




THE STATEWIDE CHILDREN'S RESOURCE
PROGRAM

Hear My Voice Conversation Cards

Supporting practitioners to have thoughtful, inclusive and meaningful conversations with infants, children and young people about their experiences of family violence and living without a home



Produced by the Statewide Children's Resource Program 2021

Foreword

Family violence and homelessness can have profound life long effects on infants, children and young people. Research strongly indicates the experience of family violence (1) and homelessness (2) is associated with adverse developmental outcomes. The consideration of safety and vulnerability of infants, children and young people must be embedded in all services that respond to homelessness and family violence.

Services that support victim survivors of family violence and people without a home are often targeted towards an adult focused service response. Despite children making up nearly one quarter of people accessing Specialist Homelessness Services (3), they are not routinely consulted (4). There is often an assumption that caregivers are meeting the needs of their children, that children's experiences aren't as traumatic or their needs are not as urgent, however this is not usually the case. We have come to understand, that when in crisis, caregivers may not have the capacity to consistently attune to the needs of their child. Children experience homelessness and family violence in their own unique way but often have few skills to process these events and need support to overcome the harmful impacts.

Throughout the years of supporting practitioners within Victoria's Specialist Homelessness Services, the Statewide Children's Resource Program identified that practitioners often reported engaging children

in sensitive conversations as a challenging area of practice. Feedback indicated that some practitioners lacked the confidence and questioned their abilities to engage with children without causing further harm or trauma.

The Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards offer professionals working with infants, children and young people and their caregivers practical tools to engage in meaningful conversations about their experiences of family violence and living without a home.

The Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards are designed to explore children's experiences in a gentle conversational style that is reflective and supportive. The cards aim to help practitioners and caregivers understand the child's experience, assist to deliver targeted services to children, and gain meaningful outcomes for their short and long term wellbeing.

The Statewide Children's Resource Program would like to thank those who contributed and provided their feedback throughout the development of the Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards.

"Whether you colour the world or light it up blue, you are making a difference. So keep being you" – Dr Seuss

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to the land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities.

We express our hope for reconciliation.

We acknowledge that sovereignty of this land was never ceded. This land is, was, and always will be Aboriginal land.



Acknowledgement of Victim - Survivors

The Statewide Children's Resource Program acknowledges victim-survivors of family violence, the majority of whom are women and children.

Children's voices are often silent and their experiences and their agency minimised. It is essential infants, children and young people are seen as victim survivors in their own right as their experiences and perspectives are unique and differ from those of adults.





