



# **Children & Youth**

**Counsellor Toolkit  
2024**

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# Introduction to Children & Youth Counselling

Children and youth counselling is a specialised form of therapy tailored to address the unique emotional, social, and developmental needs of young individuals. It provides a safe and supportive environment where children and adolescents can explore their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with a trained professional.

Counsellors use various techniques such as play therapy, art therapy, and cognitive-behavioural approaches to help young clients express themselves and develop coping skills to navigate challenges like family issues, peer pressure, trauma, or mental health concerns. Additionally, child and youth counsellors often work collaboratively with parents, teachers, and other caregivers to create a holistic support system that fosters the child's overall well-being and growth.

Through counselling, children and youth can gain insight, resilience, and the tools they need to thrive emotionally and socially.

What are Children's Rights?

## Defining Age Ranges for Children & Young People

The definition of a child or a young person's age can vary depending on the context, such as legal, medical, educational, or developmental perspectives. Here are some common age ranges used to define children and young people:

**Infancy:** Typically, infancy refers to the period from birth to around 2 years of age.

Infancy

**Early Childhood:** Early childhood generally encompasses the period from infancy to around 6 years of age. This period often includes preschool and kindergarten years.

Early Childhood

**Middle Childhood:** Middle childhood typically spans from around 6 to 12 years of age. Children in this age group are usually in elementary school.

Middle Childhood

**Adolescence:** Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood. It generally begins around 10 to 12 years of age and continues into the late teens or early twenties. Adolescence is often divided into early adolescence (10-14 years), mid-adolescence (15-17 years), and late adolescence (18-21 years).

Adolescence

**Young Adulthood:** Young adulthood typically refers to the period from the late teens to the mid-20s, although definitions may vary. It is characterised by the pursuit of higher education, career development, and greater independence.

Young Adulthood

It's important to note that these age ranges are approximate and can vary depending on cultural, social, and individual factors. Additionally, legal definitions of childhood and adolescence may vary between countries or regions, particularly regarding the age of majority and the age at which individuals are considered adults for legal purposes.

## Key Considerations for Working as a Counsellor with Children

Working as a counsellor with children can be both rewarding and challenging. Here are some key things to consider:

**Developmental Stages:** Children go through various developmental stages, each with its own challenges and needs. Understanding these stages can help tailor your approach to counselling.

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**Communication Skills:** Communicating with children requires a different approach than with adults. You need to be able to convey complex ideas in simple language and be patient in listening to their thoughts and feelings.

**Trust and Rapport Building:** Building trust and rapport is crucial in counselling, especially with children who may be hesitant to open up. Creating a safe and welcoming environment can encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings.

**Understanding Family Dynamics:** Children's issues are often interconnected with their family dynamics. Understanding the family structure and dynamics can provide valuable insights into the child's behaviour and struggles.

[More Information](#)

**Creativity and Flexibility:** Children often respond well to creative interventions such as play therapy, art therapy, or storytelling. Being creative and flexible in your approach can help engage children in the counselling process.

**Ethical Considerations:** Working with children requires adherence to strict ethical guidelines, particularly regarding confidentiality, informed consent, and boundaries.

*Refer to the ACA Mandatory Reporting Toolkit for further information.*

**Collaboration with Parents and Guardians:** Collaboration with parents or guardians is essential for the child's well-being. Keeping them informed about the counselling process and involving them in decision-making can help create a supportive environment for the child.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** Understanding and respecting the cultural background of the child and their family is important in providing effective counselling services.

*Refer to the ACA Cultural Competence and Awareness in Counselling Practise Toolkit for further information.*

**Self-Care:** Working with children who may be dealing with challenging issues can take an emotional toll. It's important to practice self-care and seek support when needed to prevent burnout.

- **Establish Boundaries:** Set clear work hours, avoid taking work home, and learn to say no.
- **Develop a Support System:** Engage in regular supervision, consultation with colleagues, and peer support networks.
- **Practice Regular Self-Care:** Prioritise physical health through sleep, exercise, and diet; engage in relaxing hobbies, meditation, or reading; and maintain emotional health by expressing feelings to trusted individuals.
- **Manage Stress Effectively:** Use mindfulness, deep breathing, and yoga; manage time with prioritisation and tools like calendars and to-do lists.

