

Postcards snapshot for South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence

What we did

Building on my annual Student Voice Postcards, I designed a postcard for South Australia's Royal Commission into Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence to engage with children and young people who may not otherwise be heard. The postcard asked children and young people about when they feel safe, what would make them feel safer, what they would do if someone they knew needed help to be safe, and what South Australia should do to prevent domestic and family violence.

The postcards were distributed to children and young people via a range of service providers. This snapshot summarises the responses received from over 110 children and young people aged 7 to 23 years.

Postcards came from children and young people living in a range of settings and contexts both across metropolitan Adelaide and in regional South Australia, including Port Pirie, Port Augusta, and Mount Gambier. This included children and young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds, living in out-of-home care, and/or engaged in alternative education settings outside of mainstream schools.

As a young person you have a right to have your say on the things that impact on you.

Throughout this year the government has asked Natasha Stott Despoja to work with people across South Australia to develop actions on how to prevent and respond to family, domestic and sexual violence.

It is important that all young people can be a part of the process to let Natasha know what needs to change to make SA a safer place for everyone.

I am helping her to connect to you through this postcard. Once completed, hand it back to the agency who it on to me. Please take the time to express your thoughts.

Thank you.

Helen Connolly,
Commissioner for Children and Young People

Have your say

I am _____ years old. I am _____ (gender)

I feel safe when...

I would feel safer if...

If someone I knew needed help to be safe I would...

To prevent family and domestic violence SA should...

Is there anything you want us to know about you?

Thank you for your answers.

Some children and young people had lived experience of violence.

Overall, there were several common themes and shared experiences regardless of background. However, some responses raised issues and experiences specific to children and young people's living situation. There was also diversity amongst children and young people living in similar contexts, highlighting the complexity of children and young people's experiences and the importance of listening to them and providing tailored support.

Responses highlight the important role of schools and community services in supporting children, young people and families earlier and consistently. They also emphasise the need to ensure children and young people have access to trusted adults and clear information about how and where to go for support that focuses on children and young people's needs.

What we heard:

What makes children and young people feel safe?

Children and young people wrote about feeling safe when they are with people they trust, in familiar places, and/or participating in activities they enjoy. While these overall key themes are similar to the Teenagers and Safety survey and report, some responses were specific to different groups of children and young people.

People

Children and young people reported feeling safe when they are with people they trust, people they care about and people who 'keep me safe' and 'comfort me'. This most often included family, particularly parents and siblings, as well as friends and pets.

While some reported feeling safe with 'trusted adults or 'older people' generally, others mentioned specific adults like teachers or carers. Some children and young people living in out-of-home care described feeling safe when they are with their carers or when 'staff are near me'.

I feel safe when...

“ Im with my family because I can talk to them & they comfort me if I feel unsafe. (11, female)

“ when I am with my dog. I also feel safe I'm at the youth centre. (13, male)

“ Im with my friends family and my workers at the house and my teacher. (10, male)

Children and young people reported that they would feel safer if they had better relationships with friends, family and trusted adults. This included being with family more, having more 'connection to loved ones' and 'more people to look after me'.

While many children and young people described feeling safe when they are with 'loved ones', 'with my community' and 'not alone', some wrote that they feel safe when 'certain people aren't around' or that they would feel safer if they didn't have contact with certain family members.

I would feel safer if...

“ my brother stops fighting with me. (8, female)

Places

Home was the most common place children and young people wrote about feeling safe. They described feeling 'protected' and 'relaxed' at home, often because they were with people or family they trust. Others described feeling safe where they had privacy, 'warmth and quiet' or their 'own space', often their bedroom.

I feel safe when...

“ I'm at home because everything I want need is there & I am protected in my house. (11, male)

“ im in my room and is quiet or when im at school in my classroom I feel the safest when im in the wellbeing room with [name] and im talking with her. (11, female)

Some children and young people, particularly those in out-of-home care, were not feeling safe where they live and did not have as much privacy or quiet. Some reported that they would feel safer if they could live somewhere else or with other people. Others wrote about wanting a calmer environment and clear ways to access support or contact carers or police.

I would feel safer if...

- “ I didn't live with destructive/angry people. and if i had a way to contact carers/police if needed. (12, female)
- “ the carers try to keep the house quiet and calm/and when the house isn't loud [isn't]. (12, female)
- “ I lived somwere I dont need to worry about getting hurt and my things getting broken and its not my fault and if I had someone who could change this. I feel like the situation im in is unfair and no one does anything about it and me and my sister dont deserve this. (11, female)

A number of children and young people mentioned feeling safe in the place where they were completing the postcard, including 'at the youth centre [Port Augusta Youth Centre]', 'at ARA [Australian Refugee Association]' or 'joining the activities of MYSA [Multicultural Youth SA]'. They linked the safety of these places to having trusted adults and 'good people' around, as well as having support and being able to 'join activities'.

I feel safe when...

