



## National Reflective Practice Tool

### Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have grown up safe, well and cared for in their families, communities and cultural traditions for thousands of years. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children continue to thrive within their families, communities and cultures. However, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face ongoing challenges that stem from colonisation and its inter-generational impacts. More than twenty years since the ground-breaking *Bringing Them Home* report on the experiences of the Stolen Generations was released it is devastating that the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC) continue to rise. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are now 11 times more likely than other Australian children to be removed from their families and placed in OOHC.

### Our campaign

**Family Matters: Strong Communities. Strong Culture. Stronger Children** is Australia's national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture. Family Matters is led by *SNAICC – National Voice for our Children* and a group of eminent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders from across the country. It is supported by a strategic alliance of over 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations. The goal of the campaign is to eliminate the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC by 2040.

Signing the Family Matters Statement of Commitment reflects a genuine intent to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their organisations to end this over-representation. The National Reflective Practice Tool has been developed for signatories of the Family Matters campaign to deeply reflect on their practice on an annual basis and identify any strengths and challenges

in effectively implementing the principles and building blocks of the campaign to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe, well and cared for in their families, communities and cultures.

## Campaign building blocks

The Family Matters building blocks have been designed on the basis of evidence, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and experience of what is needed to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child development, well-being and safety – which are interdependent and interrelated issues, requiring a holistic strategy of redress. Addressing only one without paying attention to the others will, over time, impede the achievement of sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The building blocks are as follows:



### **1. All families enjoy access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to thrive.**

Early intervention is required to strengthen families and provide long-term social and economic benefits by preventing trajectories that lead to health problems, criminalisation, and child protection intervention. Service engagement and availability barriers must also be addressed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are able to access a full range of culturally safe and acceptable universal early childhood, education, health, housing, legal and other social services. High-quality trauma-informed practice needs to be applied in all states and territories across family support, child protection, health, education, and related adult services under the leadership and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.



### **2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and community representatives must genuinely be included in the decisions that are made about their children at all stages of child protection decision making. Government and mainstream service providers need to progressively step away from direct service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and instead actively hand service delivery and decision-making responsibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.



### **3. Law, policy and practice in child and family welfare are culturally safe and responsive.**

A transformation of services is required to create a culturally safe and competent child health and wellbeing sector. This requires the development of laws, policies and practices that respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and reflect a priority to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC. The agenda of all services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children must include: full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle; amendment of policies and procedures which discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and the development of cultural competence across policies, staff and service provision.



### **4. Governments and services are accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

Efforts to address over-representation must include public measures of accountability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the oversight of reforms, including the development and monitoring of measures of success. All governments, services and institutions must prioritise the removal of racism, cultural blindness, and direct and indirect discrimination towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By completing this reflective practice tool, signatories can build on their accountability and the audit can be used as a means for the Family Matters leadership group to monitor progress towards the overall campaign goal.

### **Your commitment to the campaign**

All signatories of the Family Matters campaign have made a commitment to working in accordance with the following six key principles, and to implementing all corresponding actions (included in the reflective practice tool below):

1. Applying a child focused approach
2. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations participate in and have control over decisions that affect their children
3. Protecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's right to live in culture
4. Pursuing evidence based responses
5. Supporting, healing and strengthening families

## 6. Challenging systemic racism and inequities

### What is the Reflective Practice Tool and why use it

The Family Matters National Reflective Practice Tool has been structured around the above six core principles and their corresponding actions. At a broader level, these principles and actions support the four building blocks of the campaign. It is an expectation that organisations will complete each of the assessment frameworks for all six campaign principles on an annual basis. Annual completion of the Reflective Practice Tool will provide a consistent means to promote and share good practice with other services, reflect on areas for improvement and encourage consideration of additional activities and support where needed. Regular use of the tool will also generate valuable progress information to feed into broader evaluation of redressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations have had negative experiences of tokenistic collaborations with non-Indigenous organisations. This has led to a level of mistrust that governments and mainstream services may sign on to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander campaigns to ‘tick the box’ of cultural competence without engaging with the deeper commitment of the campaign. Tokenistic involvement does not lead to better services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Tokenism can, in fact, hold up progress as organisations that appear to be culturally responsive but fail to adjust their service delivery create deeper levels of mistrust, maintain power imbalances and fail to promote reconciliation.

In light of this the Reflective Practice Tool is designed to push further than a simple ‘tick box’ exercise. It is a conversation starting and practice building tool that can help you explore your deeper commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve long-term outcomes for children and families and establish how this can be realised in practice.

