

Safety

Care & Protection

New Zealand's rate of child abuse is one of the highest in the developed world, with an estimated 7% of all children having a family violence notification to government (New Zealand Government, 2021).

Rates of homicide of children are also concerning, although lower among children aged 5-14 years than among those under 5 years or older teens (New Zealand Police, 2020).

Rates of abuse are declining across several markers, such as the number of children and young people with police investigations for family harm, and the number of substantiated findings of abuse and neglect, however COVID-19 is thought to have affected levels of reporting abuse in recent years due to the limited connection between students and school staff, who are often the ones to report abuse. Experts acknowledge the scale of abuse is likely larger than the figures represent, due to some abuse not being reported (Oranga Tamariki, 2023) (O'Connor, 2020) (Casinder, 2023).

Recent data indicates that in the year ending 31 March 2023 Oranga Tamariki received 69,500 reports of concern involving 51,600 individual children and young people. Of these reports, 37,800 assessments or investigations were carried out leading to 760 children and young people entering statutory care (Oranga Tamariki, 2023).

For children and young people entering statutory care in the quarter to March 2023, 13% were placed with whānau caregivers, 25% were placed with non-whānau caregivers and 61% entered other types of placements. Oranga Tamariki prioritises a child's ability to maintain connection to their culture, currently 89 percent of children living with a caregiver are either in family/whānau placements or with a caregiver of the same ethnicity (Oranga Tamariki, 2023).

National Care Standards

The National Care Standards set out the standard of care every tamaiti and rangatahi needs to do well and be well, and the support all caregivers can expect to receive when they open their hearts and homes to tamariki.

National Care Standards were introduced in 2018 via the Oranga Tamariki (National Care Standards and Related Matters) Regulations 2018 and came into effect in 2019. They were established based on good social work practice and feedback from tamariki and rangatahi about how they could best be supported while in statutory care.

The care standards cover six aspects of care including:

1. needs assessments and plans for tamariki,
2. meeting the needs of tamariki in care,
3. assessments, plans and support for caregivers,
4. supporting tamariki to express their views and contribute to their care experience,
5. supporting tamariki during care transitions
6. monitoring and reporting on compliance with the National Care Standards.

— *Find out more about the [National Care Standards](#)*

— *Find out more about our care system:*

This recent [White Paper](#) highlights the issues within our care system and a way forward

See also the section on Aroturuki Tamariki | The Independent Children's Monitor who monitor the care and protection system in Aotearoa. This can be found on page 120 of Whakamana.

[VOYCE Whakarongo Mai](#) aims to amplify the voices of children in care. Find out more on page 118.

Read the latest Experiences of [Care Reports](#)

Statement of Rights for Tamariki & Rangatahi in Care

These resources set out children's rights while they are in care, including when they enter and leave care, or are moved from one care home to another.

[My Rights My Voice](#)

[Statement of Rights](#) – English

[Statement of Rights](#) – Te Reo Māori

– [Further information for children in care](#)

Safeguarding and Child Protection

Safeguarding and child protection approaches are critical to ensuring safe practice in working with children.

Safeguarding Children, an organisation that provides training to the children's workforce, sets out the distinction between safeguarding and child protection as follows:

- Safeguarding is a preventative approach to child protection by minimising or eliminating harm to a child.
- Child protection is a reactive approach to address suspected or known cases of abuse and neglect. (Safeguarding Children, 2023).

The Children's Act 2014 sets out requirements relating to the adoption of [Child Protection Policies](#) within organisations working with children and [Children's Worker Safety Checking](#) of people working with children with the intention of safeguarding children against harm.

Child protection training is not mandatory in New Zealand for professionals or volunteers who work with children.

Organisations and resources focused on supporting safe practice with children include:

Child Matters

Child Matters offers a range of information, resources and training opportunities with the aim of effecting change to prevent abuse and neglect of children and young people in Aotearoa.

Training opportunities include the NZ Diploma in Child Protection, multi-day and single-day child protection programmes, in-house training tailored to organisations and online training courses such as Introduction to Child Protection in NZ, Understanding Childhood Trauma and Responding to Disclosures.

– [Find out more about Child Matters Training Opportunities](#)

Safeguarding Children | Tiakina ngā tamariki

Safeguarding Children is a provider of safeguarding and child protection education and guidance in New Zealand, offering a range of services to suit the needs of any individual or organisation that works with children and young people.