- “ I'm at home or at MYSA, because I'm with my parent and adults who are so supportive, taking good care of us. (16, female)
- “ when the police come to the youth centre for boxing & when I'm with my Mum & Dad. (7, male)
- “ I'm at home, school or the youth centre. because there is trusted adults. (9, female)

For some children and young people, school was mentioned as a safe place because of friends or 'good teachers'. Others wanted to change school to make it safer. They reported that they would feel safer if there was less fighting, less bullying, and if only people who were meant to be there were at school.

I would feel safer if...

- “ scary people didn't come to the school that aren't meant to be there. (9, female)

Some children and young people described feeling safe in community spaces such as 'at the park' or 'at the bowling alley'. When asked what would make them feel safer in their neighbourhoods and communities, children and young people wanted more people around and more respect. They wanted to be able to walk around safely, including at night time, and they wanted there to be less alcohol and drugs and less strangers. One child living in Port Augusta reported that they would feel safer if 'there was less scary dogs'.

- “ I could walk around streets not worried about the type of people in the community. (15, female)

A smaller number of young people who had a job mentioned feeling safe at work. Others who currently don't have a job reported that they would feel safer if they had a job. Having more money and access to cheaper transport options were also important to safety.

I feel safe when...

- “ I'm at work. I love work because there are good people. (16, female)

I would feel safer if...

- “ I had a job and made money and had more friend and support. (13, male)
- “ bus went more cheeper [cheaper]. (15, female)

Some children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds wrote about feeling safe and lucky to be in Australia, a country that is safer than their home country.

- “ I feel safe in Australia because there are many opportunitis for young people to express themselves. (15, female)

Support

Children and young people described feeling safe with people and in places 'when I have support' or 'when someone is supporting me'. Some children and young people wanted more support to feel safer. This included having someone trustworthy to talk to about their feelings and problems, including upsetting topics. This also meant more safe spaces, 'more attention' to mental health, and more options 'for people going through tough times'. For some children and young people, support to be safer sometimes meant being left alone.

I would feel safer if...

- “ more attention to my mental health. more talks when feeling certain ways, more connection to loved ones. (17, unsure????) ”
- “ Physical contact is limited and for others to talk about upsetting topics (i.e; abuse, assault and mental health topics) in a quiet place where it wouldn't upset me or others. (14, non-binary) ”
- “ If down or sad Just need a small corner and sit by myself. (15, female) ”

Activities

Children and young people wrote about feeling safe when they were doing certain activities alone or with others. This included drawing, listening to music, sleeping or being on their phone. Some children and young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds described feeling safe when they are praying.

I feel safe when...

- “ im in my room reading, listening to music and when i laugh with glenny, and when I was with my mum. (16, female) ”
- “ I draw/listen to music. (15, male) ”

Children and young people reported that they would feel safer if they had more access to opportunities to connect with others and participate in activities, including playing more sport or spending more time outside.

I would feel safer if...

- “ I played soccer with my friends. (14, male) ”
- “ I was surround by adults like the time when I was joining activities at MYSA. (12, male) ”
- “ I was praying and communicating with people. (16, female) ”

Others reported feeling safe when they can be themselves and not feel judged, they feel in control and 'everything is going to plan' or 'in order', and there is no one yelling, hitting, or threatening them. Others reported that they would feel safer if other people 'were safe and happy' and if they knew that nothing bad would happen to them or their loved ones.

I would feel safer if...

- “ I knew nothing could either hurt or take my friends away from me. (13, female) ”

What would children and young people do if someone they knew needed help to be safe?

In order to support others to be safe, children and young people need access to trusted people and information about appropriate services and places to go.

Many children and young people wrote that they would do as much as they could to provide immediate support, 'become a safe person' and reassure the person needing help that they are not alone. This included listening to them, believing them, 'hugging and comforting' and 'praying for' them.

“ Get help and be there for them, making sure that they are safe both mentally, emotionally and physically. (14, non binary)

Many children and young people noted that they could only provide so much by themselves and that they would need to tell or call a trusted adult or 'someone important'. This included parents, carers, family and friends, teachers or someone else at school, youth workers or social workers. Some would contact the police or call 000.

What should South Australia do to prevent family and domestic violence?

To prevent domestic and family violence, children and young people emphasise that South Australia needs to 'take it seriously' and take children and young people seriously, 'take action' and 'have conversations'.

Responses highlighted the importance of education and information, as well as accessible and consistent support and services.

“ connect with my parents or someone who can understand us, such as reliable adults. (16, female)

“ have a conversation with them about how they need help to be safe and try to help and support them as much as I can. (13, male)

It was important to talk to them and find out what's going on in order to figure out 'who to tell' and help them find services and help them talk to adults and/or find services.

They highlighted the importance of making sure the person seeking help had a safe place to go and this included 'letting them stay with me'. They also highlighted that it was important to 'keep an eye on them', check in with them and make a safety plan to ensure ongoing support.

“ invite them to my house because it's safe. (10, female)

Some children and young people noted that they wouldn't know what to do. Others reported that it depends on the situation and who is seeking help and who else is involved.

A number of children and young people had difficulty understanding the question or did not know how to respond. Some noted that they 'don't have enough information about what SA is doing now'.

Education for children, young people and adults through schools and across the community

Children and young people's responses highlighted the importance of education, information and awareness at school and in the community to prevent domestic and family violence. This included teaching children about

their rights, including gender equality, the 'signs and what domestic violence looks like', as well as 'how to react' and how to report violence.

