



Shifting child protection assessments from a deficit focus to strengths and protection

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In recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's spiritual and cultural connection to Country, and in continuing ACU'S commitment to Reconciliation, I would like to acknowledge the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the Country where ACU campuses are located.

I respectfully acknowledge our Elders, past and present, and thank them for their guidance as I walk in their footsteps.

Risk is visible. Protection often is not.

THE DOMINANT VIEW

What is going wrong?

- Family violence
- Substance use
- Mental ill-health
- Housing and economic stress

THE MISSING VIEW

What can sustain safety?

- Trusted relationships
- Caregiver and child capabilities
- Kin, community, and culture
- Quality services and material stability

38 studies synthesised in a rapid review of **strengths, protective factors, and cultural considerations** relevant to statutory child protection
Consultation with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)

Protection is relational, material, cultural, and contextual

- The review located strengths and protective factors across the child's whole ecology
- Relationships and care
 - Parental warmth, supportive adults, social support
- Capabilities
 - Children's coping skills, caregiver knowledge and capacities, emotional resilience
- Conditions and services
 - Economic stability, education and employment, quality and accessible services
- Kin, culture, and community
 - Cultural identity, connection to culture and Country, culturally safe services

The Reservoir Model

1. Recognise

- Begin with the family's existing resources

2. Address

- Connect protection to the specific risks present

3. Reinforce

- Patch risks and strengthen meaningful supports



Risks drain resources

Risks vary in size, interact, and compound – and may 'merge' into larger holes

This model encourages practitioners to ask not only “what is the risk” but “what can realistically sustain safety?”

- Be specific
 - How do these strengths or protective factors support safety or wellbeing?
 - Resources are only helpful if they meaningfully respond to the risk or harm present
- Keep context visible
 - Structural barriers, service quality, culture and community shape whether resources can work