

**‘I think  
adults play  
a big role  
in this’**

Listening to the  
views of children and  
young people on  
*‘Acceptance, Belonging  
and Feeling Safe’* and  
*the importance of  
respectful relationships  
and consent education*



**CCYP**

Commissioner for Children  
and Young People

## Acknowledgement of Country

I acknowledge and pay my respects to the palawa/pakana people of lutruwita as the original and ongoing custodians of this land and for the more than 40,000 years they have cared for their country and their children.

## Note on Content

This report explores children and young people's views on 'Acceptance, Belonging and Feeling Safe'. This might be distressing to some people in our community. If you would like to speak with someone, some options for support include:

Kids helpline **1800 55 1800**

1800 Respect, **1800 737 732**

Sexual Assault Support Service (24 hours) **1800 697 877**

If you have a concern about the safety or wellbeing of a child or young person, call the Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice & Referral Line on **1800 000 123**, or visit <https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/>

Commissioner for Children and Young People (Tas) 2022, Hobart

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Any questions regarding this report or the work of Tasmania's Commissioner for Children and Young People more generally may be directed to the Commissioner via email at [childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au](mailto:childcomm@childcomm.tas.gov.au) or by telephoning **+61 3 6166 1366**.

For more information, visit: [www.childcomm.tas.gov.au](http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au)

# Foreword

An important part of my role is to promote the wellbeing of all Tasmanian children and young people and ensure that their rights are upheld. I know, because children and young people told me during consultations for the **We call it happy - Wellbeing Report 2020**, that wellbeing means many different things, including, 'Acceptance, Belonging and Feeling Safe'.<sup>1</sup>

Children and young people told me that feeling accepted, feeling that they belong and feeling safe in their communities were of great importance to them. It was also important to them that others enjoyed these feelings. Participants clearly wished to live in a community that is free of racism and other forms of discrimination and in one where diversity is recognised, respected and celebrated. Some participants also expressed frustration at the significant gaps in services and supports available to some groups, including, but not limited to, the Tasmanian LGBTIQ+ and migrant communities.

I also heard many children and young people tell me that they do not feel that their views are respected by adults. They told me that there needs to be more genuine and meaningful engagement with children and young people, for adults to genuinely listen to what they have to say and to respond in ways that demonstrate respect for those views.

During 2021, as part of the Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) Ambassador Program, I listened to what children and young people had to say about what it means to feel accepted, to feel they belong, and to feel safe in their schools and communities today. Importantly, I also listened to young people's views on respectful relationships and consent education in Tasmanian schools and, in early 2022, explored in more detail their views about what needs to change and how these changes could occur. This report is about respecting those views and ensuring that they are heard by those who are in a position to make change.

This snapshot report conveys what I heard during my conversations with children and young people involved in the CCYP Ambassador Program, with whom I have a well-established relationship. While this report is not necessarily representative of the views of all Tasmanian children and young people, it serves to highlight that there is great value in respectfully asking children and young people what it is that they need and what matters to them through authentic and ongoing conversations.

I strongly encourage every adult who reads this report to listen to what the children and young people who expressed their views had to say and take their views into account when considering and making decisions. I also hope that this report provides a foundation upon which to build ongoing dialogue between decision-makers and Tasmanian children and young people in the design and delivery of appropriate policy and programs to meet their needs.

I am grateful to the children and young people who have generously offered their time to participate in the consultations that have informed this report.

**Leanne McLean**

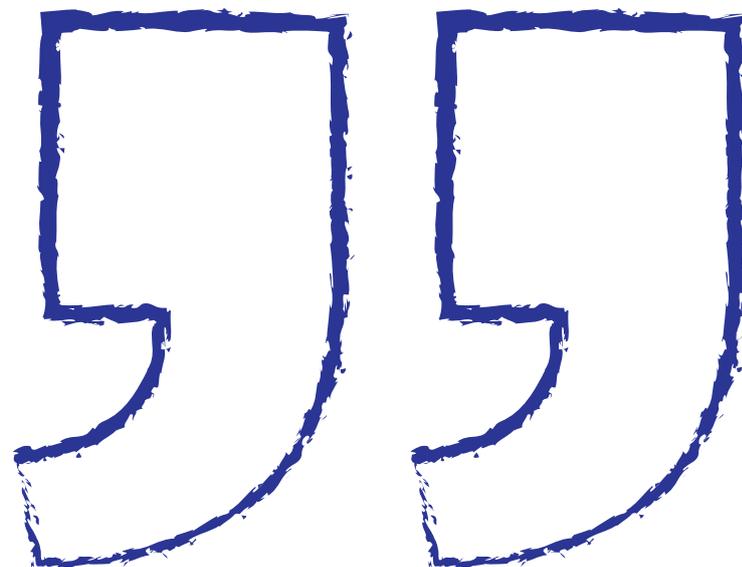
Commissioner for Children and Young People

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<sup>1</sup>This theme is one of seven that emerged from consultations conducted in relation to children and young people's wellbeing by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in 2020. See We call it happy. CCYP wellbeing consultations with 0-18 year olds, CCYP Tas 2021 at <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Wellbeing-Consultation-Report-We-Call-It-Happy.pdf> (last accessed 29 March 2022)

# Background to the CCYP Ambassador Program

The CCYP Ambassador Program is open to Tasmanian children and young people aged 10 to 17. CCYP Ambassadors help the Commissioner for Children and Young People to understand what is important to them and provides an opportunity for children and young people to have their voices heard on how things could be improved for young Tasmanians. CCYP Ambassadors meet with the Commissioner throughout the year to discuss key issues and have opportunities to meet political leaders and other decision-makers. CCYP Ambassadors come from a range of backgrounds and geographic locations around the State.



