

Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki

Exploring
the context
of middle
childhood
in Aotearoa
New Zealand



5-12
YEARS



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

Inoi me te whakatapu | Opening prayer and dedication

“Take care of our children. Take care of what they hear, take care of what they see, take care of what they feel”.

(Dame Whina Cooper)

This guide is dedicated to our tamariki – taonga that we seek to nurture, protect, and empower.

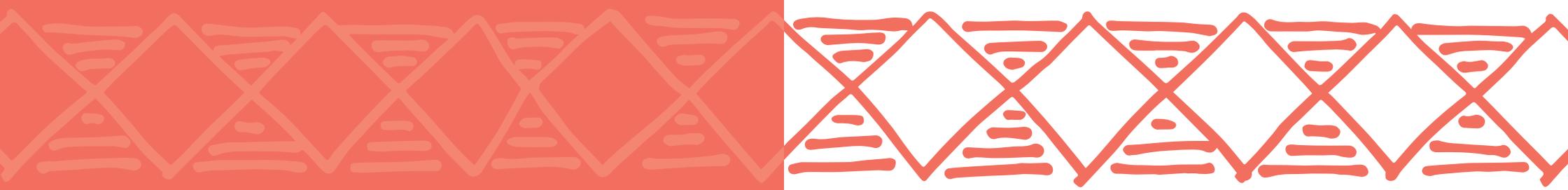
It is dedicated to those who came before us, whose shoulders we stand on as we present this iti pounamu | little treasure to the world.

It is dedicated to the founders of our organisation, who came together explicitly to address the challenges facing our communities of tamariki. Challenges we continue to face today.



Made possible with generous support of the Tindall Foundation.

Grateful thanks to all those who contributed to this report’s development, including those participating in our tamariki rōpū, the NZCCSS Children & Families Policy Group, the expert panel, the Taranaki focus group, guest contributors, and peer reviewers.



We have researched and consulted widely in compiling this guide to provide a picture of the context of middle childhood (five to 12-year-olds) in Aotearoa. In sharing this information, our aim has been to provide a resource that will allow people a starting place from which they then continue to build upon.

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Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki:
**Exploring the context of Middle Childhood
in Aotearoa New Zealand**

Written by M J Wilson, N A Hurst, K M Hamlin and R P Mackay

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New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services

PO Box 12-090

Thorndon

Wellington 6144

Aotearoa New Zealand

Email: eo@nzccss.org.nz

www.nzccss.org.nz

Designed by Helen McLaren eruptdesign.co.nz

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How to use this guide

This guide is to support readers to gain a general overview of the context of middle childhood in Aotearoa. It is in no way a definitive guide, rather it was created to share a good overview of the world of five to 12-year old New Zealanders, and the systems and structures that exist within it.

It's a beginner's guide to what exists (and doesn't exist) to support children in this age stage, and our understanding of middle childhood in New Zealand.

While readers can sit down and read from cover to cover, the intention was to summarise and direct readers on to other information – sometimes more detailed, sometimes more specific. It provides easy-to-read information with links to more in-depth information if people want to explore more - it is designed to be dipped in and out of.

The information itself is presented into chapters around the four principles of Te Whāriki:

Kotahitanga | Holistic development

Holistic approaches, therapies and practices, research and resources.

Whānau Tangata | Family, whānau and community

Place in society, place in communities, and place in whānau.

Ngā Hononga | Relationships

Social experiences, workforce, education and training.

Whakamana | Empowerment

Rights, legislation, government departments, advocates, key strategies and approaches.

Within these chapters we direct readers to what we know, where to find more, or where we have found information. We have also made note of where we see gaps, challenges, and coming issues. These gaps are summarised at the back of this report, to support clarity and highlight our hope for change. We close this guide with what we as an organisation plan to do next - and how to be involved.

Te Whāriki | The Mat

As humans we love to sort and arrange things, and frameworks are a useful tool to allow us to do this. They help us arrange complex ideas and information into more accessible formats. They ask us to consider the connections between things, and why we are sorting things the way that we are.

Te Whāriki has been designed for and applied to our pēpē/babies and tamariki/children since its inception, and yet the kaupapa of the principles and strands are universal. This framework does not cease to be relevant to children upon their entry to primary education, and yet its application to their lives stops at that point. There is no point at which children - or people of any age, or even communities for that matter - grow out of a need for empowerment, or for consideration to be given to belonging. We all require holistic development to grow, and our quality of relationships deeply impact our wellbeing. Woven across these foundational principles are the strands, which could also be understood as needs - our general wellbeing, to contribute, to belong, to communicate and to explore our worlds.

Here at NZCCSS, we know that the work we do aspires to support each of these principles and strands. And more importantly, we know that the work our member organisations undertake is grounded in these kaupapa. We also know that having a common language, with a strong evidence base, is a useful resource for shared progress.

Te Whāriki me ngā Tamariki | Te Whāriki and Middle Childhood

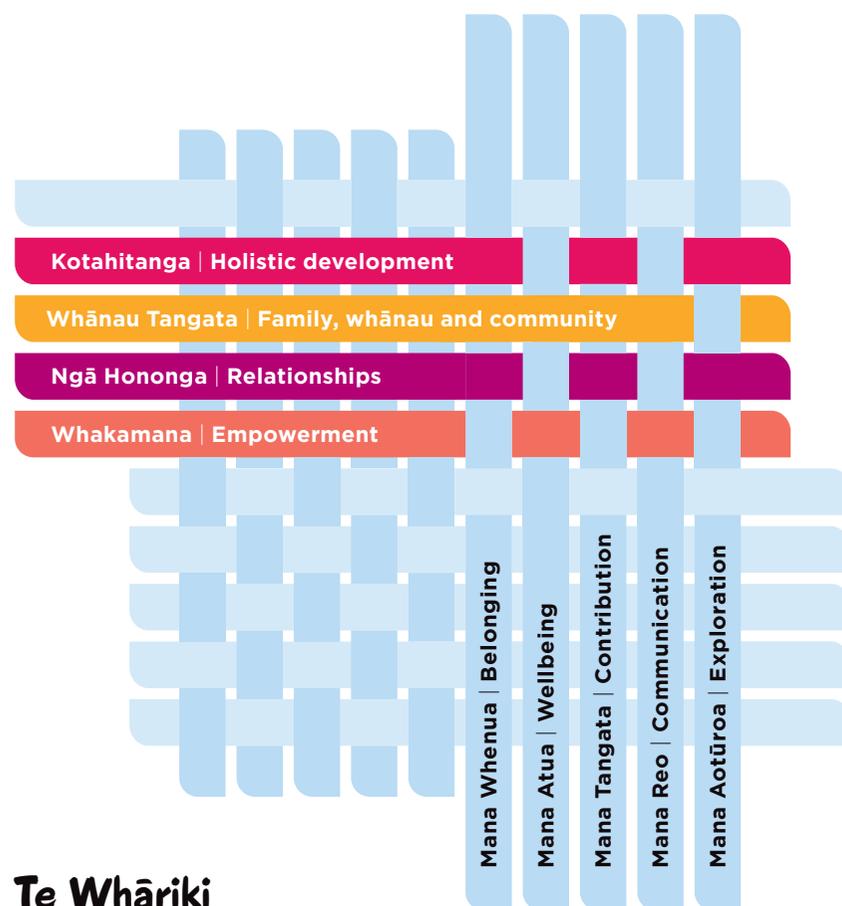
Holistic approaches allow us to consider all aspects of a person. They require us to have a good understanding of the different domains of personhood, and how they impact on wellbeing. Holistic approaches can be applied at a personal, community or even social level, and are key to how community, health and social development is practiced in Aotearoa.

There are many theories and practices that relate to specific aspects of children's lives and other holistic models that are useful (some common examples include Te Whare Tapa Whā, Fonofale). However, there is no truly holistic framework that is regularly applied specifically to five to 12-year-olds.

In considering the most appropriate way to frame this report, we decided that Te Whāriki - while previously used with younger children - would allow us a strong, evidence based and deeply New Zealand framework to shape our report and share with you the context of middle childhood in Aotearoa. We wanted a way to ensure that we considered all aspects of a person but were also able to do so at a range of levels. By its nature Te Whāriki requires high level thinking but allows for a range of uses depending on the information. It has allowed us to group concepts, and ensure we have good coverage of all aspects relevant to our kaupapa. And it gives us a language through which to discuss what we find in a way that is accessible to a range of audiences. We also think it would make a powerful assessment and evaluative tool, but will save that kōrero for another day.

In using Te Whāriki, we have confidence that we are addressing all aspects relevant to, and impacting on the lives of children. However, because our five to 12-year-olds tend to be viewed through the lens of students within their primary and intermediate schooling years (Years 1-8), and because there is a strong focus on education within the school context for these children, we have tried to focus on exploring other aspects of children's wellbeing within this report.

Te tautuhi i Te Whāriki | Defining Te Whāriki



Te Whāriki

Developed by the early childhood education sector over twenty years ago, Te Whāriki is highly practical, highly researched framework designed to ensure holistic practice.

Te Whāriki (the mat) operates as a set of interlocking principles and strands. These principles and strands combine to provide a framework which is aspirational, specific, reflective and unique to the kaupapa/area in which it is applied.

The four broad principles of Te Whāriki are:

Whakamana | Empowerment – [people] will be empowered to learn and grow.

Kotahitanga | Holistic development – [people] learn and grow in a holistic way. Their intellectual, social, cultural, physical, emotional and spiritual learning is interwoven across all their experiences.

Whānau tangata | Family, whānau and community – [people's] family, whānau and community are recognised as part of their... experience.

Ngā hononga | Relationships – [people] learn through positive relationships with people, places and things.

While the five strands are:

Mana atua – wellbeing

Mana tangata – contribution

Mana whenua – belonging

Mana reo – communication

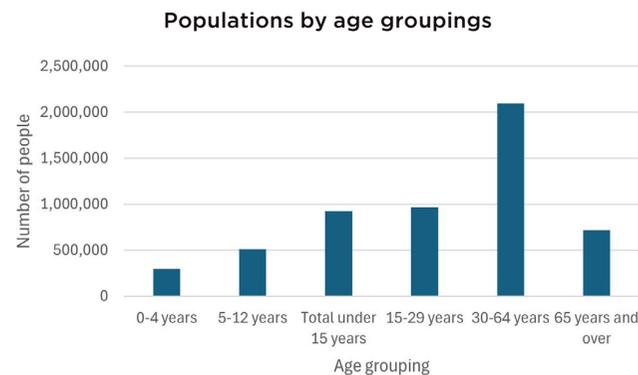
Mana aotūroa – exploration.

– Find out more about [Te Whāriki](#)

Ko wai ō mātou tamariki? | Who are our five to 12-year-olds?

According to the 2018 Census, the population of children in each year group (5 years, 6 years, 7 years etc.) between five-12 years ranges from just over 59,000 at age 12 to just over 65,000 at age 8.

While the populations of boys and girls in this age range is generally evenly split, there are slightly more boys than girls at each age. Population projections suggest that the number of children at each age will continue to sit around 60,000 across the next 50 years, slightly lower than the 2018 population prior to age 11 and slightly higher than the 2018 population of 12 year olds (Statistics NZ, 2022).

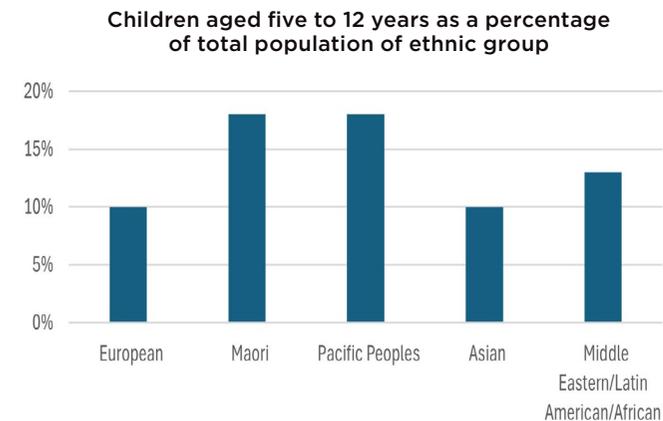


Children aged five to 12 years by ethnicity



The population of children aged five to 12 years sat at just over 500,000 according to the 2018 Census.

The population of all children aged under 15 year old is greater than our older population (65 years and older) and similar to our population aged 15-29 years.



Already New Zealand's Māori and Pacific populations are younger than the European population. Children and youth aged 18 and under make up around one fifth of the European population, while in contrast around 40% of the Māori population and 42% of the Pacific population is aged 18 years or under (Smale, 2023).

Higher fertility rates among Māori and Pacific women compared to European and Asian women suggest that the proportion of children who are of Māori or Pacific descent will increase in coming years, while the proportion of European children will decline.

The proportion of Asian children is also predicted to increase although this increase is expected to occur through immigration rather than increased birth rates (Smale, 2023).

Some things we learned about tamariki were:

77% of children had belonged to at least one sports team or recreation group or club at school or outside of school in 2022 (see page 69)

80% of students said seeing and spending time with friends was a reason for attending school (see page 15)

24% of children were cared for by grandparents in 2017 (see page 84)

424 children aged 6 and over have been adopted in the past 10 years (see page 85)

25% of 12 year olds in the Growing Up in New Zealand study received food from a school-based programme most or every school day (see page 57)

46% of primary-age children reported having been bullied in a 2019 study (see page 86)

20% of children had moved schools between the ages of 6-8 according to GUINZ research (see page 68)

7% of all children are estimated to have a family violence notification to government (see page 63)

58% of tamariki surveyed in 2022 would like to be more active (see page 26)

91% of 12 year olds in the Growing Up in New Zealand study reported having strong relationships with two or three people (see page 79)

12.5% of all children in 2022/23 lived in households that experience material hardship (see page 59)

70% of eight year olds in the Growing Up in New Zealand study lived in households with two parents (see page 82)

95% of eight year olds in the Growing Up in New Zealand study had access to at least one device at home (see page 66)

Kotahitanga | Holistic Development

1

The first principle is Kotahitanga | Holistic Development

A good understanding of child development is needed to support children. Generally, a holistic lens is most helpful, being comprised of physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual domains. This recognises two key things: firstly, that these areas are all interconnected, and secondly, that development does not necessarily follow a straight line at all times. Te Whāriki highlights the essential nature of the spiritual dimension for Māori, in that it “connects the other dimensions across time and space” (Ministry of Education, 2017, p.19).



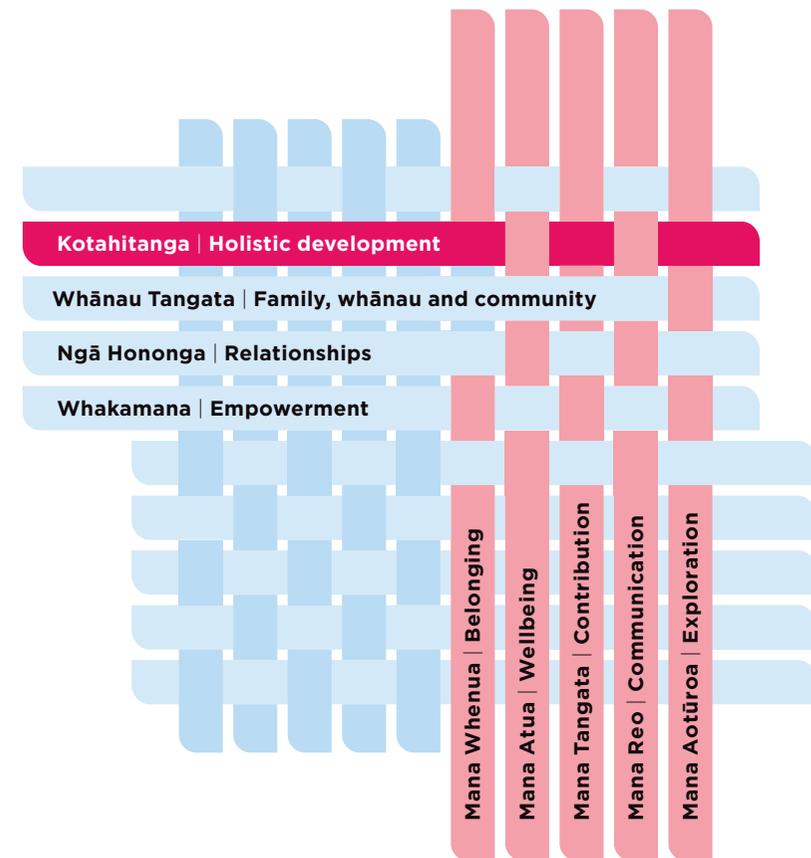
“Although the preschool years establish the base for future development, experiences in middle childhood can sustain, magnify, or reverse the advantages or disadvantages that children acquire in the preschool years. At the same time, middle childhood is a pathway to adolescence, setting trajectories that are not easily changed later.”

(Huston & Ripke, 2006, p.2)

Almost 40 years ago a major review into middle childhood took place in the United States, led by a panel established by the Committee on Child Development Research and Public Policy at the National Academy of Sciences. Researchers concluded:

Middle childhood behaviour and performance have repeatedly been found to predict adolescent and adult status, including social and personal dysfunction, more reliably than do early childhood indicators, and this predictiveness increases over the years from 6 to 12. (Collins, 1984)

According to Huston & Ripke (2006), this finding “contradicted two widespread notions” which we believe a lot of people continue to think today: “that a child’s future is shaped in early childhood and that little of interest happens in middle childhood compared with “coming of age” in adolescence. (p.1)”



The value of understanding and supporting children’s holistic development during middle childhood is crucial. But a consistent lack of attention on this age stage means that understanding our five to 12-year-olds now requires a weaving together of traditional and emerging knowledge.

Greater importance must be placed on developing good understanding specific to this age stage and our context of Aotearoa. This understanding must be from good evidence, and local and current research. And as this develops, the knowledge should be shared with children, their families, and the workforces they encounter in the process of their development.

Mana Whenua | Belonging

Within Te Whāriki, Mana Whenua (belonging) is the importance of children feeling a sense of place and their links to family and the wider world – their turangawaewae. Children’s sense of identity is forming during middle childhood as their awareness and understanding of cultural and social values develops. They are also shaping their own views about society as their ability to think critically grows.

Mana Whenua underpins holistic development, and is a protective factor for children’s mental wellbeing (Fletcher et al., 2023).

The quote below makes the point that belonging, connection and attachment continue to matter as children move into middle childhood. Belonging matters for physical and neurological development and is often seen in social and emotional behaviours. Our ability to create environments that foster belonging are also supported by the prioritisation of Te Ao Māori principles.

Te Ao Māori Perspective

Within Te Ao Māori, child development is underpinned by the following principles:

Mana and Mana Tamaiti (Tamariki)

In Te Ao Māori, tamariki are considered taonga – a precious gift connecting past, present and future generations. Early European accounts of Māori whānau show that tamariki were treated with adoration and indulgence, in contrast with the more reserved European approach to child-rearing at that time (Salmond, 2017).

Mana builds on the concept of tamariki as taonga who possess power, influence, and prestige (Rameka, 2015).

According to Mana Mokopuna (Children & Young People’s Commission) (2017) mana tamaiti refers to “the intrinsic value and inherent dignity derived from a child’s or young person’s whakapapa (genealogy) and their belonging to a whānau, hapū, iwi, or family group, in accordance with tikanga Māori or its equivalent in the culture of the child or young person”. In short, that children have their own value, resulting from their whakapapa and the communities in which they belong.

“Children’s brains hunger for social connection and the feeling of belonging. When children do not sense that they belong and when they struggle to reconcile irregularities in their environments, their brains are malnourished and fail to develop in healthy ways” (Annan, 2022, p.185)

Whakapapa

“He Tupuna he mokopuna. Mā wai i whakakī i ngā whawharua o ngā mātua Tupuna? Mā ā tātou mokopuna! He mokopuna he Tupuna.

This whakataukī draws us to the essence of the whakapapa relationship between generations. It asserts that we are all mokopuna and we are all tupuna. The mokopuna will in future generations take the place of the tupuna. All grandchildren in time become grandparents. Each generation links through whakapapa to each other and we are a reflection and continuance of our ancestral lines” (Cameron et al., 2013, p.4).

Whakapapa is the genealogical link that connects tamariki or mokopuna (grandchildren) to tupuna (ancestors), whānau and whenua (land). Through these links tamariki inherit traits such as tapu (sacredness), mana (status/power), mauri (life force) and wairua (spirit). These provide mokopuna with their sense of belonging, identity, and contribution within their community. Knowing and maintaining connection to these links are considered essential for the wellbeing of tamariki. (Greensill et al., 2022), (Rameka, 2015).

Whānau

Responsibility for the wellbeing, nurturing and development of tamariki is shared by the child’s community collectively.

Grandparents and wider whānau members play an active role in the care of mokopuna and their holistic development, including the sharing of knowledge and tikanga.

In Te Ao Māori, tamariki wellbeing can’t be viewed independently of the wellbeing of their wider whānau and community.

“...raising a child is not an individual endeavour, but rather a job for the whole community...any consideration of wellbeing for tamariki Māori must necessarily consider the role of whānau and importantly the wellbeing of the whānau collective.” (Pihama et al., 2019, p.5)

Cognitive Development

Middle childhood is considered a ‘sensitive period’ of brain development, where experiences children have during this period continue to have a strong impact on their development. During sensitive periods of brain development experiences impact how information is processed or represented within the brain. Also, children’s behaviour and beliefs about themselves and the world come from the way their brain adapts to this information. (Knudsen, 2004) (Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012).

During middle childhood connections within the brain continue to develop through neuron generation, myelination, and synaptic pruning. Neurons are nerve cells that convey messages throughout a child’s body. Myelination is where a sheath forms around nerve fibres, increasing the speed and efficiency of nerve impulses. Synaptic pruning also increases the efficiency of the brain by eliminating unused connections. (Johnson et al., 2009)

Specific developments across this age include maturing of the corpus callosum, the connection between the two hemispheres (sides) of the brain. This enhances children’s ability to carry out tasks that use both left and right brain hemispheres. Myelination also occurs in the areas of the brain connecting sensory, motor and intellectual functioning. This increases the information processing speed within the brain and children’s reaction times (Paris et al., 2021; Pye et al., 2022).

Brain development is influenced by the experiences children have during early and middle childhood. Children are shaped by learning opportunities, relationships that nurture them, friendships they form, interactions with peers, the extent to which they feel safe, the social and cultural context they exist within and the way in which they establish meaning from their experiences.

“Although the brain has various innate structures that carry out particular functions, such as moving, speaking and reasoning, the precise nature of connections between the parts is primarily shaped by experience”. (Annan, 2022, p. 43)

Aspects of children’s development during middle childhood include:

Executive Function

Developments in the prefrontal cortex enable the advancement of executive function during middle childhood.

Specific areas of advancement during middle childhood include:



Aspect of executive function	Example
Working memory	remembering directions, instructions, someone’s name, or thinking up the answer to a question asked by a teacher
Planning and prioritisation	being able to break down a task into steps to complete, identifying what is most important from a range of tasks
Organisation	being able to arrange information or things in a systematic way, this might look like a child keeping their room tidy, or being able to organise their thoughts into a story, being able to sort items into categories or groups
Time management	completing a task within a given time-frame, getting ready for school on time
Response inhibition	ignoring a distraction or stopping a thought or action based on context
Emotional control	regulating emotions based on context, developing strategies to cope with emotional stress
Sustained attention	being able to remain focused on a task, or ignore irrelevant information
Task initiation	beginning a chore or piece of schoolwork, motivating oneself to begin something difficult or unpleasant
Mental flexibility	the ability to change from one task to another, or adapt to a change in plans, problem-solving
Self-monitoring	the ability to assessing performance against expectations

(Ballagh, 2023) (Leaver, 2022)

The initial years of middle childhood have been referred to as the '5-7-Year Shift' or the 'age of reason', marking the transition that occurs as children move from early childhood to middle childhood. At age seven, children are typically more able to think rationally and self-regulate sufficiently to engage in formal academic learning, or in some parts of the world, the workforce (Arnett et al., 2020; McAdams, 2015).

Early adolescence (around ages 10-12) sees children's abilities in planning, logical thinking and decision-making. At this age children are better able to control impulses or inhibit behaviour, however the part of the brain that controls these functions does not fully mature until adulthood. (Tooley et al., 2022) (Fraser-Thill, 2022).

Rebekah Ballagh's book **Let's go, Flo!** (2023) is a great resource to help adults and tamariki explore executive function in more detail.

Social Awareness

"Social cognition is the way in which people process, remember, and use information in social contexts to explain and predict their own behaviour and that of others."

(Bulgarelli & Molina, 2016)

As the prefrontal cortex develops, children become better able to navigate their social world. This is called **social cognition**. They develop the ability to recognise and understand social signals and the expected response to those signals. This function also relates to motivation and reward, as children learn to understand how their behaviour may be received and then use this information to respond to their context. (Uytun, 2018)

Emotional recognition is another key aspect of social cognition that develops during middle childhood. Emotional recognition enables children to identify and recognise other people's emotions based on body language such as facial expressions and vocal cues. Current thinking in this area has developed from traditional understandings of attachment theory. In particular, how facial and body cues can help us navigate our social worlds. Emotional recognition is considered to be critical to children's social development and emotional regulation during middle childhood as children learn what behaviours and expressions of emotion are socially acceptable, and as friendships become more complex and take on greater importance in children's lives (Garcia & Tully, 2020).

During middle childhood children grow in their ability to consider things from another person's perspective. A key aspect of this is the development of theory of mind. Theory of mind is how we understand other people's mental state in relation to ourselves, and the world around us. **Theory of mind** grows during middle childhood by developments in the brain (e.g. language, executive function) and environmental factors (family, cultural and educational context) (Wang, Devine, Wong & Hughes, 2016).



Friendship

Friendships are a focus for children as they become more independent. They have typically moved from playing alongside each other to cooperative play with other children. This leads to increased importance being placed on friendship with more of an awareness of similarities and differences.

Relationships and friendships tend to be a place for children to test developing interpersonal skills, as well as learning about their own personality and preferences. Children develop communication and negotiation skills (taking turns, giving/receiving, sharing, compromise, conflict resolution), the ability to initiate interactions or play with others, and greater awareness of others' feelings and needs. It is common for children to have challenges with establishing, maintaining, and changing friendships and they may want support to navigate these experiences and the feelings associated with this.

During middle childhood children begin to notice social and peer-group norms. They may test out changing their behaviour to gain or keep friends. Children's play becomes more gendered – they are more likely to play with children of the same gender and more likely to reflect gendered norms in their play such as role-playing stereotypical gender roles.

“Just being around other children, however, is not enough. The development of friendships is essential, as children learn and play more competently in the rapport created with friends rather than when they are dealing with the social challenges of interacting with casual acquaintances or unfamiliar peers.”
(National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, p.2)

Friendship is a primary motivator for children's school attendance, with 80% of students in a survey conducted by the Education Review Office (2022) saying that seeing and spending time with friends is a reason for attending school.

Bullying, behaviour that involves a misuse of power, is persistent and causes deliberate harm to another person, may become an issue for children in middle childhood. See more about bullying on page 86 in our Ngā Hononga section.

Two key hormonal developments that occur during middle childhood are:

Adrenarche

Between six and eight years of age, children's bodies enter a stage called Adrenarche. The adrenal glands (located above the kidneys) begin to increase production of androgens – hormones that affect brain functioning. These hormones impact children psychologically and emotionally but this change is not typically physically obvious. Children may have difficulty managing their emotions and behaviour during adrenarche, becoming more tearful, angry, moody, and argumentative. Adrenarche is thought to occur at least two years before puberty. (Ball, 2022) (Del Giudice, 2018).

Early Adolescence

Early adolescence begins with the onset of puberty which begins between the ages of 8-13 for girls, and 9-14 for boys (Marks et. al, 2023).

Children tend to move from black and white (concrete) thinking towards more abstract thought during this period. They become self-focused and self-conscious as they experience their bodies are physically developing and are more aware how they fit in with others. Early adolescence sees children growing in independence and seeking greater privacy. Peer relationships become more of a priority in this period, as children shift away from family as their primary influence. While cognitive functions are well-developed in children at this stage, they may continue to find it difficult to regulate their emotions and may engage in more risky behaviour (Lang et al.,2022).

Physical changes that occur during puberty are discussed on page 25.

– *Find out more about [Young People's Experiences of Puberty](#)*

Social & Emotional Developmental Milestones

The following are general developmental milestones that often happen at the specified ages. In reality, children will reach these milestones at a variety of ages. While developmental milestone guides for early childhood are prevalent, this information is less accessible for middle childhood in Aotearoa.

Developmental Domain

AGES 5, 6, 7, 8

AGES 9, 10, 11, 12

Generalisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of formal education • “5-7 Shift” - the increased ability to reason • Active contributors to family life • Transition from early to middle childhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Tweens” or “Pre-teens” • Transition from childhood to early adolescence • Increased reliance on peers • Increased independence from family
Hormonal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onset of adrenarche 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onset of puberty
Cognitive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grouping information and make links between groups e.g. sorting animals into groups based on physical attributes • Apply reasoning in more and more complex ways in relation to the physical and social world • Begin to learn and gain independence in reading, writing and numeracy • Begin to connect actions with their consequences • Can draw in 2D and increasingly in 3D • Curious about how things work and able to seek out, interpret and discuss information • Begin to connect actions with their consequences • Can draw in 2D and increasingly in 3D • Curious about how things work and able to seek out, interpret and discuss information • Begin to connect actions with their consequences • Can draw in 2D and increasingly in 3D • Curious about how things work and able to seek out, interpret and discuss information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn to tell time • Able to think more logically and abstractly and express thoughts and ideas • Ability to generalise, problem-solve and reason increases • Testing of assumptions and ideas • Able to analyse risks • Able to read and write independently, and apply mathematical skills in real world situations • Better able to think of the consequences of an action or situation, and be better prepared to respond
Moral development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form views about right and wrong • Consider rules to be fairly concrete • Value and typically follow rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to think more abstractly about morality • Understand that rules exist, but also that they can be flexible

Developmental Domain (cont.)

