



Active Listening & Child-Centred Communication

Purpose

To ensure all adults working with children and young people within Surf Life Saving Clubs understand how to communicate in a child-centred, respectful and safe manner. This supports Child Safe Standard 2 – *Children are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them, and are taken seriously.*

1. What is Child-Centred Communication?

Child-centred communication places the needs, rights and views of children first.

This means:

- Treating children as capable, with valid opinions.
- Encouraging them to share thoughts, questions, concerns.
- Respecting their voice — not speaking *for* them or over them.
- Adjusting communication to their age, development, culture, or communication needs.

Key Principle: *If a child speaks, we listen. If they raise a concern, we take it seriously.*

2. What is Active Listening?

Active listening means listening with the purpose of understanding, not responding.

Active listening involves:

- Giving your full attention.
- Making eye contact when appropriate.
- Using open body language (e.g., kneeling to their level).
- Reflecting back what you heard (“So you’re saying...”).
- Being patient — let them finish.

Avoid:

✗ Interrupting

✗ Dismissing feelings (“You’ll be fine. Don’t worry about it.”)

✗ Minimising concerns (“It’s not a big deal.”)

Instead:

✓ Validate

✓ Clarify

✓ Act

3. The SLSQ Child-Centred Communication Model

Listen → Acknowledge → Check Understanding → Act → Close the loop



4. Child-Friendly Language

Keep communication **simple, clear and reassuring**.

Step	What it looks like	Example
Listen	Stop what you're doing and focus fully	"I'm listening — tell me what happened."
Acknowledge feelings	Name and validate the child's emotion	"I can see that made you upset."
Check understanding	Ask questions, clarify details	"Do you mean during the swim or on the beach?"
Act appropriately	Follow procedure, escalate concerns	"Thank you for telling me. I'm going to talk to someone who can help."
Close the loop	Let the child know what will happen next	"I've passed this on. Someone will speak with you soon."

5. Encouraging Children to Speak Up

Ways to empower children to have a voice:

- Offer choices ("Would you like to try the board again or have a break?")
- Ask open questions ("How safe did you feel today?")
- Build routine check-ins (start / end of Nippers or training sessions)
- Have visual feedback tools (stickers, smiley faces, "Nipper Voice" board)

Goal: Create a Club where speaking up is normal, not exceptional.

6. If a Child Discloses a Concern or Safety Issue

Do:

- Stay calm
- Listen without judgement
- Reassure them it was right to speak up
- Record and report according to Club/SLSQ process

Do NOT:

- Make promises you can't keep ("I won't tell anyone")
- Investigate yourself
- Express shock or disbelief

Say:



“I’m glad you told me. I’m going to help you by speaking to the right people.”

9. Supporting Resources

- [Child Safe | Surf Life Saving Queensland](#)
- [Reporting Concerns - Club Resources](#)
- compliance@lifesaving.com.au

Key message

When children feel heard, they feel safe.

When they feel safe, they thrive.