

# FINAL REPORT

Private sessions



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

VOLUME 5

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# Appendix E Sharing your story: A guide to your private session



**Royal Commission**  
into Institutional Responses  
to Child Sexual Abuse

## Sharing your story

A guide to your private session

A SAFER FUTURE  
FOR CHILDREN

## Your story matters

Thank you for registering for a private session with the Royal Commission. The Royal Commission acknowledges that it is a big step and we value your courage in coming forward to share your story.

This booklet will help to answer some questions you may have before your private session, and provide a guide to the private session process.

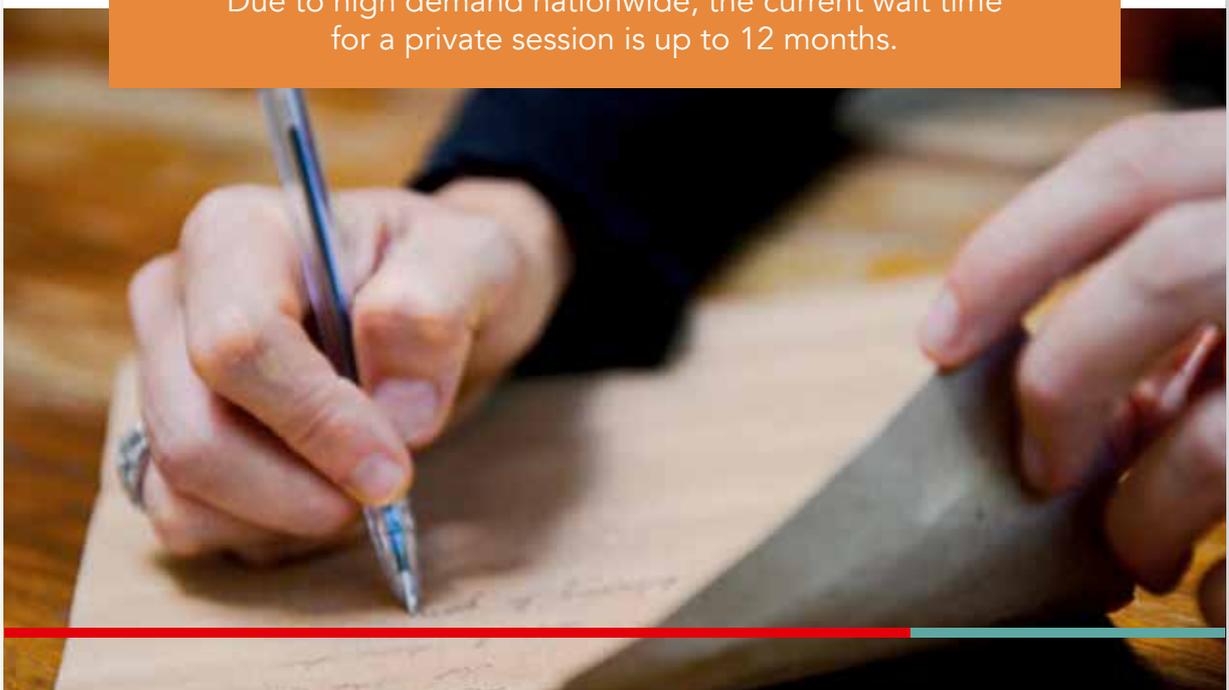
## About private sessions

A private session allows you to share your story face-to-face with a Royal Commissioner in private and comfortable surroundings.

They are an important way for the Commissioners to hear first-hand the impact of child sexual abuse that has occurred in institutions.

To protect your privacy, details of private sessions are never made public.

Registrations for private sessions will close on 30 September 2016. Due to high demand nationwide, the current wait time for a private session is up to 12 months.



## Attending my private session

Now that you are registered for a private session, you will receive a phone call to determine the date and time of your session. A confirmation letter will also be sent to you to confirm the time, date, location and other relevant details, such as transport and parking. The Royal Commission can also help with the costs for you to attend your private session.

Private sessions are held in confidential locations, and nobody else is informed of the location.

A private session usually takes about one hour.

If you wish, you can be accompanied by an adult of

your choice as a support person. Your support person could be a friend or family member, or even a professional person that you feel comfortable with, such as a counsellor or doctor. They may wait in a room close by, or they can come into the session with you. If you choose to bring your support person into your session, their role will be to support you while you tell the Commissioner your story.