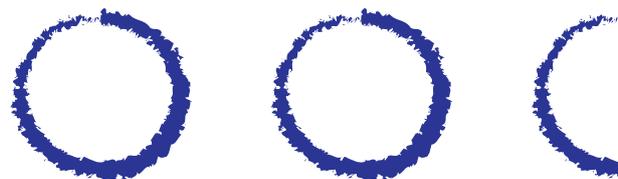
# Wellbeing and the rights of the child

The theme of 'Acceptance, Belonging and Feeling Safe' is underpinned by the rights of the child contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). These include:

- The right of all children to live free from discrimination (Article 2);
- The right of all children to have their identity protected and preserved (Article 8);
- The right of all children to privacy (Article 16);
- The right of all children to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19);
- The right of all children to be protected from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation (Article 34).
- The right of all children to education to enable them to develop to their fullest possible potential and to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences (Article 28 & 29).

In addition, all children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC. Taking account of the views of children is fundamental to making decisions in the best interests of children (Article 3).

As I have stated before ([here](#)), children's rights, and their wellbeing are intrinsically linked. By respecting and protecting children's rights and embedding them across our policy and decision-making processes, we help to improve the wellbeing of all Tasmanian children and young people.





# This report

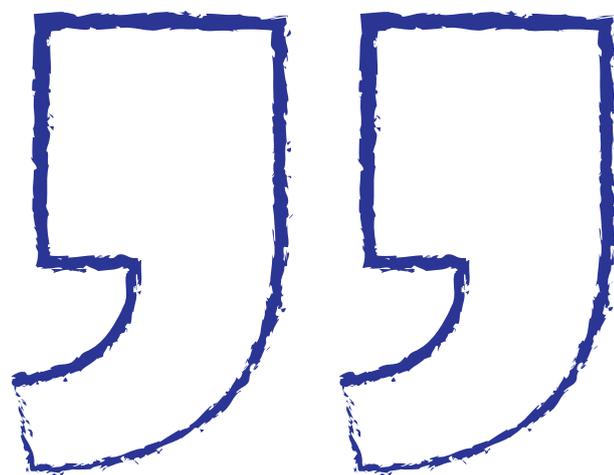
Children and young people in Tasmania have a right to feel accepted, to feel they belong and to feel safe. Sadly, this is not always the case.

Part 1 of this report, presents the views of children and young people who have told the Commissioner why they, or other children and young people around them, do not feel accepted, do not feel like they belong and do not feel safe. During these consultations, it became apparent that while there are some important challenges around these issues, children and young people are also full of ideas about what needs to change to make life better for themselves, and for others around them.

Part 2 of this report presents additional findings about an area that stood out during consultations as one in which children and

young people had a lot to say - that is, their experience of how respectful relationships and consent education is taught in Tasmanian schools and their ideas on how this could change for the better.

The final part of this report, Part 3, reflects on the views expressed by children and young people in this report, and once again encourages decision-makers to take their views seriously.



# Method

This report draws on data from a broader consultation project (The Audio Project) that explored the views of 40 Tasmanian children and young people on the theme of ‘Acceptance, Belonging and Feeling Safe’.<sup>2</sup> In addition, this report outlines findings from a follow up focus group with six young people which explored, in greater depth, a key theme from the previous project, namely, young people’s views on respectful relationships and consent education in Tasmania. The Commissioner had well established relationships with the participants through their involvement in the CCYP Ambassador Program.

## Consultation process

The consultation process for this report had two parts. Stage 1 involved the analysis of data from The Audio Project, a project led by children and young people, which was recorded during four meetings with participants. This included two meetings in Hobart (n=13; n=11), one meeting in Launceston (n=12) and one meeting in the North West (n=4) between 13 September and 17 September 2021. Stage 2 involved an online focus group held on 21 January 2022 with self-selecting young people, who responded to an invitation to participate (N=6). Participants in the focus group were sent a series of questions ahead of the meeting to inform their thinking in preparation for the session.

Both The Audio Project and the focus group were run by the office of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and facilitated by the Commissioner.

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<sup>2</sup>This theme is one of seven that emerged from consultations conducted on children and young people’s wellbeing by CCYP in 2020. See We Call It Happy. CCYP wellbeing consultations with 0-18 year olds, CCYP Tas 2021 at <https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/Wellbeing-Consultation-Report-We-Call-it-Happy.pdf> (last accessed 29 March 2022)



## Participants

Participants for this project were recruited from the CCYP Ambassador Program. During 2021, approximately 130 children and young people aged between 9 - 17 years old took part in this program. These individuals came from a broad range of backgrounds and geographical locations around Tasmania and included students from government, Catholic and independent schools, as well as those who are home educated. Forty CCYP Ambassadors participated in consultations on the theme of 'Acceptance, Belonging and Feeling Safe' (Part 1) and a further six of these young people participated in the online focus group which explored their views on respectful relationships and consent education (Part 2).

## Ethical engagement

Consultations were conducted with informed consent, and in accordance with the Commissioner's ethical participation guidelines. This consisted of both written and verbal consent; participants were informed about the purpose of the project and how information would be used and disseminated (including online publication) and that consent could be withdrawn at any time. Follow-up conversations were held with participants as appropriate.

## Recording and transcribing what we heard

A consistent recording process was used during the consultation process to ensure participants' views were accurately recorded and transcribed. Following transcription, data was analysed.