- **Seek Professional Development:** Attend workshops and training sessions and stay updated with the latest research and best practices.
- **Create a Positive Work Environment:** Promote a healthy work-life balance, take regular breaks, and encourage a supportive culture.
- **Reflect and Reconnect with Your Purpose:** Journal about experiences and remind yourself of the positive impact and reasons for choosing this profession.
- **Seek Professional Help:** Consider therapy or counselling if feeling overwhelmed to develop coping strategies.
- **Stay Socially Connected:** Engage in social activities outside of work and join support groups for shared experiences and support.
- **Regular Self-Assessment:** Periodically assess stress levels and overall well-being, adjusting self-care strategies as needed.

The Black Dog Institute offers a self-care planning tool that you can use to create your own self-care plan.

[Self-care planning](#)

**Continuous Learning:** Children's mental health and development are constantly evolving fields. Continuing education and staying updated on the latest research and best practices is essential for providing effective counselling services.

## Integrating Trauma-Informed Approaches in Child Counselling: Considerations for Supporting Healthy Development

When we overlay child development with trauma, the impact can be profound and multifaceted. Trauma, especially when experienced during critical developmental periods, can significantly disrupt a child's emotional, cognitive, social, and physical growth.

[More Information](#)

Within the realm of trauma-informed counselling, it's paramount for counsellors to operate within their designated scope of practice while maintaining a commitment to professional competence and ethical standards. This entails a continuous dedication to enhancing skills through ongoing education and seeking appropriate supervision when working with complex trauma cases. Counsellors must establish and uphold clear boundaries, prioritise client safety, and engage in regular self-reflection and consultation

to navigate the emotional demands of trauma work effectively. Cultural competence is essential, as is the practice of self-care to mitigate the risk of burnout and vicarious trauma. By integrating these principles into their practice, counsellors can provide comprehensive support while safeguarding both their clients' well-being and their own.

Here are some common impacts that could be seen when working with a child or young person who has experienced trauma.

[More Information](#)

**Emotional Regulation:** Trauma can impair a child's ability to regulate their emotions. They may experience intense emotional reactions, have difficulty calming down, or struggle with mood swings.

**Attachment and Relationships:** Trauma can affect the formation of secure attachments with caregivers, leading to trust issues and challenges in forming healthy relationships. Children may have difficulty expressing affection or seeking support from others.

**Cognitive Development:** Trauma can interfere with cognitive development, affecting attention, memory, and problem-solving skills. Children may struggle academically and have difficulty concentrating in school.

**Behavioural Problems:** Trauma often manifests in behavioural problems such as aggression, defiance, or withdrawal. Children may engage in risky behaviours or act out in response to stress.

**Physical Health:** Trauma can have long-term effects on physical health, increasing the risk of chronic conditions like obesity, heart disease, and autoimmune disorders due to the dysregulation of stress hormones.

**Self-Concept and Identity:** Trauma can negatively impact a child's self-concept and identity formation. They may develop negative beliefs about themselves, struggle with feelings of worthlessness or shame, and have a distorted sense of self.

**Social Skills:** Trauma can impair social skills and communication abilities. Children may have difficulty understanding social cues, interpreting others' emotions, or forming friendships.

**Mental Health:** Trauma significantly increases the risk of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and substance abuse later in life.

It's important to note that not all children who experience trauma will develop these challenges, as resilience and supportive environments can mitigate some of the negative effects. Early intervention and trauma-informed care, which recognises the impact of trauma on development and tailor's interventions,

accordingly, are crucial for supporting children's healthy growth and recovery.

## Key Factors in Implementing Trauma-Informed Approaches for Child Counselling

As a counsellor, it's essential to consider the impact of trauma on child development in your therapeutic approach. Here are some key points to keep in mind:

**Trauma-Informed Care:** Adopt a trauma-informed approach to counselling, which involves understanding the prevalence and impact of trauma on children's lives. This approach emphasises safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment in therapeutic interactions.

[More Information](#)

**Assessment:** Conduct thorough assessments to identify any trauma history or ongoing traumatic experiences that may be affecting the child. This includes exploring the nature of the trauma, its duration, and its impact on various areas of the child's functioning.

**Understanding Developmental Stages:** Recognise the developmental stage of the child and how trauma may have disrupted their progression through these stages. Trauma can impact developmental milestones and may result in regression or delays in certain areas of development.

**Building Trust and Safety:** Create a safe and trusting therapeutic environment where the child feels comfortable expressing themselves. Establishing a trusting relationship is essential for helping children feel secure and supported as they process their experiences.