Before you come to your private session, it helps to prepare yourself and order your thoughts so you can make the most of your time with the Commissioner. Page 6 of this booklet provides a guide to the kinds of things you might like to consider.

## Private sessions for children and young people

The Royal Commission encourages children and young people (between the ages of 11 and 17 years) and their families to share their story with us in a private session.

Hearing from children and young people provides a valuable insight into contemporary practices within institutions.

Children and young people who have experienced child sexual abuse in an institution are able to tell their story in a safe and supportive environment.

We will ensure that a child or young person clearly understands the purpose of the private session and what their participation will involve, before they make the decision to participate.

We conduct a child safety and wellbeing assessment to ensure that children and young people are not at risk of harm and are safe and supported when sharing their story with us.

The assessment will determine:

- if the child or young person is capable of consenting to engagement with the Commission;
- their ability to participate in a private session;
- whether participating in a private session might impact on their safety and wellbeing;
- whether there are other ways of sharing their story that are better suited to the child.

A Royal Commission officer is assigned as the main point of contact for each child or young person who contacts the Royal Commission.

Two Royal Commission officers will be present for any face-to-face interaction with an unaccompanied child or young person under the age of 16.

All Royal Commission Officers who have contact, or are likely to have contact, with children are cleared to work with children.

## What happens at a private session?

A Royal Commission staff member will greet you when you arrive at the private session venue.

You will sit with the Commissioner and Commission staff, and there will be recording equipment on the desk. The session will be recorded, but it will be kept confidential unless you agree to it being made public.

You will be introduced to the Commissioner who will explain the process and invite you to begin sharing your story.

You may be asked some questions by the Commissioner. The questions asked and your answers will help the Royal Commission understand the circumstances of your experiences. If there are some aspects of your story you do not want to share, that's OK. You can simply say you do not wish to discuss it.

It's also OK if you can't remember some of the details you are asked about. You can just explain that you cannot remember.

The Commissioner can also accept documents from you during your private session, if you wish to provide them. Your documents will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed without your consent.

You won't be asked to take an oath, but you should tell the truth.

If you prefer, you can bring a written statement to hand to the Commissioner.

After your private session, a member of our support team will give you the opportunity to debrief, have some refreshments and talk to you about the support you may need. If you've brought a support person with you, they can stay with you while you debrief or they can wait in a room close by.

If you'd like to see more about what happens at a private session, there are some short videos on our website at <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/media-centre/videos>

## What will happen with the information I provide at my private session?



The information you provide is confidential. It will help the Royal Commission to understand the impact of institutional child sexual abuse and how it might be prevented in the future. The Royal Commission may also use the information to help it decide what further investigations it should undertake.

The Royal Commission may also use the information you provide in your private session

in our reports. If you agree to this during your private session, your information will be “de-identified”. This means that your identity (and any other information that could reveal your identity) will not be published in our reports.

If you wish, the Royal Commission can pass the information you give in your private session to the appropriate law enforcement

body. This will usually be done only with your agreement, unless the Chair of the Royal Commission believes that disclosing certain information will prevent a person from being harmed.

The Royal Commission can also pass on information to law enforcement agencies without consent if a person discloses an offence that has been, or is being, committed. This could include a disclosure of sexual offending against children.

### Help is on hand

We understand that sharing your story may be hard. It might be the first time that you have told anyone about the abuse and it may bring back painful memories.

If you need help sharing your story, or coping with the feelings that come with sharing your story, we can put you in touch with support services in your area that can help.

If someone has supported you in the past, you may want to reconnect with them so they can help you through this process.

Sharing your story is important and we will help you every step of the way.

The questions below are only a guide, and you do not have to answer all of them. It doesn't matter if you don't remember everything or don't know an answer to a question.

Thinking through these questions may help organise your thoughts before your private session.