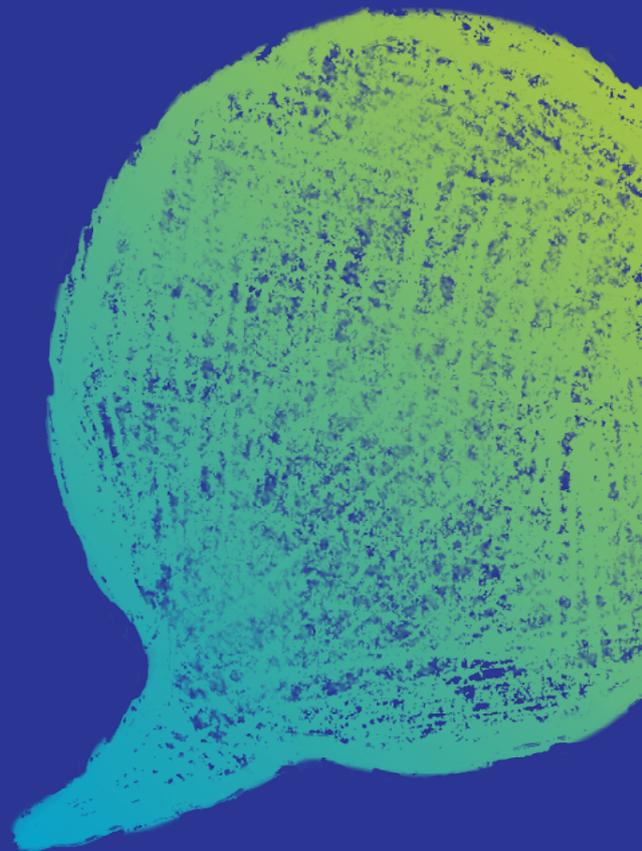
## Reporting what we heard

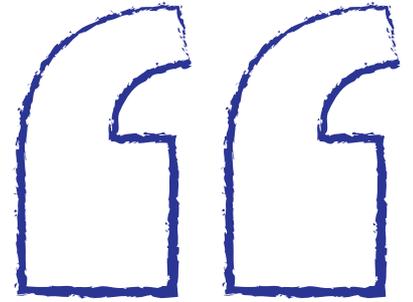
The result of this analysis is reported in Part 1 and Part 2 and illustrated by examples. Except where otherwise indicated, participants have been quoted verbatim to accurately reflect individuals' voices with some minor editing to grammar where it will assist with visual processing and the use of reading-assist technology.

Part 1

# What children and young people said about 'Acceptance, Belonging and Feeling Safe'

Participants had a lot to say about why children and young people may not feel accepted, like they belong, or feel safe, and what, in their view, could foster greater feelings of acceptance, belonging and safety.





## Not feeling accepted

Children and young people reported that they often do not feel like they are accepted within their communities, with participation in sport being a common example. Participants described discriminatory attitudes and behaviours that centred on gender. For example,

*I'm a girl and I do rugby. I'm literally the only girl there. And most of the time, people don't try to tackle me as hard or they avoid passing me the ball just because I'm a girl. And they just don't get it because I can play just as good as all the boys.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

*I played in a mixed team with boys and girls for both touch football and soccer. And they were always, like, 'pick on the girls', you know, 'aim at the girls', 'target the girls' because we're easier targets. And that doesn't always make you feel as a more valuable member of your team when you know you're the one that could be letting the team down and being the weak spot.*

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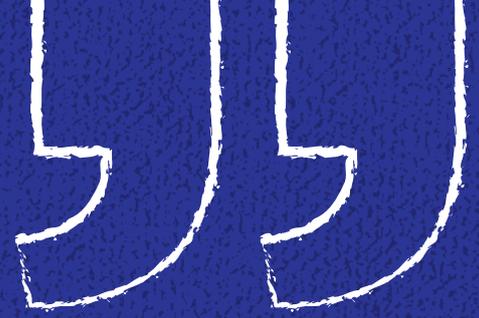
**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

However, in addition to talking about experiences where they did not feel accepted, children and young people also had important ideas about how to tackle these issues. For example, a participant emphasised the importance of educating children and young people about acceptance,

*One of the issues of acceptance could be taught in early education – acceptance of the LGBTQI community. I know that a lot of people just don't understand that, especially if they are heterosexual. And I think from a young age, as a society, we are taught 'women', 'men' and I think if there was more understanding, it would be a lot easier for teenagers who are part of that [LGBTQI+] community, to figure out who they are and I know a lot of mental health is affected because of not a lot of understanding around it.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**



In a similar vein, another participant talked about how efforts to increase acceptance need to begin from the bottom up,

*I think that we need to start in the grassroots. Of course, we also need to think about leadership and what they have to do and say in that role, but we need to go to our schools, most specifically, and what most importantly, we need to think about mental health, we need to think so that includes counselling, but also education, in the classroom, in every classroom, in every subject about that. And we need to do it in a way that's effective and not just something that may work. We need to have stories, we need to share, we need to educate on a personal level, not one that's boring and factual that can't be understood. We need to do it effectively. And I think if we educate this entire generation in our schools, we'll definitely see an improvement in society with acceptance and belonging. People will definitely feel more accepted, and they will be more accepting to others and that will improve life for everyone.*

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**Male participant, 10-17 years old**

Another participant talked about how the lack of education about acceptance was a real problem but that it could also be part of the answer,

*I think that the education that we receive isn't great. So, what I think should happen is that education should happen about acceptance and belonging particularly and just being able to be in a community where you can feel accepted, and you can be accepting of others because I haven't seen that. And I think that's why, personally, I think my school was not very accepting and I think that's where the issue lies. The adults haven't really recognised this. And if they have, they haven't done much action on it. So, if we start with education in schools, then we can influence an entire generation to create society to be a more accepting place.*

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**Male participant, 10-17 years old**



## Not belonging

Participants also talked about the theme of 'belonging' particularly in the context of what it felt like to not belong. For many participants, this involved reflecting on their experiences of racism or seeing racist behaviour from those around them. For example,

*There is a little piece of paper going around - 'the "N word" pass' - which gives someone the green light to say the "N word" but it's given to you by someone who thinks that they have the power to give that to you and I just don't think that's okay.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

*For me, it's where I've come from. So, I was born [overseas]. And I've gotten a lot of racist hate in the past and just don't feel as accepted at times.*