AGES 5, 6, 7, 8

AGES 9, 10, 11, 12

<p>Attention</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention and cognition improve due to maturing of the prefrontal cortex • Can focus attention on something and ignore irrelevant information or events happening around them • Different aspects of attention (alertness, set, spatial attention, sustained attention and interference control) develop between 6 years and 9 years • Impulsivity considered a normal for this age group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention functions mature around 12 years • Focus increases between ages 8-12
<p>Friendship</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May seek a “best friend” • Children tend to form friendships with children of the same gender • Children are developing friendships based on shared interests 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships grow in importance • Friendship groups become more mix gendered again • Seeking greater independence from family
<p>Social</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and recognise other people’s emotions based on body language and vocal cues • Begin to understand different viewpoints and consider others’ feelings and perspectives • Develop awareness of feeling embarrassed • Increased sense of empathy • Enjoy role play and being dramatic • Enjoy playing games and participating in group activities • Develop their own games, rules and competitiveness • Social hierarchies emerge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hierarchies/popularity beginning to form, and gain in importance • Greater communication skills enable increased cooperation with others and ability to handle conflict • Able to feel multiple and conflicting emotions about the same person, e.g. can be angry at someone they care about • Learning self-control for their emotions, and closeness and distance within relationships • May experience greater sense of awkwardness as they navigate social norms in relation to increased peer influences and pressure • Prefer to play with others than alone • Developing ability to manage own emotional expressions in relationships, and increase in competitiveness, joking and aggression
<p>Gender</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypical gender roles reflected in children’s play (e.g. nurturing games, playfighting) • More likely to play with peers of the same gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May become more interested in socialising with children of other gender • May question gender identity, or identify with a gender that does not align with sex identified at birth

Developmental Domain (cont.)

AGES 5, 6, 7, 8

AGES 9, 10, 11, 12

Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language is processed musically up to age 7 Vocabulary expands Understanding of how language is used increases Able to follow instructions that involve multiple steps Children begin to use slang 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use language more abstractly around age 8, including using and understanding jokes Ability to tell stories – both real and imaginary – develops Able to learn a second language most easily before the age of 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language processing speed and fluency increases significantly between ages 9-10 and 11-12 Use of humour develops as they grow in understanding of social norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best chance of becoming fluent in a second language prior to age 10
Memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developments in the pre-frontal cortex see working memory grow, adding to skills like the ability to follow directions Children use memory strategies such as rehearsal and organisation 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's working memory is developed by ages 10-12 	
Self-concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More influenced by comparisons to others from age 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate pride in their abilities and achievements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More awareness of others opinions May become more competitive, aggressive and sarcastic Growing awareness of own values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May become more egocentric May experience a drop in self-esteem around ages 9-10 due to increased self-awareness
Self-Control/ Self-Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beginning to develop their own strategies for coping in social situations and resolving problems, but still like support from parents and other trusted adults More able to self-regulate and manage their own behaviours Can identify and name a range of emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can generally express feelings but may become frustrated or aggressive when upset – but are generally able to manage this better than during early years Behaviour regulation is reinforced by expectations and responses from others around them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional regulation impacted by onset of adolescence Understand behavioural norms and social expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to develop a range of solutions to manage stressful situations Able to identify mixed or multiple emotions
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May begin helping with chores around the home Increasingly able to self-organise and take care of possessions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can dress themselves and take on more responsibility for their daily routines e.g. eating, washing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better at handling responsibilities on their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moving away from reliance on parents

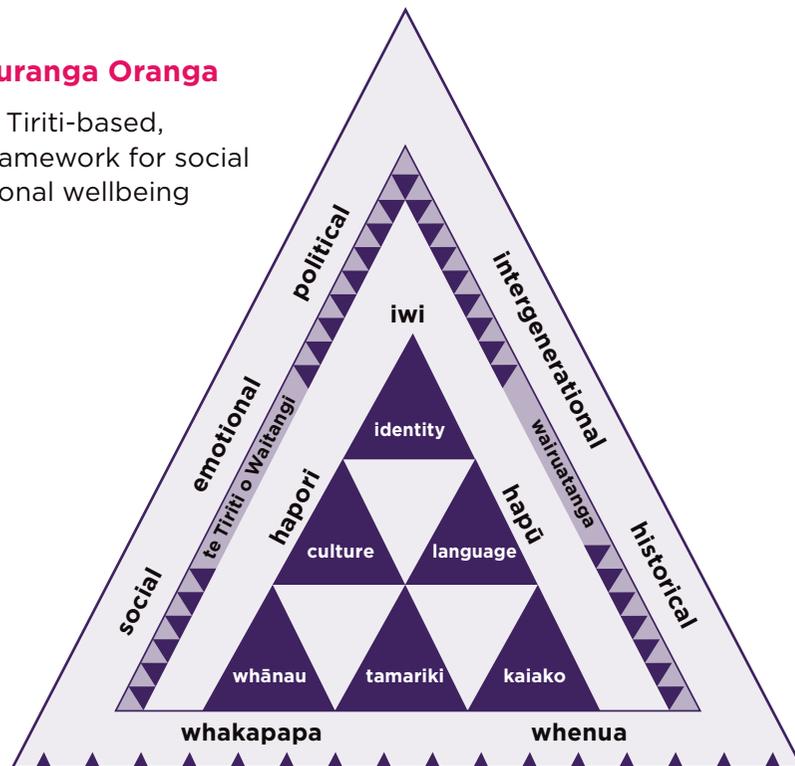
These milestones have been identified through a range of sources which can be found in the bibliography.

Models of Social and Emotional Development

Models relating to children's social and emotional development during middle childhood include:

Mātauranga Oranga

– a Te Tiriti-based, ako framework for social emotional wellbeing

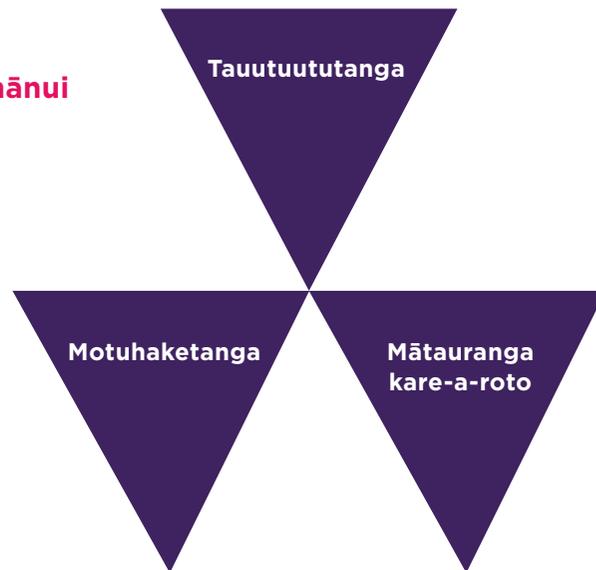


This model has been developed by Fickel et. al (2023) to meet the need for approaches to Social Emotional Learning that incorporate Te Ao Māori perspectives on wellbeing. The process of consultation with kaiako, tamariki and whānau towards shaping this framework identified that **relationships, belonging and feeling connected, and identity and sense of self**, were all central to wellbeing.

“The pattern reflects the understanding that whakawhanaungatanga, which is the process of developing and sustaining relationships with oneself and others, is the foundation of wellbeing. Whakawhanaungatanga is represented through whakapapa and whenua, and the interconnections between tamariki, whānau, and kaiako within the wider embrace of hapori (communities), hapū, and iwi. Wellbeing is influenced by and fostered through te taiao, the social, emotional, political, intergenerational, and historical aspects of the world we live in. Te Tiriti o Waitangi and wairuatanga run throughout the model, representing their centrality. The model reflects the depth, complexity, knowledge, and understanding required to promote and maintain te Tiriti o Waitangi partnerships and relationships within an educational context, and in doing so embraces all peoples.” (ibid. p.9)

The three triangles within the Mātauranga Oranga framework represent Ako Torowhānui – a “culturally responsive and sustaining construct of Social Emotional Learning” (p. 9). Communication, understanding emotions and emotional states, and normalising and reframing social-emotional experiences, were found to be important attributes of social emotional learning and these are reflected in the following Māori concepts:

Ako Torowhānui



Tauutuututanga: this concept represents the importance of reciprocal communication which is underpinned by respect and empathy.

Motuhaketanga: this concept reflects the “interconnection of autonomy, independence and self-guidance” (p.10).

Mātauranga kare-a-roto: this concept reflects the understanding of emotions and emotional states that is needed to enable positive self-reflection and relationships.

– *Find out more about [Mātauranga Oranga](#)*

Social and Emotional Competencies

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model of social and emotional competencies is one of the most prevalent models referred to in an educational context.

The CASEL framework comprises five competencies relating to social and emotional learning (SEL):

SELF-AWARENESS: The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.

SELF-MANAGEMENT: The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

SOCIAL AWARENESS: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, & contexts.

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING:
The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.
(Source CASEL, 2020, p.2)



The CASEL approach seeks to embed these competencies into settings children engage in through a partnership approach between the classroom, school, home, and the community.

“SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions”. (CASEL, 2020)

The CASEL model has been used in many educational contexts to guide the teaching and assessment of SEL. View how these competencies relate to the New Zealand Curriculum Key Competencies [here](#).

— [Find out more here](#)

This [article](#) by Denston et. al (2022) explores the relationship between social emotional learning approaches such as the CASEL model and culture, noting that most approaches to social emotional learning are based on universalistic concepts of wellbeing. This research finds that in an Aotearoa context, “culture, language, and identity are fundamental to understandings of wellbeing in students...these elements can contribute to developing relationships among students, teachers, and whānau, in a mutually reinforcing manner (p.17). This work supports the need for concepts such as the Mātauranga Oranga framework above, which has been shaped by a Te Ao Māori understanding of wellbeing.

7 Dimensions: Children’s Emotional Wellbeing – Jean Annan, 2022

Jean Annan is an Aotearoa-based psychologist who established the 7 Dimensions: Children’s Emotional Wellbeing framework.

This framework brings together knowledge about child development and neuroscience to identify seven ‘dimensions’ of children’s wellbeing framed around three key themes of safety, experience and meaning. Annan’s framework suggests that children seek the answer to seven fundamental questions as they develop, as outlined in the table below. While Annan’s book primarily explores use of this framework in educational settings, her work is a useful model for anyone caring for or working alongside children.

Level	Dimension	Question
SAFETY	Safety	Do I feel safe (socially, emotionally and physically)?
EXPERIENCE	Alliance	Is anyone at my side?
	Positive experience	Is my experience pleasurable?
	Consistency	Can I discern and predict patterns of interaction in my environment?
MEANING	Optimal disequilibrium	Am I stimulated by the activities present, but not overwhelmed?
	Self-narratives	Who am I?
	Belonging	Do I matter to anyone or anything?

(Annan, 2023, p.11-16)

— [Find out more about 7 Dimensions: Children’s Emotional Wellbeing](#)



Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Middle childhood is an important period in children's development – those who are thriving in this age stage are well set up for long-term wellbeing

(Carr, 2011)

Mana Atua | Wellbeing goals for children are that their health is promoted, their emotional wellbeing nurtured, and that they are kept safe from harm. This happens when wellbeing frameworks are holistic, current, and have good understanding of children's physical, social, cognitive, and spiritual development and health.

Holistic Models of Development

Holistic theories of development tend to include physical, social/emotional, relational, and cognitive aspects of a person's development, and increasingly also explore how their environment shapes their development. Many cultures will also include spiritual development into a holistic framework of development.

The following are some examples of holistic models of development that are commonly applied in an Aotearoa context. It is important to note that these models are not specifically children's models and are applied across the lifespan:

Te Whare Tapa Whā

Probably best known, and most frequently used, Tā Mason Durie developed Whare Tapa Wha in 1984.

It is a model of four taha or walls that need to be balanced equally for wellbeing to be achieved. These taha are whānau (family health), tinana (physical health), hinengaro (mental health) and wairua (spiritual health).

- *You can read more about this model [here](#)*
- *An example of how this model can be used with children can be found [here](#):*

[Using Te Whare Tapa Whā for learning about wellbeing: activities for year 1-8 ākongā](#)

[Fill My...Whare Tapa Whā](#)

Te Wheke

This is a Māori model of wellbeing developed by Rangimārie Rose Pere in 1997.

Through the framing of an octopus's eight tentacles, Te Wheke represents eight interrelated aspects of life that must be supported to maintain wellbeing: whānau (family), waiora (wellbeing for the individual and family), wairuatanga (spirituality), hinengaro (mind), taha tinana (physical body), whanaungatanga (extended family), mauri (life force) mana ake (identity), hā a koro ma, a kui ma (breath of life from forebearers), whatumanawa (the open and healthy expression of emotion).

— *You can read more about this model [here](#)*

Fonofale

Fonofale is a Samoan model of health that encompasses components viewed as essential to wellbeing.

Framed around the model of a fale (house), Fonofale positions cultural beliefs and values as the roof providing shelter, and family as the foundation of wellbeing. The Fonofale model integrates spiritual, physical and mental dimensions of health as well as a fourth dimension named 'other' which incorporates factors that might influence health such as sexual orientation and socioeconomic or employment status. These dimensions connect the roof and the foundation together. (Ministry of Health, 2008)

— *An example of how this model can be used with children can be found here: <https://sparklers.org.nz/activities/my-fale-house/>*

The Fonua Model

This is a Tongan model of wellbeing developed by Sione Tu'itahi in 2009.

This model comprises five interdependent dimensions of life which must all be supported in order to maintain harmony and wellbeing:

1. Atakai (environment)/Mamani (global)
2. Kainga (community)/fonua (national)
3. Sino (physical)/kolo (local)
4. Atamai (mental)/famili (family)
5. Laumalie (spiritual)/taautaha (individual).

This model also recognises four phases of development: Kumi Fonua/exploratory, Langa Fonua/formative, Tauhi Fonua/maintenance, Tufunga Fonua/reformation. (Health Promotion Forum of New Zealand, 2023)

— *Read more about the Fonua Model [here](#)*

There are many other holistic models of health that have been developed to represent a particular culture and what it values. Generally, these include physical, mental, social/emotional, and familial or community wellbeing. Many also include aspects of faith or personhood.

None seem to have been developed specifically for tamariki in their middle years.



Physical Development in Middle Childhood

The following are general developmental milestones that often happen at the specified ages. In reality, children will reach these milestones at a variety of ages. While developmental milestone guides for early childhood are prevalent, this information is less accessible for middle childhood.

Age/Stage	Key Developments
5-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth slows and remains steady – typical annual growth rates: 5-6cm in height and 2-3kg in weight • Gross and fine motor skills mature. Especially coordination, reactivity, attention, and cognition • Gross motor skills improve through involvement in play and sport • Bodies grow stronger, more coordinated, and agile • Immunity strengthened from natural development and completion of preschool immunisations • Loss of first baby teeth • Drawings become more detailed • Increased bilateral coordination enables skipping, balancing on one foot etc • Walk and jump backwards • Vocabulary comprises over 2,000 words

Age/Stage	Key Developments
6-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscles develop further and begin accumulating fat • Boys tend to have slightly more muscle than girls do, while girls tend to have more body fat than boys • Accurately colour in and cut out shapes • Able to run faster and longer due to increased lung capacity • First permanent molars arrive • Adrenarche begins (see page 15) • Maturing of the tube that connects the ear to the nose (the Eustachian tube) resulting in fewer ear infections • Can ride a bike without training wheels
7-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brains reach their adult weight by age 7 • The number of brain cells a person has (grey matter volume), representing the parts of the brain where processing occurs, peaks at age 7. • Connections within the brain, enabling communication between different parts of the brain and the body, continue to grow throughout middle childhood • Fine motor skills develop to the point of near maturity e.g. advances in their ability to write and draw etc • Similar athletic ability irrespective of gender until around age 8 • Ability to throw and catch improves with increased hand-eye coordination

Age/Stage	Key Developments
8-9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Onset of puberty in girls from age 8 onwards: development of breasts and pubic hair, skin changes, increase in body fat in advance of a growth spurt, darkening of genitals Average onset of shortsightedness in children (child myopia)
9-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased changes within the brain (synaptic pruning and myelination), particularly regarding emotional regulation and reward processing Onset of puberty in boys: increased genital size, development of pubic hair, voice deepening, production of sperm begins, increased body odour, facial hair develops
10-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's development rates vary more widely – girls are likely to experience a growth spurt around age 10 Typical annual growth rates may increase to up to 9cm in height during puberty Increased risk of injury during puberty due to bones growing faster than muscles

Age/Stage	Key Developments
11-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average peak of growth rate in terms of height occurs 2 years following the onset of puberty in girls. (For boys this occurs between 12-15 years) Menstruation typically occurs 2-2.5 years after breast development begins. Almost 50% of girls in New Zealand are likely to have begun menstruation prior to beginning secondary school Girls grow up to another 5cm following the beginning of menstruation and are physically fully grown around 2 years later Loss of all primary teeth by the age of 12 Hand-eye coordination nearly fully mature Diminished coordination due to bones growing faster than muscles Boys may begin a growth spurt following the onset of puberty



These milestones have been identified through a range of sources which can be found in the bibliography.

Active Movement

Reporting by Sport New Zealand found that:

In 2022, 94% of 5–11 year old tamariki had been physically active in play, exercise, active recreation, or sport at least once in the past week.

The most common activities for tamariki were playing (running around, climbing trees, make believe), running, jogging or cross country, playing on the playground (jungle gym), swimming and playing games (four square, tag etc.).

Activity levels decreased during the **COVID-19** pandemic, particularly in regard to organised activities, but have rebounded in **2022**.

Boys were generally more active than girls across a range of measures and experienced more noticeable declines in activity during the pandemic.

The proportion of girls meeting minimum activity guidelines was the lowest to date in **2022** – only **54%** of 5–7 year old girls and **55%** of 8–11 year old girls meeting this target.

For the **2022** period, Sport New Zealand found that children average **11.7** hours of moderate–vigorous activity per week and participate in an average of **5.1** sports or activities per week.

For the **2022** period, Sport New Zealand found that children average **11.7** hours of moderate–vigorous activity per week and participate in an average of **5.1** sports or activities per week.

Children's participation in informal play has decreased from **85%** in 2018 to **82%** in 2022, predominantly due to older children aged 8–11 being less likely to play independently.

Busyness was the primary barrier to increasing activity levels, with a quarter of tamariki noting being too busy as a barrier and almost **20%** of tamariki indicating they couldn't fit being more active into the family's others activities.

59% of tamariki spent seven or more hours active per week, the recommended minimum according to the Ministry of Health Guidelines.

Reporting across the **2017–2019** period found that children from high–deprivation areas were less likely to meet the minimum activity recommendations and faced barriers to participation in organised activities such as affordability and accessibility.

Children who spent at least seven hours active were found to have greater happiness levels than those who were less active.

— Find out more about children's activity levels in Sport New Zealand's [Spotlight on Tamariki report](#) and the [Active NZ Changes in Participation 2022 report](#)

“For older tamariki (aged 8 to 11) who would like to increase their participation, the main barriers to doing so are being too busy (25 percent), a preference for other activities (19 percent), the weather (19 percent), competing family priorities (19 percent) and the cost (18 percent).” (Sport NZ, 2022, p.10)

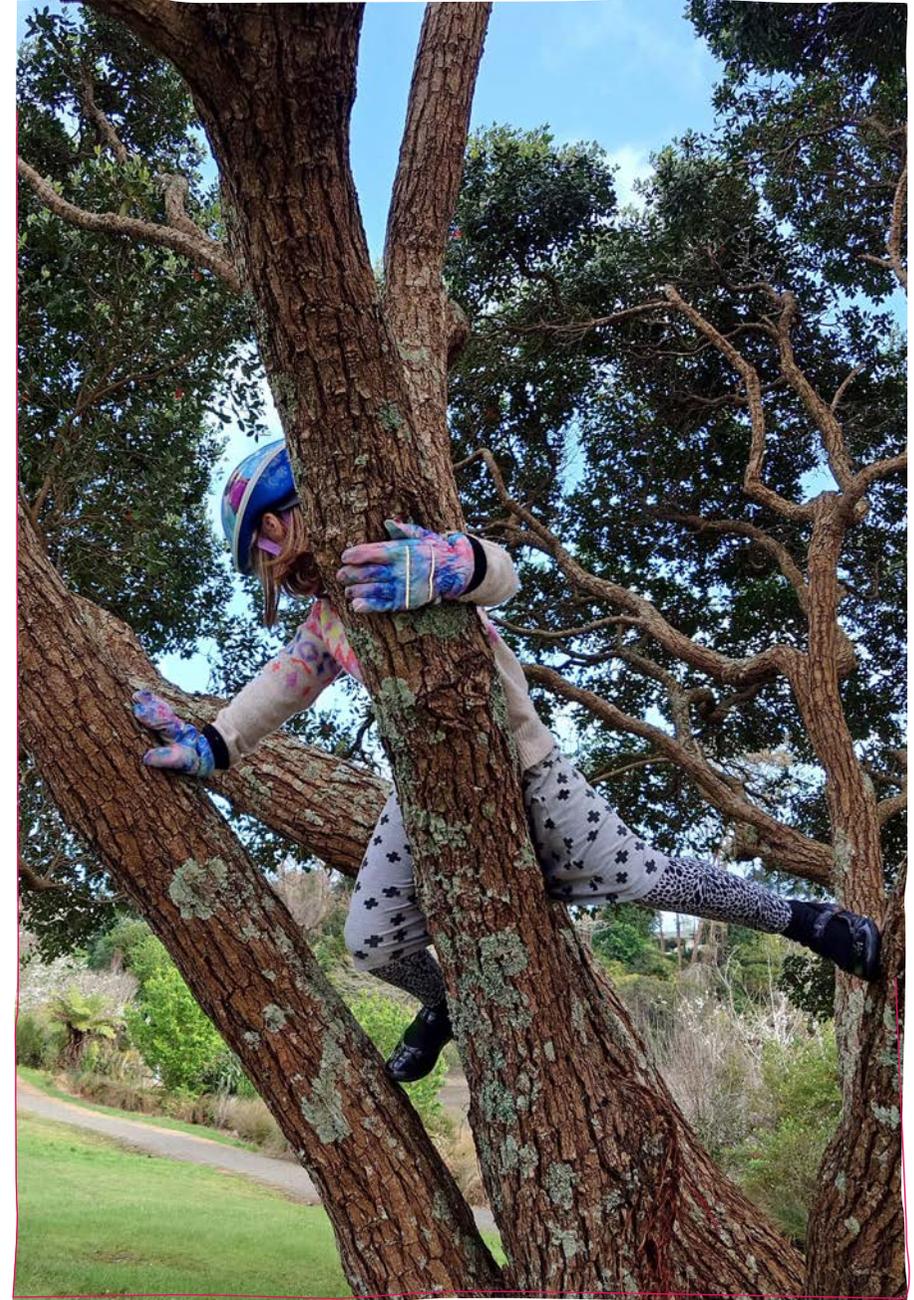
Initiatives focused on encouraging and enabling children's active movement include:

Healthy Active Learning

Healthy Active Learning is a joint initiative between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and Sport NZ, which aims to support schools and kura to create environments that support and promote play, sport, and physical activity.

Over 800 schools and kura are engaged with the Health Active Learning initiative, with a focus on decile 1-4 schools (according to the previous Decile system). This [evaluation](#) of Healthy Active Learning shows that participating schools have increased the value placed on physical activity within the school environment and improved teaching practice in relation to physical activity.

— [Find out more about Healthy Active Learning](#)



Trauma and Toxic Stress

“Children’s sense of safety is built on positive experiences, and the anticipation of pleasure and protection in the future.” (Annan, 2022, p. 50)

Research indicates that experiences of trauma and toxic stress during childhood, and particularly early childhood, have a detrimental impact on children’s brain development and their outcomes both during childhood and later in life.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic experiences or events that occur during childhood and may happen directly to the child, such as physical or emotional abuse or neglect, or within the child’s environment, such as domestic violence, or parental mental illness or addiction.

Experiences of trauma and stress affect children’s sense of safety and consequently significantly impact the brain’s ability to carry out its three functions of survival, protection, and executive thinking. (Annan, 2022, p.40). Children are less able to make decisions and problem-solve consciously and purposefully, engage effectively in learning, and their ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships with peers and adults is diminished.

A brain that has experienced trauma is wired to perceive danger and therefore more likely to operate in survival or “fight-flight-freeze” mode, where conscious thinking is limited by the brain’s protective responses. Children in this state are more likely to act impulsively, demonstrating defensive or offensive behaviours, to flee or avoid situations or to shut down and disengage. (Annan, 2022, p.41). Children may find it difficult to learn and socialise within the classroom environment, resulting in poor educational achievement and difficulty making friends (Martin & Berger, 2022).

As well as the impact on educational engagement, ACEs have also been linked to increased risk of poor health outcomes later in life, with the likelihood of poor outcomes compounding with each ACE. (Brainwave, 2022)

Increased awareness of, and education about, the impact of early trauma and toxic stress on childhood development has led to an increase in trauma-informed practices being implemented in a range of settings that children engage in, such as education, health and social work settings. While much of the focus has been on early childhood, there is a variety of resources (such as those listed below) available to practitioners working with children in the five to 12-years stage.

A trauma-informed approach ought to highlight the continued importance of safe and nurturing environments for children’s brain development throughout all of childhood, while also recognising that while a child may have experienced prior trauma, the brain’s neuroplasticity offers opportunity for healing and the development of new, positive neural pathways that will serve them into adulthood.

[Trauma & tamariki: what do we know and how can we help them?](#)
- Brainwave Trust, 2021

[Kaupapa Māori approaches to Trauma Informed Care,](#)
Kathleen Nelson, AUT, 2021

[Making SPACE for Learning: Trauma Informed Practice in Schools,](#)
Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010

[Trauma-Informed Care for the Children’s Workforce](#) - Course from the Goodfellow Unit, 2018

[Childhood trauma: impact on development & behaviour](#) -
Course from the Goodfellow Unit, 2018

[Promoting Resilience - a trauma informed practice approach](#) -
Oranga Tamariki, 2018

Mental Wellbeing

Most children in Aotearoa experience good mental wellbeing, as evidenced by findings of the Growing Up in New Zealand study and the Ministry of Health.

Ministry of Health data indicates that the prevalence of diagnosed depression among children aged 2-14 years was 0.3% - equivalent to 3,000 children - in the year 2021/22. This figure indicates a decrease from 0.8% of children diagnosed in the year 2019/20. For the 2021/22 period, the prevalence of diagnosed anxiety among children aged 2-14 years was 4.1%, or around 35,000 children (Ministry of Health, 2023).

Growing Up in New Zealand's Now We Are Twelve research also reported most children at age 12 reporting good mental health. The study found that:

- Approximately 5% of young people at age 12 had been diagnosed with depression or anxiety.
- However, over half of children in the study had an increase in depressive symptoms, and a third in anxiety symptoms, between ages 8 and 12.
- Around 8% of children had engaged with a mental health service over the previous year.
- The largest increase in symptoms between ages 8-12 and the highest levels of depression and anxiety symptoms were among transgender or non-binary children.
- Depressive symptoms were higher among Māori compared to European children.
- Children who had strong relationships with their parents and peers experienced less symptoms of depression or anxiety.
- Being bullied frequently was associated with higher rates of depression and anxiety (Fletcher et al., 2023). See more about bullying on page 86.

Among those with poor mental health, there has been a rise in the severity of cases indicated by increased rates of hospitalisation for mental illness:

- In 2021 the rate of hospitalisation for intentional self-harm among 10-14 year olds was almost 4.5 times that of 2011, with girls more affected than boys
- Between 2009 and 2021 rates of hospitalisation for mental and behavioural disorders among 10-14 year olds doubled (CureKids, 2023).

Findings of the CureKids (2003) State of Child Health report suggest that unlike many other childhood illnesses, rates of hospitalisation for mental health disorders have not been found to vary greatly across socioeconomic groups. However, Growing Up in New Zealand findings identified that individuals experiencing the highest area-level deprivation had higher depression symptoms at age 12. Similarly, results from the Strengths & Difficulties Questionnaire, a behavioural screening tool used with this age group, indicated that children from high deprivation areas were three times more likely to have concerning results than those from low-deprivation areas. (Ministry of Health, 2018)

Of great concern is the state of the children's mental healthcare system which has seen significant increases in demand coupled with "alarming rates" of vacancies (Spence, 2022). This has resulted in high wait times for services across both the public and private sectors, and the filling of specialist mental health roles with professionals who may have little experience working with children. The Growing Up in New Zealand findings noted above suggest that a much greater number of children experience anxiety and depressive symptoms than are represented in diagnosis rates. This could be because the severity of their symptoms does not warrant a diagnosis or because our overwhelmed health system makes such a diagnosis inaccessible for some children.