– [Find out more about Safeguarding Children](#)

Other resources include:

[Safer organisations](#), [Safer children](#) – developed as part of the [Children's Action Plan 2012](#), this resource provides guidelines for child protection policies to build safer organisations.

[Sport NZ Child Protection & Safeguarding Resources](#)



Online Safety

Keeping children safe online is a concern shared by many parents and professionals involved in the care of children.

Children are accustomed to screen use and navigating their world online, a trend accelerated by COVID-19 and online schooling during this period. For many 5–12-year-olds, their first schooling experiences were online.

Screen use is associated with the following negative health impacts for children:

- Lack of physical activity
- Poor concentration
- Difficulty regulating emotions and behaviour
- Difficulty sleeping
- Poor mental health (University of Otago, 2023)
- Increased dry-eye disease, myopia, repetitive strain injury (RSI), back and neck pain and headaches (Cullen & Marsh, 2023).

According to the US Surgeon General, the use of social media among children has been found to **“pose a profound risk of harm to their mental health and wellbeing”** (Pilkington, 2023).

“New studies have found structural changes in the cerebral cortex on MRI scans, associated with excessive screen use in pre-teen children, with similar changes to those seen in substance abuse.”

(Cullen & Marsh, 2023)

While the Ministry of Health’s recommended screen use for 5–17-year-olds is less than two hours per day, Growing Up in New Zealand’s Now We are Eight report (2020) indicated that children at age eight spent on average over four hours per day online, with 95% of children having access to at least one device at home (Morton et al, 2020). A more recent report using data from 2014 and 2015 showed that children aged 12 years spent one third of their after school time on screens (University of Otago, 2023).

New Zealand has a comparatively high use of screens both at home and within the school environment, with research finding that **“frequent screen use for learning has been linked not only with reduced learning outcomes, but with reduced digital skills.”** (Cullen & Marsh, 2023).

Experts express concern about children’s safety due to the lack of regulation in online spaces. Risks include access to pornographic and violent content, contact with strangers and grooming, and cyberbullying.

A 2020 report by NetSafe found that:

- 24% of 9-11 year olds were bothered or upset by something online
- 38% of 9-11 year olds were fairly/very upset after something online bothered or upset them
- 23% of 9-11 year olds had online contact with someone they had not met face to face
- 3% of 9-11 year olds had gone to an offline meeting with someone previously met online
- 79% of 9-11 year olds talked with a parent after something online bothered or upset them
- It is more common for girls to have seen content that bothered them online (Pacheco & Melhuish, 2020).



Makes Sense

Makes Sense is an initiative that aims to raise awareness of gaps in New Zealand's sexual violence prevention efforts and digital media regulation which currently enable children and young people to easily access illegal and violent online sexual content. Their petition urges the government to require internet service providers to filter illegal and violent sexual content, something which is currently voluntary.

Greater awareness regarding the impacts of screen use, and increased regulation of children's access to online content is needed to protect children from harm.

— Find out more:

New Zealand children's experiences of online risks and their perceptions of harm, NetSafe, 2020

Child Safety Online, New Zealand Government

Keeping It Real, New Zealand Government

Learn about Cyberbullying on page 86 of Ngā Hononga.

NetSafe

Netsafe is an independent organisation focused on online safety. Netsafe keeps people of all ages safe online by providing free support, advice, and education seven days a week. Netsafe takes a technology-positive approach to the challenges digital technology presents, and works to help people in New Zealand take advantage of the opportunities available through technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges.

Relevant resources include:

- Resources for young people – with a focus on safe online relationships, online bullying and other topics
- Toolkits for parents – including how to make an own online safety plan, and navigating things like Bring Your Own Device in schools.

The Light Project

The Light Project provides information and resources to facilitate discussions between children and their families about online safety and the risks associated with the current pornography landscape in Aotearoa. Their resources focus on preventing access to content and equipping children with strategies to keep themselves safe when they encounter inappropriate content. The Light Project also offers training for people working with children and young people.

Check out their resource focused on Talking with Children

— Find out more about The Light Project

Mana Whenua | Belonging

Mana whenua (belonging) recognises children's sense of belonging as key to their development and thriving. Belonging is important in the various spaces that children engage in – the home, school, and in spaces within their wider community.