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**Male participant, 10-17 years old**

Several participants talked about the importance of adult role models in tackling issues like racism in the community. For example, one participant explained that

*I think it's a circle as well. I think adults play a big role in this. Oh, you know, for example, being from different backgrounds, like, I'm African and if you say, 'All Africans are not great', automatically, your kids will pick it up and, you know, do the same thing. So, make sure you use the right words and make the right comments when you're in front of your kids.*

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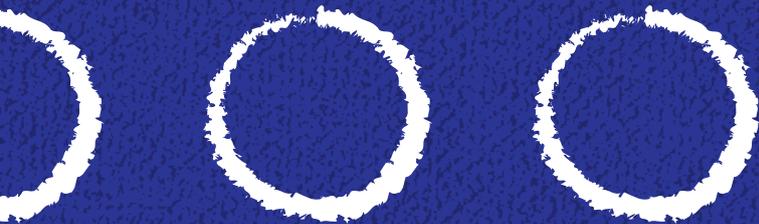
**Male participant, 10-17 years old**

Also talking about belonging, another participant described why he did not feel like he belonged at his school, explaining that:

*I had one teacher who wasn't the kindest person and we had an argument maybe me, I didn't lash back, but I can't lash back. It's not something physically possible for me. And so I just stood there and took it. I didn't do anything wrong. I was assured later that I didn't do anything wrong but it was a scary situation. I didn't belong. Afterwards, we had meetings one after the other to try and call the problem, but it didn't stop. I couldn't belong. I can't belong there anymore. I'm moving schools.*

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**Male participant, 10-17 years old**





## Not feeling safe

Many young people talked about not feeling safe because of the attitudes and behaviour of those around them. For some participants, this took the form of uninvited sexual comments by adults and other young people, for example:

*The first thing I'd like to talk about is the stigma of sexualising clothes a lot. You can wear revealing clothes especially at the beach with bikinis. I've had old men take videos of me, take photos of me, [...] and it makes it really uncomfortable, and it makes you feel really insecure about yourself. I don't feel comfortable walking around [...]. And boys at school? Like, my band uniform, I've had boys tell me that I look like a porn star out of porn wearing my school [...] uniform and I'm just playing a musical instrument when I'm in it, there's nothing sexualised about that but that makes me so uncomfortable and that's not what I want to feel like and yeah and it sucks.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

Often, young people reflected on the experiences of those around them. One participant described how the behaviour of a group of other young people must have made others feel unsafe. For example

*[The] football boys, they like to tackle each other in the locker areas. They like to be really touchy with each other [...].<sup>3</sup> And I don't understand how the other boys feel safe around them because it must make them really uncomfortable. Even the teachers talk about it. We had to have a meeting about it. It's like the football boys. They even had to contact their coaches and their clubs about it, because it was that particular group of boys in each grade that played for the same club. They just had this way about them and would just be like disruptive around everywhere and was so touchy as well. And judgmental with girls as well.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

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<sup>3</sup>This quote has been edited to remove an explicit description.

Another focused on the behaviour of other young people that breaches their privacy and made them feel unsafe.

*At lunchtime at my school, sometimes kids will look up the girls' skirts. Like, not all the time but they'll make comments. And, like, it's kind of annoying because they all sit together in the big boys' group.*

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**Female participant, 10–17 years old**

Many participants also spoke about the importance of children and young people being heard and supported by adults in their schools in order to promote safety and feeling safe. For example,

*At our school, the toilets aren't really safe and today someone ripped the seats off them. And they often break the doors and they don't listen to you when you try to advocate about issues at the school.*

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**Male participant, 10–17 years old**

Participants expressed concern about the experiences of other young people and highlighted the important role of schools in supporting young people to be safe and to feel safe, including, as highlighted by one participant, where their home may not be a safe place.

Some participants also talked about the experience of bullying at school and in the broader community, including from other children and young people.

*[M]y brother gets scared to go to school of a morning because of bullies and he does not feel accepted at all. He got suspended because of someone who's been bullying him all term. And now he's decided that he doesn't want to go back to school because he doesn't feel safe there. But I think the issue is that no matter what school you go to, you're going to have bullies because he doesn't fit into the social standard...*

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**Female participant, 10–17 years old**

... when someone goes, “hey, this person, this person here is bullying me, this person here is like making fun of my tics really obviously”, goddamnit, maybe actually do something about it...

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**Non-binary participant, 10-17 years old**

Children and young people had a lot to say about what needs to change for themselves, and others, to feel safe. Many participants believed that education about respectful relationships was an important tool to change problematic and harmful attitudes and behaviours. As one participant explained,

*I think, well, getting taught [about sex and respectful relationships] at school at a young age would be very helpful.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

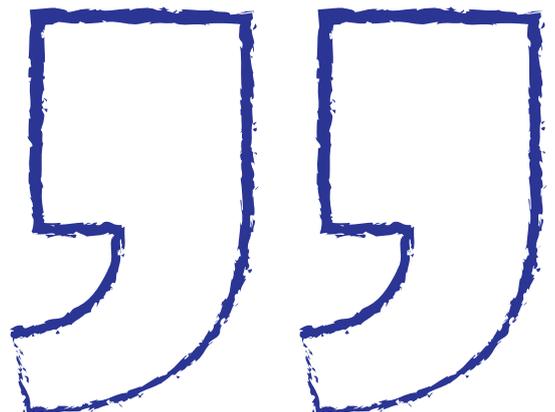
Another participant added that,

*I think it [learning about consent] would be a really good idea because I think a lot of people need to learn about consent and all that before they just do stuff without asking other people.*

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**Female participant, 10-17 years old**

The views of children and young people on education as a tool for preventing and changing problematic and harmful attitudes and behaviour warranted further exploration through a more focussed discussion. The following part of the report explores the views of six young people who volunteered to help the Commissioner to better understand their views on respectful relationship and consent education in Tasmania.