**Psychoeducation:** Provide age-appropriate psychoeducation about trauma and its effects on the body and mind. Help children understand that their reactions are normal responses to abnormal experiences and empower them to seek support when needed.

**Trauma Processing:** Use trauma-focused interventions, such as trauma-focused cognitive-behavioural therapy (TF-CBT) or eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing (EMDR), to help children process their traumatic experiences in a safe and supportive manner. It is essential that counsellors are adequately trained in these methods to ensure effective and sensitive care.

**Collaboration with Other Professionals:** Collaborate with other professionals, such as teachers, paediatricians, and social workers, to

ensure a comprehensive approach to supporting the child's needs across various settings.

## Collaborative Multidisciplinary Support for Children & Adolescents with Complex Needs

Working in a multidisciplinary team within a private practice setting, counsellors collaborate closely with parents, caregivers, and school personnel to holistically support young clients. This collaboration involves providing guidance on social reinforcement strategies at home, facilitating peer interactions in school settings, and advocating for environments conducive to social growth. By fostering strong partnerships with various stakeholders, counsellors ensure comprehensive support for children and adolescents in navigating social challenges and enhancing their overall well-being.

*Refer to the ACA Working Effectively in a Multi-disciplinary Teams as a Counsellor Toolkit for further information.*

## Enhancing Social Competence: Supporting Children & Adolescents in Peer Relationships

In counselling, addressing peer relationships and social skills is crucial for children and adolescents' emotional well-being. Counsellors assess social functioning, provide strategies to navigate peer pressure, teach communication and conflict resolution skills, and offer support for dealing with social challenges like bullying. By working collaboratively with children and young people, counsellors help foster positive social interactions and enhance overall social competence.

[More Information](#)

## Collaborative Support for Children and Youth in State Care: Ensuring Continuity & Addressing Complex Needs

Similarly, in cases involving children or youth under state care, counsellors collaborate with caseworkers, foster parents, and other professionals involved in the

child's support network to ensure continuity of care and address the child's emotional, social, and developmental needs. This collaboration may involve advocating for appropriate services, coordinating transitions between placements, and providing trauma-informed support to help the child navigate their experiences.

[More Information](#)

## Integrated Support for Children with Health Considerations: Bridging Physical and Emotional Well-being

Additionally, when working with children facing health considerations or chronic illnesses, counsellors collaborate with medical professionals, such as paediatrician's, nurses, and specialists, to address the intersection of physical health and mental well-being. By integrating counselling services with medical care, counsellors can support children and their families in managing the emotional impact of their health conditions and fostering resilience. By considering these factors, you can better prepare yourself for working as a counsellor with children and provide valuable support to them and their families.

[More Information](#)

## Working with Children with Disabilities in Counselling

When working with children with disabilities in counselling, it's crucial to understand the specific disability, tailor approaches to the individual child's needs, ensure accessibility, collaborate with special education professionals, adapt techniques, foster empowerment, and self-advocacy, provide family support and education, address stigma and discrimination, adhere to legal and ethical considerations, and be culturally sensitive. By integrating these considerations into counselling practice, professionals can effectively support the mental health and well-being of children with disabilities while promoting inclusivity and empowerment.

[More Information](#)

## Considerations for Working with Parents and Caregivers

When working with parents and caregivers, whether in counselling or other settings, it's essential to approach interactions with respect, empathy, and clear communication. Actively listen to their concerns and needs, involving them in decision-making processes and providing regular updates on their child's progress.

[More Information](#)

Adopting a strengths-based perspective, acknowledging their capabilities, and being culturally sensitive fosters a collaborative and supportive relationship. Flexibility and adaptability are crucial to meeting the diverse needs of families, while maintaining boundaries and confidentiality ensures trust and professionalism. Offering support, resources, and referrals demonstrates a commitment to their well-being and empowers them to navigate challenges effectively. By considering these key factors, professionals can establish meaningful partnerships with parents and caregivers, promoting positive outcomes for children and families alike [Link](#)

## Consent in a Counselling Setting for Children and Youth in Australia

In Australia, various laws and guidelines govern consent in a counselling setting for children and youth.