Growing Up in New Zealand findings indicate that almost 40% of children who had contact with a mental health service did not receive all the support they needed, noting that barriers included children not being eligible for a service, or the service or appointment not being accessible (Fletcher et. al, 2003).

There is an absence of training specific to middle childhood for those working with children in Aotearoa New Zealand (see 93 for more). Where training occurs, it tends to rely on older, westernised models and theories, including at degree level. The intentional development of a well-skilled and knowledgeable workforce who have a deep, current, and evidence-based understanding of middle childhood is crucial.

- [*Read about Mental Wellbeing in the Cure Kids State of Child Health 2022 Report*](#)
- [*Read about Mental Wellbeing in Growing Up In New Zealand research*](#)

Suicide

Data from Te Whatu Ora (2023) indicates that over the period 2009 to 2021 there were no confirmed or suspected suicide deaths among children aged 9 and under.

Over this same period there were 113 suspected suicide deaths among the 10-14 year old age group, of which 70 have been confirmed. A key action of Aotearoa's Suicide Prevention Strategy: **Every Life Matters - He Tapu te Oranga o ia tangata** is to increase wellbeing support for children and young people in places of learning.

- [*Find out more about suicide prevention in Aotearoa*](#)

Initiatives to support children's mental wellbeing

[**Mental Health Education: A guide for teachers, leaders and school boards**](#)

A guide for school leadership and teaching staff on how to incorporate mental health education within the New Zealand curriculum.

Mana Ake - Stronger for Tomorrow

Mana Ake is primarily a cognitive behaviour therapy based early-intervention mental health and wellbeing programme delivered for students in Years 1-8 in schools in several regions throughout New Zealand (Christchurch, Kaikōura, Bay of Plenty, West Coast, Rotorua, Taupō, South Auckland and Northland). It aims to address mild to moderate mental health challenges, and issues impacting on children's wellbeing (such as grief, loss, bullying, parental separation) by providing direct support to children and equipping families and teachers to support tamariki wellbeing.

Originally established to address increased levels of anxiety among children after the Christchurch earthquakes, the programme has since been extended to other regions and is estimated to benefit 195,000 children. This figure will increase with the programme being extended in 2023 to support children in Tairāwhiti and the Hawkes Bay following the cyclone events of 2023 (New Zealand Government, 2022) (Malatest International, 2021).

- [*Find out more about Mana Ake*](#)

Seasons for Growth

Seasons for Growth is a peer support programme designed to support children experiencing grief, change or loss. Regularly evaluated, the programme is delivered in schools by trained facilitators over eight sessions. Children may be facing grief or loss due to a range of causes such as the death or illness of a whanau member, parental separation or imprisonment, relocation, or placement in foster care.

- [*Find out more about Seasons for Growth*](#)

Sparklers

Sparklers is a resource hub designed to support resilience building for children. Sparklers is guided by the Te Whare Tapa Wha framework and offers resources for within the home and classroom.

- [*Find out more about Sparklers*](#)

Other programmes

Programmes designed to support children's resilience and wellbeing include those listed below.

Many of these programmes are based on cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), which is focused on helping children understand how their thoughts and feelings can affect how they act. There is a need for programmes to also be developed that offer other approaches, to ensure all children's needs are being met.

<p><u>Little People, Big Feelings</u> – a programme delivered in schools by the I Am Hope Foundation</p>	<p><u>Kids Feeling Safe Programme</u> – delivered by Iosis in Tāmaki Makaurau, Kids Feeling Safe is a child-focused programme, working with families who have experienced family violence. It helps them understand and develop new skills for healthy relationships</p>	<p><u>Travellers Programme</u> – this programme is targeted at children experiencing transitions such as moving city, or starting a new school. It aims to build resilience and life skills</p>	<p><u>Facing Your Fears</u> – a CBT based programme focused on managing anxiety</p>	
<p><u>Mitey</u> – a CBT based programme provided by the Sir John Kirwan Foundation that supports schools to deliver an evidence-based approach to mental health education for children in Years 1-8</p>	<p><u>Weaving Wellbeing</u> – this programme delivered by Hato Hone – St John's aims to help Year 7 and 8 students to understand their strengths, build positive relationships and develop resilience and confidence to navigate their world</p>	<p>The Resilience Project's <u>School Wellbeing Program</u> – an Australian initiative that supports mental health through presentations, student curriculum, teacher resources and digital content</p>		
<p><u>Kia Kaha</u> – a programme delivered by the New Zealand Police focused on developing strategies for respectful relationships where bullying behaviours are not tolerated</p>	<p><u>Jade Speaks Up</u> – CBT based programmes that equip teachers to help students recognise and manage situations that stem from anxiety, stress and family violence</p>	<p><u>Rock & Water Programme</u> – a social skills programme that develops whakamana/empowerment by developing children's ability to respond, rather than react, and make conscious controllable decisions in situations they may encounter</p>	<p><u>SPARX</u> – CBT based e-therapy delivered through gameplay to enable children to process emotions</p>	
<p><u>ACES</u> – this programme supports children facing parental separation</p>	<p><u>Wise-Up</u> – this CBT based programme supports children with low-mid level anxiety to manage difficult emotions</p>	<p><u>Yellow Brick Road Children's Programmes</u> are designed to help children to understand the mental illness of a family member</p>	<p><u>Pause Breathe Smile</u> – a CBT based mind health programme designed to equip children aged five to 12 with tools to manage the ups and downs of life and set them up for a healthy future</p>	<p><u>ASB St John in Schools</u> – these programmes teach children how to be lifesavers in an emergency, how to avoid injury and about becoming guardians of wellbeing in their community</p>

Mana Tangata | Contribution

When thinking about Mana Tangata | the contribution children make to our society today, it is useful to consider our theoretical whakapapa – the various academic perspectives that have shaped our understanding of human development. But more importantly, what we now know and understand – and where the gaps that we need to fill are.

Traditional Theories of Development

Much of our current understanding of middle childhood originates from classical Western theories of human development, such as those of Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner. These theories are briefly outlined below.

While not necessarily wrong, these theories were developed early last century on the other side of the globe. The society in which they emerged saw children in a fundamentally different way to our present. And while these are some of the theoretical giants whose shoulders we stand on – their relevance to now is limited. We believe there is a need to research, develop and teach Aotearoa appropriate theories and knowledge of child development.

Theory	View of middle childhood
Freud	The 'latency' stage when psychosexual development is suppressed. Children are focused on forming friendships outside the family unit and engaging in education and hobbies.
Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory	The stage of mastering industry vs. inferiority. Children's perception of their performance in comparison to their peers determines their self-concept.

Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory	The concrete operational stage when children develop the use of logic and reason. From around 11 years children enter the formal operations stage where they become able to think abstractly and hypothetically.
Bandura's Social Learning Theory	Children learn through observing and imitating others and integrating new knowledge with existing knowledge to form patterns of behaviour. They develop self-efficacy (their belief about what they can achieve).
Bowlby's Attachment Theory	Children move from "maintaining proximity" to their primary attachment figure to "assured availability of the attachment figure" as they grow in independence. Children become more aware of social norms and learn to manage behaviour based on peer influences (Abtahi & Kerns, 2017)
Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory	Children develop through social interactions, gathering knowledge from those around them who hold greater knowledge or ability than they do.
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory	Development is shaped by children's interaction within a series of systems: the microsystem (school, family, neighbours, friends), mesosystem (local communities), exosystem (parents' friends, extended family, media, local authorities), macrosystem (social norms, culture, economic and political systems) and the chronosystem (period in time).

Sources: (Antony, 2022; Arnett et. al, 2020; Lally et. al, 2022; Lazarra, 2020)

Child Development Approaches within Education

The New Zealand Curriculum

According to the Ministry of Education, the development of the NZ Curriculum “considers a number of different theories and frameworks. As such, it is very difficult to pinpoint particular theories or frameworks that focus on child development.” (Ministry of Education, 2022, received under the Official Information Act).

It is generally understood that our approach to teaching in Aotearoa is shaped by sociocultural theories. The current approach is ‘social constructivism’ which has a focus on students as active participants in their learning. Social constructivism suggests that knowledge is constructed by students through exploration and interactions with others (Johnston & Martin, 2023).

Currently the Curriculum is focused on the following key competencies which are considered “the capabilities people have and need to develop to live and learn today and in the future” (Ministry of Education, 2020):

- Thinking
- Relating to others
- Using language, symbols, and texts
- Managing self
- Participating and contributing.



Social and emotional learning is expected to occur across the curriculum relating to the key competencies of relating to others, participating and contributing, managing self and thinking (Ministry of Education, n.d.). The New Zealand Curriculum is halfway through a six-year curriculum refresh, and this approach may shift. Consultation on the refresh includes that available on [Education Conversation | Kōrero Mātauranga](#). With coming changes, there is an opportunity to make this more obvious and to consider more contemporary, and Aotearoa-informed research.

The Government’s One Hour A Day policy was introduced in Term 1 2024 and requires that students in Years 0-8 be taught one hour each of reading, writing and mathematics per day. A Ministerial Advisory Group is currently reviewing parts of the curriculum related to English and maths across these year levels.



Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (the curriculum for kura and Māori medium schools)

In relation to the complete redesign of Te Marautanga o Aotearoa which is currently taking place, the Ministry of Education states that:

“Research has begun into theories and theorists regarding learning and developmental stages that may be compatible with pedagogical approaches that support Māori-medium education, such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Skinner, Steiner, and Montessori. This work is ongoing.”

“The Ministry’s practice framework in the learning support field, He Pikorua, has shifted away from traditional developmental theories that tend to be linear and universal in their approach, suggesting a common journey for all children. However, the sociocultural perspective suggests that a child’s development is deeply influenced by their social interactions, cultural norms, and relationships.

Within mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori, development is viewed through an even broader lens. In the Māori worldview, the child doesn’t stand alone but is seen as part of an intricate web of relationships with their whānau, hapū, and iwi. Development is not just about individual growth but about how the child fits into and contributes to these wider networks.

While milestones and stages offer one framework, understanding the child’s development also means appreciating their unique place in the whānau, their connection to their tīpuna, and their ongoing journey in understanding and living within te ao Māori. Embracing this holistic view can guide more culturally-rich and individually-tailored approaches to support growth.”

(Provided by the Ministry of Education (2023) via request under the Official Information Act)

As mentioned previously, the theorists referred to here are western thinkers from the middle of last century. This we believe highlights a challenge faced across middle childhood – the evidence base has not been kept current and is not specific to our context. We hope that asking these questions and producing this guide helps to identify areas of growth and opportunity.

General Child Development Education for Children

The New Zealand Health & Physical Education Curriculum

Children are taught information about their own development in primary and intermediate schools through a focus on the following four strands of the curriculum:

- **“Personal health and physical development, in which students develop the knowledge, understandings, skills, and attitudes that they need in order to maintain and enhance their personal well-being and physical development**
- **Movement concepts and motor skills, in which students develop motor skills, knowledge and understandings about movement, and positive attitudes towards physical activity**
- **Relationships with other people, in which students develop understandings, skills, and attitudes that enhance their interactions and relationships with others**
- **Healthy communities and environments, in which students contribute to healthy communities and environments by taking responsible and critical action.”** (Ministry of Education, 2017)

There are seven key areas of learning for students which include: mental health, sexuality education, food and nutrition, body care and physical safety, physical activity, sports studies and outdoor education.

– *Learn more about the [Health & Education Curriculum](#)*

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

“Maybe we tend to neglect middle childhood because people think it is freer of major hazards than are very early childhood or adolescence. To the extent that this view is accurate, middle childhood should be valued as a window of opportunity...a good time to maximise the potential for positive growth and introduce supports and opportunities that help children along successful pathways to adulthood.” (Huston et al., 2006)

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration supports children’s development by valuing their experiences and providing environments to think and reason. This allows them to make sense of their world and their place within it.

Supporting holistic development requires us to understand what life is like for today’s children and how they can be best supported to thrive. Research and development of current models of children’s development make it possible to begin to support the needs of middle childhood.

Positive experiences in middle childhood builds strong foundations for adolescence and adulthood. There is a need for investment into this life stage to see this opportunity maximised.

“...the developmental process is initiated by genetics, but shaped by experience, making middle childhood a prime period to impact future change in a child’s life. The investments made during this period can yield favourable outcomes in the areas of future health, intelligence, social and emotional well-being.... The key is to initiate the cycle by providing environments, structures and experiences that begin, and continue, to stimulate children’s minds and bodies to build a strong base for the remainder of their lives.”

(Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012)

Emerging Theories

Te Pā Harakeke

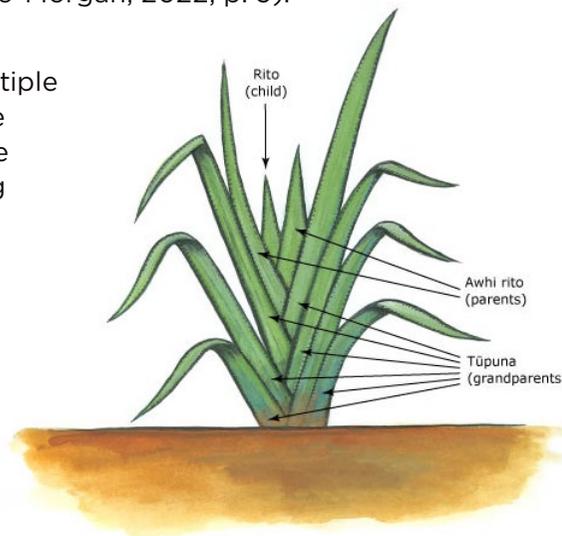
Te Pā Harakeke is a child-centred model of whānau wellbeing. It is a metaphor for family based on the harakeke (flax) plant where the flax blades represent the multigenerational support and protection that exists around a child. “At its very core is the wellbeing, nurturing, care and protection of tamariki” (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2022, p. 6).

The central flax blade or shoot, the ‘rito’, represents the child. The central shoot is vital for the health of the plant and symbolises the importance of the child at the heart of the family unit.

Surrounding the rito/child are the flax blades on either side which represent the ‘awhi rito’ or mātua – parents and aunts/uncles – who provide sustenance and protection to the rito.

The outer flax blades represent the ‘tīpuna’, grandparents and ancestors who provide shelter and care to the whānau. This includes “spiritual sustenance, guidance and protection to all generations” (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2022, p. 9).

The concept of Te Pā Harakeke incorporates multiple whānau and represents the concept of the village’s role and responsibility in raising children (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2022).



Source: Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal

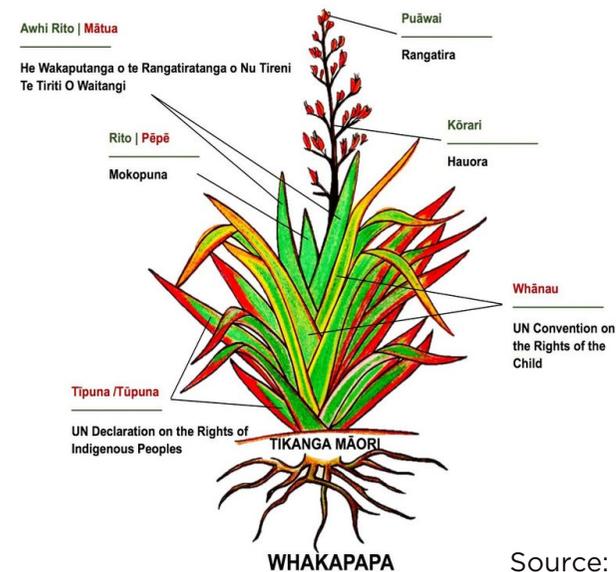
Oranga Mokopuna Framework

This is a Kaupapa Māori health and wellbeing rights framework developed by King, Cormack and Kōpua (2018). Again, framed around the harakeke plant, Oranga Mokopuna expands on the metaphor.

It starts with children as the rito (the shoot) at the heart of the harakeke plant and puāwai – the rangatira (leaders) of today. They are then protected and supported by whakapapa (whenua/land) and tikanga Māori (pakiaka/roots), as well as existing rights frameworks in the roles of whānau and tīpuna/tūpuna. Hauora (health and wellbeing) is represented by the kōrari (the stem of the harakeke).

Described as a decolonised rights model founded on tikanga Māori, Oranga Mokopuna connects the sovereign tangata whenua rights of mokopuna (recognised in He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi) with international rights frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (King et al., 2022).

– Find out more about [Oranga Mokopuna](#)



Source: King et al., 2018

Evolutionary-Developmental Theory

Approaches such as Del Giudice’s Evolutionary-Developmental model build on Erik Erikson’s traditional theories. The theory is that middle childhood corresponds biologically with ‘juvencity’ – a stage of learning (often through play) where they practice at adulthood. Del Giudice suggests that adrenarche (see page 15) acts as a developmental switch from early childhood to the stage of juvenility, and initiates changes in behaviour that are influenced by sex, genetic variation and children’s interaction with their environment (Del Giudice, 2009), (Del Giudice, 2018).

Children learn from their experiences, through play and from interactions with other people in their lives. In middle childhood relationships with peers and adults beyond their parents/ caregivers become more important. They may be developed through school, activities such as sports and clubs, and spiritual or cultural activities. Their understanding of social and cultural norms develop in middle childhood, as does their understanding of themselves, and how they fit within their own social context.

The evolutionary-developmental model suggests that social competition is an important part of social integration, as children compete for attention, influence, status, and friendship. This approach views children’s “social position” during childhood as the “springboard” for later success in life. (Del Giudice, 2018, p.102)

Weisner’s Ecocultural Theory

This theory builds on ecological and cultural theories of development and explores how children’s participation in daily activities within their cultural settings contributes to their development. Weisner’s theory sets out “ecocultural niche settings” which impact on children’s development as they engage with activities within their cultural context. “Ecocultural niche settings” include things like gender roles, socioeconomic status, work expectations for children, community safety, and health status (Arnett et. al, 2020).

Cultural-Developmental Theory of Child Development

Cultural-developmental theory builds on the work of Erikson, Weisner, and Bronfenbrenner, and suggests that as they develop, children both respond to and shape the future of their culture. This theory recognises the place of biological development, but highlights the role of culture in determining what a child learns, their aspirations, and their perception of the world and their place in it (Arnett et. al, 2020).

These models that build on traditional models of child development, such as those developed by Erikson, Piaget, and Bowlby, are useful for those of us in Aotearoa to consider. They show a way of rethinking, but through our own lens, and are a potential way to weave in recently developed knowledge and evidence to ideas that may still be useful. It would be interesting, for example, to consider Bowlby’s attachment theory through a Pacific lens, or Bronfenbrenner through Hindi experiences.



Research/Knowledge Base

Growing Up in New Zealand

Growing Up in New Zealand is a longitudinal study focused on understanding what shapes development and wellbeing for children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Beginning in 2009, the study is following the development of over 4,500 children from the antenatal period. Growing Up in New Zealand aims to build “a comprehensive picture of life for children in New Zealand today so that we can learn what works to enable someone to have a happy, healthy, and fulfilling life” (Growing Up in New Zealand, 2023).

Led by the University of Auckland, Growing Up in New Zealand has published findings from engagement with participants at eight years and most recently 12 years of age.

[Transition to School \(age 6\) Report](#)

[Now We Are Eight: Life in Middle Childhood Report](#)

[Now We Are Twelve: Life in Early Adolescence Reports](#)

– [Find out more about Growing Up in New Zealand](#)

New Zealand Child and Youth Epidemiology Service

The New Zealand Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES) is hosted by the Otago University and provides up to date information regarding the health of children and young people in Aotearoa.

The service highlights disparities in health and inequities in service provision that impact on outcomes for children, providing valuable insights for policy development.

Specific NZCYES publications of note include:

New Zealand Child and Youth Health Indicator Project

This is a framework for the NZCYES’ monitoring of child and youth health. Indicators cover a wide variety of topics, ranging from mental health to healthy housing to vaccination rates. You can look up and find reporting specific to each indicator [here](#).

Child and youth reports

The NZCYES publishes national and regional reports using the indicator framework mentioned above. Reports are available nationally or by District Health Board or region, or for Māori or Pacific people. A list of reports can be accessed [here](#).

Child Poverty Monitor Reports

Child Poverty Monitor Reports present child poverty statistics and commentary around meeting the Government’s child poverty targets. These reports can be viewed [here](#).

What Makes A Good Life?

This report by Mana Mokopuna | The Office of the Children’s Commissioner shares findings from a survey of over 6,000 children and young people asking about their thoughts on what a good life is and what needs to be changed to make life in Aotearoa better for children and young people. 37% of the respondents to this survey were aged between 7-12 years.

Key findings include that:

- change is needed to improve life for children,
- family and whānau are crucial,
- providing the basics is important, but not enough on its own,
- children and young people have valuable insights.

Reports from this survey were also published specific to the views of children in care, disabled children and tamariki Māori.

– [Find out more about *What Makes a Good Life?*](#)

Child Wellbeing Research Institute, University of Canterbury

The Child Well-being Research Institute aims to advance high quality, multidisciplinary research to enhance the learning success and healthy wellbeing of children and young people. The Institute aims to lead in developing a strengths-based discourse around child-development, health and well-being that speaks to the context of Aotearoa. Research focus areas include learning success, nutrition and well-being, social and emotional well-being, child population health, autism and wellbeing and Māori learning and success.

– [Find out more about the *Child Well-being Research Institute*](#)

Child and Youth Health Research Centre, AUT

The AUT Child and Youth Health Research Centre investigates the impact of illness and disability, home and family, health services, nutrition, physical activity, and the wider environment on young people. The Centre is committed to providing a space for young people's voices.

– [Find out more about the *AUT Child and Youth Health Research Centre*](#)

Children's Issues Centre, University of Otago

The Children's Issues Centre aims to make a difference in children's lives by improving policy and practice. It undertakes high quality research, teaching and advocacy relating to children's development, well-being and rights – underpinned by a commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and using a Childhood Studies lens.

– [Find out more about the *Children's Issues Centre*](#)

Children and Families Research Fund

The Children and Families Research Fund aims to improve the lives of children and families. It awards funding to enable further investigation of Growing Up in New Zealand findings to inform policy development. Research grants are government-funded totalling \$750,000 per year.

A list of past and present research projects can be viewed [here](#).

The Families Commission and Superu

A Families Commission, led by a Families Commissioner existed in New Zealand from 2004 until 2014, when the unit became the Social Policy Research and Evaluation Unit (Superu). Superu was disestablished in 2018. The Families Commission acted as an advocate for families generally and produced and promoted research relating to families.

Prior to its disestablishment, The Families and Whānau Wellbeing Research Programme within Superu produced a range of reporting, including an annual families and whānau status report, which measured and monitored the wellbeing of New Zealand families and whānau.

Read the last [Families & Whānau Status Report \(2018\)](#)



Mana Reo | Communication

“Middle childhood has been neglected at least since Freud relegated these years to the status of an uninteresting “latency” period. We hear a great deal about early childhood, with some people even arguing that development is fixed in the first three years; and adolescents attract a lot of attention because adults worry about sex, drugs, crime, and “rock-n-roll”.

Research specialisations in infancy and adolescence have burgeoned into separate journals and professional organizations, but no comparable trend has occurred for middle childhood.”

(Huston et al., 2006)

The value we place on middle childhood can perhaps be best understood by the extent to which we fail to talk about and understand this stage of development. The reality is that both early childhood and adolescence appear to attract far more attention and investment within political and academic worlds. Described as the “neglected” period or “the forgotten years”, middle childhood is in fact a fascinating developmental stage.

(Hutson et al., 2006; Mah & Ford-Jones, 2012)

This lack of discussion about middle childhood translates into little information gathering and sharing. We see this reflected in the choice of tools used to measure child wellbeing indicators and in the information that is shared with children, their families, and the children’s workforce about their development.

More worryingly – we don’t teach those who work alongside children about this age stage. And if we do, it tends to be the classic theorists being taught as if they are current thinking. It is hugely concerning that the vast majority of those working alongside our tamariki, have little to no current knowledge of their development. In addition, when a subject isn’t taught, it tends not be researched, as the main group of researchers in New Zealand are those who teach our degree and higher-level qualifications. This has created a chicken and egg situation where it’s hard to find experts to advocate for a qualification, and we have little research to show the value of expertise in this area.

Greater investment in tools focused on measuring wellbeing and development among this age group would provide a basis for better understanding middle childhood in a modern, Aotearoa context.



Measuring Child Development

Examples of how child development is measured and reported during middle childhood include:

- the Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy (see page 110) and
- Growing Up in New Zealand longitudinal study (see page 38)
- The Child Poverty Monitor (see page 110)
- the New Zealand Curriculum/ Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (see page 33).

Tamariki & COVID-19

The impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic on children's lives has been an area of interest for researchers over the past few years. Several Aotearoa reports capture the experiences of children during periods of lockdowns, and the impact of other COVID-19 related restrictions on their day-to-day lives.

Growing Up in New Zealand Reporting

The Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ) study produced a range of reports on the impacts of the pandemic on this research cohort:

[Now We Are Twelve: Experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic and young people's wellbeing](#) (2023)

This report focuses on concerns children held in relation to the impacts of COVID-19 on their education, family life and relationships.

[A snapshot of Life in Lockdown: Children's Health, Wellbeing and Education](#) (2021)

This report shares findings of the COVID-19 Wellbeing Survey undertaken with the GUINZ cohort of children during the May 2020 lockdown period. Focus areas include: "bubble" life, school, physical health and mental wellbeing.

Life During Lockdown, Ministry of Social Development

This series of reports uses GUINZ data to provide in-depth insights about children's experiences in relation to health and wellbeing and education:

[Life During Lockdown: Part One: Health and Wellbeing](#)

[Life During Lockdown: Part Two: Education](#)

Life in Lockdown, Mana Mokopuna, November 2020

This report shares children and young people's views on the nationwide lockdown periods that occurred in 2020. Findings indicate that the experiences and impacts of the lockdowns, both positive and negative, were diverse. The report highlights the significance for children of the impact the lockdowns had on relationships.

[Life in Lockdown \(2020\)](#)

Persistent Disadvantage

The Productivity Commission's work on persistent disadvantage – [A Fair Chance for All](#) – includes reporting that uses Growing Up in New Zealand data to explore patterns of disadvantage for children in Aotearoa and the impacts of disadvantage on children's development and wellbeing. The Productivity Commission was disestablished in early 2024.

[Family resources across the early life course and children's development in NZ](#)

Child & Youth Engagement Reports

This index comprises Aotearoa-based engagements with children and young people, undertaken by government agencies, NGOs, universities etc. While most relate to the youth age group, there are some engagements that involve children between five to 12-years.

[Child and Youth Engagement Reports Index](#)

Overseas Examples of Child Development Tools

The Middle Years Development Instrument

A great example from overseas of a tool focused on children's development during middle childhood is the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDi).

This tool, developed by the University of British Columbia (Canada), uses information gathered from children in school years 4 to 8 to help shape and deliver policy, practice and programmes that support children's emotional and social wellbeing.

The MDi focuses on five dimensions: Social and Emotional Development, Physical Health and Well-Being, Connectedness, Use of Out-of-School Time, and School Experiences, and provides a summary Wellbeing Index (covering social, emotional and physical health) and an Assets Index (which summarises things that are present in children's lives and important to their wellbeing). The tool has been used by more than 75% of public school districts in British Columbia. (Human Early Learning Partnership, University of British Columbia, 2024)

– [Find out more about the Middle Years Development Instrument](#)

The Australian Child & Youth Wellbeing Atlas (ACYWA)

This tool is a nationwide platform provides spatial data focused on child health and wellbeing indicators which can be filtered and drilled down at local and national levels. Indicators are based on six wellbeing themes: valued, loved, and safe, material basics, healthy, learning, participation, positive sense of identity and culture.

– [Find out more about the ACYWA](#)

Ngā wāhi hei arotahi | Areas to focus on

What does Kotahitanga look like for our tamariki?