### Who should use the Reflective Practice Tool

All organisations that are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are encouraged to complete this Reflective Practice Tool. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe, happy, healthy and able to thrive is a shared responsibility. We can only reach our goal with the commitment and action of every individual, family, community and organisation, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous, who touch the lives of children. The Reflective Practice Tool holds particular relevance for non-Indigenous organisations working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as it is a supportive measure to ensure the delivery of culturally safe and responsive services. A whole of practice approach is required to meaningfully engage with this

Reflective Practice Tool. This approach will look different in each organisation but could, for example, include executive, policy, managerial and direct practice leaders.

The tool ensures a cultural lens is applied to service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Completing the tool requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives be included in your reflective process, both through internal Indigenous staff and externally from Elders, community representatives, peak bodies or community controlled organisations representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

This will ensure engagement of family and community voices and enacting changes put forward by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and practitioners to improve outcomes for their children, families and communities.

### How to use the reflective practice tool

Below are stages for completing the Reflective Practice Tool, including processes to ensure that internal and external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are privileged, and partnership approaches are undertaken.

The tool can only be applied with insight from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, internal and external to your organisation. A partnership approach will assist to balance the subjective nature of the tool and to ensure an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lens is applied that is representative of the community and of families using the service.

#### **Stage 1: Come together to discuss and reflect on the values that underpin your organisations commitment to Family Matters**

Invite your key internal and external participants to the process in line with local cultural protocols. Start by checking-in about why you have signed the Statement of Commitment and what is important to you in the way you go about fulfilling this commitment.

#### **Stage 2: Complete the Reflective Practice Tool ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are privileged**

As a group, work through each of the self-assessment frameworks to deeply reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of your organisation in implementing the corresponding actions of the campaign principles. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are privileged and continue to follow local cultural protocols.

Tips: \* Be specific in your responses and clarify how you uphold the principles (it's not only 'what' you do but 'how' you do it).

- Document evidence of application of the cultural lens in your case study or other supporting evidence.
- You may also consider family and community feedback your organisation obtains through other processes as relevant.
- Any case examples shared must be de-identified. Ensure that all potentially identifiable information is removed. The focus is on practice and not on individuals.

### **Stage 3: Ensure you plan the way forward to respond to the audit outcomes**

This is a critical stage to ensure that plans are made and action is taken to address the issues and priorities identified in the audit. Talk through priority actions and assign responsibility and timeframes for completing them.

### **Stage 4: Share the outcomes of your Reflective Practice Tool to the Family Matters leadership group (optional)**

We invite you to provide the outcomes of your Reflective Practice Tool to the Family Matters leadership group in your state or territory and/or to the national leadership group. This information will be used to reflect on the progress of the campaign and a member of the relevant leadership group may contact you to discuss any challenges you are facing in carrying out your commitment to the campaign. With the permission of services who submit the outcomes of their reflective practice, Family Matters may also publish case studies of best practice. Family Matters may also publish de-identified data collected through the audit process.

### **Suggested resources**

The following resources may assist you with identifying evidence to support your assessments and establish actions for improvement. They can be accessed online through the [Family Matters](#) and [SNAICC](#) websites.

- [The Family Matters Roadmap](#)
- [The Family Matters Report](#)
- [The Family Matters Statement of Commitment](#)
- [Understanding and Applying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle](#)
- [The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: A Guide To Support Implementation](#)

## National Reflective Practice Tool

**Date:**

**Name of organisation:**

**Names and positions of people completeing this audit tool:**

### PRINCIPLE 1: APPLYING A CHILD FOCUSSED APPROACH

We recognise that in all actions concerning children their best interests should be the paramount consideration and that ensuring their safety is essential. Advancing the best interests of children requires the holistic realisation of their rights, including rights to safety, family, housing, health, education, culture and participation. We understand that the best interests of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child can only be properly determined with the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Accordingly, signatories commit to:**

Ensuring that the best interests of the child, informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, is the paramount consideration in all decisions about the care and protection of children.

Promoting the inclusion of children's voices in all decisions that affect them.

**Assessment:**

**A:** Always **B:** Often **C:** Sometimes  
**D:** Rarely **E:** Never

**Evidence & case studies to support this assessment**





Please attach additional pages if more space is required.

**Strengths:**

**Challenges:**

**Strengths:**

**Challenges:**







<b>Recommended actions for improvement</b>				
<b>Action plan</b> 1. Who will action this? 2. When will it be actioned by? 3. What supports will be required? 4. How will you measure improvement?	1. 2. 3. 4.		1. 2. 3. 4.	
<b>Relevant Building Blocks</b>	 <b>Building block 2:</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.   <b>Building block 3:</b> Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.		 <b>Building block 2:</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.   <b>Building block 3:</b> Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.	