# Young people's views on respectful relationships and consent education in Tasmania

In Tasmanian Government schools, respectful relationships education is intended to 'support [...] the development of attributes that assist everyone in maintaining healthy and fulfilling lives'.<sup>4</sup> However, at the outset, it is important to acknowledge that the young people involved in the focus group recognised that the issues around respectful relationships and education on what constitutes consent were much broader than what was taught in schools. As one participant explained,

*I think a major problem we have is not only about the way we teach [respectful relationships and consent], but the culture of society that we live in. Like, if our society started to get better at addressing sexual harassment and sexual assault, but it's still kind of a bit like it's not as serious as it should be. Like if you look at the Parliament House, it's ridiculous how normalized sexual assault and sexual harassment is in our society and so if you have that culture and then you teach it in schools, any sex, but particularly males will just understand that culture and have come from a culture where they know they're more powerful. Not all males. I'm not saying it's every man, but is a generalized statement, and they obviously were as you were saying, sit at the back of the classroom and go 'This isn't about us, you know, we're pretty cool'. And the girls are paying attention 'cause they need it as a survival skill, and so it's not necessarily about the way we teach it, but also the society that we live in.*

**Female participant, 13-17 years old**



## Young people's views on respectful relationship and consent education in schools

Young people were of the view that the distinction between respectful relationships and consent education was important. Some participants observed that there had been a real effort made to explain to them that respectful relationships education was broader than just being about consent,

*I think in definitely the early years of high school in particular, so like Grade 7 and Grade 8, there was a fair bit of [...] emphasis on the fact that it's not just sexual and romantic relationships that you have to have respect and consent. They made sure that we understood it was also about friendships and about our relationships with family members, and even our student-teacher relationships and that consent is not just about sex, it's about all types of interactions with people.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

However, this was not the only experience, with another participant identifying that the lack of distinction between the teaching of respectful relationships and consent represented a real issue,

*...teachers are teaching it like it's all in one, like consent and respectful relationships are like one package so they kinda need to make it two separate topics and more coverage on the two topics.*

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**Male participant, 13-17 years old**

Picking up on the issue of coverage, participants commented that there was a lack of information about respectful relationships education and that this meant that many young people had to go looking for information themselves, which was often problematic. For example,

*I kind of think 'cause there's so many missing areas in our healthy relationship education like respectful relationships, a lot of students go online to find out information 'cause like that's the way we do it. If we have something that we are curious about we search it up online and I think there's a lot of misleading and incorrect information, and so for those students who don't feel comfortable like going and talking about it like we are now, I feel like the government should set up a website that has all the information to do with sex, respectful relationships, consent. You know, they could have, like, I think my mum calls it a webinar? like, where people can go and ask anonymous questions where they can do their own research on this website that has completely correct information, not misleading information, and so it's not like that awkward thing of where you have to go and ask someone.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Another participant underlined the importance of having access to information, and how schools were well placed to provide additional resources for students,

*All schools could have a link to that website, like and we all have - my school calls it a dash page where you get your timetable and stuff from. Well, we could all have that. Like on the school box website. A link to it. And then they could have professionals from that website come round and talk to students as part of their sex education.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**



Further to respectful relationships education, young people had a lot to say about how consent was taught. For some participants, this was about the concept of consent at a fundamental level, with one participant recalling an early school experience where an opportunity to model consent was missed,

*Straight away, like – I don't remember, in kindergarten? – being taught, you know, asking someone to hold their hand. I remember the teachers telling us, 'You gotta hold hands with the people next to you!' like you've got no option. [...] From the earliest age possible, I think we should teach consent, but also have it reflected in our education system.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Several participants talked about the need for consent to be taught universally, across all schools, particularly in the context of education about sexual relationships. For example,

*With the sex ed system, shouldn't it all be the one system, whether you go to a private Catholic or public school? We should all receive the same education around consent and sexual relationships.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

In a similar vein, another participant talked about how important it is that everyone in a class is taught 'the same thing' about consent,

*... Both sides – like both girls and boys – everyone in the class is taught the same thing. I think that's a good thing cause it's important for guys to know how consent works just as much as girls do.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**



In this context, other participants explained the negative consequences of not teaching a class about these issues together. For example,

*In Grade 4 when we first started to talk about like bras and stuff like that. We were separated, and the boys learnt one thing and the girls learnt another thing. Like, the boys didn't learn about periods. I think they wrote a picture book and from what I've heard about this mysterious picture book - which the girls weren't allowed to read - it was very like stereotyping. Like, periods and stuff. So, my school hasn't really covered consent or consensual relationships in one way to both genders and non-binary people - like, there's just not that coverage.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Another participant added,

*We did an entire subject on [consent] at school and how we discuss this. And the stupid thing is, they encourage this discussion and then they segregate us into boys and girls. We talk about [consent] in the girls' classes but the boys don't learn about it. Instead of teaching your daughter to wear clothes to protect herself, why don't we teach boys about consent?*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Concern around the gendering of consent education was seen as a particular issue for LGBTIQ+ young people. As one participant explained,

*All of our classes have been split off into gender separated groups, and there has been no grey middle ground. I went to a Catholic school. And so, it was like most of this LGBTIQ plus stuff didn't exist for us. We had no clue of it. And later, learning about it through the Internet, not through school, we found out that like some of my friends belong to that category, and that's cool, right? But we learned nothing of it, so they didn't know how to like at least have a friendly relationship with someone without making it weird.*

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**Male participant, 13-17 years old**

Another participant added,

*It's also that I feel like there are not enough points of views if you know what I mean of different people. So, it's like, it's just a boy's point of view and the girl's point of view. But it's just those two, whereas there's like not enough point of views of the LGBTIQ+, and like those specific genders, and they're not covering that.*