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Middle childhood is prioritised through investment in training, expertise and research specific to this age stage

Mana Tangata | Contribution

Children's development is understood through current, Aotearoa-focused frameworks

Mana Whenua | Belonging

Children's holistic development is supported through a strong sense of belonging to people and place



Mana Reo | Communication

Middle childhood is valued in our society through investment in research and monitoring

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

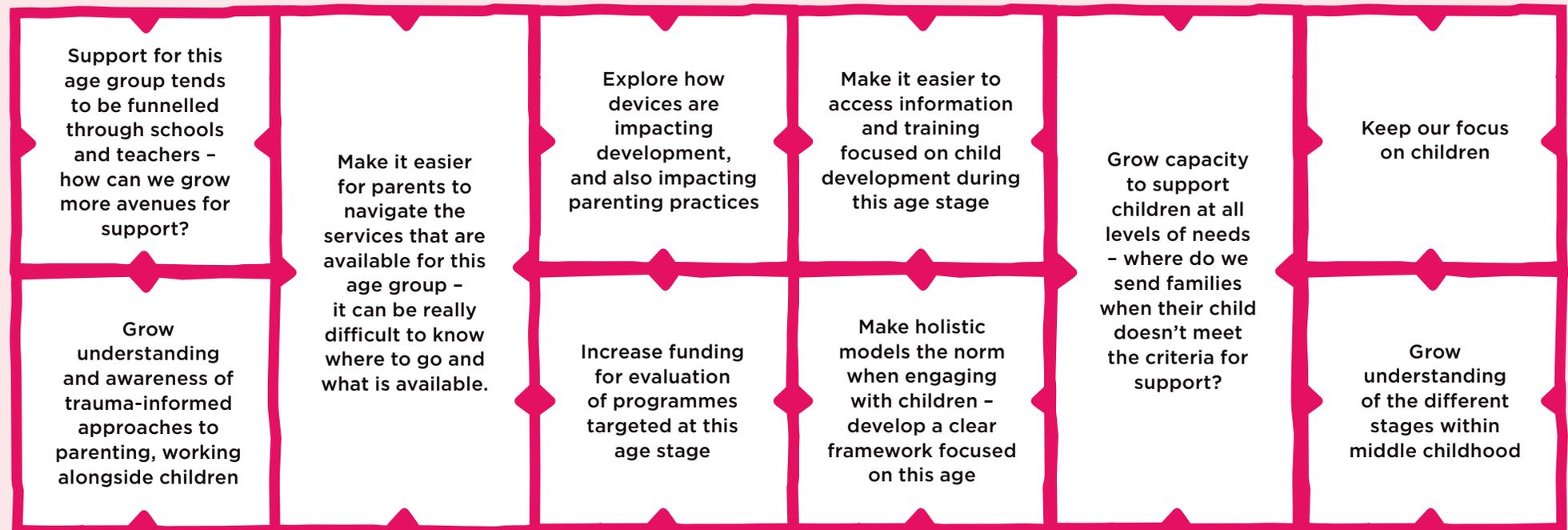
Children's wellbeing is supported through investment in holistic and appropriate service delivery



What might it look like to strengthen Kotahitanga for children....

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

Within the landscape of knowledge and research centred on the holistic development of five to 12-year-olds we have identified some key recommendations to better recognise and strengthen the Te Whāriki principles and improve outcomes for children:



Whānau Tangata | Family & Community

2

The second principle is Whānau Tangata | Family & Community

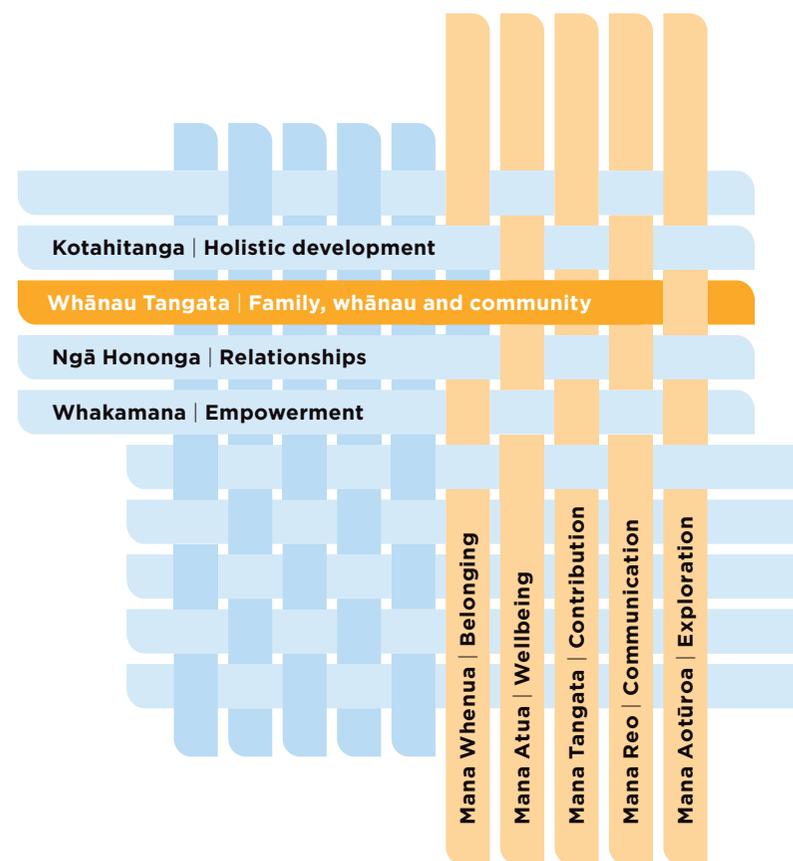
Within Te Whāriki, Whānau Tangata relates to the beliefs, traditions, and child-rearing practices held by our society, and the value placed on specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions.

This section of our report explores the trends and opportunities within our society that reflect what we do to support children's development during middle childhood.



“Children learn through play: by doing, asking questions, interacting with others, devising theories about how things work and then trying them out and by making purposeful use of resources. As they engage in exploration, they begin to develop attitudes and expectations that will continue to influence their learning throughout life.”

(Ministry of Education, 2017)



As we consider the Whānau Tangata principle through the lens of middle childhood we have explored some of the aspirations that we as a collective community hold for our tamariki.

We look at how children’s lives are impacted by social issues such as child poverty, food, and housing insecurity. We highlight how they contribute to our community through leadership, extracurricular learning and service, and the barriers to participating in these activities. We also explore the importance of play, and our society’s diminishing focus on play as a component of children’s healthy development beyond early childhood.

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Te Whāriki sees play as crucial to children's mana aotūroa (exploration) and development. Research is clear that in early childhood education settings, children's play IS learning, and that spontaneous play is deeply important.

This is linked to physical and cognitive outcomes, such as children gaining confidence in and control of their bodies, learning strategies for exploration, thinking and reasoning, and developing working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds.

The research is also clear that play continues to be of great importance to children beyond the age of five, however we do not see this reflected across middle childhood today. Particularly in how most of our schools approach learning and expectations of tamariki.

Greater effort must be made to ensure that children continue to benefit from unstructured play as they progress through their formal schooling years – this requires recognition and prioritisation of children's right to play within curriculums and policy, and increased emphasis on opportunities for play within our homes, neighbourhoods, cities, and education settings (Allee et al., 2019; Ginsburg et al, 2007; Lester et al., 2010; Sport NZ, 2017).

Play

Play is critical to children's physical and cognitive development. It is crucial to their overall wellbeing, resilience, capability, and health. Play builds, strengthens, and enables healthy brain development.

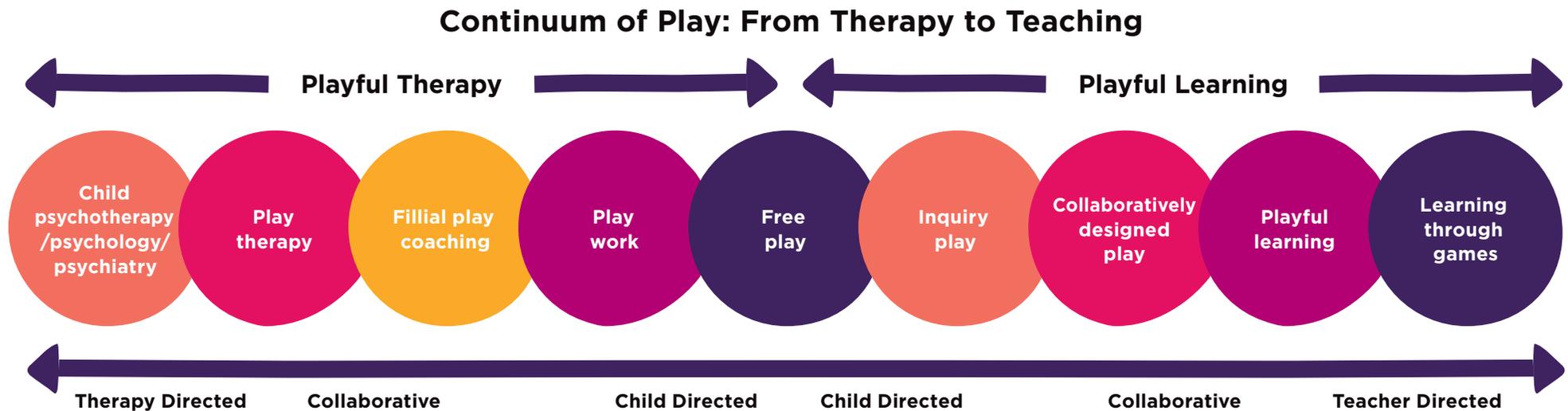
As well as providing enjoyment, play affects the development of:

- Executive functions such as memory, motivation and reward systems, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.
- Social and emotional processing and connection – emotional regulation, attachment, stress-responses
- Physical and mental health through active movement
- Development of gross and fine motor skills
- Relationship building skills
- Learning
- Creativity
- Leadership
- Independence
- Adaptability.



“Play allows tamariki and rangatahi to engage their manawa reka (curiosity, interest) and auahatanga (creativity) to weave together knowledge and skills, ways of being and belonging, and their tuakiri (identity) to enhance mana (influence, spiritual power).” (Play Aotearoa, 2022)

What do we mean by play?



*Adapted in part from Play Therapy United Kingdom's continuum of play therapy (n.d.) and Pyle and Danniels (2017) Continuum of Play-based Learning. (Source: Allee et. al, 2019)

The Continuum of Play above shows the range of ways that children play from a therapeutic perspective to within education settings.

'Free play' (the middle of the range) is of particular importance to children's development. Free play is underpinned by the following principles:

- **Child-led**

Free play is first and foremost decided by the child (child-led). Free play allows a child to explore interests with limited adult input and is self-directed. As a result, the motivation to play comes from the child, as opposed to being decided for them or influenced by adults. This also develops curiosity.

Children may choose to play individually, alongside or with others, but should have the freedom to choose when and how they engage, rather than this being instructed. Self-directed play means that children take on the role of leader and make choices for themselves, building their sense of empowerment and their self-confidence.

To enable this, play must be accessible and mana-enhancing. For example, play among children who are neurodiverse, or those with disabilities, may look different to that of other children, yet is equally important for their development.

- Freedom

“Adults generally define the purpose and use of space and time; children usually find ways to play that appear within the cracks of this adult order.”

(Lester & Russell, 2010, p.11)

Children must be free to interact with their worlds without constant restriction or interruption. Children need play-rich environments – spaces that allow for movement and sensory experiences, inside and out. Equipment doesn't need to be expensive, it just needs to enable children to create, explore and adapt their environment as they play.

Play engages children's imagination and is not reliant on reality. It is not tied to a particular outcome or result. Within play, children should also have the freedom to construct their own rules – these may be self-constructed or negotiated by a group of children playing together.

- Allows for appropriate risk-taking

Risk-taking is a key component of play, enabling children to experiment, testing their abilities and assumptions at their own pace within a safe context. This may happen physically, such as in climbing a tree, or relationally, as children process emotions and practice social and relational interactions and skills through their world of play. While play may provide an escape from reality for children, they are developing vital skills for the real world as they do so. (Lester et al., 2010; Play Aotearoa, 2022; Sport NZ, 2017)

“Play is about creating a world in which, for that moment, children are in control and can seek out uncertainty in order to triumph over it – or, if not, no matter, it is only a game. In this way, children develop a repertoire of flexible responses to situations they create and encounter.”

(Lester & Russell, 2010, p.10)

Since we know that children's ability to play is crucial to their wellbeing, we must also realise that restrictions on or absence of play have a terrible effect on a child's development.

(Lester & Russell, 2010)

Sport NZ (2017) have identified several factors that are thought to influence children's ability to engage in play:

- Limited understanding among adults of how to enable quality play
- Less unstructured time in children's schedules
- Increased use of screen time
- Changing perspectives on places that are appropriate for play
- Increased fears and regulations around safety.
- Greater appetite for instant gratification in contrast to the slower pace of play.



Play in Middle Childhood

Play is prioritised within early childhood in Aotearoa as a crucial component of Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017). Internationally there are widely accepted frameworks such as Parten's 6 Stages of Play which focus on the types and stages of play that children engage in during early childhood.



However, despite play continuing to be of importance for children's development during the middle years, there does not appear to be a similar focus within education, or more broadly in society, on what play looks like, or the progression of play, during this period.

Cognitive and physical advances during middle childhood result in developments in children's play, such as:

- Richer play, as children's ability to concentrate improves
- More structured play, as children become more able to construct, communicate and understand rules
- Engagement in board games and organised games
- Imaginative play deepened by stories
- Influences on play increase – books, media, social circles, etc...
- Daydreaming increases
- Play may become more internalised as children become more aware of what is socially acceptable among their peers
- Increases in strength and agility impact on physical play
- Children engage in gendered play

(Smith, 2013)

The right to play

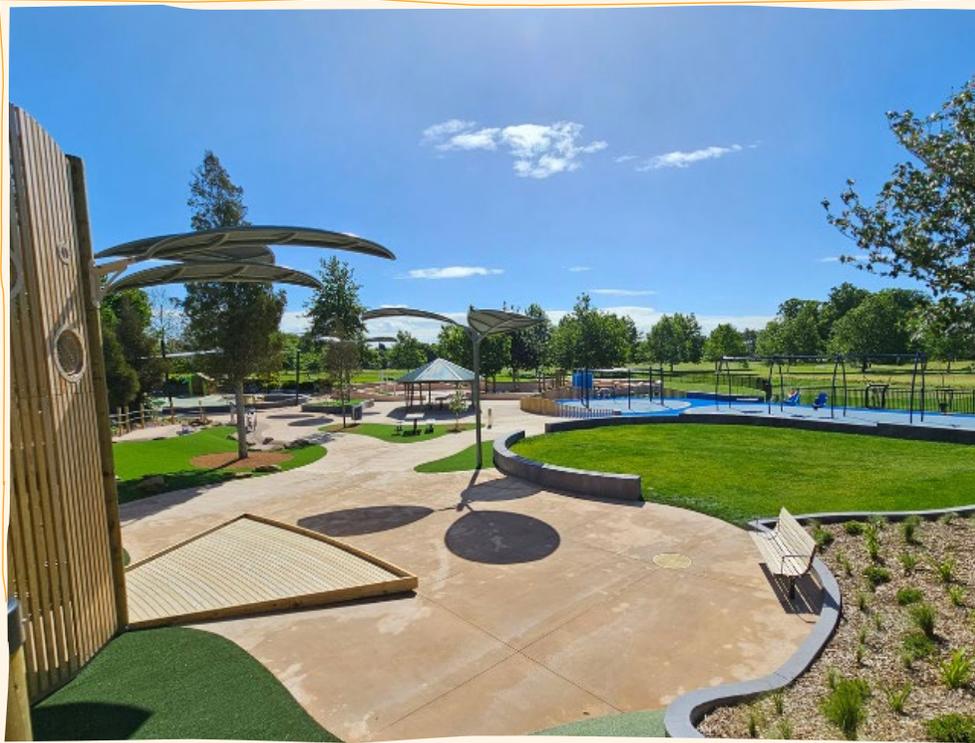
Children's right to play is affirmed in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that:

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Further definition of the terminology used in this Article by the [International Play Association](#) identifies play as including **“activities of children that are not controlled by adults and that do not necessarily conform to any rules”** (Play Aotearoa, 2022).

The right to play is recognised in the Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy (see page 15 in Whakamana), which aspires for children to be Happy and Healthy through the provision of **spaces and opportunities to play and express themselves creatively**.

Children's ability to engage in play is largely influenced by the value placed on play by the adults around them. Play must be recognised and supported through the systems that directly engage with children – such as our education curricula and health system – and those systems that impact the environment in which they live, such as town planning and housing policies. Enabling appropriate and accessible opportunities for play is key to ensuring the right to play is upheld within Aotearoa.



Magical Bridge Playground

The Magical Bridge Playground is a fully accessible and inclusive playground that opened in Hamilton in December 2023.

The Playground was designed to **“remove barriers for individuals and families with physical or neurological disabilities, and is designed to include everyone, no matter their age or ability.”**

(Hamilton City Council, 2023)

— [Find out more here](#)

Play through a Te Ao Māori Lens

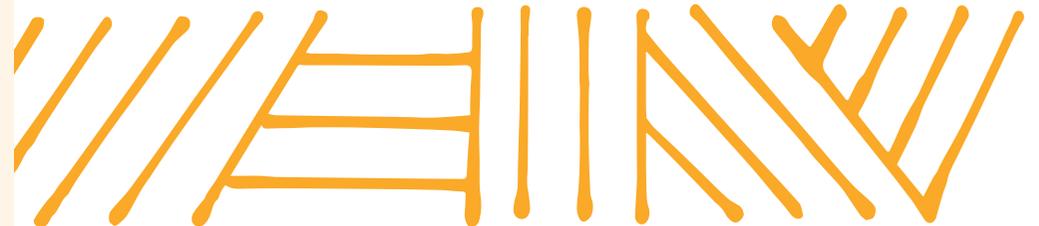
Sport New Zealand’s [Māori Voices of Play Insights report](#) highlights traditional activities and spaces that enabling play within Te Ao Māori.

This included:

- Te Whare Tapere – a community space for performing arts and entertainment. This included ngā waiata, ngā haka (dance), ngā kōrero (storytelling), ngā taonga pūoro (instruments) and ngā tākaro (games).
- Te Whare Tū Taua – a space designated for war and weaponry.
- Ngā Taonga Tākaro – traditional Māori games and sports which typically had a connection to spiritual beliefs.
- Ngā Mahi a te Rēhia – games which enabled the sharing and strengthening of practices and values.
- Kapa Haka – chanting and dancing underpinned by Māori creation and whakapapa
- Mara Hupara – educative playgrounds based on traditional games and play items. See this example in Auckland

The report identified that for Māori, play is strongly connected to the natural environment, that uniquely Māori play opportunities are highly valued, and that play is a vehicle for sharing mātauranga Māori. The intergenerational nature of play on the marae and at home and the valuing of stories within Māori culture enable this to occur. (Sport New Zealand, 2020)

— [Find out more: Traditional Māori Games](#)





Waka Ama

Waka Ama, is a traditional Pacific form of canoeing considered to be “major vehicle of Māori cultural identity for participants and supporters” (Sport NZ, 2020).

In 2023, children made up around one quarter of the membership of Waka Ama Aotearoa. Over half of all members were Māori.

— *Find out more at [Waka Ama Aotearoa](#)*

Te Mana Kuratahi

Te Mana Kuratahi is the biennial national primary schools kapa haka competition.

Hosted by different regions, the competition enables children from around New Zealand to compete over a four-day period. The competition has now been running for over 20 years.

— *Find out more at [Te Mana Kuratahi](#)*

Play within Education

In recent years play has become increasingly recognised as an important aspect of learning and development during the first year or two of primary school.

There is then a noticeable drop off in the place of play within education from the age of around Year 3 (7-8 years), suggesting that there is little understanding generally of the importance of play to children's development across middle to late childhood. Play is referenced in the [New Zealand Curriculum](#) under The Arts (Drama) and Health & Physical Education.

Research within Aotearoa that is focused on play also tends to focus on younger children. One exception to this is the work of Julia Bevin who is completing her Doctorate of Education focused on how play enhances learner agency and well-being in the upper primary levels in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

– [Find out more about Bevan's work here](#)

Resources and initiatives focused on play within education include:

- **Play Pedagogy Aotearoa** – champions an education where every child experiences developmentally appropriate, play-based learning, equipping them with the skills and dispositions to thrive in the future.
- **Play Conversations** – a podcast lead by Dr Sarah Aiono which engages passionate play leaders, advocates, experts, and educators about all things play and why our children need opportunities for play in school – no matter their age.
- **Longworth Education** case studies of play-based education within primary schools can be found [here](#).
- **Loose parts play** involves the use of open-ended objects and materials to facilitate play experiences for children. While common within early childhood settings, play advocates support the use of loose parts play in education more broadly.

Check out [Junky Monkeys](#) and [Conscious Kids](#) to learn more about loose parts play being used in Aotearoa schools.

- **Healthy Active Learning** – a joint initiative between the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, and Sport NZ, which aims to support schools to create environments that support and promote play, sport, and physical activity. Through this initiative it is hoped that tamariki will have more opportunities for free play at school.

Additional Play Resources

Sport New Zealand

Sport New Zealand recognises its role as a kaitiaki (guardian) of play in Aotearoa and the correlation that play has to physical literacy.

It has developed several initiatives to uphold children's right to play:

- [Principles of Play](#) (developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health). These principles underpin the work of Sport New Zealand in promoting opportunities for play for tamariki in Aotearoa:
 1. Play is important to the wellbeing of young New Zealanders
 2. Play is a cornerstone of our physical literacy approach and a crucial part of development for young people.
 3. Play is the shared responsibility of everyone
 4. Young people must have access to enriched and varied playful experiences within their local environments.
 5. Adults must understand what their role is in enabling play.
 6. Young people need the opportunity to experience risk and challenge through play
 7. Wherever possible, play should include the opportunity to be active.

- [Kia Hīanga - The Play Plan](#) – Sport NZ’s 2021-2024 bicultural plan focused on tamariki aged five-12. The plan sets out how Sport NZ aims to deliver on improving the quality of experiences, opportunities and support for play and create an environment for play to flourish in Aotearoa.
- [Neighbourhood Play System \(NPS\)](#) – a child-centred approach to urban play design, the NPS provides a blueprint to identify and address opportunities and barriers for tamariki to play in their school and neighbourhood. Linking to local plans and funding opportunities, the NPS blueprint looks at how to embed play elements through school grounds, footpaths, streets, alleyways, greenspaces, waterways, industrial zones, parks, churches and shops – to promote play every day.
- [Local Play Advocates](#) – Local Play Advocates work within local government to build awareness and understanding of the importance of play for children’s wellbeing, and the role that Councils have in enabling play within their communities. These roles are funded by Sport New Zealand for a period of two years, with the hope that they will become embedded in Council beyond that period.

Research

Sport New Zealand has also published the following recent reports focused on play in Aotearoa:

- [Spotlight on Tamariki](#): Findings from the Active NZ survey focused on participation in play, active recreation and sport for tamariki aged 5-11.
- [Power of Play](#): Regional insights focused on communities’ perceptions and experiences of play and what helps, or hinders, children’s play.
- [Play in Crisis](#) (2021): A set of resources to inform the preservation and enhancement of play for tamariki in Aotearoa during crisis.

Play as Therapy

Play therapy uses play and the creative arts as a means of alleviating emotional, behavioural, and mental health challenges experienced by children.

Play therapy offers children a safe environment to process emotions and desires that they may find difficult to understand or communicate verbally. It allows children to rehearse skills and identify new strategies for dealing with situations they encounter. A variety of therapeutic tools may be utilised in play therapy such as creative visualisation, therapeutic storytelling, drama and role play, visual arts, music, dance and movement.

Play therapy has a [strong evidence-base](#) internationally as an effective therapy for five to 12-year-olds.

- *[Further information about the efficacy of play therapy can be found in the Association for Play Therapy USA Play Therapy Evidence-Based Practice Statement \[here\]\(#\)](#)*

While an established field of practice in many other countries, play therapy is effectively unsupported in New Zealand.

Except for hospital play specialists (profiled below), there are no NZQA accredited play therapy qualifications available to practitioners in New Zealand, and none of our therapeutic, social work, community or health qualifications are required to include learning related to play therapy.

This creates three major issues:

1. There is no regulation of therapeutic play therapy, or those who offer it
2. Those offering play therapy to children are unlikely to have received specific training in this approach
3. There is effectively no research on the practice of therapeutic play therapy in New Zealand.



Hospital Play Specialists

Hospital Play Specialists support children, young people and their whānau to cope with hospitalization by using play as a medium to minimize associated stress and anxiety, build coping strategies and create opportunities for participating in their health care experiences (Hospital Play Specialists Association, 2023).

It should be noted that most hospital play specialists first train in early childhood education, with those under five years of age.

- *Examples of Hospital Play Specialists at Starship Children's Hospital can be found [here](#) and [here](#)*
- *Find out more at [Hospital Play Specialists Association Aotearoa New Zealand](#) - a professional body supporting the work of hospital play specialists*

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Te Whāriki upholds mana atua (wellbeing) through the promotion of children's health, provision of an adequate standard of living and their protection from harm.

One way to explore the state of mana atua for our tamariki is how we understand and act on socioeconomic disadvantage and the impacts issues such as poverty, housing insecurity and food insecurity have on children's development. We also look at how children are protected from harm within our society.

At an international level, Aotearoa experiences comparatively high levels of both child poverty and harm to children. We continue to see unequal impacts of this falling on Māori, Pacific and refugee migrant children.

Food Security

Children in food insecure households have been found to have poorer health outcomes than those experiencing food security – evident in rates of poor nutrition, childhood obesity or being overweight, asthma and behavioural or developmental difficulties.

(Ministry of Health, 2019)

The Child Poverty Monitor reporting indicates that in 2020/21, around one in six children (14.9%) were living in households where food ran out often or sometimes due to lack of money.

This figure was higher for children living in areas with the highest deprivation score (30.5%), Pacific children (37.3%) and Māori children (26.4%) (Duncanson et al., 2022).

Over the same period, research from Growing Up in New Zealand tells us that one in six 12-year-olds in their cohort were living in households that were not food secure. Food insecurity was highest for Pacific or Māori children, or children living in high deprivation neighbourhoods. Interestingly, food insecurity indicators had decreased for the Growing Up in New Zealand cohort between ages 8 and 12, except for the use of special food grants and food banks which had increased. This shows that the reliance on grants and food banks is replacing real food security for many of our children. (Gerritsen et al., 2023).

A range of initiatives exist to address food insecurity for children:

KickStart Breakfast

KickStart Breakfast aims to support children's learning and wellbeing through the provision of a healthy breakfast at schools throughout Aotearoa. The programme is delivered in partnership by the Ministry of Social Development, Fonterra and Sanitarium. Over 180,000 breakfasts of Weet-Bix and Anchor milk are served per week to children across the 1,400+ schools (over 50% of all schools) that have adopted the programme. The programme is available to all schools and alternative education providers at primary, intermediate and secondary level.

– [Find out more about KickStart Breakfast](#)



Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy School Lunches Programme

The Ka Ora, Ka Ako programme aims to reduce food insecurity through the provision of healthy lunches in school communities that face the greatest socioeconomic barriers. Currently around 25% of all students in New Zealand have access to Ka Ora, Ka Ako - meals are available to all students at participating schools. The primary measure of eligibility is a school's Equity Index.

As at September 2023 around 230,000 students had access to lunches through this programme, with 87% of participating schools containing students in the five to 12-years age range (Ministry of Education, 2023).

The Growing Up in NZ study found that:

- one in four 12-year-olds received food from a school-based programme most or every school day
- 20% received Ka Ora, Ka Ako
- Half of the young people living in moderately food insecure households, and a third of those living in severely food insecure households, did not receive Ka Ora, Ka Ako in the past year (Gerritsen et al., 2023).

– [Find out more about Ka Ora, Ka Ako | Healthy Lunches Programme](#)

Fruit in Schools Programme

The Fruit in Schools Programme delivers fresh fruit to students in 566 primary schools throughout Aotearoa. The programme aims to enable students to regularly eat fresh fruit, while also raising awareness of, and promoting, healthy eating and lifestyles. Fresh fruit was supplied daily to over 120,000 tamariki and staff during term time in 2022. Positive impacts reported by school leadership include the ability for schools to feed hungry students, promotion of a healthy food environment within the school setting, and a sense of equality among students.

Fruit in Schools was developed by an interagency group comprising health, education, and sport organisations.

– [Find out more about Fruit in Schools](#)

Housing

Housing insecurity is a major issue for children in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Issues faced by children experiencing housing insecurity may include:

- The loss of social connections through increased mobility
- Impact on education through changing schooling
- Health impacts associated with overcrowding and inadequate standards of housing
- Lack of consistency in healthcare services due to changing locations
- Potential lack of play spaces available to children in emergency housing

Statistics NZ data from 2021 tells us that children in households experiencing poverty are more likely to be living in rental housing:

- 4 out of 5 children in material hardship lived in homes that were rented.
- A child living in a rented home was seven times more likely to experience material hardship than a child living in a home owned by their family (22.1 percent or 101,800, compared with 3.2 percent or 14,600, respectively).
- 113,400, or 24.6% of children living in a rented home were in low-income households, compared with 52,900, or 11.8% of children living in homes their family owned (Statistics NZ, 2022).

The Housing Register is a list of people eligible for and awaiting placement in public housing. For the period December 2023, there were 10,326 applicants with children on the Housing Register.

(MSD, 2023)

Children living in emergency housing

Data from the Ministry of Social Development (2024) tell us that at the end of January 2024:

- More than 3,000 children were living in emergency housing – a figure that has remained consistently high over the past 18 months.
- 297 couples with children and 1,209 single people with children received Emergency Housing Special Needs Grants.
- Single people with children make up 42% of the households receiving Emergency Housing Grants.
- Couples with children and single people with children together make up over half the households receiving Emergency Housing Grants.

While a month-end total number of children in households living in Emergency Housing is reported, MSD does not record details of the individual children associated with Emergency Housing grants. This means that we cannot calculate for example, the total number of unique children living in Emergency Housing across a period (e.g. per month, quarter, year) as their caregiver(s) may have received more than one grant during this time (Ministry of Social Development, 2023).

Because details about the children living in Emergency Housing (such as age or ethnicity) are not recorded, we know little about these children and their specific needs.

Emergency Housing is not required to meet New Zealand's Healthy Homes Standards meaning that children's health may be compromised due to poor housing conditions.

Children living in Emergency Housing may be required to shift between Emergency Housing Providers – this means that they may have to change schools or lose community connections each time they move.