Sociologist Ray Oldenburg's 'third place' theory describes how our wellbeing is improved by participating in neutral spaces outside of the home, workplace or school, where we connect with others (White, 2018). For children third spaces might look like public pools, libraries, and parks. They could also include extracurricular spaces, where children engage with others, play and develop new skills. This sense of belonging develops as children are enabled to participate and feel respected in these spaces.

When asked about belonging in the context of school, children described it as **“feeling accepted, comfortable, supported, that they mattered. They want to know that their views are listened to and acted upon. They want to feel part of the school community and for everyone to feel accepted”** (Ministry of Education, 2018, p.34).

For children, mana whenua can be fostered through positive school transitions, and in finding a place of common ground with other children through shared extracurricular interests.

Spirituality is another aspect of belonging that is central to children's lives and must be considered as we seek to support holistic development during middle childhood.

School Transitions

Tamariki in New Zealand transition from early childhood education to primary school between their fifth and sixth birthdays. While the age for commencing school varies around the world, many other countries begin primary education from age six.

Children also experience school transitions due to change as evidenced by Growing Up in New Zealand research which found that 20% of children had moved schools between the ages of six and eight, with most having moved at least twice (Morton et al., 2020).

Children may also experience transition between primary and intermediate school depending on the type of school they attend.

The following resources provide insight into children's perspectives of school transitions:

Entry to schooling (at age five or six)

- Watch this Ministry of Education video of children sharing their thoughts on their transition to school
- Transition to School: Findings from Growing Up in New Zealand
- Crossing the Border, Carol Hartley, Jemma Smith, Margaret Carr, Pat Rogers & Sally Peters, 2012 – Chapter 2 of this book is available online and outlines the Mangere Bridge Project, a research project in which children's views on transitions were sought to shape recommendations for teaching staff and families on improving school transition experiences for children.
- Learning journeys from early childhood into school – Peters, Paki & Davis, 2015.



School Transitions (at any age)

- Transitions, Office of the Children's Commissioner – children and young peoples' views on what helps during periods of transition in education.
- Transitions: Students at the centre – a video that details how transitions are managed at Mt Roskill School Campus both for those students coming from primary school into intermediate, and those students transitioning on to secondary school.