# Questions that may help you share your story with the Royal Commission

## What happened

1. Are you telling us about child sexual abuse that happened to you?
  - Yes, it happened to me
  - No, it happened to someone else. What is your relationship to that person?
2. Where did the sexual abuse happen? If you can remember, tell us:
  - Institution
  - City/Town
  - State
3. When, or around when, did the abuse happen? If you can remember, provide us with a date, or a range of dates. Can you remember your age at the time?
4. Can you tell us what happened?
5. Did anyone else see what happened?
  - Yes. Who?
  - No/not sure
6. Did you tell anyone about it around the time when it happened?
  - Yes. Who?
  - No

## Reporting to the institution

1. Did you report the sexual abuse to the institution?
  - Yes
  - No
2. Who at the institution did you tell about it? If you can remember, tell us their name and/or position.
3. What did you tell them?
4. When, or around when, did you tell them? If you can remember, provide us with the date or range of dates.
5. Did you put it in writing?
  - Yes. Do you have a copy of it?
  - No
6. Did you wait some time before telling the institution?
  - Yes. If yes, why?
  - No

## The institution's response

1. Did the institution do anything when you told it about the sexual abuse?
  - Yes
  - No/not sure

2. How did the institution first respond?
3. What else did the institution do about it?
4. Did the institution investigate what happened to you?
  - Yes. If yes, how did they investigate?
  - No/Not sure
5. Did you feel encouraged by the institution for reporting the abuse?
  - Yes. Why?
  - No. Why not?
6. Did the institution offer you any help or support?
  - Yes. What help did they offer you?
  - No (Skip to question 9)
7. Did you accept the help or support they offered?
  - Yes
  - No
8. To accept their help or support, did you have to agree to any conditions (like keeping it confidential)?
  - Yes. What were those conditions?
  - No

9. Did the institution accept responsibility for what happened?
- Yes. How? For example, did they apologise to you personally or in a public statement?
  - No
10. Did the institution encourage you to report the abuse to the police?
- Yes
  - No

### Reporting to the police

1. Did you report the sexual abuse to the police?
- Yes
  - No. Was there a reason why you didn't? Would you like us to report it for you?
2. If you reported the abuse to the police, who did you tell? Where and when? If you can remember, provide the police officer's name, police station and the date.
3. What did the police do?
4. Did the police charge the accused person?
- Yes
  - No/Not sure

5. Did you give evidence in a criminal case?

Yes

No

6. What was the result for the accused person?

### Compensation

1. Did you seek compensation for the sexual abuse?

Yes

No

2. How did you seek compensation? For example, did you go to court, attend mediation, go through a formal compensation process, or approach the institution directly?

3. Did you receive a compensation payment?

Yes. How much was the payment? Was it enough? Who paid it?

No

4. Were there any conditions attached (like keeping it confidential)?

Yes. What were they?

No

5. Did you have help from a lawyer when you sought compensation?

Yes

No. Did the institution encourage you to seek independent legal advice before agreeing to any compensation?

Yes

No

6. How long did it take for you to receive compensation, from when you first requested it?

7. Were you satisfied with the compensation process?

Yes. Why?

No. Why not?

## Support

1. Have you received any emotional or psychological support since the sexual abuse?

Yes

No

2. What support if any, have you had?

3. What support if any, are you getting now?

4. Is there any support you would like to have?

### Other inquiries

1. Have you told your story of child sexual abuse to another inquiry?
  - Yes
  - No
2. If yes, which inquiry was it? What was its name?
3. How did you tell your story to that inquiry?
  - Made a written submission
  - Gave evidence in public
  - Gave evidence in private

### Your recommendations for change

1. Please let us know if you have suggestions that we should consider, or any other information you would like to share with us.
2. Do you have suggestions for changes to the institution's policies or procedures?
3. Is there anything you would like us to recommend to the government?
4. Is there anything else you would like to share with the Royal Commission?

## Legal assistance

All information provided to the Royal Commission is protected by law.

Most people do not need legal assistance to talk to the Royal Commission. However, if you have legal questions or concerns about telling your story to the Royal Commission, you can contact knowmore, a free legal advisory service.

For more information visit [www.knowmore.org.au](http://www.knowmore.org.au) or free call knowmore on 1800 605 762.



## Contact us

### General enquiries

8am - 8pm AEST/AEDT  
Monday to Friday (excluding national public holidays).

Callers within Australia  
– 1800 099 340  
Toll free number. Calls from a mobile or pay telephone will attract additional charges.