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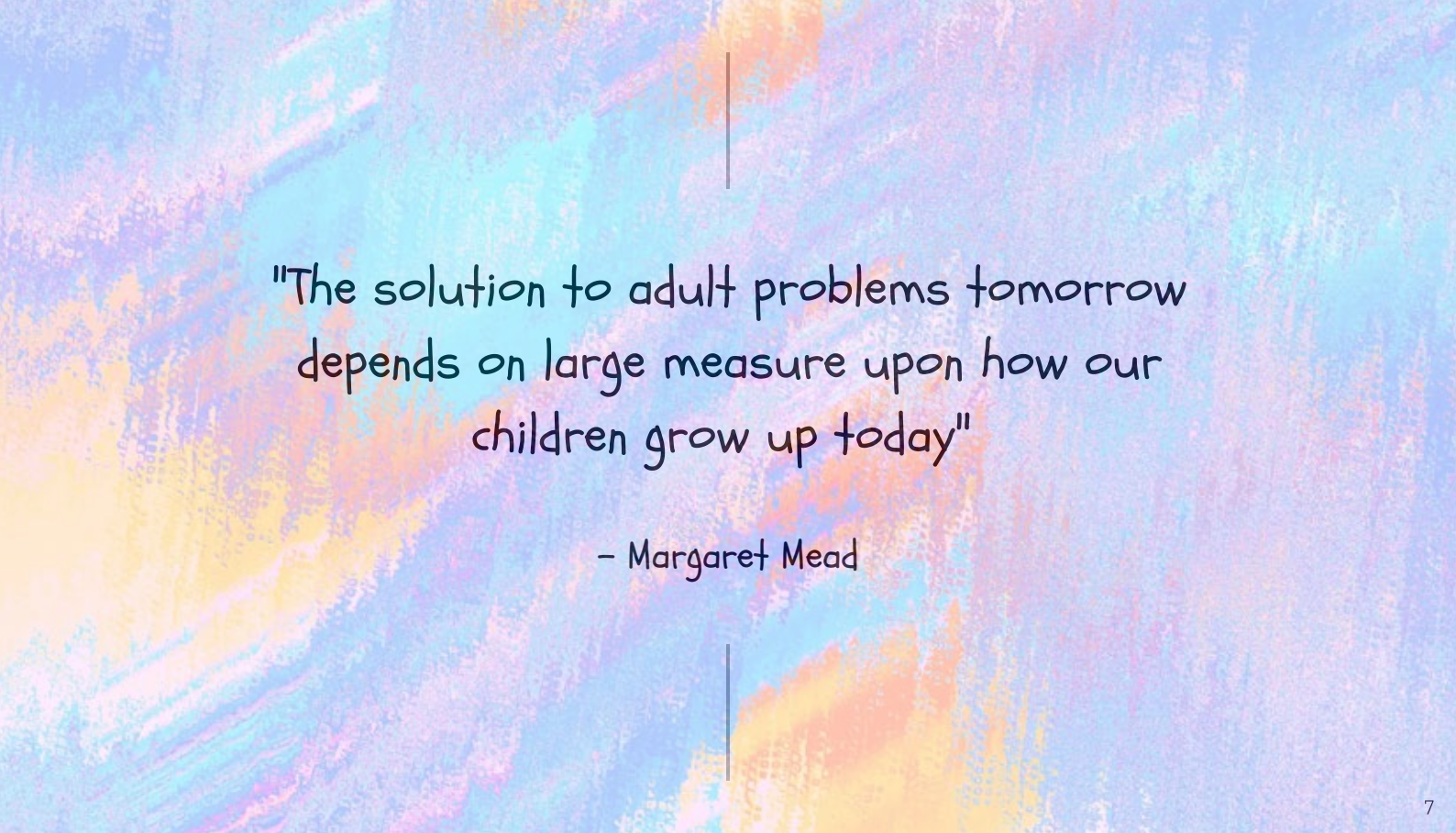
The Statewide Children's Resource Program

The Statewide Children's Resource Program (SCRP) is funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to assist, support and resource Specialist Homelessness Services, family violence agencies and other non government agencies and sectors to respond more effectively to the needs of children and young people who have experienced homelessness and family violence. The SCRPP position grew out of recognition within the Victorian government that children were a significant presence in adult focused services within the specialist homelessness and family violence sectors.

The family violence and homelessness sector largely requires practitioners to focus on the needs of adults engaging with their services. The SCRPP works to ensure that the needs of children receive significant focus. Infants, children and young people who are provided quality support from services are more likely to have better long term outcomes in addition to an environment that is physically and psychologically safe to recover from trauma. In order to provide meaningful support, we must first engage with infants, children and young people and take the time to understand their individual experiences, learn what it is they need to feel safe and aid their recovery.

Throughout this resource we use the word 'caregiver' to describe the primary adults in a child's life. We use this term in order to include non-biological parents, grandparents, extended family, kinship caregivers, foster caregivers, and others who raise children. Infants, children and young people require caregivers to be consistent in their love and responsive to their needs.

Throughout this resource we refer to infants, children and young people as a way of acknowledging the ages and stages of childhood. These terms may be used interchangeably.



"The solution to adult problems tomorrow
depends on large measure upon how our
children grow up today"

– Margaret Mead

Family violence and affordable housing shortages push many into homelessness. Family violence is gendered; driven by gender inequality and overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against women and children (5). It is one of the main reasons women and children are without a home in Australia (6). Groups who are at a higher risk of domestic and family violence include women with disabilities, pregnant women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, members of the LGBTQI+ community, women experiencing financial hardship, and women and men who experienced abuse or domestic violence as children. We must not forget that these women are often caregivers, and their children are also victims. Infants, children and young people are impacted directly and indirectly by family violence. The profound distress of the adults they love causing harm and fear can have long-term effects if left unspoken and unresolved.

Despite services largely focused on meeting adult needs, on any given day across Australia 18,500 children are supported by homelessness services. Given the prevalence of children accessing family violence and homelessness services, it is vital that practitioners assess and support the child's individual needs.