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**Male participant, 13-17 years old**

For some young people, this has very personal implications,

*I've been going through a lot in the last couple of months with questioning my gender and sexuality identity. And I found it really hard to feel comfortable discussing this with people around me because I don't know how accepting they're going to be simply because I feel they don't have the education they need on it. For myself, I've had to kind of go out and find the information to try and figure myself out and use mostly social media to try and find this information. But I feel that when people don't have any good reason to do it from their own point of view, they don't go out and get that information and they don't have the necessary education on these topics to then be able to be accepting and supportive of the people around them. So, information about diverse identities needs to be more widely available so that people that don't identify like this are still able to help their friends that do identify because they understand at least to some extent what they're going through.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old.**

Further underlining the lack of focus on experiences of LGBTQI+ individuals in this context, a participant explained that,

*There's no focus on the LGBTQI+, especially in my school. There was no mention of LGBTQI+ relationships and the lack of that would lead to so many more problems, so we definitely need to cover that more cause there's just nothing.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Several participants shared their views about what they saw as the limitations of their education about consent. A particular issue was the content about consent itself, for example,

*We kind of briefly went over this in health but I think it was only one lesson long. We didn't really go much into depth. It was kind of just, "Ask for consent", but there wasn't really much depth like, "You can't give consent if you are under the influence" and stuff like that.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

In a similar vein, another participant added,

*We got handed a pamphlet and watched the Tea [Tea Consent] video<sup>5</sup> and they talked about sexual assault in a very vague way, like there was nothing covered on rape or issues like that, which horrifies me. If you're gonna teach consent, teach the spectrum of it, like asking someone to hug them and then asking for a cup of tea, and that spectrum of this for like frank consent like, 'Can I hug you?' and then there's sexual consent and the different levels of that. And that just wasn't taught at all.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Other participants thought that their school had not felt comfortable with the subject of consent, and this resulted in a lack of meaningful engagement with the topic,

*At school they often try to dance around the subject. They will go into it a little bit, but they don't go deep enough to give it any meaning.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

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<sup>5</sup><https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>

In this context, the potential for teaching to not be inclusive was again raised. A participant described how,

*All throughout school, when we're being taught how babies are made and then we move on to like learning how to use condoms and things and it's very much that, like you know, 'Sexual assault isn't OK' but sex is very much a part of our society and it's kind of like, you know, we are sort of being primed to expect to have sex at some stage and there's nothing about if you're asexual or if even if you're gay or lesbian and how that's different for you...*

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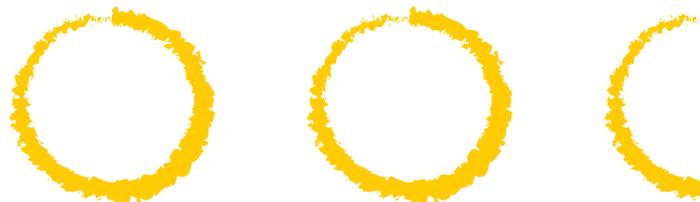
**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

While some participants reflected on the fact that they had had a number of experiences of being taught about consent, primarily focusing on the context of sexual relationships, they commented that it had been focussed on the 'legal' aspects of consent and did not really teach the 'emotional consent side'. As the participant explained,

*We had a couple of different workshops, some within class and some as like an assembly or with various guest speakers and things coming in around this topic. But a lot of it was kind of the legal specifics and a little bit of the, like, "This is what you do", "This is where you can go", but it was from someone who runs a sexual assault help service. So, it was very much just, like, "You come to us if you need help" but it's kind of the emotional stuff that like is difficult to talk about, so they just tell us you know, "This is illegal. Don't do it." Obviously, it's kind of hard to teach the emotional consent side of this, but I feel like sometimes they just don't try that, like you just need to know what the 'law' is.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old.**



Demonstrating the different experiences of young people, another participant described that while their consent education taught them about the boundaries of consent, it did not help them know what to do if they are 'not safe'.

*I think the other thing is that like we were taught, like you know what sexual assault is and you know what sexting is and stuff. But we weren't taught how to respond if something does happen. And I think, you know, this is bad, you need to, you know, look for consent. But we weren't taught to respond to situations in which there isn't that kind of consent, and so we don't know what to do if we're not safe.*

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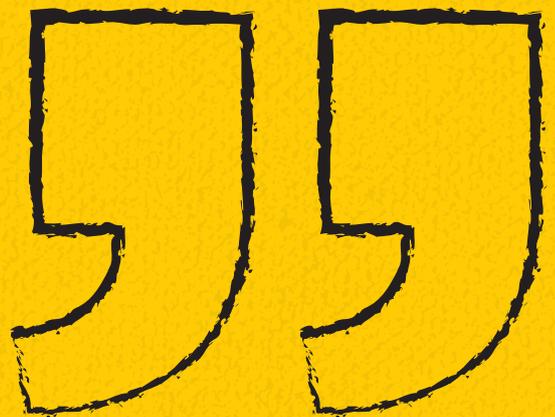
**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

For another young person, a focus on the reality of sexual assault was important in the context of learning about consent.