Callers from overseas  
– 61 2 8815 2319

### Postal address

GPO Box 5283  
Sydney NSW 2001

### Email and website

[contact@childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au)

[www.childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au)

### Social media

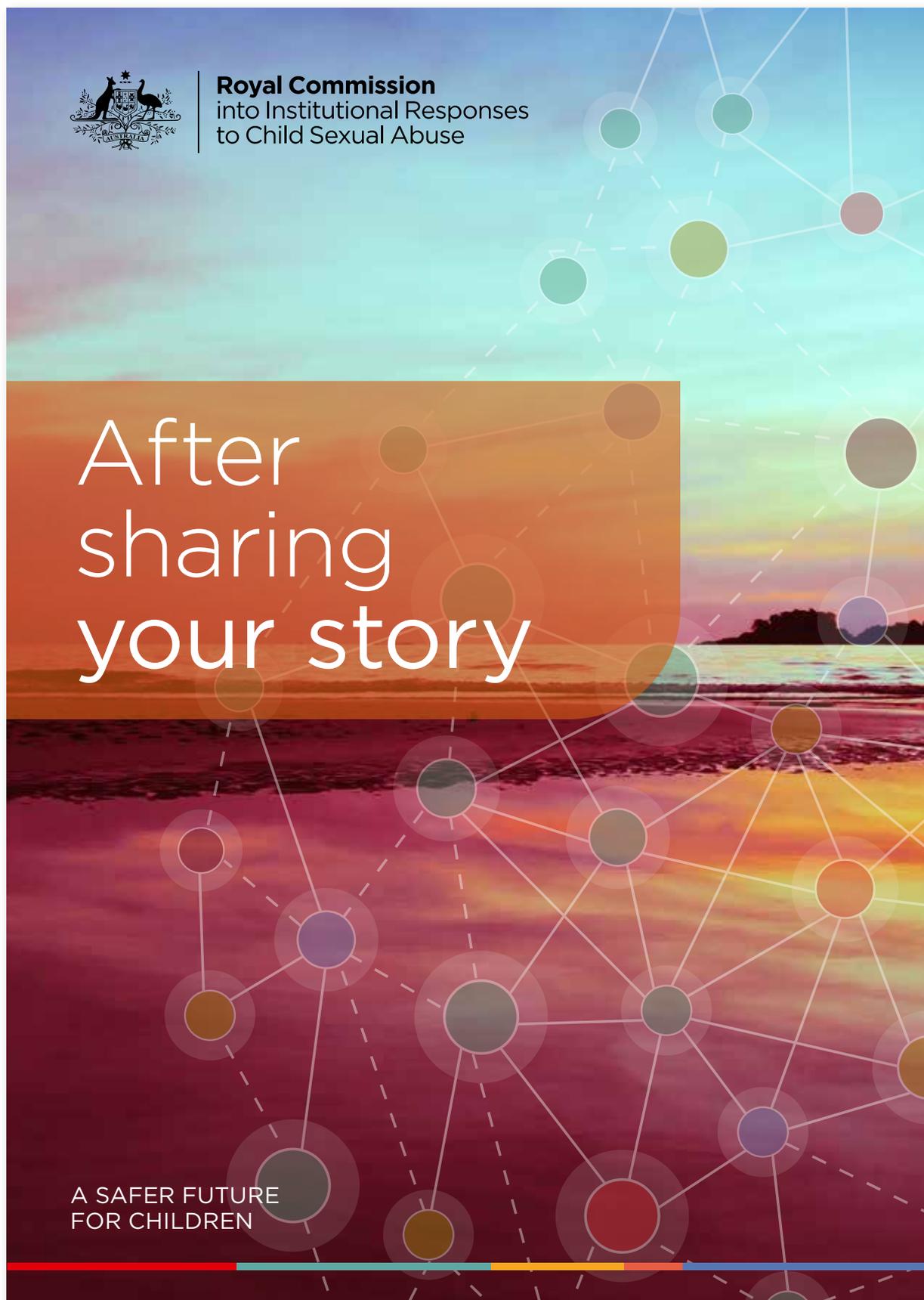
 [www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm](http://www.facebook.com/CARoyalComm)

