

Listening to Children in the wake of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Tunya Petridis
Children's Consultant

What 10 year old Amy had to say:

Amy: “How many people?”

Me: “About 250”

Amy: “What sort of people?”

Me: “Well - they’ll be nice people, interested people.”

Amy: “No”.. “what *sort* of people?”

Me: “You mean what do they do?”

Amy: “Yes”

Me: “Oh, ok...there’ll be some lawyers.”

Amy: “Lawyers”



Me: “and some counsellors like me.”

Amy: “Counsellors?”

Me: “and some people who do a bit of both....”

Amy: “So, you’ll be talking to arguing type people?”

Me: “Well, yes you could say that.”

Amy: “and feel-y type people?”

Me: “yeah”

Amy: “all together?”

Me: “Yes, I said, that’s the idea.”



“No way”



Children, as a powerless minority group, struggle to have their voices heard or their views acted upon... Historically, Western children have been silenced ...'seen and not heard' or by their voice being distorted by mediated accounts... It isn't easy for children, without any 'authorial voice' to challenge adult accounts.

Kellett, M. (2011)

Child Inclusive Practice:



At the level of social justice, the approach represents a strategic extension of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, giving children the right to present their wishes in family law proceedings about them, and to have those experiences thoughtfully considered by their parents and the dispute resolution practitioners involved.

McIntosh, J. 2007

In a review of international developments in this field, Bessel concludes that “protection (of children) and participation are increasingly recognised as reinforcing one another.”

Bessell, S. (2011)



Are children knowledgeable social actors informed by their own experiences (with a mind of their own) or are they vulnerable, dependent, a ‘blank slate’ and in need of protection?

Do children have an “authorial voice” or are they “authored” by others?

First, a child's powers of observation and memory are less reliable than an adult's. Secondly, children are prone to live in a make-believe world, so that they magnify incidents which happen to them or invent them completely. Thirdly, they are also very egocentric, so that details seemingly unrelated to their own world are quickly forgotten by them. Fourthly, because of their immaturity they are very suggestible and can easily be influenced by adults and other children. One lying child may influence others to lie; anxious parents may take a child through a story again and again so that it becomes drilled in untruths.

Heydon, J. 1984.



Dealing with Sexual Abuse

Baker, H. (2015)

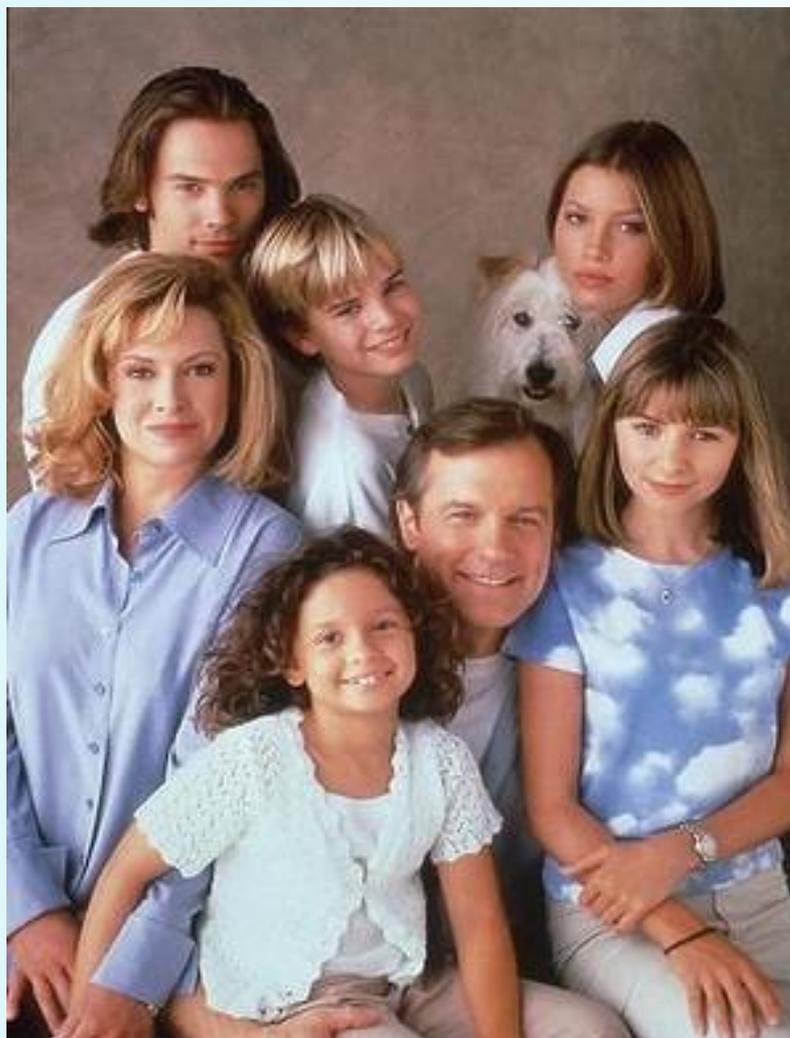


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What Hannah said:

“Nobody wants to know what’s happening to me because there’s no easy solution...but nobody wants to know because it’s too disgusting to understand or believe....”

Baker. H, (2015)



the corrosive power of charm

“The benefit of the doubt should always be with the victim.”

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, case no 6, 2014

“A former principal of Geelong Grammar, Lister Hannah, gave testimony this week about why the extent of sexual abuse wasn’t fully acted upon during his employment. There was a succession of insipid defences: “not in the mindset ... in hindsight ... I had many things on my mind ... in the context of the times...” When Hannah invoked “the times”, he was suggesting a period that’s somehow forgivably distant. But his tenure as headmaster was 1995 to 2000.”

Martin Mckenzie-Murray, October 8 2015

“It is over a year since I acknowledged publicly that it was not until I began my work with the Commission that I came adequately to appreciate the devastating and long-lasting effect which abuse can have on some people. I have also learned that many others in the community have a similarly limited knowledge”.

The Hon Justice Peter McClellan, (2014)

“Just know that children aren’t just children. That they have opinions, that they are not stupid they know what goes on and they are capable of being able to recognize what they want, and if they get stuck every second week with a parent that they don’t necessarily like then it is going to foster horrible feelings and its just going to get worse. They need to realise that children should be heard.”

Anna

Graham, A. and Fitzgerald, R.M. (2006)