



National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse

Today the Australian Government and this Parliament, on behalf of all Australians, unreservedly apologises to the victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

For too many years our eyes and hearts were closed to the truths we were told by children.

For too many years governments and institutions refused to acknowledge the darkness that lay within our community.

Today, we reckon with our past and commit to protect children now and into the future.

Today, we apologise for the pain, suffering and trauma inflicted upon victims and survivors as children, and for its profound and ongoing impact.

As children, you deserved care and protection. Instead, the very people and institutions entrusted with your care failed you. You suffered appalling physical and mental abuse, and endured horrific sexual crimes.

As fellow Australians, we apologise for this gross betrayal of trust and for the fact that organisations with power over children – schools; religious organisations; governments; orphanages; sports and social clubs; and charities – were left unchecked.

Today, we say we are sorry. Sorry that you were not protected, sorry that you were not listened to. We are sorry for refusing to trust the words of children, for not believing you.

As we say sorry, we also say we believe you. We say what happened was not your fault.

We are sorry that perpetrators of abuse were relocated and shielded rather than held to account, that records have been withheld and destroyed, and accountability avoided.

We are sorry that the justice and child welfare systems that should have protected you, were at times used to perpetrate yet more injustices against you.

We apologise for the lifelong impacts this abuse has had on your health, your relationships, and your ability to live life to its full potential.

We also extend this apology to your children, your parents, siblings, families, friends and supporters; all those who have helped carry the burden of your experiences and helped advocate for accountability.

We regret that your children's lives have been changed and relationships have been broken by the enduring effects of abuse.

We hear the rage, despair and hurt of parents whose trust was betrayed along with your own.

We admit that we failed to protect the most vulnerable people in our society from those who abused their power. Our community believed people and institutions who did not deserve our trust, instead of believing the children who did.

Because of our inaction, too many victims are no longer with us to hear this apology. They did not live to see the justice they deserved. But today we remember them, and we extend this apology, along with our sincere sympathies, to their families, friends and supporters.

As we say sorry, we honour the courage of survivors and advocates who spoke out to expose sexual abuse in our institutions, often at great personal cost. Your voices saved lives. Your bravery has allowed us to uncover this dark chapter of our national life and understand what we must now do to protect children.

We also acknowledge the many victims and survivors who have not spoken of their abuse. Your suffering is no less anguished for your silence.

Together, as a Government, a Parliament and a community we must all play a role in the protection of children from abuse. We must accept our responsibility to keep our eyes and ears open and speak out to keep our children safe.

We must listen to children and believe what they tell us.

Child sexual abuse is a serious criminal act, and a violation of Australian law. Perpetrators must and will be held to account.

Today, we commit to take action, to build awareness in our community and strengthen our systems to promote children's safety across Australia. We commit to ensuring that all of our institutions are child-safe.

We know that we must and will do better to protect all children in Australia from abuse and that our actions will give true and practical meaning to this apology.

Our children deserve nothing less.

*The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
22 October 2018*