Childhood can be a time of vulnerability, and children who experience family violence or are without a home are more likely to have a range of critical unmet needs. The signs of these adverse experiences can be observed through changes to a child's behaviour, developmental and emotional wellbeing. These unmet needs may create challenges later in life as they are more likely to have poor educational, social, and health outcomes (7).

Introduction: children impacted by family violence and homelessness

Introduction: children impacted by family violence and homelessness

You can have a positive influence in a child's life by identifying their needs and strengths and implementing supports that will assist them to heal from their experiences by placing them at the center of your work practice. Women and children are seen as a national priority in homelessness services. Effective responses are required to recognise the impact of trauma and family violence. This can be achieved by making time to sight infants, children and young people and speak with them to find how to best support them in their recovery. Infants, toddlers and non verbal children are unable to tell us about their experiences however it is still essential to consider them as a client in their own right with their own experiences, needs and right to access services. Infants, toddlers and children communicate largely through their behaviour. In order to gain any understanding of what their experiences have been, we have a duty of care to engage and observe their behaviour.

If you require further information about how to assess and support infants, children and young people or engage with them, speak with your local Statewide Children's Resource Coordinator. Further resources are available in the Practitioner Toolkit accessed through the QR code in this booklet or via the SCRP website (see back page).

About the Hear My Voice Conversation Cards

The Statewide Children's Resource Program designed the Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards to be used by new or experienced practitioners within the homelessness and family violence sectors.

The purpose of the Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards is to:

- bring infants, children and young people's safety, experiences and voices into practitioners' interactions with caregivers
- assist caregivers and practitioners to apply a trauma informed approach in responding to infants, children and young people and assist to develop meaningful case plans
- provide practitioners tools to ensure children's wellbeing is supported
- enhance the skills of practitioners to meaningfully engage with infants, children and young people and identify how their experiences have shaped them
- support the assessment of each infant, child and young person and provide support for caregivers to attune to the needs of their children
- explore support options that address the needs of infants, children and young people.

The Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards provide an opportunity for infants, children and young people to receive a tailored response from the practitioner that is reflective of their individual need. Early intervention and ongoing support can help a child's recovery from traumatic events and lead to better long term outcomes.

It is acknowledged that the Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards may elicit 'big feelings' for infants, children, young people and their caregivers due to the nature of their experiences. It is important that you discuss the purpose of the conversation and what you will do with the information before you commence. It's good practice to be transparent about your responsibility to report any concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing if you reasonably foresee risk.

For further information on engaging with children, please refer to the SCRPP developed resource "See, Listen and Respond" which can be found on our website or the Practitioner Toolkit accessed through the QR code in this booklet. Refer to relevant legislation: Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Management Framework (MARAM) Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS) and Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS).

The Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards are designed with the expectation that a conversational approach will be adopted by practitioners to provide a positive and strengths-based interaction with infants, children, young people and their caregiver. Gentle questioning and curiosity will validate the unique experiences of trauma for infants, children and young people. This will inform an appropriate response to support their individual needs.

While a number of prompt questions are provided, practitioners are encouraged to be creative and use their own style of conversation and questioning to facilitate discussion and understanding. Avoid the use of jargon and adapt your style according to the age and abilities of the infant, child, young person or caregiver you are working with. It is helpful to think about the type of discussion you want to have, who it is with and the intended outcomes. Adapt your questions accordingly to gain the most from these conversations.

There are many ways you can apply these cards. For example you may want to:

- Ask the child to go through the cards and select 3-5 cards they may want to answer
- Prior to meeting your client, choose a number of cards you think will be helpful to discuss and explore
- Get creative by using play materials that will engage a child or young person's interest. Have paper and pencils ready to draw or record responses. For younger children, you may want to incorporate role play using puppets, figurines, dolls, or animal toys
- Have the child or young person select 2-4 cards and journal their responses. Explore these at your next visit
- Have these conversations individually, as a sibling group, or as a family.

The Hear My Voice – Conversation Cards have been colour coded to easily identify which questions are most suitable for children, caregivers, or used as icebreakers. The cards provide 'tips' to expand on the questions and elicit further understanding of their experiences. The children's cards are written in a way that allows children to explore, read and hold. The caregiver's cards have an italicised section which aids practitioners understanding the purpose of the question.