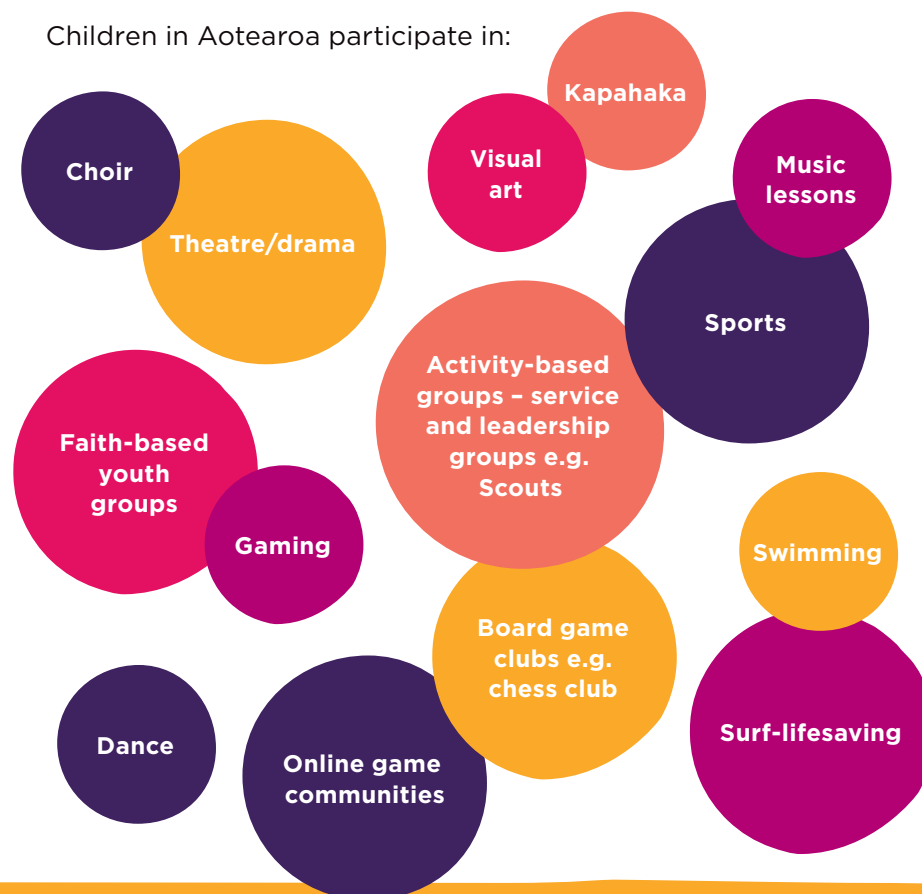
Extracurricular

Extracurricular activities provide children with opportunity to learn new skills, build friendships and develop leadership. They also support children to develop a sense of belonging and achievement. (Oranga Tamariki, 2019)

Participation in extracurricular activities is an important aspect of child development, creating experiences that shape how the brain is wired and adding to the traditional learning that occurs in formal education.

The 2022 Sport New Zealand Active NZ survey found that 77% of tamariki belong to at least one sports team or recreation group or club at school or outside of school.

Children in Aotearoa participate in:



“One of the most important resilience-building activities that you can do is music, the arts and sports. And the irony is, in educational environments, all too often we view those as add-ons, sort of as electives. But the truth is, if you really understand how the brain works, you’ll recognize that the best way to make somebody available for high-quality academic achievement is to give them episodic regulatory opportunities for resilience-building through sport, through music, through creative arts, through performance arts. Those things should be absolutely core to high-quality academic curriculum.” (Perry in Sipp, 2021)

Barriers to participation in extracurricular activities include cost, access (transport, timing), funding and lack of awareness. Children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to miss out on participation in extracurricular activities and experience a sense of exclusion as a result (Barbalich & Ball, 2022) (Egan-Bitran, 2010). Living rurally can also be a barrier to participation in extracurricular activities and programmes.

“Childhood is an important time for the formation of self and social identities. The ability to make and sustain good friendships and take part in social activities is vital to children and young people’s sense of belonging and their wellbeing.” (Egan-Bitran, 2010, p.15)

Participants in NZCCSS focus groups also highlighted funding for service provision as a potential barrier to children’s participation. Many programmes and services for children are delivered by charitable organisations who are reliant on annual grants and donations to continue operating. A lack of steady funding jeopardises the likelihood of consistent opportunities for children to engage in extracurricular activities. As does our declining volunteer workforce (Department of Internal Affairs, 2022).



Spirituality

Holistic models of development used within Aotearoa, such as Te Whare Tapa Whā, Fonofale and Te Wheke (see pages 22-23 in Kotahitanga) position spirituality as a key aspect of wellbeing alongside a person’s cognitive, physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing. Yet spiritual wellbeing is not given much attention when it comes to children’s development.

Te Whāriki upholds Te Whare Tapa Whā, viewing each of the dimensions of wellbeing as closely interwoven and interdependent. It maintains that spirituality has an importance place in the development of the whole child, and that **“for Māori the spiritual dimension is fundamental because it connects the other dimensions across time and space”** (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.20). This is demonstrated by children inheriting specific traits such as tapu, mana, mauri and wairua – which connect children spiritually to creation, whenua and tupuna.

Spirituality can sometimes be interpreted as simply meaning religion, rather than something that is part of every child and must be nurtured alongside their emotional, mental and physical needs. Over the past decades religious education in schools has decreased, and many would interpret this as a loss of focus on spirituality. Except for within religious schools, religion is viewed as a personal aspect of children’s lives that they engage in with their family outside of the school environment. Te Whāriki suggests that children’s culture and beliefs should be respected and recognised within education, alongside those of other children noting that **“this may involve, for example, making links to children’s everyday experiences and to special events celebrated by families, whānau, and local and cultural communities”** (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.20).



In recent years there has been increased integration of tikanga and mātauranga Māori in the New Zealand curriculum, which has deepened the place of spirituality within classroom and school practices through the lens of Te Ao Māori. Bone (2016) suggests that a Māori understanding of wellbeing is what has kept spirituality alive in New Zealand, with Māori acting as **“kaitiaki or spiritual guardians of indigenous spirituality and the spirituality of others”**. (Bone, 2016 in Arnst, 2019, p.56).

