

CREATING CHILD AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENTS



In this tool, you will find:

- » Guidance on what makes a child and family-friendly environment
- » Suggestions on how CaFIS providers can create child and family-friendly environments
- » Links to tools and resources to guide practice

Related tools:

- » Community Engagement Planning
- » Cultural Safety and Responsiveness
- » Cultural Competency

- » adults use appropriate language, tools and games to engage with them in a way they understand, is predictable and engaging
- » there are spaces where children can have fun and “time out” from any challenges they are experiencing.

Creating family-friendly environments

Family-friendly environments recognise every family member has different needs, including physical, emotional and cultural needs. For example, fathers and other males often report feeling uncomfortable in family support services.

CaFIS providers might consider strategies to encourage participation of males, for example, by holding sessions when fathers can attend, ensuring promotional materials are inclusive of fathers, and reaching out to invite fathers to attend sessions.

KEY GUIDANCE

Background

Families are likely to feel more comfortable seeking support in environments that are safe, where they feel welcome and valued and where they are encouraged to care for their children without feeling judged.

For children, many of the physical environments where their families seek support do not feel child-friendly because they have been designed by adults for adults, and feel uninviting and uncomfortable.

When children and families feel safe and welcomed, they are more likely to engage with workers, and build trusting, open relationships where they can share their needs and concerns.

Services need not be provided out of a centre, and children and families may prefer a different setting, such as at a community meeting place, their own home, or a quiet place outdoors.

Regardless of the service setting, this tool sets out some considerations for CaFIS providers to ensure the space is child and family-friendly.

Creating child-friendly environments

A child-friendly environment is one where:

- » children feel comfortable and a sense of belonging
- » children are able to participate without worrying about what is shared and who is watching on

APPLICATION TO CaFIS PROVIDERS

Service location and space

Where services are provided out of a centre, the selection of locations for service sites can help families access services, for example, when services are easy to get to, close to transport, or co-located with other services families use.

As some families may feel shame or be embarrassed to access targeted intensive support services, it can help when services are integrated with, or operate alongside, mainstream or universal services.

CaFIS providers are required to engage with the community to ensure services are locally relevant and this should extend to the location, design, use and layout of facilities and spaces. See the CaFIS tool *Community Engagement Planning* for more detail on community engagement.

Physically safe services

The way a service is delivered can contribute to how safe children and families feel. Privacy is an important consideration. Children and families should be able to discuss their concerns without worrying they can be seen or heard by others.

Aboriginal children and families are more likely to trust services if privacy, gender issues and kinship relationships are recognised and managed appropriately.

To ensure a welcoming environment for families, CaFIS providers could engage the local community to develop signs, symbols and materials used in the service.

Where possible, CaFIS services might also consider having a space set up specifically for children and young people. This space can be transformed to be child-friendly by including artwork and posters on the wall, comfortable furniture and games and toys.

Children and families may feel more comfortable or prefer to participate in settings away from a centre, for example, at a school, in a family's home, or in a shady place outside. CaFIS providers should seek and respect the family's views and preferences.

With some planning most spaces can be transformed into child and family-friendly spaces, by bringing cushions, food, and activities to include all family members.

Emotionally safe services

Emotionally safe spaces are those where children and families are not concerned about being hurt or harmed, of being embarrassed or feeling shame, or being asked to do things that are confusing or don't feel quite right.

The response a family receives from a service is an important factor in determining whether they feel supported and develop a trusting, open relationship.

Families are more likely to engage with services when they feel listened to and treated respectfully.

CaFIS providers could consider the following aspects of their service to improve emotional safety:

- » how children and families are welcomed, including the role of front office staff in welcoming them
- » ensuring all communication with children and families is non-threatening, respectful, consistent and empowering
- » awareness of the individual and family's culture and background and how this might impact their sense of emotional safety
- » for children and young people, considering play as a way to help them feel comfortable and express their thoughts and feelings.

Families are more likely to have a positive experience when they feel a service responds to their individual circumstances, rather than having to fit in with the requirements of the service.

Flexibility and responsiveness are needed to respond to a family's individual circumstances. CaFIS providers may want to consider:

- » Operating hours that fit the lives and daily routines of the family
- » Ways to reduce waiting times for families with small children
- » Flexibility to provide services in different ways, for example, phone sessions or home visits.

Culturally safe services

Culturally safe environments are those where people feel safe, are protected from racism and discrimination, where their cultural identity, beliefs and traditions are celebrated and where they feel safe expressing their needs and wishes. See the CaFIS tools *Cultural Safety and Responsiveness* and *Cultural Competency* for further guidance on how to ensure services are culturally safe.

Inclusive and non-discriminatory services

Child and family-friendly environments are inclusive of all children, young people and families, regardless of their age, developmental or physical ability, race, ethnicity, family makeup, gender and sexuality. This requires consideration of how individuals move around spaces and whether particular groups need to have identified areas where their additional needs are met, for example, children's rooms or accessible bathrooms.

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Where to go for more information

South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People (2020) Trust is a Must: What does it take to be child friendly and child safe? At: <https://www.ccyp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Screen-Trust-is-a-Must-Report.pdf>

Moore & Layton (2009) Make it Fun (Environments surrounding children are child-friendly and provide them with opportunities to develop and grow) in Kids Central, Institute of Child Protection Studies at: <https://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-centres/institute-of-child-protection-studies/kids-central-toolkit/tools-and-resources/make-it-fun>

Keenaghan & Redmond (2016) Section 2: Toolkit Activities for Creating Space in Child and Youth Participation Kit, Tusla Child and Family Agency at: [https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_-_Toolkit_\(web_version\).pdf](https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_-_Toolkit_(web_version).pdf)

FAHCSIA (2009) Father-inclusive practice guide: A tool to support the inclusion of fathers in a holistic approach to service delivery, https://www.mengage.org.au/images/work/father_inclusive_practice.pdf