

About the 2009 National Survey

For National Child Protection Week 2009, NAPCAN wished to gauge community attitudes to child abuse and neglect. We developed an attitudinal Survey which attracted more than 21,000 respondents, making it Australia's largest Survey of its kind.

Methodology

NAPCAN pooled the expertise of a group of social scientists to develop a Survey questionnaire. After a literature review and focus group pre-testing, the Survey was launched in the lead-up to National Child Protection Week 2009. NAPCAN created this website, making the Survey available online through to early November 2009. People without access to the internet were able to ring a 1800 number and do the Survey with a NAPCAN staff member.

Respondent characteristics

The Survey report is a valid indicator of *the views of concerned people*. The Survey was not intended to be a Survey of the general population's feelings about child protection. Because respondents self-selected, there was a disproportionate number of respondents who were:

- women (80%, compared with 51% nationally);
- people with tertiary qualifications (60%, compared with 11% nationally); and
- 35 - 44 year olds (29%, compared with 15% nationally).

Key findings of Survey respondents' views

1. Almost everyone (92%) believes that child abuse and neglect is a serious problem in Australia.

Almost all respondents (92%) said they personally considered that child abuse and neglect is a serious problem in Australia.

However, just under half (47%) thought that child abuse and neglect was not recognised nearly enough as a serious problem in the general community.

2. But some people think that business, media and neighbours have *no responsibility at all* for children's wellbeing and safety.

The Survey revealed that a significant number of people think that there are key parts of our society with absolutely no responsibility at all for children's wellbeing and safety - namely, business, the media and neighbours.

Respondents were asked who is responsible for the wellbeing and safety of children.

On who is *mainly* responsible, almost all respondents nominated parents (98%), with almost half the sample nominating other relatives (54%), schools (51%) and child protection authorities (48%). Far lesser proportions nominated the media, charities and welfare groups, neighbours and businesses. All societal groups were considered *mainly* or *partly* responsible.

However, some respondents stated that business, the media and neighbours were *not at all* responsible for children’s wellbeing and safety:

- 31% thought **business** was not at all responsible;
- 17 % thought **media** was not at all responsible;

and, most startlingly:

- 11% thought **neighbours** was not at all responsible.

| | Mainly % | Partly % | Not at all % | No response % |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|--------------|---------------|
| Parents | 98 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Other relatives | 54 | 45 | 1 | 0 |
| Schools | 51 | 49 | 0 | 0 |
| Child protection authorities | 48 | 50 | 1 | 1 |
| Police | 43 | 54 | 2 | 1 |
| Government | 35 | 61 | 3 | 1 |
| Health professionals and agencies | 33 | 65 | 1 | 1 |
| The media | 22 | 60 | 17 | 1 |
| Charities and welfare groups | 20 | 70 | 9 | 1 |
| Neighbours | 10 | 78 | 11 | 1 |
| Businesses/companies | 8 | 60 | 31 | 1 |

3. When confronted by clear-cut cases of child abuse, less than half of the people surveyed would definitely take formal action to protect the child.

Respondents were presented with three hypothetical situations and asked what they would do in each. Each scenario depicts a clear-cut case of child abuse:

- **Physical abuse scenario:** “Your neighbour’s 7 year old child often has bruises. You hear a lot of yelling and screaming coming from the house. You see the child with a new black eye”.

- **Neglect scenario:** “When walking past a house in your neighbourhood you often notice 3 children in their front yard. They are skinny and always look dirty. One of the children, who is about 10 years old regularly asks you for money for food.”
- **Sexual abuse scenario:** “A twelve year old child, who is a member of your extended family, tells you that an adult relative has been touching him/her on the genitals.”

For each scenario, respondents were asked to nominate what they ‘definitely would do’, ‘probably would do’, ‘might or might not do’, ‘probably wouldn’t do’ and ‘definitely wouldn’t do’ each action. Definite action results are shown below.

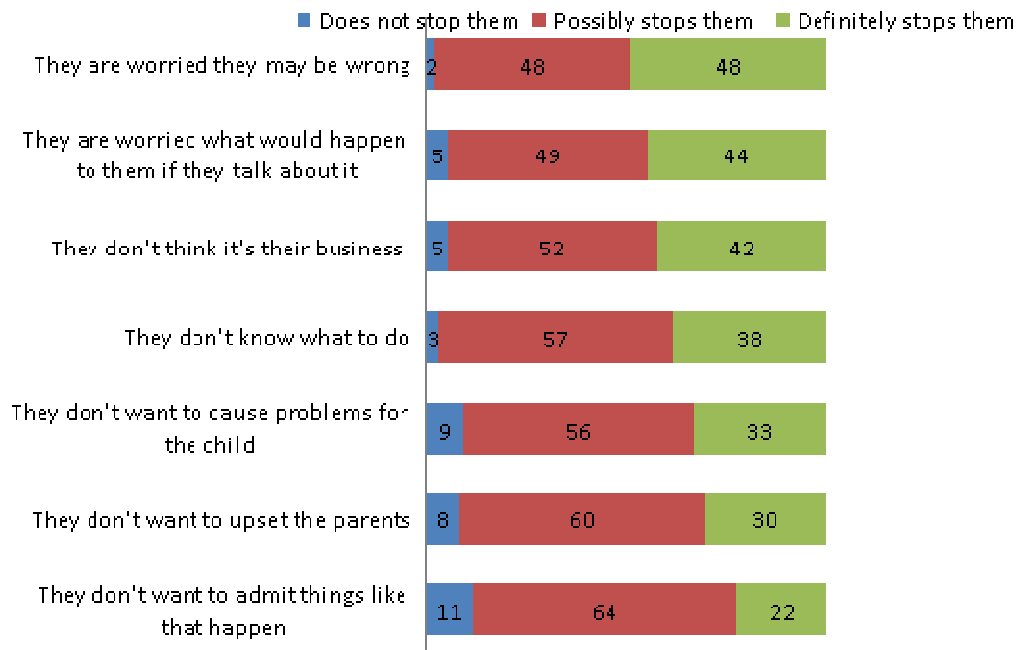
What respondents would ‘definitely’ do if confronted by child abuse

| Percentage who definitely would do | Physical abuse | Neglect | Sexual abuse |
|---|----------------|---------|--------------|
| | % | % | % |
| Discuss it with a friend or partner | 80 | 76 | 76 |
| Call the families/child protection department | 45 | 44 | 49 |
| Phone a helpline for advice | 31 | 27 | 36 |
| Call the police | 28 | 13 | 34 |
| Talk to the child | 20 | 28 | 14 |
| Call a child health nurse/teacher | 11 | 13 | 15 |
| Talk to the parents | 7 | 6 | 42 |

The above results show that even though most respondents considered child abuse to be a serious issue, if they were confronted with a clear-cut case of child abuse or neglect, less than 50% would take definite action to protect the child, by ringing a child protection authority or the police. And even in the sexual abuse scenario, only 34% of respondents would definitely call the police.

4. People would not take definite action to protect a child because they're worried they may be wrong or about what might happen to them, believe it's none of their business or don't know what to do.

The Survey reveals that a range of fears stop people from taking action to protect a child they are worried about.



The Survey asked respondents what would stop them from taking action. Fears that would definitely stop them were that they:

- are worried they may be wrong (48%)
- are worried what would happen to them (44%)
- don't think it's their business (42%)
- don't know what to do (38%)
- don't want to cause problems for the child (33%)
- don't want to upset the parents (30%)
- don't want to admit things like that happen (22%).