Child Poverty

Child poverty is a significant issue in Aotearoa, with nearly 150,000 children living in households that are considered low income or experience material hardship

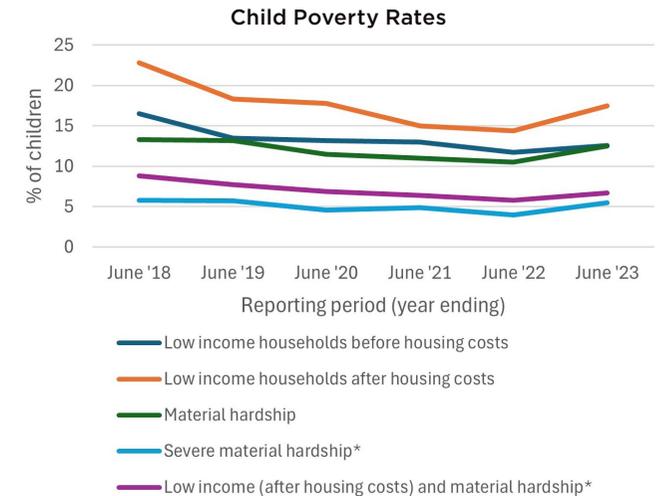
Poverty impacts children’s cognitive, social and behavioural development and is linked to poorer educational and health outcomes (Ministry for Social Development, 2018).

Rates of child poverty have reduced across eight out of nine measures since the government’s child poverty reduction targets were introduced under the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 (see page 114).

While two out of three of the government’s first three-year targets (Low income after housing costs, and material hardship measures) were achieved in 2020/2021, both measures have since increased in the 2022/23 year (Statistics NZ, 2022; 2023; 2024). Greater efforts to address child poverty are needed to enable the government’s future targets to be met, and ensure more children experience an adequate standard of living.

Poverty is experienced disproportionately by Māori and Pacific children and children with a disability, or those living in households where someone has a disability.

Target/ reporting period	Percentage of children living in low income households BEFORE housing costs	Percentage of children living in low income households AFTER housing costs	Percentage of children living in households experiencing material hardship
2017/18	16.5%	22.8%	13.3%
2022/23	12.6% (1 in 8 children) 146,000 children	17.5% (1 in 6 children) 202,100 children	12.5% (1 in 8 children) 143,700 children
- Tamariki Māori	14.4% (1 in 7 children)	19.8% (1 in 5 children)	21.5% (1 in 5 children)
- Pacific children	17.0% (1 in 6 children)	17.3% (1 in 6 children)	28.9% (1 in 4 children)
- Children with disability**	12.7% (1 in 8 children)	16.5% (1 in 7 children)	22.3% (1 in 5 children)
2023/24 (3yr target)	10%	15%	9%
2027/28 (10yr target)	5%	10%	6%



Low-income: less than 50% median equivalised disposable household income

*These are two of the six supplementary measures of child poverty that the government must report on.

**This figure refers specifically to children with disabilities however this percentage would be higher when considering children living in households impacted by disability (e.g. living with a disabled family member).

Source: Statistics NZ, 2024

Material Hardship

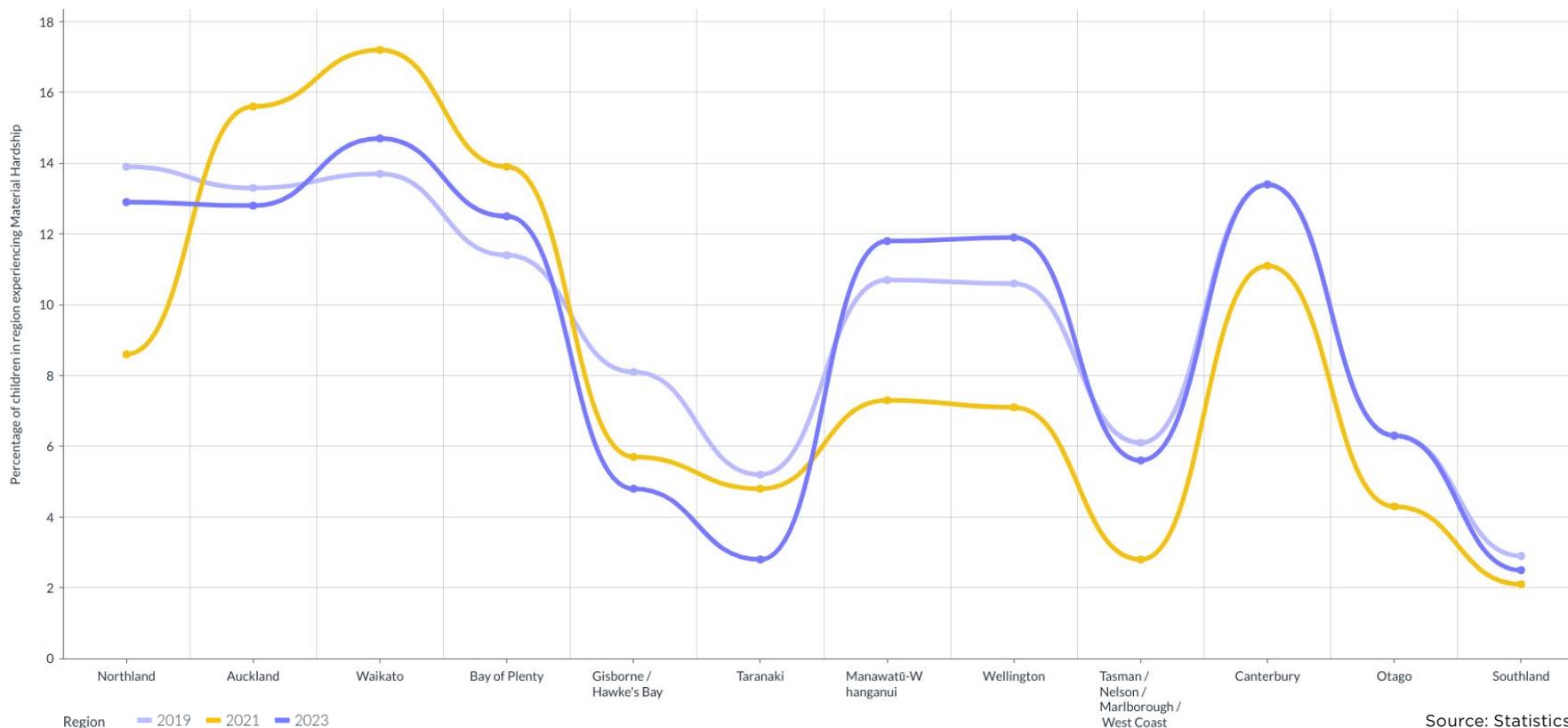
Material hardship is reflected in a lack of access to food and clothing, healthcare services, adequate living conditions and experiences such as trips and special occasions. In this respect, material hardship may be a more tangible measure of poverty for children than the income measures used in reporting child poverty.

The Growing Up in New Zealand study found that at age 12, 1 out of 10 children were living in households reporting material hardship, and 1 out of 5 children had lived in material hardship at some point during their childhood. Māori and Pacific children, and those from low-income or sole parent households, had a greater likelihood of

living in material hardship. Over half of the children experiencing material hardship at some point during childhood were found to experience material hardship during the middle childhood/early adolescence period (Grant et. al, 2023).

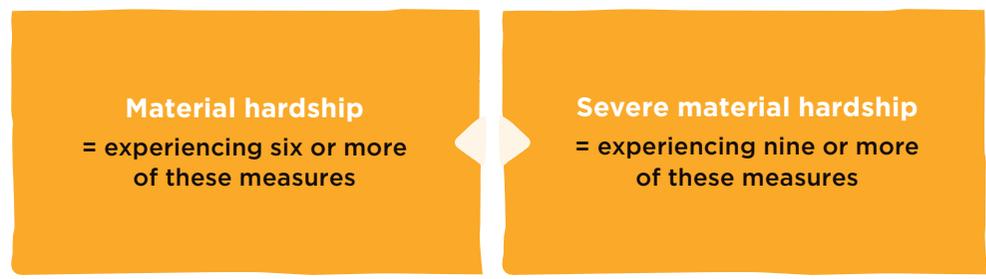
Recent reporting on child poverty statistics indicates that while the rate of material hardship decreased from 13.3% in the year ending June 2018 to 10.5% in the year ending June 2022, it has increased to 12.5% in the year ending June 2023. Similarly rates of severe material hardship decreased from 5.8% in the year ending June 2018 to 4% in the year to June 2022, but increased to 5.5% in the year to June 2023 (Statistics New Zealand, 2024).

Material Hardship rates by Region



Source: Statistics NZ, 2024

Material deprivation is measured in Aotearoa using the DEP-17 Index which includes the following indicators of poverty, as reported by an adult in the household:

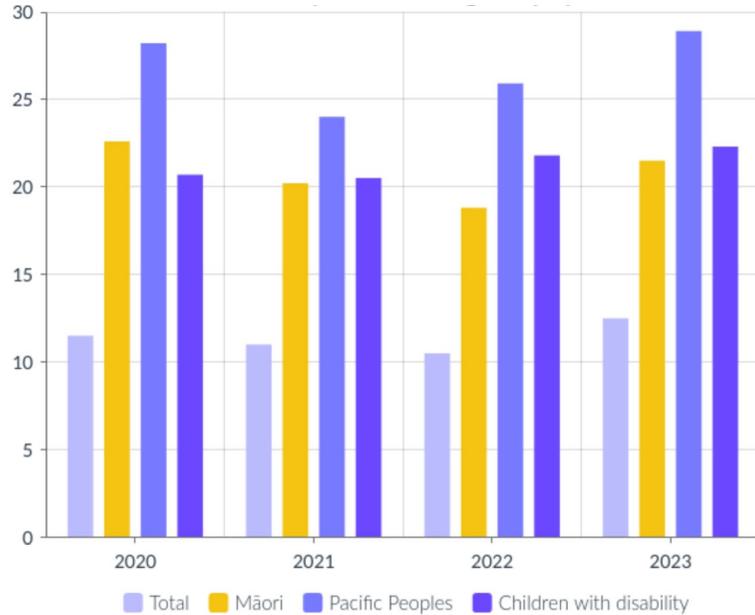


Did not eat a meal with meat/veggie substitute every 2nd day	Fell behind on payments for car	Put up with feeling cold	Did not have two pairs of good shoes	Did not have suitable clothes for special occasions	Was unable to give gifts
Put off doctor's visits	Went without fresh fruit and vegetables	Could not pay utilities	Borrowed money to meet costs	Delayed replacing/repairing appliances	Did not have home contents insurance
Felt limited in buying clothes/shoes	Could not afford unexpected \$500 expense	Cut back on local trips	Put off dentist's visit	Bought cheaper or less meat	

(Grant et. al, 2023, p.3)

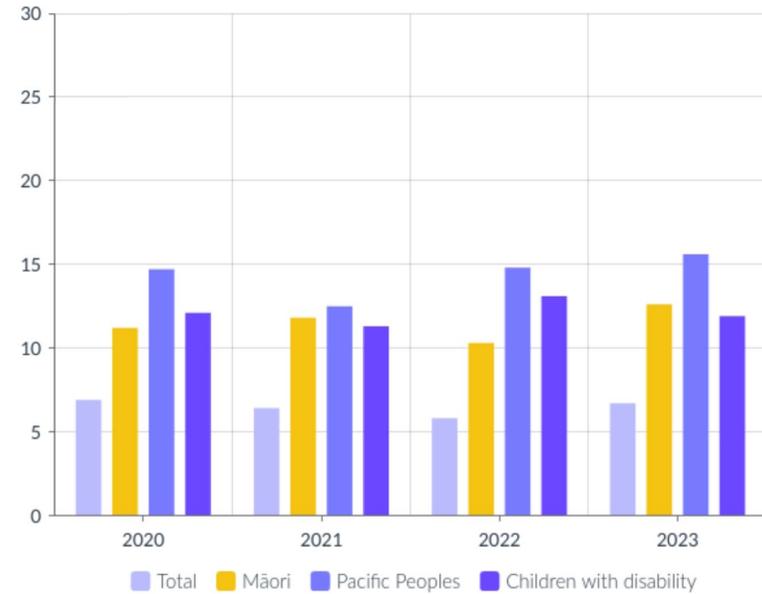
In addition to the primary material hardship measure, the government must report on six supplementary measures of child poverty, including reporting on children living in households experiencing severe material hardship, and children living in households that are considered low-income* and experiencing material hardship.

Material Hardship - Percentage of Populations



Rates of children living in households considered to be low-income and in material hardship are provided below for the 2020-2023 period:

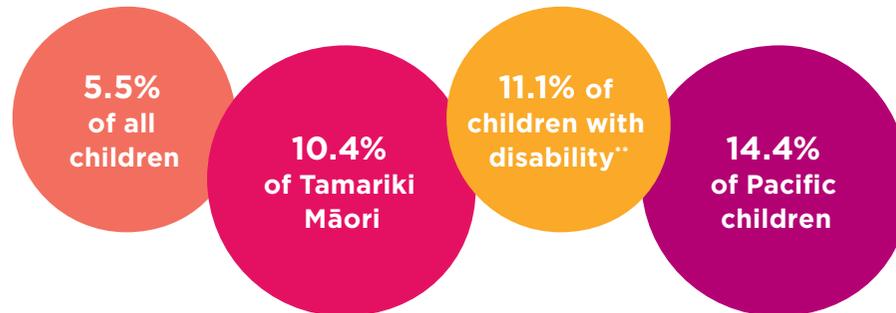
Material Hardship and Low-income - Percentage of Populations



*Low-income is defined as having less than 60% median-equivalised disposable household income after deducting housing costs (AHC) for the financial year. Source: Statistics NZ, 2024

Children living in households experiencing **severe material hardship** during the year to June 2023:

“This figure refers specifically to children with disabilities however this percentage would be higher when considering children living in households impacted by disability (e.g. living with a disabled family member).



Child Poverty statistics are derived using the Household Economic Survey which does not include children in Emergency Housing!

A 2010 report published by Mana Mokopuna asked children to define poverty and its impacts.

Children's views and experiences centred around the following themes:

LACK OF MONEY
 Lack of essentials, Housing including food
Health
 Physical Social ADDICTIONS
 environments exclusion Work &
 School the impact on
 Gangs children
CHILD ABUSE, MENTAL & NEGLECT AND VIOLENCE
 emotional wellbeing
 Future prospects

(Egan-Bitran, 2010, p.10)

Statistics New Zealand notes that

“certain families may ‘protect’ children from hardship by ensuring they have essentials while doing without items themselves” and indicates that there could be value in exploring how material hardship could be monitored using child-specific measures to better understand children’s experiences.

(Statistics NZ, 2019; Grant et al., 2023)

– *Find out more:*

See the full report of recent [Child Poverty results](#) from Statistics New Zealand.

Read the [Growing Up in New Zealand Now We are Twelve Snapshot: Material Hardship](#)

Mana Mokopuna’s [‘This is how I see it’ Children, young people and young adults’ views and experiences of poverty](#) (2010)

Read the latest [Annual Report on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and Child Poverty Related Indicators](#)

See also:

- Find out about the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018 on page 114 of Whakamana.
- Find out about the Child Poverty Monitor report on page 110 of Whakamana.

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.

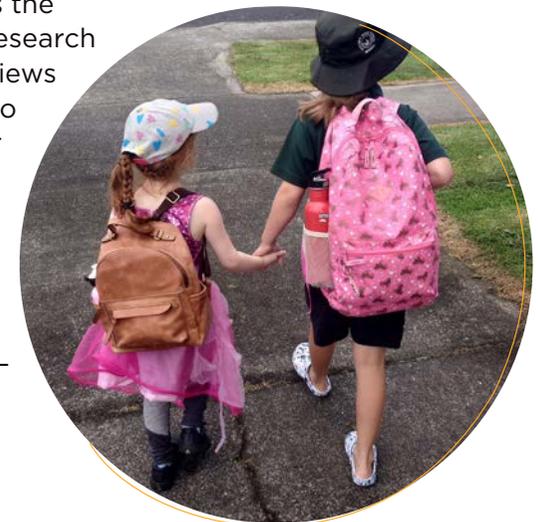
Children also experience school transitions due to change as evidenced by Growing Up in New Zealand research which found that 20% of children had moved schools between the ages of six and eight, with most having moved at least twice (Morton et al., 2020).

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:



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 heartrate 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:



Ngā Hononga | Relationships

3

The third principle is Ngā Hononga | Relationships

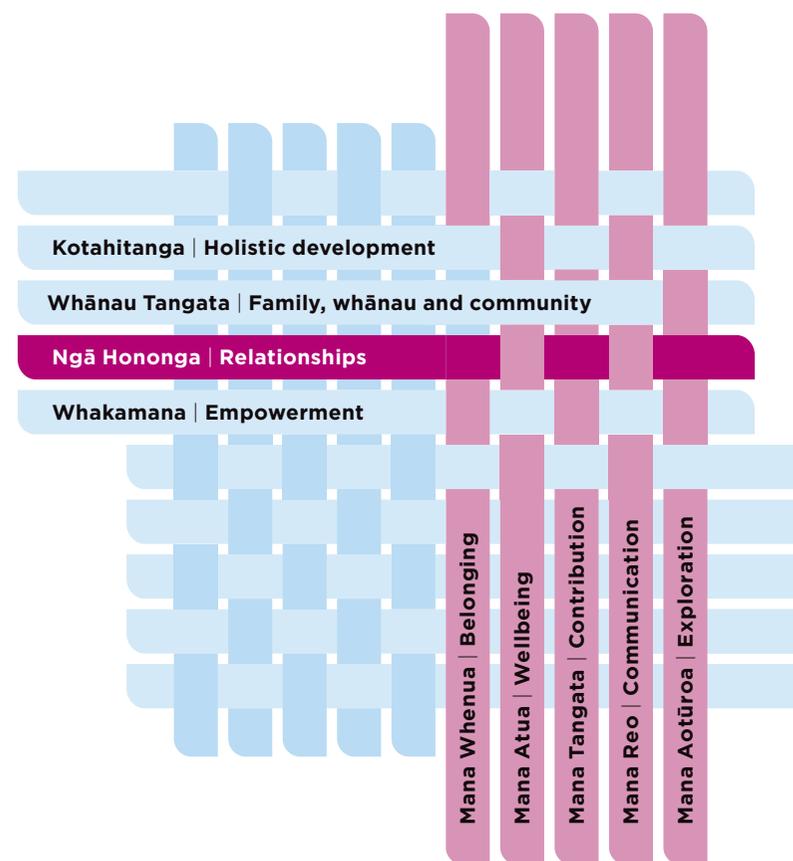
Te Whāriki identifies ngā hononga (relationships) as a fundamental aspect of children's development, noting that "it is through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things that children have opportunities to try out their ideas and refine their working theories".

(Ministry of Education, 2017, p.21).



“Working theories are a way in which children draw on and apply ideas and understandings accumulated from their personal and social experiences, in order to make sense of their world. The concept of working theories celebrates children’s unique ways of thinking and inquiring.”

(Hargraves, 2019)



Te Whāriki maintains that relationships are not limited to those of today, but within a Te Ao Māori worldview include connections to people and place through whakapapa.

In this section we explore some of the relationships that are central to children’s lives during middle childhood and how we can support richer relationships during this period of development.

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Mana atua (wellbeing) refers to the nurturing of children's wellbeing, the promotion of their health, and their protection from harm.

Healthy relationships are an essential aspect of wellbeing throughout childhood, expanding as children enter middle childhood to encompass a wider group of people – not only family but also peers and adults that children interact with through schooling, extracurricular activities, services and in play. The importance of relationships with peers and other adults increases as children age and begin to seek social and emotional support from beyond parental relationships.

Positive relationships protect children from harm and enable them to develop the skills needed to keep themselves safe and healthy as they grow. They provide a safe space for children to express their emotions and needs. Children's own perceptions of their relationships provide insight into how valued and safe they feel.

During middle childhood children's relationships deepen as they gain the cognitive and emotional skills to navigate and maintain more complex and varied relationships (Evans et al., 2023).



The Value of Relationships in Children's Lives

Having good relationships with family and friends, and being valued and respected for who they are, have been identified by children and young people as among the top three things needed to have a good life (Mana Mokopuna, 2019).

According to the findings of the *Growing Up in New Zealand* longitudinal study (2023), the presence of positive relationships leads to

“positive developmental outcomes for children, including self-regulation, coping, prosocial behaviour, and long-lasting positive relationships with others”.

Findings from this research indicate that most 12 year olds experience positive relationships in their life:

- Most children reported high levels of trust, communication and reliability in their relationships with parents, and positive relationships with peers.
- Half of young people experienced strong relationships with parents, peers, and had a special adult in their lives.
- 91% of children reported having strong relationships with two or three people.
- Less than 1% of the cohort reported having poor relationships with parents and peers and no strong relationship with another adult.
- 48% of young people reported having at least one special adult other than their parents in their life, and were most likely to identify grandparents, aunts, uncles, and teachers as this person. However 35% reported not having a special adult in their life.

- In Te Ao Māori, raising children is a collective whānau responsibility, so positive relationships with other adults are especially important. The findings supported this notion, with Rangatahi Māori and Pacific young people more likely to have a special adult in their life compared to European young people.
- Deprivation was found to impact children's relationships, with children living in the most socioeconomically deprived areas reporting less close relationships with parents compared to those in other areas, and greater prevalence of a relationship with a special adult compared to those living in the least deprived areas.
- Children who identified as transgender or non-binary were less likely to have strong relationships with their parents compared to cisgender children, but equally likely to have a strong relationship with another adult (Evans et. al, 2023).

– **Find out more about children's relationships:**

Growing Up in New Zealand Now We Are Twelve Relationships Snapshot (2022) and [full report](#)

See also the Mana Mokopuna [What Makes A Good Life? Report](#) (2019)



Mana Whenua | Belonging

Within Te Whāriki, mana whenua (belonging) speaks to children's connections with whānau and the wider world being affirmed and extended. This enables tamariki to recognise their turangawaewae (place to stand) – a fundamental aspect of belonging.

Belonging is generally first understood for children within the context of their family and whānau. It is the primary relationship that affirms a child's place in the world, and is likely to shape their experience of other relationships as they grow.

The value of family and whānau has previously been upheld in Aotearoa through the Families Commission, which acted as an advocate for families generally and produced and promoted research relating to families. The Commission was established in 2004 and in 2014 became Superu, which was subsequently disestablished in 2018. The loss of this organisation, and its focus on understanding the strengths and challenges experienced by families in New Zealand, has left a gap in recent research that provides insight into this aspect of children's lives.



We explore below some of the facets of family and children's belonging through the lens of middle childhood.

Family & Whānau

"Families are the foundation of our society, in whatever form they take. Throughout the ages they have provided the social input to the development of dynamic and effective societies."

(The Families Commission, 2008, p.11)

The former Families Commission identified four core functions of families, being:

- "the nurturing, rearing, socialisation, and protection of children
 - maintaining and improving the wellbeing of family members by providing them with emotional and material support
 - the psychological "anchorage" of adults and children by way of affection, companionship and a sense of belonging and identity
 - passing on culture, knowledge, values, attitudes, obligations, and property from one generation to the next"
- (Cribb, 2009, p.4).

While these functions apply in most cultures, different groups of people prioritise certain aspects of family over others.

"The strong relationship between children's wellbeing and positive parent-child relationships is consistent across cultures, emphasising the universal importance of positive family dynamic in child development... The relationship between child and family during development is widely accepted as bidirectional, with parents also shaped and influenced by their child's characteristics."

(Morton et. al, 2020, p.53)

Whānau is the Māori concept of family, which expands beyond Western concepts of the nuclear family. Whānau is defined as a larger family unit based on a common whakapapa (descent from a shared ancestor or ancestors), who maintain certain responsibilities and obligations to each other. Another understanding of whānau is that of Kaupapa whānau, where people are connected through a shared mission and as a result behave together as a family (Durie (1994) in Cunningham et. al, 2005, p. 13).

"Children and young people told us that families must be well in order for children to be well, and families must be involved in making things better." (Mana Mokopuna, 2019, p.9)

Growing Up in New Zealand findings report that at age eight:

- 70% of children lived in households with two parents – this was an increase from 66% during the antenatal period. It is more likely for European children, and children living rurally, to live in households with two parents, than other ethnicities or children in urban areas.
- 16% of children (1 in 6) lived in households with at least one parent and extended family, and 4% lived in households with at least one parent and someone who is not kin, such as a flatmate. This indicated a decrease from the antenatal period, which continued to age 12 when only 12% of children were living with extended family. It is more likely for Pacific, Asian and Māori children, and children living in urban areas, to live with extended family than European children, or those living rurally.
- 10% lived in single parent households – an increase from 3% in the antenatal period. This increased slightly to 17% of children at 12 years. It is more likely for Māori children to live in single parent households than other ethnicities (Morton et.al, 2020).

While information about siblings wasn't available, the birth rate in New Zealand has been declining for some time and sits at 1.56 births per woman (2023). The average maternal birth age has also risen, meaning that women are having fewer children and having them when they are older (Statistics NZ, 2024).

Find out more by reading this factsheet on [Families and Whānau](#) (2023) from Growing Up in New Zealand or previous reports such as [Now We are Eight](#) (2020)

Outside of Growing Up in New Zealand reporting there appears to be a gap in research focused on families, particularly since the disestablishment of the Families Commission. The following reports are dated but provide some insight into the nature of families in Aotearoa.

The Families Commission 2008 report [The Kiwi Nest: 60 years of change in New Zealand families](#) outlines the form families have taken and continue to take in New Zealand, and the drivers of

change that contribute to the shape of families today.

Key changes to family structures over this period include greater diversity of family make-up, greater rates of divorce and de factor relationships, lower rates of marriage and reproduction, and an increase in maternal birth age and life expectancy.

[Analysis of the Characteristics of Whānau in Aotearoa](#) – a report published in 2005 by Massey University – outlines the characteristics of whānau.

Parenting

Few would argue that the experience of parenting has changed considerably in Aotearoa over the past fifty years as our communities have transitioned from the nostalgic “village” approach to raising children, to the faster-paced and less connected neighbourhoods of today.

The rates of working mothers, and caregiving fathers have increased, as have the rates of two-earner families. Families are more reliant on paid childcare and are less likely to live close to or with extended family who can provide childcare.

At the same time the availability of information and opinion regarding parenting is more readily available to parents from a much wider range of sources. Where previously there may have been a smaller circle of family, peers and professionals influencing a parent or caregiver's approach to parenting, today's parents and caregivers have access to endless and conflicting information online. Social norms about what is considered acceptable behaviour from both children and parents/caregivers are less clear than in previous generations.

Most children experience positive parenting relationships, with most mothers involved in the Growing Up in NZ study reporting frequently expressing affection for their child, enjoying listening to and spending time with their child, and always or often telling their child how happy they make them (Morton et. al, 2020).

“Parental display of appropriate warmth or affection is found to predict positive child developmental outcomes, and has been found to act as an important protective factor during childhood adversity.”

(Morton et. al, 2020, p.55)

While most mothers (72%) reported feeling supported in their parenting, 11% of mothers, more likely to be single parents, felt they rarely or never had enough support (Morton et. al, 2020). Parents may seek support from specific services in relation to developmental concerns or may seek support generally to enable them to gain knowledge, confidence and skills in their approach to parenting.

A range of parenting programmes exist today to support parents and grow parenting skills. Courses focused on middle childhood typically include information about connecting with your child, reflecting on parenting styles, managing misbehaviour and discipline strategies and understanding how to support children through the types of situations and challenges they may encounter during this age stage.

The availability of parenting courses will vary depending on location. Courses may be inaccessible to parents due to timing, or lack of finance or childcare. Long waitlists and a lack of funding, or narrow access criteria for funded courses, means many willing parents miss out. In some cases, parents may perceive referral to parenting support as a criticism. Feedback from professionals working with tamariki in this age group suggests that children and their families would benefit greatly from increased access to parenting education.

Tupuna Parenting

Tūpuna Parenting is focused on decolonising parenting practice by reclaiming traditional Māori parenting ways. Tūpuna Parenting shares mātauranga Māori relating to parenting practice with parents and practitioners.

– [Find out more about *Tūpuna Parenting*](#)

The Incredible Years

- [Incredible Years Parent](#): a 14-session programme for parents of children aged 3-8, which provides parents with skills to better support children, creating a positive home environment to promote children’s social and emotional competence, and communication skills.
- [Incredible Years Autism](#): a 14 session, group-based programme for parents of children aged 2-5 on the autism spectrum.

Building Awesome Whānau

The Parenting Place’s Building Awesome Whānau programme draws on the wisdom of mātauranga Māori and the best of the Toolbox parenting courses to offer a kaupapa that is unique to Aotearoa. Designed for whānau raising children aged 0-12, this course can be delivered over a number of weeks, or as a wānanga.

– [Find out more about *Building Awesome Whānau*](#)

Other examples of parenting programmes include:

- [Toolbox Primary Years](#)
- [Triple P Parenting](#)
- [Tuning Into Kids](#)
- [Parenting Through Separation](#)
- [Kids Feeling Safe](#)
- [The Parenting Journey](#)
- [Game On Parenting for Dads](#)

[Flourish Taranaki](#) is a community collaboration focused on making parenting a little bit easier. Flourish fosters “village building” by offering opportunities for parents to be supported, connect, grow and play.