- “ educate kids/teens on how to treat females and be kind. (16, female)
- “ learn about signs and what domestic violence looks like. (14, male)
- “ teach young people to protect themselves by providing them information. (14, female)
- “ educate the children that they have the right to speak up for their self. and no one has this right to hurt them or bullying them. or touch them inappropriately. But we also need to get the people who are being violent to change their behaviour. (20, girl)

In addition to providing young people with information to protect themselves, responses highlighted that parents also need guidance to 'promote safe home environments'.

Children and young people also highlighted the important role of schools in providing support as well as information, and that it was important for all school staff – educators and wellbeing staff – to have education and training so they are not only aware of domestic, family and sexual violence but also supported to respond appropriately.

- “ I think school can be a supportive environment to help children. (14, male)
- “ have more options in schools to help & protect us. To also teach parents. (8, female)
- “ sped more awerness about it and show people how much it impacts you to be a part of domestic violence and its something that needs to stop. (11, female)
- “ educate parents about providing healthy family for their children. (15, female)
- “ promote safe home environments. (13, male)

More accessible support and information about services

Children and young people highlighted the need for more support for children, young people and families. This included better support to 'help families talk to each other' and help parents talk to each other, as well as access to health and mental health care, housing and financial support as well as alcohol and other drugs services.

- “ help families talk to each other better about thier problems. keep the bad people away. (9, female)
- “ help parents to stop fighting or if they want to stay together. (9, female)

They also wanted more ways to anonymously report violence, including a private number for families to call, as well as safe places, including safe houses and accommodation, for young people.

- “ support young people when they need a safe place to stay. (15, male)
- “ More safe places for people. (8, female)

They emphasised the importance of making sure children and young people know where to go for help and for making support available in places where children and young people are already connected.

- “ Have acessible help services. Check in with kids/ family members every few months. (12, female)
- “ make sure people know where they can go for help. posters - not only on the internet. (15, female)
- “ have more supports for young people in school and community settings. (17, female)
- “ give students their own health care, teacher a student can trust to tell them if anything happens or family therapy. (14, female)

Regular check-ins and ongoing family support

Children and young people highlighted the importance of checking in and checking up on families regularly. Providing consistent support is key to building a system that people can trust.

- “ do a check with the children once a month to see what is happening in their life. (13, girl)
- “ do more mental health assessments/daily housing check ups. (17, unsure????)
- “ Do regular check ups on people and take notes of any suspicion to make sure there could be evidence if there is anything criminal behaviour. Educate people on consent and boundaries & make sure the people know SA can be trusted and people's privacy is respected. (14, non-binary)

Several children and young people wrote about keeping families together and keeping families safe. Sometimes removing or separating certain members was seen as necessary: 'take away the person getting hurt, or the one hurting'. Some responses emphasised a need to focus more on perpetrators or those 'doing the wrong thing' and getting 'violent people to change their behaviour'.

- “ keep families safe by punishing the bad parent & keep the rest of the family safe (10, female)
- “ keep the family together just separate the family members/member that is doing the wrong thing to the family (11, male)

- “ give them strategies on how to manage. and take the child to keep them safe. (16, female)
- “ should have conversations with parents about how violence could affect their kid's health and life. (13, male)

Children and young people shared mixed perspectives and experiences with police. Some saw 'more police' as part of violence prevention and response. However, many children and young people highlighted that police did not make them feel safe. They noted the need for changes to police practices and processes to be more trustworthy and responsive to children and families.

- “ allow police to walk into DV homes when they get called. (16, female)
- “ get more police or tell the mayor of Port Augusta for more services. (11, female)
- “ get better police officers that are trained better & actually keep us safe. (10, female)
- “ Get the police to listen more to victims. (16, female)

For some children and young people, changing the system meant a 'better law system' and 'stronger laws to stop people abusing each other'. While some responses focused on 'harsher punishment', others focused on increasing therapy and support options for families in schools and communities.

Listen to children and young people

Children and young people highlighted the importance of listening to children and young people and taking them seriously. There should be supportive spaces and opportunities for young people that support their 'right to speak up' and to be able to feel comfortable 'opening up' when they are ready.

“ I am from DV family. To speak out by ourselves is important. I got help from school. (15, female)

“ Take more action, take it more seriously and be able to let people feel comfortable enough about opening up. (15, female)

“ take children seriously. Provide training to school teachers or staff to be aware of domestic violence or bullying. (15, female)

“ help young people voice their opinions, e.g. safe space at school. (17, male)

“ provide educational program for children to learn how to react to domestic violence. (14, male)

“ run groups for children who are at risk, letting them express themselves in a safe space. (14, male)

At the same time, responses noted that young people are scared and may struggle to speak up about experiences of violence, including because they want to protect others or because of threats.

“ young people struggle to speak up because they want to protect those involved. (16, female)

The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016* ('the Act'). The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and issues of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.

The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular, children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making, and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda, including ways in which children and young people can have greater input into the design and delivery of policies, programs and practices that affect their lives.

Acknowledgements

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