The New Zealand Curriculum briefly references spirituality under the Physical Education & Health learning area by defining hauora (wellbeing) through the Te Whare Tapa Whā model. However there does not appear to be a cohesive approach to how schools develop and support spiritual wellbeing in students. Despite teachers identifying that pastoral care is a significant proportion of their role now, it does not appear that they are being equipped or supported to nurture children’s holistic wellbeing, or their spiritual wellbeing within that (Gibbs, 2023).

Research conducted on Spirituality in the Context of the Aotearoa New Zealand Primary School Classroom found that primary aged children were able to relate spirituality to **“both external spirits and, more personally, to personal characteristics, beliefs and a sense of inner purpose which influenced life decisions”** (p. 127). The same research found that for children, spiritual expression might look like self-awareness and connectedness to other people or animals, such as family pets, stewardship of the environment, or connection to a higher being or power. (Arnst, 2019).

This and other research affirm spirituality as integral to children’s lives, and fundamental to their wellbeing, concluding that we must place more focus on how to address spirituality within the classroom if we are to

“fully prepare children for a life of wellness and wholeness” (Arnst, 2019, p.1)



Mana Tangata | Contribution

Middle childhood marks the beginning of many children's formal leadership journey, as they have opportunities to consider and develop leadership qualities and engage in leadership roles within their school and extracurricular communities. This is one of the ways in which mana tangata (contribution) can be expressed by children in their communities.

Student Leadership

In a 2018 Ministry of Education survey of primary and intermediate aged children, students identified leadership skills as a key attribute of successful students.

Students taking charge of a situation, speaking up for themselves and others and listening and taking on advice, were considered indicators of leadership. Cultural competency is referenced in the National Curriculum in relation to leadership, highlighting the value of students developing understanding and ability in tikanga Māori and Te Reo (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Leadership may be fostered by enabling students to have input into decision-making and planning, through tuakana-teina relationships supporting younger children, by enabling students to lead certain events such as school assemblies, or through participation in cultural or sporting activities and events. Kaitiakitanga is also developed through initiatives such as Enviro-Schools or Road Patrol.

While the qualities of leadership are developed in a variety of ways within education, students may take on formal leadership roles, such as Class Representative or Senior Leader, during their final years at primary school and during their intermediate years. Children may also benefit from more formal leadership training through events such as [National Young Leaders Day](#).

Service By Children

Leadership is also developed throughout middle childhood via belonging to various service organisations (sometimes referred to as uniformed services).

Many of these organisations have long histories of providing educational programmes for children that enable them to develop specific skills and leadership qualities. Often these programmes are based around a badge system where children show that they have gained certain skills or demonstrated certain values.

Scouts Aotearoa

Scouts Aotearoa aims to empower youth through adventurous experiences to lead lives that make a positive difference. Scouts is the world's largest non-formal education institution, offering Kea, Cubs & Scouts programmes for children aged five to 12-years across New Zealand.

— [Find out more about Scouts Aotearoa](#)



Girl Guides

Girl Guides is an international organisation that aims to build girls' confidence and life skills with fun, adventures, and friendships. Girl Guides offers Pippins, Brownies, and Guides programmes, as well as Explore, an online programme, for girls aged five-12 years.

— *Find out more about [Girl Guides](#)*

Hato Hone - St John's

[St John's Penguin & Cadet Programmes](#) are badge-based programmes that aim to develop confidence, knowledge, and a culture of giving back among primary and secondary aged children. Children make friendships, learn first aid skills, and develop leadership and decision-making skills.

— *Find out more about [St John's Youth Programmes](#)*

Hato Hone - St John's also offer in-school programmes. Find out more on page 31 of Kotahitanga.

Boys Brigade NZ

Boy's Brigade's Anchor (5-7 years) and Adventure (8-10 years) and Delta Junior (11-13 years) programmes aim to foster resilience, innovation, and adventure in boys by providing opportunities to develop problem-solving and real-life skills, shaped by Bible principles.

