the Minister for Child Protection and the broader child protection and family support system. Membership includes 16 children and young people aged between 13 to 19 years of age, who meet quarterly.

4.1.4 Engagement within residential care

DCP utilises the Sanctuary Model of care for children and young people living in residential care. For further guidance, refer to the [Support children and young people in residential care](#) section of the Manual of Practice.

Wellbeing Plans and All About Me

Children and young people living in DCP residential care require a [Residential Care: Wellbeing Plan](#). Every child or young person is unique, and it is best practice to adopt an individualised approach to support their healing and development. These strategies and approaches are to be documented in a Wellbeing Plan. To inform the Plan, staff can support the child or young person to develop an All About Me document. This provides a genuine opportunity for staff to learn the child or young person's strengths, likes and dislikes and understand how they can help them to feel safe and supported. For Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, culture is integral to their safety and wellbeing. The All About Me Culture document includes space to celebrate and acknowledge their cultural identity.

MyPlace

MyPlace is an initiative enabling children and young people to have an active voice in shaping their personal environments within residential care, including choosing the décor, furniture and soft furnishings for bedrooms and shared living areas.

More information refer to the [Create a safe and nurturing home in residential care](#) section of the Manual of Practice.



Youth Adventure and Recreation Service

The Youth Adventure and Recreation Service (YARS) facilitates recreational and adventure programs and experiences within the local community, for children and young people within DCP residential care. These opportunities incorporate elements that build children and young people's skills in effective communication, keeping themselves safe and emotional regulation.

YARS programs include the opportunity for participation in:

- short school day based recreational activities
- school holiday full day adventure-based programs
- twice yearly, week-long country programs.

Youth Engagement Officers

Within the DCP residential care team, Youth Engagement Officers (YEOs) play vital, multifunctional roles to support the active and meaningful participation of children and young people within a DCP residential care placement.

The YEO focuses on:

- developing and maintaining effective and meaningful youth participation mechanisms that provide opportunities for young people to have a voice on youth issues
- maintaining and developing links/partnerships that facilitate cooperation and coordination of activities that improve outcomes for young people.

The Aboriginal YEO focuses on:

- supporting DCP residential care staff to build therapeutic relationships with children and young people, to strengthen relational and cultural engagement
- advocating for the voices of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people to ensure their lived experiences meaningfully inform care decisions, practice, and system responses
- building and strengthening relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, community partners and other stakeholders to support culturally safe and responsive care
- providing 1:1 support in response to identified need, guided by the Principal Aboriginal Consultant (PAC).

4.2 Engaging with children and young people from diverse backgrounds

Children and young people come from a variety of backgrounds, have diverse interests and engage and interact in different ways. While a particular form of engagement may be suited to some children and young people, others may need to be engaged in different ways to draw on their unique abilities, skills, talents and experiences. It is also important to acknowledge that intersectional lived experiences is common for children and young people with a care experience. For example, a child or young person with disability may also be from a culturally or linguistically diverse background.

When engaging with children or young people, DCP staff should:

- use a range of developmentally appropriate methods for seeking the views of children and young people
- use language that is trauma-informed, child and youth-friendly and developmentally appropriate
- follow the child or young person's cues and go at their pace.

4.2.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

When engaging with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, it is important to have a genuine understanding of intergenerational trauma and the continuing effects it has on them, their



families and wider communities. Additionally, it is important to recognise and understand the importance of self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, in decision making on matters affecting their lives including practicing culture and maintaining their identity.

Culture and community are seen as protective factors for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, strengthening their sense of safety, identity, confidence and connection. Incorporating the elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle will help to build trusting and culturally respectful engagement.