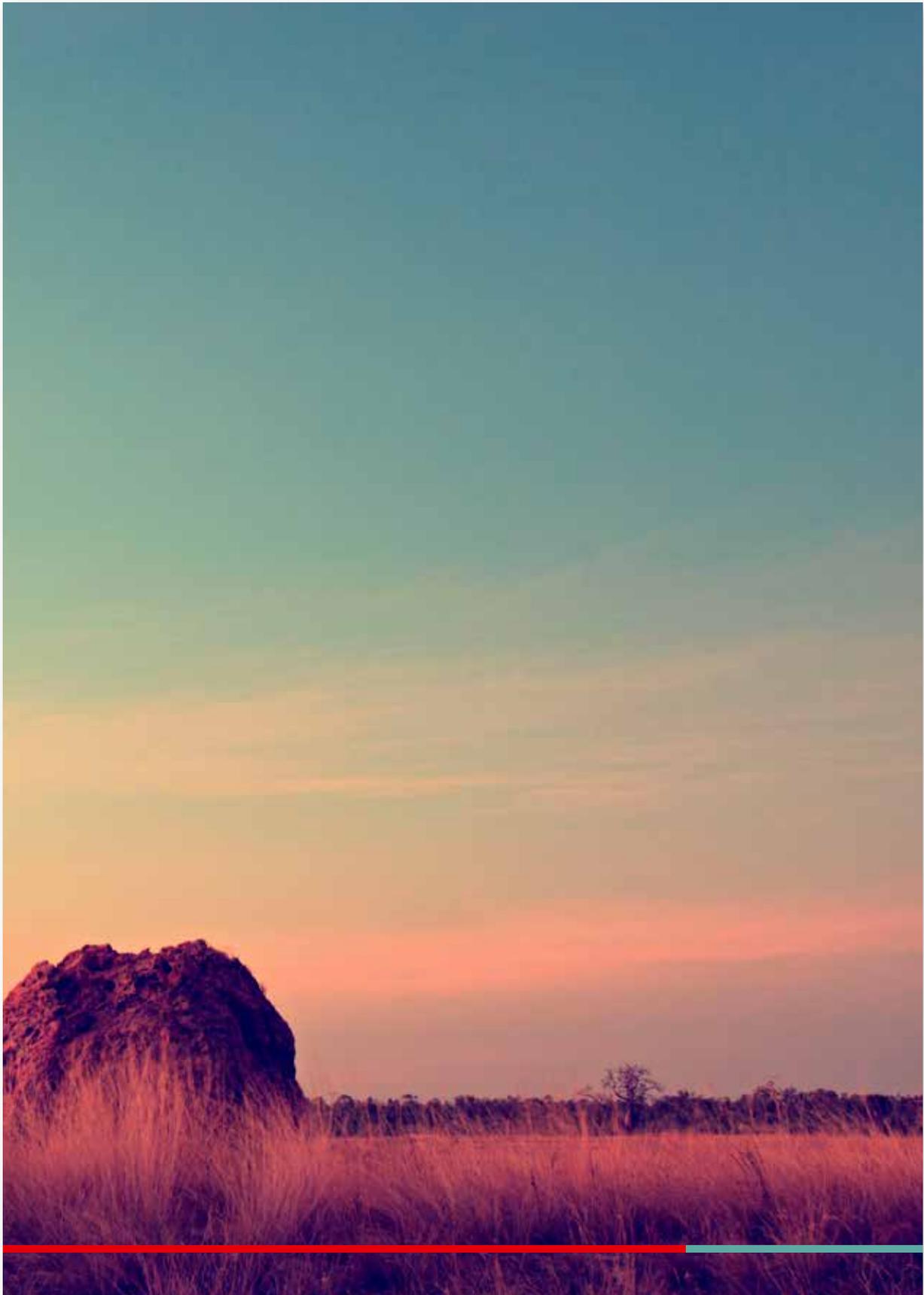
 [@CARoyalComm](https://twitter.com/CARoyalComm)



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## Appendix H After sharing your story





Thank you for sharing your story with the Royal Commission. We recognise that sharing your story can be difficult and we thank you for your courage in coming forward.

Sharing your story in a private session or written account is an important way for the Commissioners to bear witness to the stories of survivors of child sexual abuse while under the responsibility of an institution. Your story will contribute to the recommendations made by the Royal Commission to improve laws, policies and practices and create a safer future for children.

*Thank you*

# Message to Australia

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is making a book called 'Message to Australia'.

