

THE BOOKLET THAT SAVED A LITTLE BOY'S CHILDHOOD

Act for Kids created a comic booklet that empowers children to seek help if they feel unsafe. Incredibly, the booklet may have saved a little boy from enduring lifelong trauma.



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He was shaking, he felt shame, he blamed himself.

The little boy's mother

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The 8 year old was given the Act for Kids Superhero Booklet at his school during Child Protection Week. The booklet teaches students two important messages: we all have the right to feel safe all the time and we can tell a safe adult anything, no matter what.

An activity in the booklet asks children to choose five safety adults (one for each finger on their hand) who they can trust and talk to if they feel unsafe. The booklet also teaches children that we must never keep an unsafe secret. These learnings led to a little boy bravely telling his parents that he had been sexually assaulted in his own backyard.

The student took the booklet home and his parents decided it was an important conversation to continue. His mother shared their story with Act for Kids.

“Back in the day when I went to school there was no awareness of this. It was an absolute taboo topic,” his mother told Act for Kids.

“I just remember thinking I desperately hope that he never had to use any of the strategies in this book,” she said.

They spent a couple of weekends going through the pages of the booklet, identifying his five safety adults, what unsafe means and why unsafe secrets shouldn't be kept.

It was on a Saturday morning when the conversation became a reality for this young family.

“We went through what to do if somebody tells you to keep something a secret and this was the light bulb moment.”

The little boy felt empowered to tell his parents something that he had kept quiet for two weeks.

“Whenever somebody tells you to keep a secret, do the opposite. They were his exact words. My husband and I, we just had shudders going down our spine. We said, ‘My goodness what's happened,’ she explained.

The little boy went on to explain to his parents in great detail that he had been sexually assaulted by a classmate in their backyard in the month prior to receiving the booklet.

“He was shaking, he felt shame, he blamed himself. We were hugging him and telling him it was not his fault.”

“We had goosebumps and thanked him first for telling us and we said you're absolutely right when someone tells you to keep a secret and it's something to do with your private parts, you do the opposite.”





His parents told Act for Kids they have since reported his assault to the school and relevant child protection services.

The boy has also received therapy to heal from his trauma and he is now looking forward to returning to his classroom.

His mother expressed her immense appreciation to Act for Kids for developing the superhero booklet.

"If it hadn't been for this booklet then who knows he may have kept this a secret for the rest of his life and he may have experienced substantial damage from this," she explained with gratitude.

She also told Act for Kids she couldn't believe he'd learned these powerful skills in primary skills before he reached adolescence. "He didn't have to turn 16 to learn about this. He is eight."

Although 1 in 5 children experiencing sexual abuse, it continues to be significantly under-reported and therefore investigated in Australia.

In 2021 Act for Kids' own research found less than half (44%) of parents, carers and grandparents surveyed have been open with their children about consent, despite 89% of Australian adults saying it is the parents' responsibility. This research highlights the crucial role prevention plays in protecting children.

Act for Kids Service Quality and Development Manager Sam Melching says education is key to keeping kids safe.

"Unfortunately, we know not every child or caregiver has the knowledge or confidence to openly talk about personal safety. This is why evidence-based protective behaviour programs in schools are so important in giving kids and families tools to have powerful and often life-changing conversations," she said.

"The Act for Kids protective behaviours resources, such as the Superhero Booklet are designed to remove the blame, shame and guilt from the child who has been assaulted and instead empower them to speak up and seek help," Ms Melching explained.

Act for Kids own evidence-based protective behaviours program *Learn to Be Safe with Emmy and Friends* has been developed for early primary school students so that children just like this little boy get the help they deserve and prevent others from experiencing sexual abuse in the future.



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