— *Find out more about [Boys' Brigade](#)*

Girl's Brigade and Iconz 4 Girlz:

These programmes aim to empower girls to succeed in tomorrow's world. Based on biblical principles, these programmes challenge and nurture girls using a badge system focused on the following domains:

Girls' Brigade: Physical, Social Education, and Spiritual.

Programmes are offered for this age group include Juniors (5-8 years) and (Seniors) 9-12 years.

Iconz for Girls: Spiritual, Physical, Adventure, Community Service, and Interest.

Programmes are offered for this age group include IFG Explore (5-7 years), IFG Adventure (8-10 years) and IFG Challenge (11-13 years).

— *Find out more about [Girls Brigade and Iconz for Girls](#)*



Mana Reo | Communication

Mana reo (communication) upholds children's developing ability to communicate about themselves and their experience of the world. This extends to them feeling safe to voice their concerns about the issues that they see around them.

In recent years it has become more common for government to seek the views of children in relation to how they experience key systems such as education and care and protection. The children's rights sector also acts as a conduit for children's voices in relation to specific issues, and provides ongoing advocacy for the inclusion of children's views within government processes and decision-making. Learn more about Children's Voice in Whakamana on page 116.

As part of this report, we invited a group of children to share the main issues for them, their families and communities. Their responses included:

We don't have a voice

We have poor education – read children's views of education in Mana Mokopuna's Education matters to me: Key Insights report

Clean water

Bullying – read children's views of bullying the MAI World Child & Youth Voices on Bullying report

Better research needed

Rubbish/ litter everywhere

Bad environment

We need better playgrounds

Vaping

Lowering voting age to 16

Online game communities

Poor access to play

Climate change – read children's views in Save the Children's Messages in Bottle campaign

Vaping

Written by Annabelle, age 11

Nowadays you can't walk through any city without inhaling puffs of smoke. This is a huge problem. Vapes were only invented 20 years ago but now so many people have them! 81.9 million is the estimated number of vapers in 2021, and with more underage people vaping it is a disaster. Vape stores near schools contribute to this problem and it needs to stop.

Vaping is bad for our heart and lungs and it can cause you to crave smoke. Nicotine (used in vapes) is a toxic substance, it raises your blood pressure and spikes your adrenaline which increases your heart rate and the likelihood of having a heart attack! Vaping does not benefit you. If adults in a household vape this is just going to increase the chance of underage vaping. Vaping around children is never okay or good, it is harmful to their lungs as well as yours. Second hand smoke can harm a baby's

breathing, heart rate and growth, which can put the baby at higher risk of sudden unexpected death in infancy.

Vapes were made by a 52 year old Chinese pharmacist Hon Lik in 2003. Hon made vapes to serve as an alternative to smoking cigarettes. With the number of vapers getting higher and higher each year something needs to change. The New Zealand Government has made a new law that means no one can open a vape store within a certain distance from any school. But the law was made too late because there were already many schools in New Plymouth that have one or more vape stores near them, which can encourage kids to vape. Also, not all people selling vapes ask for ID and this can mean underage teenagers can buy these products. It's a big cycle, if a kid's parents grow up thinking it's 'cool' and 'ok', then when they grow up, vape and have kids of their own their kids think it's great too and so on. This isn't what we want.

So do you really want to vape now? Now you know how harmful it is? Never encourage vaping or smoking no matter how old or young – you are not looking after your body! Vaping is harmful, dangerous, addictive and nobody benefits from it. So don't be a fool, don't ruin your lungs and don't vape!

Ngā wāhi hei arotahi | Areas to focus on

**What does Whānau Tangata
look like for our tamariki?**

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Children experience a
standard of living that
enables them to thrive
and are protected
from all harm



Mana Reo | Communication

Tamariki have
opportunities to speak
up about the issues
that matter to them

Mana Whenua | Belonging

Tamariki experience
belonging through
participating in and feeling
respected within their
communities

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Play is prioritised for children
during the middle years –
in education, in guidance
for parents, and in our
neighbourhoods and
communities



Mana Tangata | Contribution

Children have
opportunities to
develop leadership
within education and
extra-curricular settings

What might it look like to strengthen Whānau Tangata for children....

- within your mahi?
- within your home or community?

Within the context of our wider community structures we have identified some key recommendations to better recognise and strengthen the Te Whāriki principles and improve outcomes for children within middle childhood:

