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National child abuse prevention agency, NAPCAN, calls on all Queenslanders to ask themselves how they can play their part in protecting all children.

The death of 12-year-old schoolgirl, Tiahleigh Palmer, is a senseless tragedy that has touched almost every Queenslander and rightfully raised feelings of anger, blame, sadness and helplessness.

But NAPCAN urges Queenslanders to move away from blame and aggressive finger-pointing and to ask ourselves ‘what can I do to play my part in protecting children?’.

Reviews to learn from our mistakes and change how we work with children are important, but the only way we will ever keep children and young people truly safe is to prevent child abuse and neglect before it starts. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has clearly demonstrated that, in spite of organisations’ policies and procedures, perpetrators are still offending. It is clear from this that we need to move beyond formal processes and work towards changing the culture of organisations and communities to ensure that everyone plays their part in keeping children and young people safe.

The sad reality is that Tiahleigh was directly and indirectly failed by many adults during her short life; but rather than focus blame on those people, we need to ask ourselves tough questions about what we would have done, and how we can protect other vulnerable children.

NAPCAN’s National Survey in 2009 showed that less than half of the Australian community would take action to protect a child even when confronted with clear signs of abuse or neglect. This attitude can no longer be tolerated; we need to bring child abuse and neglect into the light, and actively support families, organisations and communities to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

Unfortunately, we will never be able to bring Tiahleigh back, but we can honour her memory.

We urge all Australians to honour Tiahleigh’s memory by working together to ensure that all children and young people live free from violence, abuse and neglect.

NAPCAN is heartened to see a strong focus on prevention in the policies of the Department of Child Safety under Minister Fentiman, but warns that we can't rely solely on government agencies to fix these problems.

If it takes a village to raise a child, then the entire village needs to accept some responsibility when a child is abused.

How can you play your part?

Be part of your community - The evidence tells us that social cohesion provides a protective effect for children. This means building communities where there is a sense of belonging, where people know each other, where families are supported, where children are seen and heard, and where everyone plays a part in keeping children safe.

Listen to, and believe, children - When we look at horrific cases of abuse, one of the consistent themes is the how important it is to believe children and to act. What would you do if a child confided in you?

Help to change the conversation - When talking about tragedies such as Tiahleigh's death, we can all help to move the conversation away from blame and back to 'what can we do to stop this from happening again?'. We need to all challenge ourselves about our own behaviour. What would I have done? Do I know enough about the signs of child abuse and neglect? How can I look out for children in my community and help to support vulnerable families?

Reach out for help - Don't be afraid to ask for help if you, or someone you know, needs support. We are fortunate in Queensland to have a range of great hotlines and support numbers including:

- Parentline - 1300 30 1300
- Family and Child Connect - 13 32 64
- Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800

For more information about how you can play your part in protecting children, visit www.napcan.org.au.

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About NAPCAN

The National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, (NAPCAN) was founded in 1987. NAPCAN's mission is to support and encourage changes in individual and community behaviour to stop child abuse and neglect before it starts. NAPCAN contributes to the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children by raising public awareness of child abuse & neglect and by developing effective prevention strategies and programs in partnership with communities.