

# Still Unseen & Ignored

Tracking community knowledge and attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia

## In 2021, Australian Childhood Foundation research has concluded that child abuse is still out of sight and out of mind.



Over the past eighteen years, we have conducted research across the community to understand Australians' attitudes and beliefs about the issue of child abuse.

This year's results echo findings over the past two decades that indicate child abuse is of less concern to the community than problems with public transport and roads.

Not only is there a lack of awareness of the issues that children face, but also a lack of belief of children who disclose abuse.

The community at large remains ambivalent about trusting children and lacks all of the building blocks required to prevent child abuse and adequately act to protect them from abuse and neglect.

They are not aware of the true scale and impact of child abuse. They do not believe that it is as widespread as it really is. They have a shallow understanding of how it is defined, what its components are, how it develops or the level of risk that children and young people face in their own homes.

They lack confidence about when, how and why they should take action when exposed to information that children are being abused and neglected.

There are still prevailing attitudes that stop people from stepping up to keep children safe. These attitudes have not shifted for at least eighteen years.

These attitudes allow for the continued abuse of children and young people.

### 67%

of respondents believe that children make up stories about being abused or are uncertain whether to believe children when they disclosed abuse. This remains a devastating result for children, meaning children only have a 1 in 3 chance of finding an adult who will believe them.



### 1 in 3

respondents did not believe child abuse is a problem that they need be concerned about. That means one third of the community that may not be willing, capable or aware enough to take action if they saw a child or young person who was facing abuse, neglect or violence.

### 3 in 4

respondents support the need for Australia to have a national campaign to raise awareness of child abuse and how the community can act more protectively towards children. Just under half would be prepared to become actively involved to support a campaign.

### 1 in 5

respondents were not confident of being able to recognise that a child was being abused or neglected. This means 22% of the community do not feel they are able to recognise a child or young people facing abuse.

### 22%

of respondents were not confident about knowing what to do if they suspected that a child was being abused or neglected. That's one in every five people who don't know how to help a child facing abuse.

### 38%

of respondents perceived the number of reports of child abuse annually in Australia to be less than 25,000 – a small fraction of the real figure which was a **staggering 480,000 last year.**



### 1 in 6

respondents were uncertain whether or were reluctant to report a child being abused or neglected even if they were sure of the facts. This small but significant proportion of adults who fail to take action result in continued risk for children and young people.

### 69%

of respondents were worried about the possibility of their own children being abused and exploited online.

### 22%

of respondents had witnessed a child or young people being physically abused by an adult family member over the past five years. 38% of respondents had witnessed humiliation or criticism of a child or young people, while 23% of respondents had heard someone make sexually suggestive comments or jokes about a child or young people over the past five years.

Of most concern is that 1 in 6 who reported having witnessed abuse **did nothing to protect the child or young person, leaving them in real danger.**

**Learn more about community attitudes towards child abuse at:** [childhood.org.au](https://childhood.org.au)

for more information contact [marketing@childhood.org.au](mailto:marketing@childhood.org.au)

# Still Unseen & Ignored

Tracking community knowledge and attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia

In 2021, Australian Childhood Foundation research concluded that child abuse is still largely unseen and ignored. The results of the 2021 study echo findings over the past two decades that indicate child abuse is of less concern to the community than problems with public transport and roads.

Not only is there a lack of awareness of the issues that children face, but also a lack of belief of children who disclose abuse. The community at large remains ambivalent about trusting children and lacks all of the building blocks required to prevent child abuse and adequately act to protect them from abuse and neglect.

People are not aware of the true scale and impact of child abuse and do not believe that it is as widespread as it really is, or the level of risk that children and young people face in their own homes. These attitudes allow for the continued abuse of children and young people.



**1 in 3**  
respondents

did not believe child abuse is a problem that they need be concerned about.

**22% of respondents**

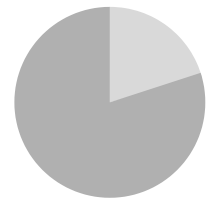
were not confident about knowing what to do if they suspected that a child was being abused or neglected.



**67%**

of respondents

believe that children make up stories about being abused or are uncertain whether to believe children when they disclosed abuse.



**1 in 5**

respondents

were not confident of being able to recognise that a child was being abused or neglected; 22% of the community can't recognise a child or young people facing abuse.



**32%**

of respondents

believed that children can make up stories about being abused, when we know that most often children who disclose abuse are telling the truth.



**22-38%**

of respondents

had witnessed a child being physically abused, humiliated or criticised by an adult family member over the past five years.



**1 in 6**

of respondents

were uncertain or reluctant in reporting child abuse or neglect even if they were sure of the facts.



**38%**

of respondents

perceived the number of reports of child abuse annually in Australia to be less than 25,000 – a small fraction of the real figure which was a staggering 480,000 last year.

1 in 6 who reported having witnessed abuse

**did nothing to protect the child**



**1 in 3**

respondents

were worried about the possibility of their own children being abused and exploited online.



Learn more about community attitudes towards child abuse at:

Australia Childhood Foundation  
**childhood.org.au**

for more information contact  
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**Australian Childhood Foundation**

Tucci, J & Mitchell, J, (2021), 'Still unseen and ignored: Tracking community knowledge and attitudes about child abuse and child protection in Australia', Australian Childhood Foundation, Abbotsford, Victoria.