If we enhance the capacity of caregivers to engage in a meaningful and intentional way with their children, we improve safety and wellbeing.

About the Hear My Voice Conversation Cards

Colour Coded Cards

Children

AQUA CARD

To support conversations between children, young people and their practitioner. Tips provide suggestions on worksheets that can be printed from the Practitioner Toolkit, provide an alternative way to ask the question or a way to extend on the conversation. The cards can be given to children to read, hold and interact with.

AQUA AND PINK CARD

All cards are relevant to children of all ages, however the card featuring a pink and aqua boarder is specifically designed to prompt practitioners to ensure that infants, toddlers and non-verbal children receive a service response that addresses their safety, needs and experiences. Observing caregiver and infant interactions and responses will enhance your knowledge and develop appropriate assessment, intervention and referral pathways for each individual.

BLUE CARD

To support conversation between caregivers and their practitioner. *Italicised* comments are for practitioner's guidance and reflection. The tips detail specific worksheet suggestions that can be printed from the Practitioner Toolkit, these can provide alternative ways to ask the question or help extend on the conversation.

YELLOW CARD

Use with children, young people and caregivers to build rapport, as an icebreakers, to re-engage conversation, or to provide light questions that explore interests and imagination. We recommend finishing a session on a yellow card as these may help to transition participants back into casual conversation and a positive headspace.

Infants,
toddlers and
non-verbal
children

Caregiver

Icebreaker

Decoding the Caregiver Cards

Question

Practitioner guidance

Tips and extension
questions



The main question for
caregiver



The italicised section
provides information
about the purpose of the
question, additional
practice knowledge and
strengths based support



Extension and
alternative questions

Practice Considerations

- Questions are designed to ask about an individual child, not a sibling group. If you are speaking or asking about a sibling group, ask the same question of each child.
- Seek permission to share the child's insights with their caregiver if appropriate.
- Be transparent. Tell them why you want to have this conversation.
- Conversations can be difficult; take a break if you need one. Talk about how you will let each other know a break is needed prior to starting your conversation.
- If the participant isn't comfortable with a question, ask them if they'd prefer to revisit it another time or move on from that one.
- Ensure participants are aware of your obligations to report information if you have concerns about their safety and wellbeing or that of another.

If you are unsure about how to use these cards contact your regional Statewide Children's Resource Coordinator for further guidance.

*"They may forget what you said but
they will never forget how you made
them feel" – Carl W Buechner*



Self Care

Self care:

The experience of family violence and homelessness can be traumatic. Although the Hear My Voice – Conversation Cards are designed to gently support the discussion of these experiences, they can bring up strong feelings. Conscious monitoring and managing of stress by all participants will lead to better outcomes and it is vital that participants are freely able to perform self care throughout.



Creating a Safe Space

Creating a safe space:

It is essential to create a safe space in order to have meaningful conversations. Safe spaces include somewhere that is private and away from interruptions, and a location that the participant feels comfortable. A child friendly space is also essential to creating a supportive setting that will allow children to open up. Be conscious of your body language and position yourself at eye level. Provide age appropriate resources and toys that children can touch and play with.



Cultural Considerations

The questions within the cards may bring up big feelings for children and caregivers and it is important that you are aware of how to respond. The SCRP have developed a resource titled 'See, Listen, Respond' which provides information and support for practitioners about engaging with children who've experienced trauma. You may also wish to have a discussion with the caregiver about how to provide support to their child following the conversation.

Cultural considerations:

Culture refers to everything that defines and distinguishes a person including their ethnicity, cultural identity, gender, age, sexual orientation, personal identity, family structure, faith, parenting roles and expectations, ability, language, values, goals, and life experiences. Prior to engaging in conversation, it is important to consider the cultural context and adapt these discussions accordingly. Knowing how someone prefers/chooses to be addressed, what language they are comfortable with, their language skills, and what matters most to them is all important information to consider during the conversations.