**PRINCIPLE 2: ENSURING THAT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONS PARTICIPATE IN AND HAVE CONTROL OVER DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEIR CHILDREN**

We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the strengths and the right to lead change for their own children. Governments and services should provide mechanisms and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and organisations to participate in and drive decision-making about the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

<p><b>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</b></p>	<p>Building and transferring capacity to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to provide services that respond to the needs of their communities.</p>		<p>Ensuring policies and mechanisms to facilitate the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in all decisions that affect them.</p>		<p>Recognising the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to drive local solutions to local issues.</p>	
<p><b>Assessment:</b>  <b>A:</b> Always <b>B:</b> Often  <b>C:</b> Sometimes <b>D:</b> Rarely  <b>E:</b> Never</p>						
<p><b>Evidence &amp; case studies to support this assessment</b></p> <p>Please attach additional pages if more space is required.</p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p>	<p><b>Challenges:</b></p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p>	<p><b>Challenges:</b></p>	<p><b>Strengths:</b></p>	<p><b>Challenges:</b></p>

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<b>Relevant Building Blocks</b>	 <b>Building block 1:</b> Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.   <b>Building block 2:</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.	 <b>Building block 2:</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.	 <b>Building block 1:</b> Access to quality, culturally safe, universal and targeted services.   <b>Building block 2:</b> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in decision-making.   <b>Building block 3:</b> Appropriate laws, policies and practices that are culturally safe and responsive.			






**PRINCIPLE 3: PROTECTING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO LIVE IN CULTURE**

We recognise that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, connections to their family, community and culture are critical to their wellbeing and positive self-identity. We also recognise the evidence that cultural and community networks support safety for children, and that continuity of cultural identity promotes healthy development. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to practise their cultures with their families and communities.

<p><b>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</b></p>	<p>Promoting and enabling the full implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in line with its intent to maintain quality cultural connections for children throughout their involvement with child protection systems.</p>	<p>Developing the capability of organisations and staff to work in culturally safe and competent ways to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.</p>
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<p><b>Assessment:</b>  <b>A:</b> Always <b>B:</b> Often <b>C:</b> Sometimes  <b>D:</b> Rarely <b>E:</b> Never</p>		
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**PRINCIPLE 4: PURSUING EVIDENCE BASED RESPONSES**

We believe that in responding to the issue of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems, our efforts should be based on the evidence of what works. This evidence base critically includes the knowledge, wisdom and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Accordingly, signatories commit to:**

Respecting and practically applying research findings on what is effective to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, recognising the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in research to the quality of the evidence base.

Listening to the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on how best to respond to the needs of their children and families, including by resourcing and supporting community-led program evaluation and research.

**Assessment**

**A:** Always **B:** Often **C:** Sometimes  
**D:** Rarely **E:** Never

**Evidence & case studies to support this assessment**






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**PRINCIPLE 5: SUPPORTING, HEALING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES**

We recognise that family is the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s social, cultural and emotional wellbeing and is their most important life-long support. We acknowledge the unique need for healing supports to address the impacts of intergenerational trauma on families that has resulted from experiences of colonisation, the Stolen Generations and other discriminatory government policies. We recognise and respect the evidence that shows that early intervention is critical to heal and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to care for their children and ensure they thrive.

**Accordingly, signatories commit to:**

Promoting and driving increased early intervention supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and increased proportional investment in early intervention as compared to OOHC.

Supporting and promoting a priority to safely reunify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with their families wherever it is possible to do so.

**A: Always B: Often C: Sometimes  
D: Rarely E: Never**

**Evidence & case studies to support this assessment**




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**PRINCIPLE 6: CHALLENGING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND INEQUITIES**

We acknowledge that the current challenges facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families result from a history of injustice and racism that remains embedded within the laws, policies and practices of our society, systems and institutions.

<p><b>Accordingly, signatories commit to:</b></p>	<p>Taking actions to ensure law, policy and practice are designed to respond to the root causes of poverty and disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p>		<p>Challenging racism where we see or experience it in laws, policies, procedures or behaviours.</p>	
<p><b>Assessment:</b>  <b>A:</b> Always <b>B:</b> Often <b>C:</b> Sometimes  <b>D:</b> Rarely <b>E:</b> Never</p>				
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*Thank you for completing the Family Matters National Reflective Practice Tool. If you would like to submit the outcomes of your audit please forward it to the Family Matters group in your jurisdiction, or directly to SNAICC.*