– [Find out more about parenting in *Now We Are Eight \(2020\)*](#)



Grandparents

Grandparents play a key role in the lives of children through shared experiences, nurturing and the passing on of skills, knowledge, and whakapapa to the next generation.

The former Families Commission conducted a survey in 2009 identifying that for most grandparents, the pleasures of grandparenting outweighed the pressures (Kerslake Hendricks, 2010). However there has been little research in Aotearoa on this topic since the Commission was disestablished.

Research from the United Kingdom indicates that children who enjoyed a high level of grandparental involvement in their life had fewer emotional and behavioural problems (Hale, 2023). Being actively engaged in grandparenting not only benefits children but has been shown to improve cognitive and physical wellbeing for older people.

Grandparents contribute significantly to providing informal childcare to families: the Childcare in New Zealand Survey identified that 24% of children were cared for by grandparents in 2017 (Statistics New Zealand, 2017).

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren



In addition to traditional grandparent input, some may find themselves taking on full-time care of grandchildren.

There are almost 10,000 grandparents raising their grandchildren in New Zealand, according to the 2018 Census. This can be a challenging and isolating situation for many grandparents - adjusting to caring 24/7 for a child who may have experienced prior trauma, trying to navigate the system of support that may be available to them as a caregiver and for some, caring for an existing spouse and/or continuing to work.

Typically, the Unsupported Child Benefit will provide financial support to grandparents in this situation however some may struggle to access this due to lack of awareness or the evidence that is required to demonstrate the parent-child relationship breakdown. There are also inconsistencies in the level of financial support children being raised by grandchildren receive in comparison to those in state care (Mana Ake, 2020) (Keogh, 2023).

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren provides services to grandparents across New Zealand who are caring for grandchildren. Services are focused on empowering grandparent and whānau care families so that they can raise resilient and healthy tamariki and rangatahi.

- [Find out more about *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren*](#)
- [Read the Families Commission's report: *Changing Roles: The pleasures and pressures of being a grandparent in New Zealand*](#)

Adoption

Oranga Tamariki oversees the adoption system in Aotearoa.

Most adoptions in New Zealand are open adoptions which enable both sets of parents and the child to establish the level of information sharing and/or contact that may occur between the child and their birth parents. Our adoption system supports children having access to information about their birth family to ensure the child can retain the important connection to their whakapapa and identity.

Children have a legal right to information about their birth parents once they reach the age of 20. Once an adopted child turns 19, they can elect to prevent their birth parents from accessing information about them by vetoing this information on their adoption records. Children can request information about other members of their birth family (such as siblings) and a Family Court Judge will determine whether to make this information available to the adopted child (Oranga Tamariki, 2023).

424 children aged 6 years and older have been adopted in New Zealand in the past 10 years.

In 2023 adoptions for this age group made up 20% (22) of total adoptions (110). Over the past 10 years the number of adoptions per year of children aged 6 and older has ranged between 70 (2016) and 21 (2022) (Ministry of Justice, 2024).

Oranga Tamariki also has responsibility for international adoptions which are carried out under the Adoption (Intercountry) Act 1997 in accordance with the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

— *Find out more about [Adoption and Intercountry Adoption](#)*

Whāngai

Whāngai is a Māori custom where a child is raised by someone other than their birth parents. Mātua whāngai (caregivers who will raise the child) usually come from within the child's whānau but may be unrelated. Typically, the child will continue to have a relationship with their birth parents.

As whāngai is an informal arrangement, the child's birth parents remain the legal guardians of the child and there is no input required from statutory agencies such as Oranga Tamariki, however whāngai is recognised within the Māori Land Court when it comes to inheriting property.

“Your whakapapa and direct bloodline are very important to your history and identity, but the day-to-day responsibility of clothing, protecting, and feeding someone (whāngai also means to feed) could be performed by any family member. This is why whāngai can also be thought of as less ‘raising a family member’s child as your own’ and more of an acknowledgement that the child is already part of the wider family’s responsibilities, with an informal agreement as to who will be doing the feeding”. (Hayden, 2019).

Whāngai can occur for various reasons, including in situations where children are orphaned, or their parents are unwell, or to enable people who are unable to have children to raise a child. Whāngai can also enable the sharing of knowledge and tikanga. One traditional expression of whāngai is where an eldest child is raised by grandparents to ensure the transmission of generational knowledge (Hayden, 2019).

“The practice of whāngai supports tamariki identities because it is usually based on whakapapa connections. The principle of kinship supports tamariki to know their social and cultural contexts, through acknowledging their heritage, culture, and language. This knowledge and connection promote positive identity development by protecting the self-esteem, mana and tapu of tamariki” (Deane et al., 2023, p.35-36).

— *Find out more about [Whāngai](#)*

Mana Tangata | Contribution

Mana tangata (contribution) affirms children as individuals and seeks to see children recognise their own abilities and grow capable of treating others fairly, including others in play, and learning alongside them.

Relationships with peers reflect and influence children's development and their contribution to the world around them during middle childhood. Developments in the brain mean that children are more able to communicate their own feelings and interests, and consider those of others. With this comes greater understanding of social norms and hierarchies, and how their behaviour affects others.

It is during middle childhood that bullying emerges as an issue for many children, impacting negatively on their self-confidence and belonging. Increasing numbers of children connecting online have led to online bullying become a more prominent issue during this stage of development.

As a society we must be mindful of the ways in which bullying behaviour is inadvertently reinforced and how we can invest further in guiding children to navigate social dynamics and develop positive, healthy relationships with their peers.

Bullying

Bullying is a longstanding issue experienced by many children in Aotearoa and at a higher rate than many other countries. The prevalence of bullying is widespread, with 46% of primary-age students reporting having been bullied at school, according to research carried out by the Education Review Office in 2019.

Additional research suggests that bullying is more prevalent during late primary/intermediate, peaking around age 12 and decreasing as children age. The most common forms of bullying are being made fun of or being excluded from activities. (Kljakovic et al., 2015) (Mhuru, 2020).

Bullying is deliberate, involves a misuse of power, is persistent (typically occurs more than once) and causes deliberate harm to another person. Victims of bullying experience feelings of fear and powerlessness. While traditional understandings of bullying include name calling, exclusion and violence in the schoolyard or on the street corner, the nature of bullying has evolved over time due to increased use and accessibility of digital technology and the emergence of cyberbullying. Online bullying can occur in a variety of ways, including sending unwanted or offensive content (messages/images/videos) to others, sharing content without permission, or establishing fake accounts or profiles on social media platforms. While the impacts of face-to-face bullying tactics tend to be visible to the bully, the impacts of online bullying may be less so. (Pink Shirt Day, 2023)

Bullying can have a damaging effect on children's sense of wellbeing and self-confidence, peer relationships, engagement at school, educational outcomes and longer-term outcomes such as the likelihood of committing crime, abusing substances, and experiencing relationship difficulties (Dickinson, 2019). Students who experience bullying are more likely to experience depression or anxiety. Those found to be more at risk of experiencing bullying include children experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, disability or health issues, those identifying as LGBTQIA+, and those in school years 7-10 (Mhuru, 2020).

Bullying is a deterrent to children wanting to attend school. In the [Kōrero Mātauranga Education Conversations 2018](#) survey of primary and secondary students, students identified bullying as an issue requiring urgent attention and that currently not enough is being done to address this issue in schools. A 2022 report by the [Education Review Office](#) found that almost 40% of parents would keep children home from school to avoid bullying, while 10% of students noted bullying as a reason why they would avoid school.

– **Find out more:**

Read [What do we know about bullying behaviours? \(2020\)](#) – a report published by the Ministry of Education.

Read children’s views on bullying in the [Mai World Child & Youth Voices on Bullying in Aotearoa](#) report (2017)

Find out about the the [Bullying Free New Zealand Schools Framework](#)



A range of bullying prevention efforts exist:

Safe School Environments

A safe, caring school environment where students feel a sense of belonging can have a positive impact on bullying prevention. School Boards of Trustees are responsible for providing a safe physical and emotional environment for children under National Administration Guideline 5, including provision for cyber safety. Schools are encouraged to adopt bullying prevention and response policies however these may vary widely given the self-governing nature of schools and the extent to which bullying is prevalent or recognised. A lack of consistent measurement of bullying behaviour across schools limits understanding of how serious and widespread this issue may be for tamariki. According to the Education Review Office only 38% of New Zealand schools were working towards a bullying-free environment “to a great extent” in 2019 (Collins, 2019).

- *Find out more about [Safe School Environments](#)*
- *Read [Our Kind of School \(2021\)](#) – a report that identifies the markers of a positive, safe and inclusive school environment*

Wellbeing@School Survey

The Wellbeing@School Survey is a toolkit that enables schools to self-review with a focus on promoting a safe and caring social climate that deters behaviours such as bullying. This toolkit comprises anonymous student surveys targeted at students in Years 5-8 and Years 7-13, which pose questions relating to students’ experiences of different behaviour at school, and awareness of strategies in place to promote safe and caring behaviours.

- *Find out more about the [Wellbeing@School Survey](#)*

Pink Shirt Day

Pink Shirt Day is an international initiative aimed at reducing bullying by celebrating diversity and promoting kindness and inclusivity. Participants in schools and workplaces are encouraged to wear pink and donate to the Mental Health Foundation's bullying awareness and prevention activities. Participating schools are provided resources to engage students in discussion about bullying. Over 2,700 schools and kura across Aotearoa engage with Pink Shirt Day.

— [Find out more about Pink Shirt Day](#)

Bullying Prevention Programmes

Sticks n Stones

Sticks 'n Stones are NZ's multi award winning, authentically youth-led bullying prevention organisation. Sticks 'n Stones empowers young people through ongoing training programmes and regular opportunities to collaborate, learn, and lead. The organisation delivers fortnightly sessions aimed at developing practical skills and challenging and changing attitudes, norms and behaviours that lead to or accept bullying. Sticks 'n Stones believes in providing a wide range of leadership opportunities with a belief in non-traditional leadership opportunities so that our young people develop their own strengths, skills and experience and view leadership and their ability to affect change holistically.

— [Find out more about Sticks 'n Stones](#)

KiVa

KiVa is an international evidence-based bullying prevention programme that focuses on prevention, intervention and monitoring. The goal of KiVa is to prevent bullying and to teach how to manage cases of bullying effectively. At least 50 New Zealand schools have implemented KiVa.

— [Find out more about KiVa](#)

NetSafe Bullying Resources

NetSafe's online bullying help for young people provides guidance on how to manage online bullying, and the avenues available for seeking assistance.

— [Find out more about NetSafe](#)

Friendship

Middle childhood is a period of significant development in children's relationships with peers. Find out more on page 15 of the Kotahitanga section.



Mana Reo | Communication

Within this guide we have interpreted mana reo (communication) to encompass both children's voices and views about their lives, and how societal perspectives of childhood are reflected in the way we speak about and for children.

The children's workforce is one aspect of a societal narrative that positions middle childhood in discussions about health or education. Outside of these fields there is very little attention given to the subject of child development in the training of people working or volunteering with this age group. Surprisingly even within the field of education there is little time given to child development as a subject in initial teacher education.

This suggests that children interact with many adults who are assumed to understand developmental milestones, norms and concerning markers appropriate to middle childhood, but who in reality may never have gained this knowledge and are therefore unable to reflect it in the way they work alongside our tamariki.



Pathways to working with children during middle childhood

During the Primary and Intermediate years children engage with a range of roles within our society:

Education

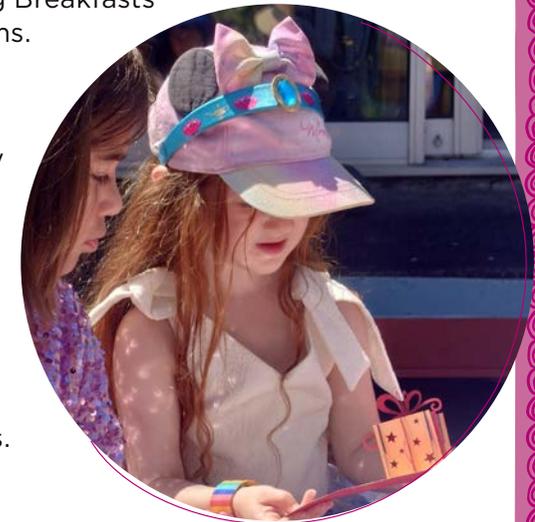
Children in traditional education settings develop relationships with school and teaching staff, such as their classroom teacher, teacher aides, principal, and administrative staff. Where they require additional support, they may also engage with roles such as Learning Support Coordinators, Speech Language Therapists, Literacy Specialists or Occupational Therapists. Students may receive pastoral support from a Whānau Worker, Youth Worker or may engage with a Public Health Nurse, a Social Worker in Schools, a Mana Ake kaimahi, or Counsellor. Children also meet a range of volunteers, such as parents running Breakfasts in Schools, or coaching sports teams.

Health

Within health settings children may interact with General Practitioners, nurses, paediatricians, child psychiatrists or psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech language therapists, dentists, dental assistants, optometrists, chaplains or a variety of other specialist roles.

Community

Within the community children may interact with a variety of roles including librarians, mentors, sports coaches, leaders of children's programmes, activities, clubs and after-school care, providers of extracurricular education such as music teachers, arts teachers, kaumatua and spiritual leaders such as pastors.



Legal

Within the legal system children may interact with Police Officers, Lawyers for Child, and Psychologists and Therapists.

Teacher

To teach children at Primary or Intermediate schools in New Zealand you require either a Bachelor of Education or one of several graduate or postgraduate teaching qualifications:

- Bachelor of Education (Primary) or Bachelor of Teaching (Primary). These are Level 7, three year degrees available at most universities and Te Pūkenga (some locations).

As part of this degree, students will typically undertake one Level 1 paper focused on child development.

Those who already hold a Bachelors degree in a field other than teaching, or other relevant experience, may qualify for one of the following graduate and postgraduate level qualifications. Compulsory courses within these qualifications tend to focus on professional practice and curriculum, as well as developing understanding of Te Ao Māori and inclusive education approaches. There is usually no specific child development paper for these qualifications.

- [Graduate Diploma in Teaching \(Primary\)](#)
- [Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Learning](#)
- [Master of Teaching and Learning](#)

The examples provided above link to a specific tertiary provider, however the same or a similar course may be provided by multiple tertiary institutes.

Teaching staff may then opt to complete further study at postgraduate level to enhance their practice.

There is currently an oversupply of primary school teachers in Aotearoa. The Ministry of Education has predicted a surplus of between 593 and 919 primary school teachers for 2024, a figure

that is expected to increase to between 1217 and 1977 in 2026. (Gerritsen, 2023).

The surplus of teachers has been in part due to lower-than-expected forecast school rolls. The 2022 current rate of retention for primary teachers was 89 percent – a figure that is more or less the historical average. (Gerritsen, 2022)

There were 600 fewer primary teacher training applicants in 2023 than in 2022. (Gerritsen, 2023).

New Zealand's teacher training system has come under criticism for inadequately preparing teachers for the classroom, with six key flaws identified by the New Zealand Initiative in their 2023 report [Who Teaches the Teachers?](#) Graduate teachers were found to have suffered from an overly sociocultural philosophy of teaching and insufficient practical classroom experience, in addition to having insufficient assessment of their classroom readiness and poor curriculum experience. (Johnston & Martin, 2023)

What is perhaps more surprising is that an analysis of courses taught to trainee teachers highlighted the minimal teaching on child development that trainees receive. The NZ Institute found that only 3.8% of course classifications related to human development or other psychological themes. (Johnston & Martin, 2023).

Paediatrician

“Paediatrics involves the assessment, diagnosis and management of infants, children and young people with disturbances of health, growth, behaviour and/or development. It also addresses the health status of this group through population assessments, intervention, education and research” (Medical Council of New Zealand, 2023)

To train as a Paediatrician students must first complete a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MB ChB) qualification from the University of Auckland or the University of Otago.

Graduates must then complete six years of vocational training to become a Paediatrician, including:

- 3 years of basic training, of which 2 years must be in paediatrics and child health
- 3 years of advanced training in paediatric medicine

– [Find out more](#)

Social Workers

NZCCSS' [Workforce Guide](#) outlines various roles that work alongside children, including social workers, psychologists, supervised contact supervisors, and youth workers.



Children's Librarians

By Alice Haworth

Not one person graces this earth that isn't shaped by a story – we are told stories from the minute we are born about ourselves and about the world around us. We use stories to shape and mould our children into humans with the values we deem important.

Development of literacy skills is an essential life skill, giving us the ability to understand and interpret our world. The middle years of childhood are the soil in which our ability to make sense of ourselves in relation to the world around us grows. The development of critical literacy skills in this period has a lasting impact on the trajectory of a young person's life.

There is clear research to support this. Reading for pleasure is the single greatest determining factor in wellbeing and success in a young person's life¹. Reading for pleasure ranks higher than socio-economic status, meaning it doesn't matter where you come from, or how wealthy your family are or are not, if someone can engage you successfully in reading for pleasure, your chance for academic success, personal wellbeing, and positive life outcome increases exponentially.

This development doesn't happen by accident – young people require key people around them to help them along. Parents and teachers play a vital role in this process, but often their sharing of stories is shaped by their own likes and dislikes. Very few parents or teachers have the skills, knowledge, and resources to give children unfettered access to reading material that interests them.

Librarians, however, are uniquely placed to help children develop good lifelong literacy practices. Librarians are trained specifically to understand how to help a child navigate the increasingly overwhelming landscape of books and information.

¹You can find an extensive list of all of this research here [Reading for pleasure – a door to success | National Library of New Zealand \(natlib.govt.nz\)](#)

²McNaughton, S. (2020, August 7). *The literacy landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved November 4, 2023, from https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-04/PMCSA-20-15_The-Literacy-Landscape-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand-Full-report-final.pdf*

Children’s librarians know their collections well – they read, discuss and research books professionally, and they talk to hundreds of children regularly about what they like to read. Librarians are also professionally trained with skills in information literacy – not just how you find information, but also how you interpret that information. Given our current levels of information access, these skills are essential for our tamariki and rangatahi, and libraries are spaces perfectly positioned to support the development of young people in Aotearoa.

Unfortunately, libraries are systematically underfunded and insufficiently staffed to be able to deliver the level of programs that would allow for full enrichment of literacy and information literacy practices for young people.

Key literacy research in New Zealand fails to even consider the role libraries play in the development of literacy and information literacy for our Tamariki, and this omission is unforgivable².

School libraries can tailor programs and collections specifically to the children in their communities, as well as building essential relationships with children over an extended period of time, in order to help them develop their literacy skills. Unfortunately, school libraries have been on the decline for years in New Zealand after being dropped into the operations budget alongside toilet paper and electricity³.

Research is clear that outcomes for ākonga are raised significantly by having a qualified librarian able to support the schools teaching and learning, and yet school libraries, and librarians, are viewed as an optional extra, rather than as pivotal to the teaching and learning of the school.

Our brand new NZ curriculum finally enshrines reading for pleasure as a key component of academic achievement, but just how schools are expected to achieve this, while not having libraries funded and staffed correctly, remains a question which must be grappled with if we are to serve our young people well.

Public libraries remain the last bastion of free, neutral spaces where no one is expected to pay for access to much needed

resources. Public libraries provide books, programmes, free access to digital equipment, holiday programs, puzzles and building equipment – and all for the low price of nothing at all. And yet, even these well respected community institutions are misunderstood and underestimated, maligned as “just buildings with books in them”.

Libraries are vital to the wellbeing of our young people – they have a direct and measurable impact on wellbeing and literacy outcomes for tamariki. Libraries should no longer be seen as a luxury, but as an essential, integral institution within which information, access, and the joy of reading is built. Maybe then, as a nation, we can finally move beyond the years of falling literacy rates, into a space where our tamariki are able to flourish.

Alice Haworth, Senior Librarian,
Discover It! Children’s Library,
Puke Ariki, New Plymouth



²McNaughton, S. (2020, August 7). *The literacy landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved November 4, 2023, from https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-04/PMCSA-20-15_The-Literacy-Landscape-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand-Full-report-final.pdf

³Little, P. (2023, August 26). *Bring to books*. NZ Listener, 22-27.

⁴Emerson, L., Kilpin, K., & White, S., et al. (2018). *Under-recognised, undervalued, and undervalued: School libraries and librarians in New Zealand secondary school curriculum planning and delivery*. *Curriculum Matters*, 14, 48-68. <https://doi.org/10.18296/cm.0029>

⁵Law, T. (2023, October 17). *Council to consider shutting libraries and cutting swimming pool hours to avoid 18% rates rise*. *The Press Te Matatika*. Retrieved December 8, 2023, from <https://www.thepress.co.nz/nz-news/350092667/council-consider-shutting-libraries-and-cutting-swimming-pool-hours-avoid-18>

Volunteering

Volunteers work alongside children in a range of settings, from the sports field to the breakfast club. Some may receive child protection training, but it is unlikely that many will receive any kind of training in child development for the age stage of the children they support.

The requirement to safeguard children has led to greater awareness and action aimed at protecting children. However, it has also had a negative impact on rates of volunteering, with both volunteers and organisations reporting the increasing burden of regulatory compliance related to working with children to be a barrier to volunteering (Volunteering NZ, 2020).

- *Find out more about [creating safe organisations when volunteering with children](#)*

Training in child development

There are few avenues for training in child development generally, particularly with a focus on middle childhood. The University of Otago previously offered Certificate and Diploma courses at postgraduate level in Children's Issues and Child-Centred Practice, but these are no longer available. Courses such as AUT's Postgraduate Certificate in Health Science (Child Health) and courses in Educational Psychology provide training specific to those fields.

Services for children

Conversations with the children's workforce highlighted issues related to service provision for children in this age stage:

We need greater awareness of what services exist to support children:

Those working alongside children noted it is difficult to stay up to date with available services and access criteria. Funding changes, siloed services, and long waitlists mean that this shifting landscape is challenging for both the workforce and parents to navigate. Having services mapped out in detail, or a detailed registry of services that is kept updated, were ideas about how this could be improved.

While schools were highlighted as key connectors to other support services, there was concern about the demand being placed on schools to meet a wide range of children's needs.

We need support for spectrum of children's needs, not just the most severe:

Those working alongside children noted that support for this age group can be crisis-driven, requiring a high level of need in order to gain immediate access to services. Children whose needs are mild-moderate may face long waitlists in order to access help, or fail to qualify for support. One participant noted that it can feel as though there is an "empty tank" for support where children do not have an official diagnosis (and many of those who do). People we spoke to noted an increasing complexity of need and the need for multidisciplinary approaches to support children. Greater focus on preventative services is needed to address this bottom-of-the-cliff approach.

Training and retention of the children's workforce needs to be prioritised

Workforce shortages contribute to the challenges children experience in accessing services, particularly in regional or rural communities. Those in Taranaki, for example, noted shortages in roles such as educational psychologists, speech language therapists, occupational therapists, and roles in child and adolescent mental health departments, with people staying for a short time or completing training in Taranaki before moving on. This is also demonstrated in the challenges in resourcing GP roles in more regional or remote areas.

Issues include not training enough professionals to meet the need in our communities, and the way workforce shortages contribute to a cycle of burn-out which affects retention of existing staff. In some fields, work may be pushed out to people in less-skilled roles in order to meet demand. Volunteers are also becoming harder to find, adding to the pressure on some community services.

Finding current information or training specific to middle childhood development was also noted as a challenge, with a time-poor workforce having to be very proactive to seek this out.

Skills required to work with children

Working in a role alongside children requires the ability to build a genuine relationship with children, and a diverse range of skills:

Fun: The ability to have fun and create spaces that are and can be fun matter. Having fun can create a strong sense of safety and will support children to feel secure and to take safe risks.

Creativity: Working with children requires thinking outside the box to keep them engaged and interested. Being flexible and able to adapt to changing circumstances is essential for maintaining a positive and supportive environment for the child. Creativity can extend to spaces, activities and even the language you use.

Empathy: Understanding and empathising with children's emotions helps you connect with them on a deeper level. It also enables you to build connection and be a person who can provide support.

Communication skills: The ability to communicate effectively with children is crucial. This includes actively listening to their thoughts, feelings and needs. It also means being open to them teaching us how to communicate with them – the shifting meanings they give to language and behaviour, and communicating with them in the ways they find useful.

Respect and kindness: Healthy relationships are possible when mutual respect and kindness exist. To genuinely work alongside children, we need to be aware of the power adults have over

children, and the impact this has on our relationships with them. Meeting them with genuine kindness and respect helps to manage that dynamic.

Cultural competence: Being culturally competent means having an understanding and respect for various cultural norms and values, and being able to provide support that is safe, appropriate and sensitive to their cultural background.

Health and safety awareness: Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children is paramount. This includes understanding legislation, operating within professional ethics frameworks, being aware of potential hazards, implementing safety protocols, and being prepared to respond to emergencies.

Knowledge: Having a strong understanding of child development enables us to work appropriately alongside tamariki, with awareness of what changes are occurring for them and the type of support they may need as they grow and develop. This knowledge helps us to provide relevant opportunities to support their development and response to the challenges they may face during this stage of childhood. Similarly, an understanding of children's rights enables us to champion the standard of childhood we as a nation have committed to provide for them, and advocate for children where rights are breached.

At the core of these skills is the need for an ability to build connection with children, in ways that show you value them as people.



Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Te Whāriki upholds the importance of mana aotūroa (exploration) for children’s development, identifying a key learning outcome as children “making sense of their worlds by generating and refining working theories”.⁶

Relationships contribute to children’s understanding of the world by reflecting how they and the people, places, and things around them are valued. They enable new experiences and are a conduit for the sharing of knowledge and skills.

Relationships with family and peers are central to children’s lives during middle childhood, yet engaging with people from other age groups provides a richness that has the potential to benefit all involved. For children, this sense of mana aotūroa is enriched by interaction with people whose skills and experience are different from their own.

It is common during this stage of development for children to be primarily placed in groups with children their age and sometimes their own gender as well. This happens in the classroom, and in sports and extracurricular activities. Spaces and places where children interact in an intentional way with people of a variety of age stages appear to be the exception not the norm to community life today, and must be encouraged if we wish to see mutually beneficial relationships between young and old developed and sustained.



⁶Working theories refers to how children form ideas and understanding about how their world works



Intergenerational Connection

Connecting with people from different age groups helps to build understanding, reduces isolation, and fosters strong communities. Children benefit from interacting with people from older generations – they identify role models, develop social skills, and learn from the experience and skills held by older people in our communities.

Many children do not have strong relationships with extended family such as aunts, uncles or grandparents, or relationships with other adults. According to Growing Up in New Zealand findings, 35% of 12 year olds reported not having a special adult (other than a parent/caregiver) in their life (Evans et. al, 2023).

There are few spaces within our communities where children can build intentional relationships with older people. Marae and churches offer an intergenerational space and opportunity to connect with people outside of family and friends. However, some children do not have an association with either of these spaces and as such, public spaces such as parks, pools, sports fields, and libraries become even more important as locations of connection.

Intergenerational Spaces

By Steph Brook

As we seek to find better, healthier and more equitable ways of being community together, the option of being intergenerational is becoming increasingly researched. Our communities face a myriad of challenges, including those formed from the consequences of marginalisation, poverty, loneliness, compromised mental health, educational challenges – and all the “isms” (e.g. racism, ageism, colonialism, genderism, etc). Being intergenerational is a possible antidote.

What does “intergenerational” mean?

To be intergenerational is about intentionally building relationship across ages with the intent of inclusion, mutuality and equity. An older person or the very young may not be able to run around or be ‘productive’ all day long, but they offer other skills, wisdom, curiosity and unconditional love that others may not be able to offer. My father is 83 and while his physical strength and stamina may have changed, in recent years he has offered his wisdom and experience through his intellect to two advocacy organisations that are making a difference to structural injustice in our communities. My little grandsons, the eldest of whom is 6, helped us through the illnesses and death of my mother and father-in-law by being themselves. I am a youth pastor who has worked in churches most of my career, and part of my role (a largely unspoken one) is to help the various generations build respectful relationships with each other.

How is this different from what we already have?

One could easily imagine that churches are intergenerational – indeed, we often have many generations gathering at the same building on a regular basis. A closer look would serve to belie that image. In the same way that the rest of community has segregated into ages and stages, so has the church. Should a church have young people aged five-12, during the service they head off to children’s church/Sunday school/kids ministry or whatever name

said church has for education of children. Bigger churches will also have something similar for pre-schoolers and youth. Thus, the variety of ages will only connect for the first and last song and be tolerated over morning tea time. Libraries, public swimming pools, parks, sports and creative outlets all have a similar problem: we are in the same spaces mostly at the same times, but with very little **intentional** interaction, except sometimes of the fractious kind or the simple imparting of information.

Let’s take a look at the agreed definitions that we are using within the faith communities of various ways of having multiple generations in the same environment.

In the **multigenerational** dynamic, there is tolerance of the various generations. The interactions are superficial and generally polite. In this environment little is known of each other’s story, ‘othering’ is easy and therefore labels can inform understanding or misunderstanding. Think ‘okay boomer’ or ‘kids these days’.

In the **cross-generational** environment there is some sharing, listening and learning but those interactions aren’t serving to transform or enrich each other’s lives. There is some benefit, more than the multigenerational environment, but not as beneficial for all as the intergenerational space.