Considerations for DCP staff include:

- identifying and understanding cultural obligations, and taking care not to misunderstand or minimise these
- building rapport with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, Elders, community and kinship networks involved with the child or young person, and their families, that you intend to engage with, and ensuring respect for Elders and designated cultural authorities
- listening deeply and patiently to both the expressed views and non-verbal cues of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in articulating what they need to feel culturally safe and adjust approaches where needed, recognising that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people may prefer indirect communication styles or storytelling
- working in partnership with other agencies such as Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to assist with building meaningful communication and relationships with families
- use of culturally safe and trauma-informed engagement methods with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, including tools such as yarning circles and storytelling
- considering cultural safety when choosing environments for engagement with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child or young person especially when needing to discuss important topics (for example, an Annual Review), including location, timing, who is present, and the presence of symbols, artwork and/or language
- use of culturally safe and trauma-informed communication protocols and visual aids, such as interpreters/translators or photographs and images, to overcome potential language barriers
- allowing extra time for children and young people to process or respond in a second language (where applicable)
- engaging with a Principal Aboriginal Consultant (PAC) or the Aboriginal YEO in DCP residential care, where needed
- supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people to access, participate in and commemorate key events, including community and cultural events, festivals and Sorry Business
- acknowledging that assumptions should not be made about the cultural knowledge, identity or family background of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and that some children and young people may need support in strengthening their knowledge, connections and networks.

For further guidance refer to the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Practice Paper](#).

4.2.2 Children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Of the children and young people with a care experience, many have culturally diverse identities. Culture can be a protective factor, and can inform the identity of a child or young person, as well as the beliefs, practices, values and celebrations they participate in.

Considerations for DCP staff include:



- building knowledge of the culturally and linguistically diverse supports available for the child or young person, to ensure they are able to build and maintain connections with their cultures and communities
- being aware of the expressed views and non-verbal cues of children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in articulating what they need to feel culturally safe and adjust approaches where needed
- working in partnership with multicultural agencies to assist with building meaningful communication and relationships with families
- identifying culturally safe environments when engaging with a child or young person to discuss important topics (for example, an Annual Review)
- being aware of cultural and religious celebrations and obligations and supporting the child or young person in observing these (for example, a Muslim child or young person may need halal products and may need support celebrating Eid)
- using culturally appropriate communication protocols and visual aids, such as interpreters/translators or photographs and images, to overcome potential language barriers and encourage feelings of inclusion
- allowing extra time for children and young people to process or respond in a second language (where applicable)
- seeking guidance from the DCP Multicultural Services team to inform culturally responsive decision-making
- acknowledging that not all children and young people from a CALD background, or their families, have established connections to their culture or community and may need support in strengthening their connections and networks.

For further guidance, refer to the [Working with cultural diversity Practice Paper](#).

4.2.3 Children and young people with developmental delay or disability

Children and young people with developmental delay or disability often experience the world in different ways to their peers. It is important to understand and accommodate the needs of children and young people with disability so their unique perspectives can contribute to decision making.

Children and young people with disability are likely to require considered approaches to engagement and participatory activities. They may need strategies tailored to their disability to enable or optimise their engagement and participation.

Considerations for DCP staff include:

- investing necessary time and attention to promote active and meaningful participation, based on their individual needs as they relate to any developmental delay or disability
- attending to any assistance or support that may be required for them to express themselves adequately and appropriately, free of any barriers to engagement or participation
- adapting and structuring spaces, processes, communication approaches and activities to support them
- liaising with therapeutic teams within the Disability and Development program to seek feedback and clarity regarding communication approaches and key decisions.

The [Working with children and young people with disability Practice Paper](#) provides further guidance.

5. Compliance, monitoring and evaluation

The Voice of Child portfolio within the Strategic Policy, Partnerships and Reform (SPPR) directorate pursues departmental-wide activities to support delivery of this framework, including coordinating internal and external partnerships and acting as a departmental advocate to raise the voice of children and young people with a care experience.



The SPPR directorate will monitor and review the Framework in accordance with the policy review cycle.

6. Related documents

Related documents, forms and templates
Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017
Children and Young People (Safety) Regulations 2017
National Principles for Child Safe Organisations - The Australian Human Rights Commission 2019
Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 - 2031
South Australia's Outcomes Framework for Children and Young People 2019
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Child and adolescent development Practice Paper
Relationship based practice Practice Paper
No Capes for Change Terms of Reference and Group Charter
Family Led Decision Making for Aboriginal families Framework
Manual of Practice chapter (MoP) – Supporting children and young people in care
Practical strategies for engaging children in a practice setting



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