The book will be made up of messages from people who have attended a Royal Commission private session or provided a written account of their experiences.

At the end of the Royal Commission, the book will be kept at the National Library of Australia, where it will be available to members of the public and preserved for future generations.

Do you have a message that you would like us to include in the book?

Your message can tell other Australians about your experience, and any hopes you have for making the future safer for all children.

If you would like to send us a message, all you need to do is fill out the enclosed piece of paper. A stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed for you to send your message to us.

While not all of the messages will be included in the final 'Message to Australia' book – every message is important and we encourage you to share yours.

Please remember:

- Don't include your name or any other person's name, addresses or other personal information.
- Don't include swear words.
- Only fill out one side of the piece of paper.

We know that sharing your story wasn't easy but we are very grateful that you did so.

Thank you sharing your story and for giving us your Message to Australia.

If you would like to send us your Message to Australia, please write your message in the space provided below and send it back using the enclosed reply paid envelope. If you need assistance writing your Message to Australia please contact us, our details are provided in the back of this booklet.

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## My Message to Australia

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## After sharing your story



Many people who have shared their story describe feeling that they have been heard, believed and respected. They often describe feeling lighter, relieved or less burdened.

Later, you may also feel a mix of fluctuating feelings such as flat, angry, depressed or proud of yourself for sharing your story. You can expect this after such a significant personal step.

You may already have strategies you use to process the different emotions that arise.

Here are a few suggestions you may find helpful from survivors who have come forward to share their stories:

- Know that these feelings are to be expected.
- Talk to someone you trust, even if you don't feel like it.
- Be kind to yourself – do things that are self-nurturing.
- Honour your survival and challenge the negative self-talk.
- Safely express feelings by doing things like crying, exercise, talking and writing.
- If you feel overwhelmed, call crisis and support services.

## What will happen to the information I have provided to the Royal Commission?

The information you have provided to the Royal Commission will help us to better understand the impact of child sexual abuse in institutions and how it might be prevented in the future.

The Royal Commission is bound by legislation to keep the information you provide confidential. The Royal Commission may also use the information to help decide what further investigations it should undertake.

If you have agreed to it, the Royal Commission may also use some of your information in its reports. Your information will be 'de-identified', which means that your identity (and any other information that could reveal your identity) will not be published in our reports.

If you wish, the Royal Commission can pass the

information you give in your private session to the appropriate law enforcement body. This will usually be done only with your agreement, unless the Chair of the Royal Commission believes that disclosing certain information will prevent a person from being harmed.

## Will my information be used in a public hearing?

Decisions about whether your information might be useful for a public hearing, or whether the institution you talked about should be investigated further by the Royal Commission, are not usually made until after the private session is finished.

If it is later decided that your information might be useful for an investigation or public hearing, you will be contacted by a Commission officer to discuss whether or not you are willing to give evidence at a hearing. You will only need to give evidence at a hearing if you agree to it.

## What happens next?



If you have shared your story in a private session, you will be contacted by a member of the Royal Commission support team to follow up with you within a few weeks.

They can discuss with you any of the reactions you have had to sharing your story, and if needed, put you in touch with a range of services to best meet your circumstances. These may include counselling and legal services.

If you have shared your story in a written account, you

can expect a letter from the Commissioner who has read your written statement.

Because we are finding out about so many institutions, it is impossible for us to investigate every institution in a public hearing. We are selecting public hearings very carefully, and this means for most people, your private session, or written statement, will be the end of your involvement with the Royal Commission.

Thank you again for speaking with us.

## Crisis and support contact details

**1800 Respect:**

1800 737 732 or visit [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)

**Lifeline:**

13 11 14

**Mensline:**

1300 789 978

A list of support services is available at:

<http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/support-services>

## Contact Us

### General enquiries

8am - 8pm AEST/AEDT  
Monday to Friday (excluding  
national public holidays).

Callers within Australia  
– 1800 099 340  
Toll free number. Calls from  
a mobile or pay telephone  
will attract additional charges.

Callers from overseas  
– 61 2 8815 2319

### Postal address

GPO Box 5283  
Sydney NSW 2001

### Email and website

[contact@childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au](mailto:contact@childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au)

[www.childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au](http://www.childabuseroyal.commission.gov.au)

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