[More Information](#)

These regulations ensure that minors' rights are protected while allowing for appropriate participation in counselling services. Key legal frameworks include federal laws, state and territory legislation, and professional guidelines. Here's an overview:

### Federal Laws

[Consent Policy Framework](#),  
[Age of consent laws in Australia](#),  
[Family Law Act 1975](#),  
[Privacy Act 1988](#)

### New South Wales:

[Children and Young Persons](#) (Care and Protection) Act 1998

### Victoria:

[Children, Youth and Families Act 2005](#)  
[Mental Health Act 2014](#)

### Queensland:

[Child Protection Act 1999](#)

### [Public Health Act 2005](#)

### Western Australia:

[Children and Community Services Act 2004](#)  
[Health Services Act 2016](#)

### South Australia:

[Children's Protection Act 2017](#)  
[Consent to Medical Treatment and Palliative Care Act 1995](#)

### Northern Territory:

[Care and Protection of Children Act 2007](#)  
[Medical Services Act 1982](#)

### Professional Guidelines

[Australian Counselling Association \(ACA\) Code of Ethics and Practice:](#)

The ACA Code of Ethics requires counsellors to obtain informed consent from clients, including minors, and to explain the counselling process in an age-appropriate manner. It emphasises the need to assess a minor's competence to consent and to involve parents or guardians when necessary.

### Assessing Gillick Competence:

Counsellors must determine if a minor is Gillick competent, meaning they have sufficient maturity and understanding to consent to counselling services.

[More Information](#)

### Parental or Guardian Consent:

If minors are not deemed Gillick competent, parental or guardian consent is required. Counsellors should also seek the minor's consent to involve them in the decision-making process.

## Confidentiality

Counsellors must clearly explain confidentiality and its limits to both minors and their parents or guardians. Mandatory reporting laws require the disclosure of certain information to protect the child's welfare.

*Refer to the ACA Mandatory Reporting Toolkit for further information.*

### Conclusion

The legal framework for consent in a counselling setting for children and youth in Australia involves a combination of federal and state/territory laws, along with professional ethical guidelines. These laws ensure that minors' rights are protected while allowing for appropriate participation in counselling services. Counsellors must navigate these laws carefully, assessing the competence of minors, obtaining necessary consents, and maintaining confidentiality to provide ethical and effective counselling services.

# Training and Professional Development

Continuing Education: Stay abreast of the latest research, best practices, and advancements in child counselling and disabilities by engaging in ongoing training, workshops, conferences, and professional development opportunities. Additionally, seek practical experience through internships, volunteer work, or supervised practice to gain valuable hands-on experience in working with children and individuals with disabilities under the mentorship of seasoned professionals.

- **Enhancing Clinical Skills:** Participate in workshops aimed at improving essential skills such as active listening, empathy, and crisis intervention.
- **Specialised Counselling Techniques:** Develop proficiency in specialised counselling modalities such as CBT, mindfulness, play therapy, or family therapy.
- **Cultural Competence Training:** Expand your awareness and skills to effectively work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- **Supervision and Consultation:** Seek guidance and feedback from experienced clinicians to further develop your counselling practice.
- **Ethics and Legal Training:** Gain a comprehensive understanding of ethical standards and legal requirements governing the counselling profession.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Deepen your understanding of trauma's impact and learn how to integrate sensitive approaches into your counselling practice.

[More Information](#)

- **Child and Adolescent Counselling:** Acquire insights into youth development and family dynamics to better support young clients and their families.
- **Substance Abuse Counselling:** Obtain skills to effectively support clients struggling with substance use disorders.
- **Online Counselling Training:** Prepare yourself to deliver effective counselling services in virtual settings through specialised training.
- **Continuing Education:** Stay informed about the latest research findings and best practices in the field through participation in conferences, webinars, and other educational opportunities.
- **Collaboration with Other Professionals:** Coordinating care and collaborating with other professionals, such as educators, healthcare providers, or social workers, can be challenging due to differences in approaches, goals, or communication styles.



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"Disclaimer: While the information provided in this fact sheet is current as of the date written, it is essential for counsellors to stay updated with the latest regulations, resources, and practices specific to their state within Australia. It is the responsibility of the counsellor to ensure compliance and effectiveness in their work. Seeking guidance from a supervisor is advised to navigate regional requirements. This disclaimer underscores the counsellor's responsibility to stay informed and adhere to relevant standards and guidelines."



**ACA**

**AUSTRALIAN  
COUNSELLING  
ASSOCIATION**

Unit 2/42 Finsbury Street  
Newmarket QLD 4051  
Australia – Yuggera Country

P : 07 3356 4255  
E : [aca@theaca.net.au](mailto:aca@theaca.net.au)  
W : [www.theaca.net.au](http://www.theaca.net.au)

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