*I think one of the good things is, particularly now we're in a high school, is that they actually talked about the fact that you know sexual assault occurs in our society and they were actually blunt about it, and so like they weren't just trying to hide the problem and we knew more about it.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**





## Young people's views on the teaching of respectful relationships and consent in schools

All the young people that I spoke with on the topic emphasised the importance of education about respectful relationships and consent for children and young people. As one participant explained,

*Well, I think it's really important that we do normalize [talking about respectful relationships and consent] for younger people. I remember being in like Grade 5 or 6 and doing some of the Growing Up program and then being told we shouldn't talk about it outside of that program because it would make people feel uncomfortable. And it's like, I feel like we need to normalize it so that we are comfortable talking about these things outside of class because it is important. We do talk about them.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

There was agreement among several young people that it was vital that education in this area begin early and that it is taught continually throughout the early years and onwards. As one young person explained,

*There needs to be a lot more [education on consent in school]. Definitely probably around the start of the year and definitely at every year level rather than just senior [down] to Grade 10 because we want to get this into little kids early just as much as getting it to kids at high school level.*

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**Male participant, 13-17 years old**

For another participant, the lack of continual, or gradual teaching, could affect understanding and engagement,

*You never talk about this at all in primary school. Like you have Ditto [a personal safety education program] tell you about your private parts and that's it. And then you get to Year 7 or 8 and then all of a sudden, they're like, you know, 'This is what rape is', 'This is consent' and it's all just piled on you at once. Whereas if they introduced it like more gradually as it became important than I think a lot more people would actually understand and engage with it.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Highlighting this issue again, another participant added,

*It's kind of frustrating that it's not taught gradually over the years, and then suddenly [in Year 7] 'bam!' - just like all in your head. And so then you just start to overcompensate. [...] I think it should, like, be taught in like Grade 5/6[...] And then yeah, it could go gradually from Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 and then once you get to Year 10, you'll be a lot more knowledgeable, and you'll be you'll feel a lot more safe.*

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**Male participant, 13-17 years old**

Also identifying the need for education to begin before Year 7, another participant explained that

*It needs to be kind of before Year 7 that a lot of these conversations need to happen. You know, the relationship ones as well as the consent ones. Because I think in a way like that Year 7 kind of age group is probably the most vulnerable, 'cause you know you're going into high school. You wanna feel adult, you wanna be one of the big kids and I feel like there's a culture that's like a lot of pressure to get into a relationship and things at around that age group and to only start educating them on this stuff part way through the year in Grade 7 means that, you know, it's too late. They've already developed these kind of toxic relationship patterns between each other, or you know, because they're trying to act older with older students at their school 'cause they're in that vulnerable position. And it's also like the same age where you see a lot of kids starting to use social media, you know, and you turn 13. You're legally allowed to use a lot more of the social media so there's that whole aspect of vulnerability as well.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

For other participants, it was important that consent was taught in age-appropriate ways to protect children, explaining that,

*The thing with things like sexual harassment and sexual assault is that, in a way, it kind of needs to be indirectly taught from the very young age, just the whole kind of like private parts stuff and about not letting people touch you in particular spots and things and not letting people treat you in a particular way, especially like adults. Like you need that safeguard to protect students from possible sexual assault instances from a very young age and then as they get older and older you can by the age of about you know 12 you can start kind of labelling it as harassment and assault but having it be like this is not OK from basically as early as they can possibly understand. It is really necessary.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Several participants talked about how Year 7 was an important time for education about respectful relationships and consent.





## Young people's views on who should teach respectful relationships and consent education in schools

There was some agreement among the young people that, sometimes, their teachers were not best placed to teach them about respectful relationships and consent. As one participant explained,

*I think part of it is that because the teachers aren't comfortable talking about it because they feel awkward, that makes us kids feel awkward. But there are times when I would have had the same education from a teacher and an external person, and with the external person I'm perfectly happy talking about and it's all fine, but when it's your teacher because they're uncomfortable, you feel like you should be uncomfortable with it, and so you are more awkward with it.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

However, there was also recognition that,

*But on the flip side, sometimes in a way it's better to have someone you know somewhat because you know it can be very awkward to kind of have this random person coming just to teach you this [and] someone you don't know and aren't exactly comfortable [with].*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Several participants identified the need for 'professionals' to fulfill this role,

*I think we need professional people to come in and speak to us who know exactly how to give us the information without them feeling like, 'Oh I might say the wrong thing' or 'I feel uncomfortable presenting this'. I think we need trained people to come in and give us the information.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

*I think it should be taught by professionals that that's what they do for a living, 'cause I feel like the way they [currently] teach it, it's not consistent across all schools across even all classes, so I think it should be like a sexual assault worker, someone that that's their entire job. Like the Growing Up Program - there was someone that came into school and taught that.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Another participant felt that there was space for a middle ground, with the possibility of a 'professional' based within a school. They explained that

*This is a subject that needs to be taught in every school and to every year level, so it would be a position that you would need to continually have filled. Could you have a sexual health professional at each school? Because then you'd have it if it was in a high school, for example, you could go to them if you're having sexual problems for sexual advice anyways, and most likely they would also have training as a mental health professional or physical health professional so it could be like a multi-purpose role that every school has, so it stays the same... The information that they're providing would be the same at every school.*

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**Female participant, 13-17 years old**



## Young people's views on how to change respectful relationships and consent education in schools

Young people told me that they want to be included in the broader conversation about how respectful relationship and consent education is taught in Tasmanian schools. In expressing their views about how decision makers should consult with Tasmanian children and young people, there was strong agreement among participants that it was important to ensure that a diversity of views are heard. As one participant explained,

*[O]ne of the things that's really important is getting people from like different backgrounds and different religions and different sexualities and gender identities because I think they really need to have a voice in reforming the system because they're the ones being left behind.*