To be **intergenerational** involves deliberate intention to grow in relationship with all others, from an attitude of mutuality, equality and reciprocity. We allow others to have an impact on us, to be transformed by having people of all ages and stages in our lives and we learn from one another. From the toddler discovering the world for the first time and reminding the 30, 50 and 80 year old of the beauty of the crushed daisy, to the 80 year old reminding the 20 year old there is a lot of life to come and it’s worth getting through this tough patch to discover it, to the 30 year old teaching the 70 year old how to use Zoom and so much more. This level of learning from, and alongside, one another comes through trust, constant exposure and happens where respect and grace are both given and received.

In the intergenerational environment all find belonging and connection, but in order for the intergenerational environment to thrive, it must be intentional and everyone has their part to play. Fostering this environment is something the church is wrestling with. Some churches are going for it and working hard to go down this unsignposted path.

What are the benefits of an intergenerational society?

The benefits are significant for people of all ages and stages. For children and young people, the research tells us that to grow resilience young people need 4-6 unrelated adults in their lives, modelling how to live well, spending time with them and listening to them as they navigate life. The elderly often become quite lonely as their friends pass on and family, if they have them, are busy or live far away. Although they may not have the physicality of their youth, their minds and their memories have much to impart – and they have time to do this. Those in between who are often busy working full time, raising families, caring for elderly parents and everything in between often model for those little eyes watching, what that looks like. Coaches and teachers, youth leaders and creative arts leaders all often impact the young when they go the extra mile.

In an intergenerational community, over time one becomes **known**. Young people are known for the things they love, not just the subjects they excel in at school. Older people can be reminded of the joy they found in remote controlled boats and find others to pass their joy onto. What someone **does** becomes secondary to who someone **is**. It is in that being known, being seen, being heard that healthy society can thrive.

Our counsellors and psychiatrists have been telling us repeatedly of the need for each other, for being patient with each other, of our need for belonging and connection. We know this stuff, we know we need each other. But being intergenerational can be hard work. Being intergenerational requires facilitators to support and encourage people to build relationships, to reach across

differences to find familiarity. It takes doing things together intentionally and with purpose.

What might an intergenerational society look like?

I remember as I was leading in a church there was an older couple (some 20 years older than me) who were both only children, like me. In one year both of them lost both of their parents, and the husband got prostate cancer. As a community we supported them through this challenging time for them. I didn't realise I had been observing them and how they coped until some years later, when my own mother died after a long and difficult illness, only two months after my father-in-law had died. When I was encouraged by a dear older friend of mine that this pain would find its place, I was surprised to find myself answering that I knew that, and I reminded her of that couple's journey. I had paid special attention because we had something so integral to our identities in common.

Imagine if your awesome local youth council worked with the local council on **all** council decisions, with equal voice. Young people would not only be learning some parts of council functions, but hearing from and understanding the concerns and needs of a wide part of the community, decision-making processes and building intentional relationships across generations. The same could be said for the adults on the local councils too. They would get to know and see responsible young people who care about their community and the issues facing it – they would hear their hearts.

Think of the young Mum struggling with a small baby or juggling the dynamics of a variety of ages of children. Connecting with other parents slightly further on in their parenting journeys could encourage and support the young Mum practically and through storytelling. The older parents benefit through enjoying the little baby and/or chaos of little ones, that are both fun and tiring for short periods of time. Their experiences and memories have meaning and impact.

One of the obstacles to creating intergenerational spaces is that they cannot be project oriented, because relationships take time and consistency. It would be possible to design long-term projects with facilitators that foster safe and healthy intergenerational relationships which continue beyond the 'project phase', but only if it was long enough to enable being intentionally intergenerational to become second nature. While intentional intergenerational spaces benefit everyone, children especially benefit through the wider community of care around them, the many voices and experiences they hear, and the sense of the bigger picture. This can be seen as being similar to a temporary one-on-one mentoring arrangement – except it's a permanent community for all. And it is within our reach.

Steph Brook, Diocesan Youth Facilitator, Anglican Diocese of Auckland

Resources:

Allen, H.C., Lawton, C & Seibel, C.L (2023). *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (2nd ed). IVP Academic.

Allen, H.C. (Editor) (2018). *Intergenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*. Abilene Christian University Press.

– Descriptions of Multi, Cross & Intergenerational are originally from *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, but adapted from *Intergenerate*.

Seibel, C (2021). *Engage All Generations*. Abilene Christian University Press.

Youth councils – <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-councils-local-government.html>

Mentoring

Mentoring can provide children with a trusted, supportive relationship outside of the family unit and is particularly used to support children who may be experiencing hardship for a range of reasons.

Mentors act as a positive role model, and offer 1:1 attention, taking an interest in the child and their development. They spend time regularly with their mentee, engaging in activities the child enjoys, such as sports or crafts.

There are a range of organisations providing mentoring support to children:

Big Brothers, Big Sisters

This mentoring programme supports children aged 6-12 years to form positive, supportive relationships and expand their potential.

Family Works Buddy Programme

This mentoring programme is delivered by Presbyterian Support for children up to 12 years of age who need extra support for a variety of reasons.

Pillars

This mentoring programme supports children and young people who have a parent or caregiver in prison.

Like other services for children, mentoring services can experience high demand and children may face long waitlists before accessing such support.

Ngā wāhi hei arotahi | Areas to focus on

What does Ngā Hononga look like for our tamariki?

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Intergenerational relationships are accessible and encouraged for all tamariki to support their development

Mana Tangata | Contribution

Children participate in and experience healthy peer relationships and are supported to navigate experiences of bullying safely

Mana Whenua | Belonging

Children's sense of belonging is strengthened through connection to people and place

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Children experience safe, positive relationships with whānau, peers and others in their communities

Mana Reo | Communication

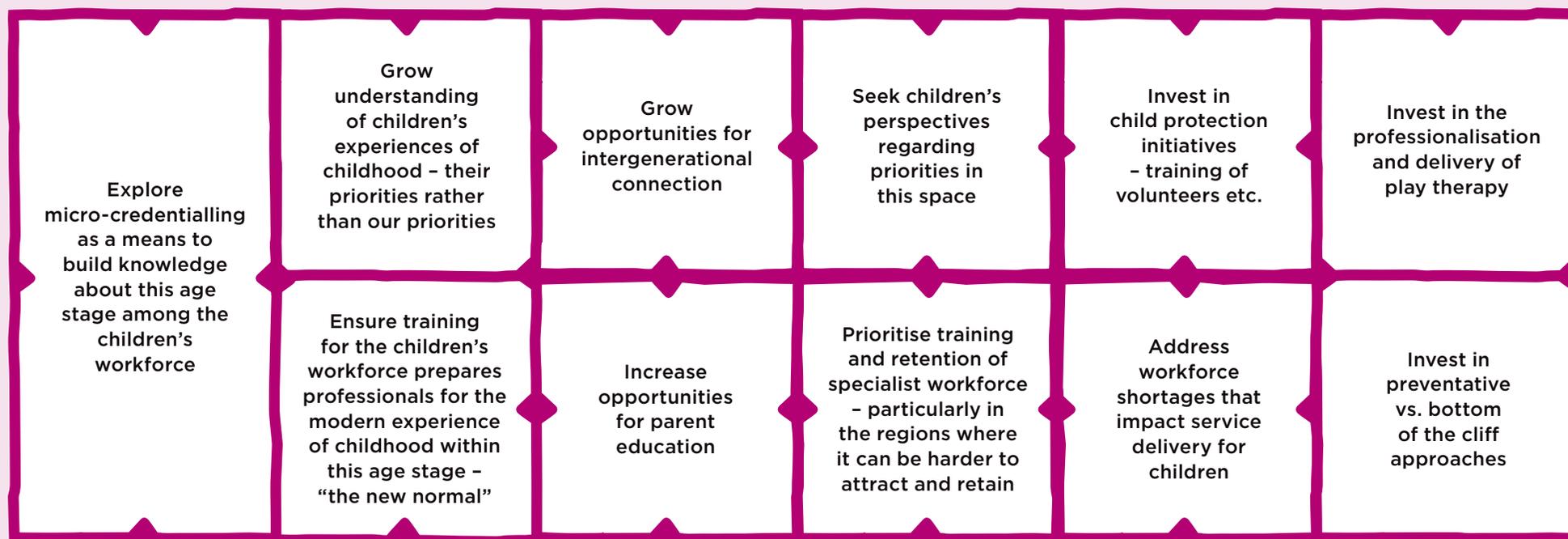
Childrens' development is supported by a skilled and valued workforce, who are equipped to support the modern experience of childhood



What might it look like to strengthen Ngā Hononga for children....

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

Within the context of the relationships children have with whānau, peers, and the children's workforce we have identified some key recommendations to better recognise and strengthen the Te Whāriki principles and improve outcomes for children within middle childhood:



Whakamana | Empowerment

4

The fourth principle is
Whakamana | Empowerment

Within a Māori worldview, whakamana is tied to the concept of mana. This recognises the value children possess as taonga (treasures), and the status they inherit through their whakapapa (ancestry). Mana can be described as the personal authority which we are all born with, passed down by our tīpuna (ancestors) and that develops over our lifetime.



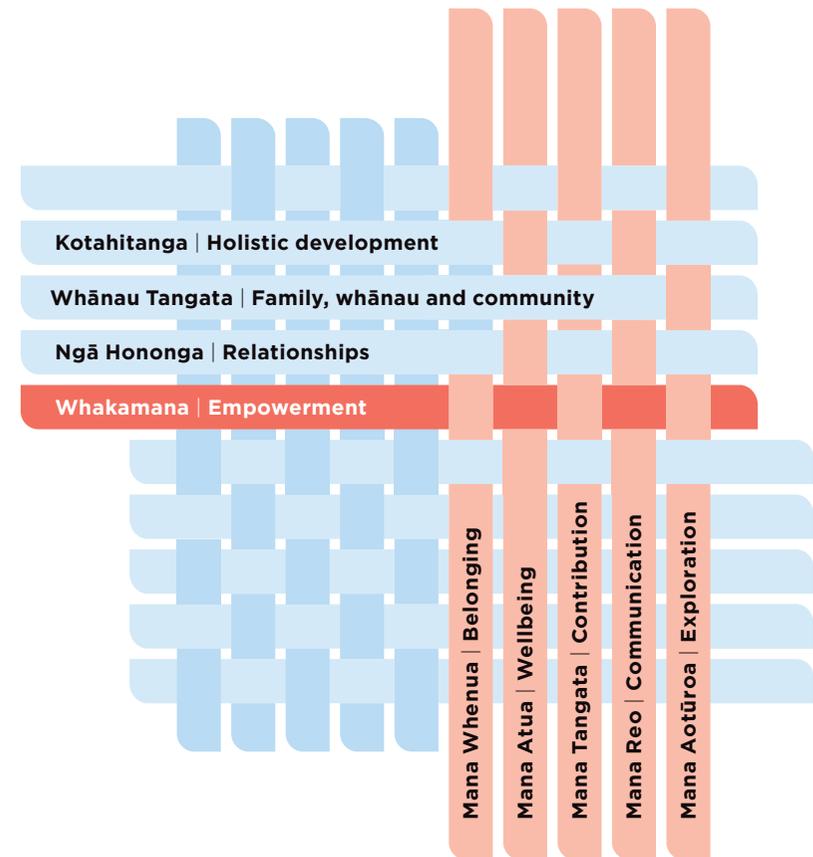
“Mana is inherited at birth, based on whakapapa and connection to the land. Throughout their life, people accumulate mana through their actions and achievements that are reflected in their social standing and related integrity, authority or power.”

(Ara Taiohi, 2024)

Everyone has mana!

King et al. (2022) describe mana as “influence, power and authority under which one is able to exercise particular rights and obligations” (p.199).

In this country there are several rights, laws, government agencies, advocacy groups and frameworks which work toward upholding the wellbeing and mana of children, ensuring that they are empowered and protected.



Empowerment is central to children’s wellbeing for many reasons. It can be expressed through:

- recognising and celebrating a child’s unique identity,
- supporting their sense of belonging,
- protecting them from harm,
- providing for their nurturing and development,
- inviting their participation,
- giving confidence in their own abilities.

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Children's wellbeing (mana atua) is a key foundation of many of the laws, policies, and frameworks we have in place in Aotearoa.

It features in Te Tiriti, in international rights frameworks and in the policies that guide access to resources within our communities. A wellbeing approach prioritises children's protection from harm, access to an adequate standard of living, education and healthcare, and the removal of barriers that stop them thriving.

It's important for these frameworks to be known and understood by all people involved in children's lives. This knowledge can be used by groups advocating for children in general or a group of children, as well as by one person advocating for one child.



Children's Rights Frameworks

Te Tiriti o Waitangi | The Treaty of Waitangi

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand which created an agreement between Māori as Tangata Whenua and the British Crown. The Treaty is made up of three written articles, and one verbal article noted at the time of signing in 1840.

Article One promised Māori Tino Rangatiratanga (sovereignty). In practice this means Māori have agency over individual and collective development, including over issues such as children's health and wellbeing, education, child poverty, and family violence.

Article Two of Te Tiriti recognises Māori rights to things they consider taonga (treasures/properties). In practice this includes tamariki as taonga and provides a mandate to ensure the wellbeing of all children can be realised equitably.

Article Three of Te Tiriti states that Māori will have the protection of the Crown, and all the rights and privileges of citizens. This includes rights for tamariki, and the special privileges that all children should expect from our society.

Article Four was an oral commitment to protect the right to freedom of religion and belief (Te Kāhui Tika Tangata Human Rights Commission, n.d.).

- [Read Te Tiriti o Waitangi](#)
- [Find out more about Te Tiriti o Waitangi](#)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international convention which sets out rights designed to provide protection, empowerment, and accountability for children.

UN Conventions are recognised by most countries in the world as international law. New Zealand joined this Convention in 1993.

1 DEFINITION OF A CHILD	2 NO DISCRIMINATION	3 BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD	4 MAKING RIGHTS REAL	5 FAMILY GUIDANCE AS CHILDREN DEVELOP	6 LIFE, SURVIVAL AND DEVELOPMENT	7 NAME AND NATIONALITY	7 Children must be registered when they are born and given a name which is officially recognized by the government. Children must have a nationality (belong to a country). Whenever possible, children should know their parents and be looked after by them.	6 Every child has the right to be alive. Governments must make sure that children survive and develop in the best possible way.	5 Governments should let families and communities guide their children so that, as they grow up, they learn to use their rights in the best way. The more children grow, the less guidance they will need.	4 Governments must do all they can to make sure that every child in their countries can enjoy all the rights in this Convention.	3 When adults make decisions, they should think about how their decisions will affect children. All adults should do what is best for children. Governments should make sure children are protected and looked after by their parents, or by other people when this is needed. Governments must make sure that people and places responsible for looking after children are doing a good job.	2 All children have all these rights, no matter who they are, where they live, what language they speak, what their religion is, what they think, what they look like, if they are a boy or girl, if they have a disability, if they are rich or poor, or no matter who their parents or families are or what their parents or families believe or do. No child should be treated unfairly for any reason.	1 A child is any person under the age of 18.
8 IDENTITY	9 KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER	10 CONTACT WITH PARENTS ACROSS COUNTRIES	11 PROTECTION FROM KIDNAPPING	12 RESPECT FOR CHILDREN'S VIEWS	13 SHARING THOUGHTS FREELY	14 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND RELIGION	14 Children can choose their own thoughts, opinions and religion, but this should not stop other people from enjoying their rights. Parents can guide children so that as they grow up, they learn to properly use this right.	13 Children have the right to share freely with others what they learn, think and feel, by talking, drawing, writing or in any other way unless it harms other people.	12 Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.	11 Governments must stop children being taken out of the country when this is against the law – for example, being kidnapped by someone or held abroad by a parent when the other parent does not agree.	10 If a child lives in a different country than their parents, governments must let the child and parents travel so that they can stay in contact and be together.	9 Children should not be separated from their parents unless they are not being properly looked after – for example, if a parent hurts or does not take care of a child. Children whose parents don't live together should stay in contact with both parents unless this might harm the child.	8 Children have the right to their own identity – an official record of who they are which includes their name, nationality and family relations. No one should take this away from them, but if this happens, governments must help children to quickly get their identity back.
15 SETTING UP OR JOINING GROUPS	16 PROTECTION OF PRIVACY	17 ACCESS TO INFORMATION	18 RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS	19 PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE	20 CHILDREN WITHOUT FAMILIES	21 CHILDREN WHO ARE ADOPTED	21 When children are adopted, the most important thing is to do what is best for them. If a child cannot be properly looked after in their own country – for example by living with another family – then they might be adopted in another country.	20 Every child who cannot be looked after by their own family has the right to be looked after properly by people who respect the child's religion, culture, language and other aspects of their life.	19 Governments must protect children from violence, abuse and being neglected by anyone who looks after them.	18 Parents are the main people responsible for bringing up a child. When the child does not have any parents, another adult will have this responsibility and they are called a "guardian". Parents and guardians should always consider what is best for that child. Governments should help them. Where a child has both parents, both of them should be responsible for bringing up the child.	17 Children have the right to get information from the Internet, radio, television, newspapers, books and other sources. Adults should make sure the information they are getting is not harmful. Governments should encourage the media to share information from lots of different sources, in languages that all children can understand.	16 Every child has the right to privacy. The law must protect a child's privacy, family, home, communications and reputation (or good name) from any attack.	15 Children can join or set up groups or organisations, and they can meet with others, as long as this does not harm other people.
22 REFUGEE CHILDREN	23 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES	24 HEALTH, WATER, FOOD, ENVIRONMENT	25 REVIEW OF A CHILD'S PLACEMENT	26 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HELP	27 FOOD, CLOTHING, A SAFE HOME	28 ACCESS TO EDUCATION	28 Every child has the right to an education. Primary education should be free. Secondary and higher education should be available to every child. Children should be encouraged to go to school to the highest level possible. Discipline in schools should respect children's rights and never use violence.	27 Children have the right to food, clothing and a safe place to live so they can develop in the best possible way. The government should help families and children who cannot afford this.	26 Governments should provide money or other support to help children from poor families.	25 Every child who has been placed somewhere away from home – for their care, protection or health – should have their situation checked regularly to see if everything is going well and if this is still the best place for the child to be.	24 Children have the right to the best health care possible. This includes clean water to drink, healthy food and a clean and safe environment to live in. All adults and children should have information about how to stay safe and healthy.	23 Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society. Governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and to participate actively in the community.	22 Children who move from their home country to another country as refugees (because it was not safe for them to stay there) should get help and protection and have the same rights as children born in that country.
29 AIMS OF EDUCATION	30 MINORITY CULTURE, LANGUAGE AND RELIGION	31 REST, PLAY, CULTURE, ARTS	32 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL WORK	33 PROTECTION FROM HARMFUL DRUGS	34 PROTECTION FROM SEXUAL ABUSE	35 PREVENTION OF SALE AND TRAFFICKING	35 Governments must make sure that children are not kidnapped or sold, or taken to other countries or places to be exploited (taken advantage of).	34 The government should protect children from sexual exploitation (being taken advantage of) and sexual abuse, including by people forcing children to have sex for money, or making sexual pictures or films of them.	33 Governments must protect children from doing work that is dangerous or selling harmful drugs.	32 Children have the right to be protected from doing work that is dangerous or bad for their education, health or development. If children work, they have the right to be safe and paid fairly.	31 Every child has the right to rest, relax, play and to take part in cultural and creative activities.	30 Children have the right to use their own language, culture and religion – even if these are not shared by most people in the country where they live.	29 Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment.
36 PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION	37 CHILDREN IN DETENTION	38 PROTECTION IN WAR	39 RECOVERY AND REINTEGRATION	40 CHILDREN WHO BREAK THE LAW	41 BEST LAW FOR CHILDREN APPLIES	42 EVERYONE MUST KNOW CHILDREN'S RIGHTS	42 Governments should actively tell children and adults about this Convention so that everyone knows about children's rights.	41 If the laws of a country protect children's rights better than this Convention, then those laws should be used.	40 Children accused of breaking the law have the right to legal help and fair treatment. There should be lots of solutions to help these children become good members of their communities. Prison should only be the last choice.	39 Children have the right to get help if they have been hurt, neglected, treated badly or affected by war, so they can get back their health and dignity.	38 Children have the right to be protected during war. No child under 15 can join the army or take part in war.	37 Children who are accused of breaking the law should not be killed, tortured, treated cruelly, put in prison forever, or put in prison with adults. Prison should always be the last choice and only for the shortest possible time. Children in prison should have legal help and be able to stay in contact with their family.	36 Children have the right to be protected from all other kinds of exploitation (being taken advantage of), even if these are not specifically mentioned in this Convention.

43-54

HOW THE CONVENTION WORKS

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

43-54

These articles explain how governments, the United Nations – including the Committee on the Rights of Child and UNICEF – and other organisations work to make sure all children enjoy all their rights.

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD – THE CHILDREN'S VERSION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important agreement by countries who have promised to protect children's rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child explains who children are, all their rights, and the responsibilities of governments. All the rights are connected, they are all equally important and they cannot be taken away from children.

This text is supported by the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

Source: Play Scotland

In Aotearoa, the Convention on the Rights of the Child must also be considered in relation to Te Ao Māori. This means that it must be considered within a Māori worldview which is not framed around exercising individual rights but centres children within the collective rights of their whānau, hapū and iwi. (Human Rights Commission, n.d.)

Oranga Mokoopuna is a Kaupapa Māori rights framework developed by Māori academics King and Cormack, with Tohunga Mark Kōpua (2022). Their view is that “only when sovereign tangata whenua rights are fully acknowledged and recognised can the useful application of international human-rights instruments be made” (p. 191).

Mana Mokoopuna – the Children & Young People’s Commission (see more on page 120) plays an important advocacy and accountability role in advancing the government’s adherence to the Convention.

The Children’s Rights Alliance of Aotearoa New Zealand (see more on page 100) coordinates reporting from non-governmental organisations to the UN on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

– *Find out more about the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)*



United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a universal framework which establishes minimum standards for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of indigenous peoples.

UNDRIP was adopted by the UN in 2007, with New Zealand endorsing the Declaration in 2010. The Declaration aims to foster cooperation between governments and indigenous peoples, guided by partnership and respect.

According to the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (2020), the rights contained in UNDRIP can be categorised into the following 12 domains:

- 1 Self-determination
- 2 CULTURAL INTEGRITY
- 3 Lands, territories and natural resources
- 4 Fundamental rights and freedoms
- 5 Participation in public affairs
- 6 Legal protection
- 7 CROSS-BORDER CONTACT
- 8 Freedom of expression and media
- 9 General economic and social development
- 10 Education
- 11 HEALTH
- 12 Employment and occupation

While UNDRIP applies to people of all ages, the Declaration reinforces the rights of children under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Articles 14 and 22 focus specifically on children: Article 14 refers to rights relating to education for indigenous children, and Article 22 refers to the special rights and protections that women and children are entitled to.

As with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNDRIP must be understood in relation to existing frameworks such as Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Te Puni Kōkori – Ministry for Māori Development (the government’s principal policy advisor on Māori wellbeing and development), the National Iwi Chairs Forum and the Human Rights Commission work collaboratively to hold government to account in advancing the aspirations of UNDRIP in Aotearoa.

– Find out more about the [UNDRIP](#)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) is a human rights framework that upholds the rights of disabled people to be active members of society and to make decisions for their lives based on free will and consent.

The Convention helps to identify opportunities to strengthen the rights of disabled persons and provides protection where rights have been violated.

– Find out more about the [UNCRPD](#)



Image Source: ARCH Disability Law Centre, 2018 archdisabilitylaw.ca



Charter of tamariki/children's and rangatahi/young people's rights in healthcare services

This Charter was established in 2011 by Children's Hospitals Australia (CHA) and the Paediatric Society of NZ. It outlines 11 rights that apply to children using healthcare services in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This Charter distinguishes child-specific rights in accordance with NZ law, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the rights outlined in the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumer Rights, which do not always apply directly to children. For example, the rights to make an informed choice and give informed consent may not apply as directly to a child in the sense that their parent is legally able to give consent on their behalf.

Feedback from the children's workforce suggests that this charter is not heavily promoted within healthcare settings.

- [Find out more and read the Charter](#)
- [Learn more about consent in the context of children's medical care](#)

Rights Education for Tamariki

There is no stated requirement within the New Zealand Education Curriculum to teach children about their specific rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, New Zealand Law or the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

However, the Social Sciences Achievement Objectives within the Curriculum say that children between five-12 years must be taught about rights generally.

At Curriculum Level 2 (approximately ages 7-9), children are expected to gain understanding "that people have social, cultural, and economic roles, rights, and responsibilities" (Ministry of Education, 2014). Each school can choose the topics used to teach children about rights. Feedback from child rights advocates suggests that awareness of rights amongst children is limited and children are more likely to be taught about rights in an overseas context, rather than within Aotearoa rights frameworks.

Advocacy organisations such as Save the Children New Zealand and UNICEF produce resources to facilitate learning about children's rights:

- [For Each and Every Child | He Taonga Tonu te Tamariki](#) - a children's book which outlines children's rights in Aotearoa in accordance with Te Tiriti and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.



We asked tamariki, and adults working alongside tamariki, to tell us about empowerment.

Our tamariki focus group DIDN'T know they had rights!

- UNICEF Know Your Rights - Child Friendly Poster in [English](#), [Te Reo Māori](#), [Samoan](#), [Tongan](#).
- Save the Children Children's Rights Flyer in [English](#) and [Te Reo Māori](#).
- [Find out more resources:](#)
 - [Save the Children Education Hub](#)
 - [UNICEF Child Rights Resources for Children](#)

Awareness of Children's Rights

It's not only children who don't realise they have rights - many of the adults in their world don't either.

Without this awareness, it is not possible to fully advocate for children. This is shown in cases where children are excluded formally or informally from school - in breach of their right to education; or when healthcare services are not delivered in accordance with children's rights.

Greater awareness of children's rights, and parent/caregiver responsibilities in relation to these rights, will mean that children and their whānau will have increased empowerment and mana. As a society, we will also be better able to hold government and systems to account when rights are breached.

"Knowing about their rights adds a protective layer where children understand they have the right to be protected from harm or to have a say on issues that are important to them... When children learn about their rights, they also learn about the rights of others. Research shows they are more likely to respect the rights of others and speak up when they see injustices or to offer support to those who need it."

(Jacqui Southey, Save the Children in Ministry of Education, 2022)

Children's Rights in Middle Childhood

By Jacqui Southey

The stages of child development are important, and each require particular focus from parents and professionals including the understanding of children's needs, development capacities and milestones, and that children have their rights met during each stage.

There is growing awareness of the importance of understanding children's stages of development. For example, there is now greater awareness of the First 1000 days and the importance this phase has not only on childhood, but over the lifecourse. The teen years have long had attention due to the proximity to adulthood and as a time when choices made during these years can significantly influence their future trajectory positively or negatively.

Whereas middle childhood, the years 5 to 12, have been to a degree left in limbo. Children during this phase of life are often reduced to being seen by society at large and governments as students, as the bulk of children are in school during this time. Being in education during this time is a legal requirement¹ and requires significant investment from governments to administer. The COVID-19 crisis is an example where children became largely invisible in our society, particularly during lockdowns, and when children were discussed, it was immediately linked to education, achievements or lack of, and the difficulties for teachers to continue teaching in such circumstances.

Yet middle childhood is too an important time of development for children. During this time children have significant growth physically, mentally and emotionally. They start to become increasingly independent, develop more complex motor skills and their growing independence can be seen in the development of friendships and confidence in spending time away from their parents and homes. Their talents and interests develop as does their capabilities to make their own decisions.

¹New Zealand legal age for school attendance is 6 years.

The development during this stage in life is crucial to their adolescent and teen years, and will shape much of their successes in adulthood. Critical to the success of middle childhood is the degree to which children enjoy their rights. Children's rights are holistic and encompass their identity, provision of needs such as education, healthcare, healthy environments, shelter, access to play, leisure and accurate information, protection from all forms of harm, inclusion, and participation. When children's rights are met, they are healthy, protected and included. They are seen as individuals but also as citizens in their own right making important contributions to their families, their schools, communities, and society more broadly. They are more likely to see the promise of a bright future fulfilled.

The tragedy is the lost opportunity and completely avoidable harms that children endure when their rights are not met, exclusion within or from school, denial of health due to housing and food insecurity, exposure to violence and harm, lack of access to play and experiences such as the opportunity join in and learn a sport or life skill like swimming.

For children to access their rights they need to know about them, and so do the adults who care for them, their parents and wider whānau members, and adults that provide education, health care, the coaches, the swim instructors, and the policy makers that dictate at a macro level how well children's rights will be understood, respected and resourced. The Committee on the Rights of the Child identified priority areas that our government should take action on, discrimination, violence, State removal of children, disabled children, housing, food and income insecurity, child justice, and the rights of Tamariki Māori.

These priority areas all apply to children aged 5 - 12 years and are critical to ensure their health, wellbeing and development. To ensure they are upheld, it is essential we all recognise the importance of this stage of children's lifecourse and ensure their rights are realised during this crucial time.

Jacqui Southey, Child Rights Advocacy Director, Save the Children

Policies & Frameworks

Child Poverty Monitor

The Child Poverty Monitor is an annual technical report that presents the most recent child poverty statistics and provides commentary on how well the government is meeting its child poverty reduction targets. It explores how poverty affects specific groups of children and identifies initiatives aimed at tackling child poverty.