Setting the Scene for a Successful Conversation

Prior to your conversation:

- Plan ahead. Read the cards and identify which cards you want to explore and the purpose. Identify whether you are information gathering, undertaking an assessment, or planning to refer.
- Consider sibling groups and how you will engage each individually and how they will provide their feedback about their unique experience.
- Have any resources or tools you want to use printed and ready. Familiarise yourself with the tool and how you can apply it.
- Prepare yourself for potential blockages and barriers such as the family's history with services.
- Prepare for some discussions that may be upsetting. Have some ideas and activities planned that allows for self care such as mindfulness drawing, icebreaker questions, or strengths based games.

During your conversation:

- Position yourself at eye level. For children and young people, try to position yourself alongside them rather than directly facing them. If possible, mirror their body and verbal language.
- Introduce yourself, including who you are and what you do.
- Engage in casual conversation to ease any anxiety and introduce the child to the activity. Explain what you will do with the information.
- Set some boundaries. Let them know that they can choose to skip a question or come back to it when they are comfortable.
- Finish your conversation with some lighthearted conversation.
- Follow up with further conversations in the future.

QR Code - Practitioner Toolkit

The QR code will navigate you to resources mentioned throughout the Hear My Voice - Conversation Cards. You may wish to print and use them during your conversations.



Alternatively, you can access the resource toolkit located on the Statewide Children's Resource Program's website
<https://statewidechildrenresourceprogram.weebly.com/>

Additional Resources

In addition to the resources listed in the toolkit, you will find reference to play materials that you can use in combination with the cards. Prior to your conversation, gather the items you wish to use to aid interaction and support engagement.

The resources identified include but are not limited to:

- Paper and pencils/markers/crayons/pens
- Tools for role play such as puppets, dolls, and figurines
- Balloons, bubbles, play dough, and other sensory items

Practitioners Toolkit



Infants

The Practitioners Toolkit is an online file regularly updated by the Statewide Children's Resource Program Coordinators to showcase up-to-date practice information, resources and psycho-educational material. This is accessible to practitioners with the QR code found on page 17 of this booklet or via the SCRCP website.



Children

The Practitioners Toolkit is divided into five parts: Infants, Children, Young People, Caregivers and Practitioners.



Young
People

Throughout the Infants, Children and Young People files you can access developmentally appropriate activities and worksheets to support meaningful engagement aimed at supporting practice and improving outcomes.



Caregivers

The Caregivers file contains psycho-educational material that can be printed and provided to caregivers to support their understanding of the impact of their children's experiences and what they can do to support their healing.



Practitioners

The Practitioners file offers a range of tools, guides and fact sheets to assist practitioners to work with infants, children and young people to express their views and wishes, explore relationships, make observations, set goals, and ensure their safety and wellbeing.

References

- 1 - Australian Childhood Foundation 2020. <https://www.childhood.org.au/the-impact/>
- 2 - Kirkman, M. Heys, D. Turner, A. Bodzak, D. (2009) *Does Camping Count? Children's Experiences of Homelessness*. The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory, Melbourne <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/06Aug2012PolicyResearch-and-Submissions-Does-Camping-Count-final-report.pdf>
- 3 - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. *Australia's Children in Brief* <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-children/contents/housing/homelessness>
- 4 - Glennen, K. (2020, March) *Statewide Children's Resource Program Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria - Submission* https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry_into_Homelessness_in_Victoria/Submissions/S305_-_Statewide_Childrens_Resource_Redacted.pdf
- 5 - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. *Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018*. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.
- 6 - Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute 2021 - *Housing, Homelessness and Domestic and Family Violence* <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/policy-analysis/housing-homelessness-domestic-family-violence>
- 7 - Glennen, K. (2020, March) *Statewide Children's Resource Program Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria - Submission* https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCLSI/Inquiry_into_Homelessness_in_Victoria/Submissions/S305_-_Statewide_Childrens_Resource_Redacted.pdf

The Hear My Voice – Conversation Cards have been developed by the Statewide Children's Resource Program to support practitioners within the Specialist Homelessness Services and intersecting services to engage in meaningful conversations with infants, children, young people and their caregivers. The cards have been colour coded with helpful tips to extend on questions and links to additional resources. The cards give voice to the often invisible experiences of infants, children and young people.

The cards provide examples of strengths based questions with a curiosity approach to place the child at the center of your practice and provide meaningful and life changing support. By understanding the lived experience of infants, children, and young people we can support their healing journey. Caregivers are provided an opportunity to explore their strengths and identify any support needs their family may have.