**Female participant, 13-17 years old**

Reinforcing this view, another participant added that,

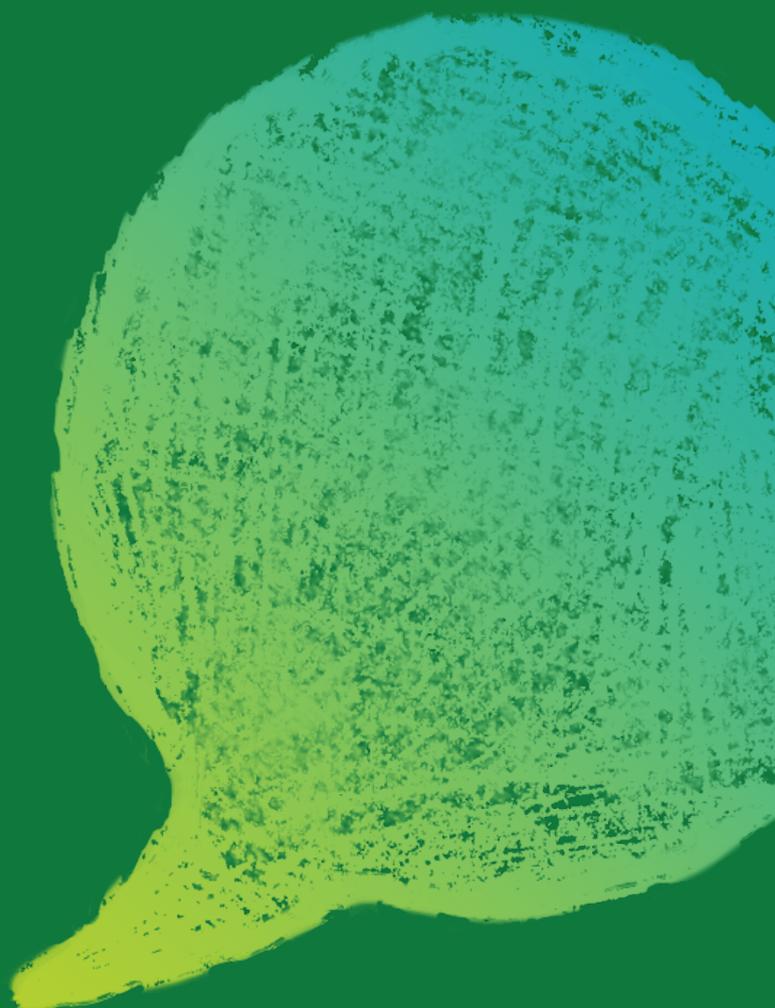
*Well, I think the key is that they have to make sure they get that diversity of students. If you want it to target all students across all grades or systems, you need to have people from all grades and all systems involved in designing it because they understand the way that they're currently being taught in whichever system they're in. But you also need people who understand the way each of the systems work, like teachers or like admin people. But having like focus groups of students from each system, but also a survey or something just so that anyone can kind of say, because, you know, there's a lot of students who aren't gonna care... but there are students who might not want to talk about it because they have had a really bad experience or they're just not comfortable talking about it, but still have these ideas. So, having that way that they can still get involved, I think is really important".*

**Female participant, 13-17 years old**



Part 3

# Reflecting on the views of children and young people and taking them seriously



For children and young people to truly feel like they are accepted, that they belong, and that they are safe, their views must be listened to and responded to in ways that demonstrate respect for their views. For this to occur, there must be genuine and meaningful engagement with children and young people on topics that affect them.

This report highlights the important insights that children and young people have about their lives and experiences.

Under the theme of 'acceptance' participants told the Commissioner that discriminatory and sexist attitudes, particularly in a sporting context, negatively affect their feelings of being accepted. Yet, participants had valuable ideas about how to improve acceptance including: the importance of early education about acceptance and gender; the role of leaders in leading positive change; and the need for greater mental health support for children and young people about these issues.

Under the theme of 'belonging' participants explained that issues relating to race, and racist attitudes, were a big problem. However, participants also had ideas about how such issues could be tackled, including, better understanding of the important role of adult role models in modelling behaviour, particularly for young children.

Participants had much to say about the theme of 'feeling safe' which centred on experiences of violence, including sexual harassment from others, and witnessing the behaviour of others in places such as school settings. Again, participants had important ideas about how to tackle these issues, including the critical role of adults in supporting children and young people, listening to their concerns, taking them seriously and taking action to protect them. Going further, participants emphasised the importance, in this context, of education about respectful relationships and consent as a vehicle to tackle problematic and harmful attitudes and behaviours.

Participants told the Commissioner that there were several issues with how respectful relationships and consent education is taught in Tasmanian schools. Participants stated that tackling disrespectful relationships is about initiating conversations early within the education system and ensuring that such education is ongoing. They also underlined the importance of ensuring education is provided equitably, and in a way that respects gender diversity. Participants identified many inconsistencies in what, when and how they currently learn about respectful relationships and consent education in Tasmanian schools.

With respect to consent education, participants emphasised the need for a holistic understanding of consent, beyond sexual relationships. Participants also identified the need for education on consent to be taught in a way that enables students to meaningfully engage with this topic, including knowing what to do if things go wrong. Some participants felt that to feel comfortable in learning and talking about this often-sensitive topic, they needed to be educated by a 'professional' with specialist skills and experience.

Participants had many valuable ideas about what needs to change to make education about respectful relationships and consent education better. It is vital that, going forward, the views of children and young people are sought, and taken into account on these topics.

Given what we already know about the importance of primary prevention and what we have heard consistently from children and young people across Tasmania, there is a strong argument for the implementation and resourcing of mandated, evidence-based, consistent whole-of-school respectful relationships and consent education which is developmentally appropriate and co-designed with children and young people.



# Conclusion

This report provides a strong foundation upon which to build ongoing dialogue between decision-makers and Tasmanian children and young people in the design and delivery of appropriate policy and programs to meet their needs.

As all Australian schools will be required to teach students about consent from 2023,<sup>6</sup> it is important that the views presented in this report from those who will be the recipients of this education are heard and taken into account by the policy makers and those who will be implementing the curriculum.

The Commissioner will also continue to monitor and promote the involvement of children and young people in the design and delivery of respectful relationships and consent education, and the development of other initiatives to improve the wellbeing of Tasmania's children, young people, and their families.

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<sup>6</sup><https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-17/mandatory-consent-lessons-to-be-taught-in-schools/100841202>



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