The Monitor is published by a partnership of the J R McKenzie Trust, the Office of the Children's Commissioner, and the New Zealand Child and Youth Epidemiology Service (NZCYES) at the University of Otago.

- [Read the *2022 Child Poverty Monitor*](#)
- [Find out more about Child Poverty in the *Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018* section on page 114 and on page 59 of *Whānau Tangata*.](#)

Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy

The Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy was launched by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in 2019, with the intention of unifying government understanding of, and investment in, the things that are important for child and youth wellbeing.

Over 6,000 children and young people were involved in the development of the strategy, led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy contains the overarching vision that **“New Zealand is the best place in the world for children and young people”** and is made up of the following six wellbeing outcomes which outline what children and young people want and need for a good life.

Children and young people:

- are loved, safe and nurtured
- have what they need
- are happy and healthy
- are learning and developing
- are accepted, respected and connected
- are involved and empowered

Progress towards these outcomes is measured against 36 indicators using data from a variety of sources including government agency data and surveys. It is worth noting that many of the indicators of children's wellbeing are not measured on children in the five to 12-years age group.

A [review](#) of the Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy in 2022 identified four priority areas for the next phase of its implementation:

1. reducing child poverty and mitigating the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage
2. enhancing child and whānau wellbeing in the first 1000 days
3. addressing racism, discrimination, and stigma
4. enhancing the mental wellbeing of children and young people.

- [Find out more about the *Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy*](#)
- [Read the latest *Annual Report on the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy and Child Poverty Related Indicators*](#)

Te Aorerekura

Te Aorerekura is the National Strategy to Eliminate Family Violence and Sexual Violence.

It is a 25-year cross-government strategy that seeks to unify government and sector efforts and increase political and public sector accountability across these areas. This strategy was launched in December 2021.

The vision of Te Aorerekura is that **“All people in Aotearoa New Zealand are thriving, their wellbeing is enhanced and sustained because they are safe and supported to live their lives free from family violence and sexual violence.”**

- [Find out more about *Te Aorerekura*](#)
- [Find out more about *Children's Safety* on page 64](#)

Enabling Good Lives

Enabling Good Lives (EGL) aims to increase choice and control for disabled people and their families.

The EGL approach guides positive change for disabled people, families, communities and governance structures. The EGL approach has eight core principles, a vision and key components to guide positive change. The eight principles are: self-determination, beginning early, person-centred, ordinary life outcomes, mainstream first, mana enhancing, easy to use and relationship building.

- [Find out more about *Enabling Good Lives*](#)

Ka Ora, Ka Ako

This initiative is part of the Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy and aims to reduce food insecurity by providing children with lunches in schools.

- [Find out more about *food security and Ka Ora, Ka Ako* on page 57](#)



Mana Whenua | Belonging

There is a deep connection between belonging (mana whenua) and empowerment when it comes to children. The aspiration within Te Whāriki is that children grow up secure in their sense of belonging, that they experience respect for their individual strengths, interests and background and feel confident to participate within their environment.

(Hargraves, 2020)

Belonging and whakamana go hand in hand - one cannot feel empowered without feeling included and without a turangawaewae (place to stand/ belong).

At a societal level, we show whakamana for our children by their special place in the laws of our land. Our role is to recognise children's inherent belonging - the dignity of every child - and reflect that back to them through the laws that keep our society in check, and allow them to thrive.



“A sense of belonging is integrated into the broad narratives of a child’s life, shaping their perceptions of social connections, their niche within various communities, and their sense of identity. It parallels the meaning and purpose they assign to their life.”

(Annan, 2022, p. 20)

Legislation

In New Zealand, there are several pieces of legislation that are specifically relevant to children. These laws provide legal protections and rights to children and aim to ensure that they are treated with dignity. Children's belonging is reinforced when we show the value we place on children by ensuring we have good legislation to allow for their protection and wellbeing.

Children's Act 2014

The Children's Act 2014 sets out three key legislative requirements intended to improve the wellbeing of children and young people in Aotearoa.

- **Part 1** - requires government to adopt, publish and review a strategy for improving the wellbeing of children and ensure that children's agencies work together to improve wellbeing for particular groups of children.
- **Part 2** - requires the adoption of and reporting on child protection policies by state services and boards of Te Whatu Ora and Te Aka Whai Ora, school boards and certain contracted agencies and services used by schools.
- **Part 3** - requires the safety checking of people employed or engaged in work that involves regular or overnight contact with children.

— [Find out more about Children's Act 2014](#)

Education and Training Act 2020

The Education and Training Act 2020 is the law that guides New Zealand's education system from early childhood to tertiary level.

The Act maintains children's rights to free education at any State school from their fifth birthday until the age of 19. Enrolment at a registered school is mandatory between the ages of six

and sixteen years. The Act also says that students with special educational needs have the same rights as other students. Children must be enrolled at a school unless the Ministry is satisfied that an alternative method of education is appropriate. This will usually only be in situations where the child will be taught at least as regularly and as well as they would be in a registered school, or specialist school or service.

— [Find out more about Education and Training Act 2020](#)

Care of Children Act 2004

The Care of Children Act defines and regulates powers and responsibilities associated with the care of children, whether held by parents or through guardianship arrangements.

This Act guides the process for resolving legal disputes about the care of children. The Act maintains the ultimate importance of children's welfare and best interests. It requires that the views of children be considered regarding their care.

— [Find out more about the Care of Children Act 2004](#)



Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018

The Child Poverty Reduction Act was introduced in 2018 with the purpose of helping to “achieve a significant and sustained reduction in child poverty in New Zealand”. It aims to establish greater focus, accountability, and transparency with regards to government progress on child poverty reduction.

The Act requires the government to set long-term (10 year) and intermediate (3 year) targets on four primary measures of poverty and hardship, and report annually on these measures. The Act also specifies a further six supplementary measures that the government must use to monitor poverty rates in Aotearoa.

Child poverty is primarily measured by:

1. Percentage of children living in low-income households before housing costs
2. Percentage of children living in low-income households after housing costs
3. Percentage of children living in households experiencing material hardship
4. Percentage of children living in households experiencing poverty over several years (poverty persistence).

The first three measures have been in effect since 2019. The fourth measure will come into effect from 2025/26. Child poverty reduction targets were set in 2019 and again in 2022 with an overall goal of more than halving rates of child poverty within ten years.

The Child Poverty Reduction Act requires the government to report on child poverty as part of the annual Budget process. This includes reporting progress made in the preceding year towards meeting child poverty reduction targets and explaining how the Budget for the coming year will work towards reducing child poverty.

– [Read the 2023 Wellbeing Budget Child Poverty Report](#)

Statistics New Zealand publishes child poverty statistics annually, with the [most recent results](#) published in February 2024. You can

read a summary of these results on page 59 of Whānau Tangata.

The Child Poverty Monitor publishes statistics and commentary on how well the government’s child poverty reduction targets are being met. Find out more on page 110.

– [Read the Child Poverty Reduction Act 2018](#)

Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022

The Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022 aims to ensure engagement with Oranga Tamariki leads to positive outcomes for children by establishing the [Independent Children’s Monitor](#) (see more on page 120).

The Act also extends the duties and powers of the Ombudsman in relation to investigating services or support delivered by Oranga Tamariki or care or custody providers.

The Act sets out how the Independent Children’s Monitor, the Ombudsman and the Children & Young People’s Commission should work together to carry out oversight functions relating to the care and protection and youth justice systems.

A review of this Act, to assess its effectiveness, is due in 2025.

– [Find out more about the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022](#)



Mana Tangata | Contribution

“Children’s lives are largely determined by adult plans, working arrangements, interests, and goals, and they are also often the object of adult work, such as teaching and caregiving. Their opportunities for expressing their ideas and for taking responsibility outside the home, school or community have diminished in the Western minority world.” (Smith, 2013, p243)

Within Te Whāriki, the concept of mana tangata (contribution) focuses on children feeling confident to contribute their thoughts and ideas and advocate for themselves, as well as showing respect for the opinions and feelings of others. (Hargraves, 2020)

It features in Te Tiriti, in international rights frameworks and in the policies that guide access to resources within our communities. A wellbeing approach prioritises children’s protection from harm, access to an adequate standard of living, education and healthcare, and the removal of barriers that stop them thriving.

The ability to express oneself is fundamental to whakamana, as it directly affects the extent to which children have agency over their life and experiences and contributes to their sense of identity and self-confidence.

The Voice of Children

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out children’s rights with regards to them contributing to decisions, issues and opportunities in relation to matters that affect them.

Feedback from those working with children suggests that there are limited opportunities for children in the middle years to have a voice, and that typically their voices are heard via those of the adults involved in their care.

“...children have a unique perspective or point of view, which in the past has often been ignored....children are considered to lack competence, rationality, independence and experience, and their viewpoints of the world are thought to be merely a reflection of what their parents or teachers think.”

(Smith, 2013)

The requirement to consult with children when developing strategy or service delivery is included in several pieces of New Zealand legislation. These include the Children and Young Peoples Commission Act 2022, Children’s Amendment Act 2014, the Integrity Sport and Recreation Bill 2023, and the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki System Act 2022. While this requirement exists, there is no guidance on how this should occur. This risks consultation that is not based on best practice and therefore not effective or child-friendly.

Feeling safe and having trusted relationships is critical to children feeling confident to share their views. This may be difficult to achieve for children in families negatively impacted by previous interactions with government systems.

Voice

Recent tools and resources developed to support children's voice include:

Child Impact Assessment Tool

The CIA Tool was created to support the policy-making process of government and non-government organisations.

It enables users to assess:

- the impact of a policy on children and young people's wellbeing and rights
- the extent to which a policy or law aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The Tool was created in response to a recommendation from the United Nations in 2011 challenging the government to integrate the views of children and young people in decision-making. Whilst current awareness and use of the tool appears to be limited, the United Nations has recently recommended that use of the tool be made mandatory across government.

— [Find out more about the *Child Impact Assessment \(CIA\) Tool*](#)

Child-Centred Decision-Making Tool

This tool was developed by Mana Mokopuna | The Children & Young People's Commission in 2017 to help organisations recognise the needs, rights, and views of children in the development of policy and legislation, services or products.

- [Find out more about the *Child-Centred Decision-Making Tool*](#)
- [A prior resource titled *Being Child-Centred* was also produced by the Office of the Children's Commissioner](#)
- [Mana Mokopuna n provides a variety of other guidance and resources to support safe and effective engagement with young people.](#)

Mai World

Mai World is the Child and Youth Voices Project of Mana Mokopuna. Mai World aims to inform government and community decision making by listening to and amplifying the voices of mokopuna.

Currently over 25,000 children are connected to this initiative via 41 schools and several community groups.

— [Find out more about *Mai World*](#)

Kia Tika, Kia Pono – Honouring Truths

Kia Tika, Kia Pono – Honouring Truths is a framework designed to guide ethical, meaningful and culturally safe engagement with care experienced children and young people.

The framework positions children and young people as experts and makes sure that their contributions and experiences are honoured and respected by the adults and organisations who engage with them.

— [Find out more about *Kia Tika, Kia Pono – Honouring Truths*](#)



Government engagements with children and young people

The Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy website provides a list of recent reports developed from engagements with children and young people.

While many of these engagements focus on youth, there are several engagements involving the five-12 age stage. [View the complete list of reports.](#)

Notable reports include:

What Makes A Good Life?

This report by the Office of the Children's Commissioner shares findings from a survey of over 6,000 children and young people asking about their thoughts on what a good life is and what needs to be changed to make life in Aotearoa better for children and young people. 37% of the respondents to this survey were aged between 7-12 years. Key findings include that change is needed to improve life for children, family and whānau, providing the basics is important, but not enough on its own, and that children and young people have valuable insights. Reports from this survey were also published specific to the views of [children in care](#), [disabled children](#) and [tamariki Māori](#).

— [Find out more about What Makes a Good Life?](#)

Kōrero Mātauranga - Education Conversations

Kōrero Mātauranga is described as “a series of education conversations to help build the world's best education system for all our children and young people.” (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Through this initiative, the Ministry has captured the views of over 1,900 children and young people in order to guide the ongoing development of education.

— [A summary of findings is available in the Voices of Young People reports.](#)

Mana Reo | Communication

Mana reo (communication) has been explored in the way we communicate about children, which tells a story about the role we give them in society. It is critical to think about how we do this, whether children's perspectives are considered, and how our perspectives impact the decisions we make about their lives.

Whakamana is fostered through respect – this looks like respect for the mana of all children and for the contribution they offer. Respect for the things that are important to them having a good life. It is also demonstrated through respectful consideration of their views, and respectful communication with and about children.

Children's advocates play a crucial role in raising children's voices and challenging our cultural narratives. Advocacy provides accountability for our commitments to and aspirations for our mokopuna. Advocacy organisations act as a voice for the rights of children and champion the conditions that are needed for them to thrive.

In addition to the advocacy role held by Mana Mokopuna – The Children & Young People's Commission, as a Crown Institute, there are many non-governmental children's advocacy organisations, who have a focus on the rights of mokopuna and children within Aotearoa and the Pacific region. We have highlighted several following, but wish to acknowledge the many others across Aotearoa who tirelessly advocate at an individual and collective level for the rights of our taonga.

Advocacy

Organisations and roles

Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand

Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand (CRAANZ) is the collective voice for children's rights in Aotearoa. CRAANZ is the leading non-Government voice reporting to the United Nations on how well the Convention is being implemented in Aotearoa.

– [Find out more about *Children's Rights Alliance Aotearoa New Zealand*](#)

Save the Children New Zealand

Save the Children works to save the lives of children, protect their rights and provide them with opportunities to live healthy, successful lives. The organisation is active in advocacy, disaster-relief and development projects in the Pacific, Asia and around the world.

– [Find out more about *Save the Children New Zealand*](#)

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)

Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) is an independent charity working to eliminate child poverty in Aotearoa New Zealand so all children can thrive. CPAG carries out policy analysis, research, reporting and advocacy to highlight the causes and effects of poverty and the impact of government policies on children.

– [Find out more about *Child Poverty Action Group*](#)

Child Matters

Child Matters aims to prevent abuse and neglect of children by providing child protection education, training and consultancy services to organisations, workforce, community, and families.

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

– [Find out more about *Safeguarding & Child Protection on 65*](#)

UNICEF Aotearoa

UNICEF Aotearoa is part of the global UNICEF network, mandated by the United Nations to advocate for the protection of children's rights

both nationally and internationally. UNICEF works together with government, non-government organisations, businesses, donors, and children, seeking to strengthen children's rights to protection, health, education, basic needs, and opportunities to reach their full potential. UNICEF leads development programmes in the Pacific, as well as providing emergency assistance and advocacy.

– [Find out more about *UNICEF*](#)

VOYCE

VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai is an independent charity established to empower care experienced children in Aotearoa New Zealand. VOYCE aims to amplify the voices of children in foster or whanau care (past and present) in order to positively influence individual care experiences and the wider care system. VOYCE enables connection and support through events, networks, and advocacy.

– [Find out more about *VOYCE - Whakarongo Mai*](#)

Tick for Kids

Tick for Kids is a movement designed to engage the public and politicians in discussion about what needs to be done to improve life for children and young people in New Zealand. Tick for Kids is especially active during the election period when its coalition of members provide analysis of party policies through the lens of children's wellbeing and rights.

– [Find out more about *Tick for Kids*](#)

Child Rich Communities

The goal of the Child Rich Communities (CRC) project is to grow a network of people and projects working in community-led ways to improve the wellbeing of tamariki, rangatahi, whānau, and communities across Aotearoa. CRC aims to promote leaders, activities, and community-led action that is making a positive difference for children and whānau and encourage more integrated social service and community-building approaches.

– [Find out more about *Child Rich Communities*](#)

Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Mana aotūroa or exploration within Te Whāriki is all about supporting children “to explore, learn from, respect and make sense of the world.”

(Ministry of Education, 2023)

At a societal level, exploration through whakamana is seen through the Crown organisations that are responsible for our children.

Ministries and Crown Entities Responsibilities

Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga

The Ministry of Education is responsible for shaping an education system that delivers equitable and excellent outcomes for tamariki.

This happens through leadership, guidance, and the resourcing of education providers, teachers and other professionals. It is also supported through intervention where there is risk to student achievement, participation, or provider performance. The Ministry of Education administers legislative and regulatory controls (such as the National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and National Curriculum) designed to protect learners, educators and the communities that support them.

– *Find out more about the [Ministry of Education](#)*

Oranga Tamariki | Ministry for Children

Oranga Tamariki is the Ministry responsible for protecting the wellbeing of children and young people in Aotearoa, with a focus on those most at risk of harm.

It oversees the care and protection and youth justice systems, guided by the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. Oranga Tamariki also oversees the adoption system and is involved in surrogacy arrangements.

– *Find out more about [Oranga Tamariki](#)*



Mana Mokopuna | The Children & Young People's Commission

Mana Mokopuna – The Children and Young People's Commission is tasked with promoting and protecting the rights, health, welfare, and wellbeing of all children and young people aged under 18 and care experienced young people aged up to 25 years.

The strategic priorities of Mana Mokopuna are education, mental wellbeing, ending family violence, and monitoring places of detention.

The Commission's responsibilities include:

- promoting and monitoring children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
 - advocating for system-level changes to improve child wellbeing
 - establishing monitoring and complaints processes for children and supporting children to participate in these processes
 - raising awareness of issues relating to children and their wellbeing
 - providing expertise to courts and government agencies
 - reporting to the Prime Minister on matters affecting the rights of children
 - encouraging children and young peoples' participation and voices in decisions affecting their lives through consultation with children, and promoting best practice engagement
 - monitoring as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT).
- [Find out more about Mana Mokopuna – The Children & Young People's Commission](#)

Aroturuki Tamariki | Independent Children's Monitor

In 2022, the Oversight of Oranga Tamariki Bill established an Independent Monitor to take on the functions held by the Office of the Children's Commissioner relating to independent monitoring of the Oranga Tamariki system.

The Independent Children's Monitor provides independent, impartial, evidence-based oversight of the Oranga Tamariki system. This includes assessing:

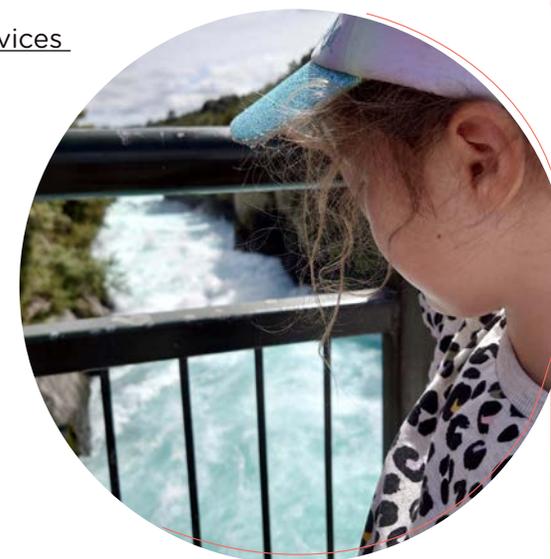
- agency compliance with the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and national care standards regulations,
 - quality of service provision and practice, and
 - outcomes for children, young people, families and whānau who receive services through the Oranga Tamariki system.
- [Find out more about Aroturuki Tamariki – Independent Children's Monitor](#)

Recent reports published by Aroturuki Tamariki include:

[Experiences of Care: annual reports on agency compliance with the National Care Standards for the years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23](#)

[Access to Primary Health Services and Dental Care \(2024\)](#)

[Returning Home From Care \(2023\)](#)



Ngā wāhi hei arotahi | Areas to focus on

**What does Whakamana
look like for our tamariki?**

Mana Atua | Wellbeing

Frameworks support children's wellbeing through protection from harm, adequate standard of living and the removal of barriers that prevent their thriving

Mana Whenua | Belonging

Legislation and policy reflect children's belonging and inherent dignity

Mana Reo | Communication

Children are shown respect in the way we as a society talk about them and invite their perspective



Mana Aotūroa | Exploration

Children's exploration and thriving is fostered through Ministries that demonstrate best practice and innovation.

Mana Tangata | Contribution

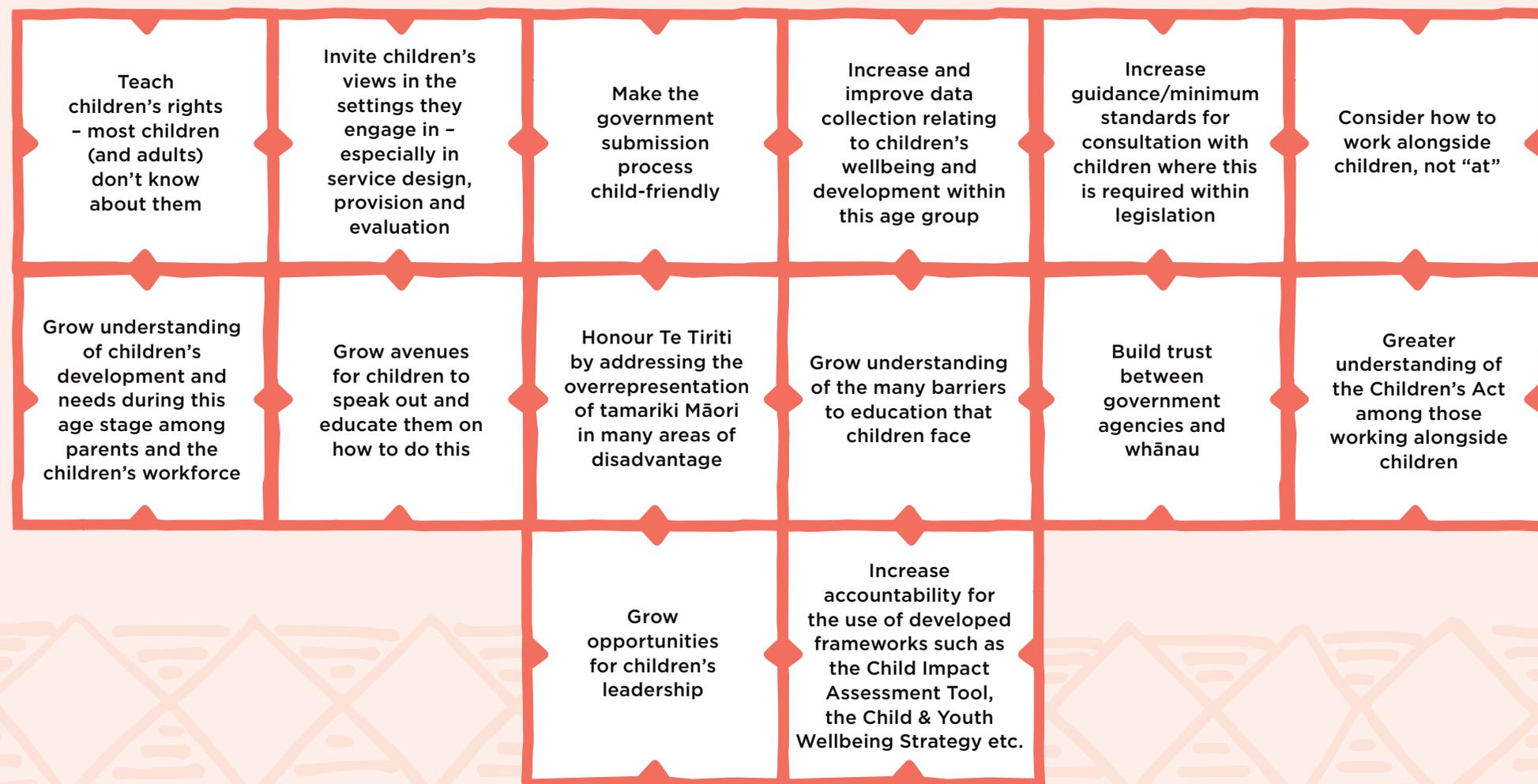
Children have opportunity to express themselves and contribute in society



What might it look like to strengthen Whakamana for children....

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

Within the landscape of legislation, tools, resources and organisations centred on five to 12-year-olds we have identified some key recommendations to better recognise and strengthen the Te Whāriki principles and improve outcomes for children:



Ngā wāhi hei arotahi | Areas to focus on

Across this guide we have noted recommendations to improve the support available during middle childhood.

Below we highlight major, overarching recommendations, through our Te Whāriki lens. These will not capture all the gaps in the structures currently working to empower five to 12-year-olds in New Zealand. However we believe that it's crucial that these areas of focus are addressed to enable a holistic approach to development during middle childhood.

Principle	Mana Atua Wellbeing	Mana Whenua Belonging	Mana Tangata Contribution	Mana Reo Communication	Mana Aotūroa Exploration
Kotahitanga Holistic Development	Children's wellbeing is supported through understanding of holistic approaches to child development and investment in appropriate service delivery	Children's holistic development is supported through a strong sense of belonging	Children's contribution to society is reflected in the value we place on research and engagement with this age group	Middle childhood is prioritised in training and research	Children's development is supported through research and current, contextually-appropriate theories of child development
Whānau Tangata Family & Community	Children experience a standard of living that enables them to thrive and are protected from all harm	Children experience belonging through participating in and feeling respected within their communities	Children have opportunities to develop leadership within education and extra-curricular settings	Children have opportunities to speak up about the issues that matter to them	Play is prioritised for children during the middle years - in education, in guidance for parents, and in our neighbourhoods and communities
Ngā Hononga Relationships	Children experience safe, positive relationships with whānau, peers and others in their communities	Children's sense of belonging is strengthened through connection to people and place	Children participate in and experience healthy peer relationships and are supported to navigate experiences of bullying safely	Children's development is supported by a skilled and valued workforce, who are equipped to support the current experience of childhood	Intergenerational relationships are accessible and encouraged for all tamariki to support their development
Whakamana Empowerment	Frameworks support children's wellbeing through protection from harm, adequate standard of living and the removal of barriers that prevent their thriving	Legislation and policy reflect children's belonging and inherent dignity	Children have opportunity to express themselves and contribute in society	Children are shown respect in the way we as a society talk about them and invite their perspective	Children's exploration and thriving is fostered through Ministries that demonstrate best practice and innovation

He aha muri? | What Next?

This report serves as one of the key pieces of work for 2023/24 for our portfolio focused on Children & Families.

Our aim was for this report to provide the fullest possible picture, in one place, of what is currently available to support middle childhood in New Zealand, as well as what is missing. By framing it as an easy-to-read guide with links to further information, we hope it will be of benefit to our members, the people they work alongside, and the wider community.

This work is also intended as a call to action, to generate interest, and spark collaboration. We feel strongly that middle childhood requires greater prioritisation and that by collaborating we can draw attention to this important developmental stage.

We are working towards an Aotearoa where middle childhood is understood and invested in. A country with a specialised workforce who deeply understand children's needs during this period. Where children can access appropriate services in a timely manner to enable their thriving. An Aotearoa where middle childhood is prioritised within government policy, funding, and the wider social sector.

Strategic planning and action are needed now, to realise the potential of middle childhood in terms of children's long-term outcomes.

If you'd like to be part of this important mahi, please get in touch.

Ko wai tātou | Who we are

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) represents more than 230 member organisations providing a range of community, health, and social support services across Aotearoa.

These organisations include some of the most recognised and highly regarded names in social service provision, and all are world famous in their in own rohe. Their mahi informs our deep understanding of the everyday lives of New Zealand communities as we work towards achieving a just and compassionate society for all. We see this work as an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ, which we seek to fulfil through our commitment to giving priority to the systematically disempowered, and to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

NZCCSS comprises six members: the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches. Nationally, the range and scope of our member networks is extensive. Around 230 separate providers in 55 towns and cities throughout New Zealand deliver 37 types of services through 1,024 programmes. Members employ over 5,000 full-time staff, 7,000 part-time staff, and co-ordinate almost 16,000 volunteers.

Our work is focused in three policy areas – Equity and Inclusion, Children and Families, and Older People. For each area, we have a specialist working group made up of leaders of service organisations from across the country who provide up-to-date knowledge of experiences and need in their communities. We call these groups 'Policy Groups'.

This knowledge, along with input from the representatives of Council's six members, informs our mahi of providing research, representation, connection, good practice dissemination, policy advice/information and advocacy services for our members.

— nzccss.org.nz

Nga kupu whakatepe mai o tātou rangatira | Closing words from our leaders

Poipoia te kākano kia puawai Nurture the seed and it will blossom

Most people would agree with the above whakataukī when it comes to supporting and raising children – but society often underestimates the significance of middle childhood (five to 12-years of age), focusing more on early childhood or adolescence. However, we believe that middle childhood is also a crucial time when tamariki further develop their personalities, interests, and values, which will shape them into the adults they will become.

NZCCSS recognises the immense value that children in middle childhood hold. Not only are they our future leaders and members of society, but they are also active participants in the present, deserving of attention, care, and support. This accessible guide provides insights into the various aspects of middle childhood in Aotearoa. We hope it will deepen understanding of this crucial stage of development, empowering all those who love children and who work with children to provide the best possible support throughout middle childhood.

NZCCSS exists to work towards a more just and compassionate society for all across Aotearoa. We do so as an expression of our faith, as an extension of the mission of Jesus Christ, and our commitment to honour the articles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

On behalf of NZCCSS, it is our pleasure to share this guide with you. We hope that you find it useful.

Dr. Bonnie Robinson MNZM

Co-President
Doctor of Professional Practice,
BA, BD, BA_pMan

Renee Rewi

Co-President
Ngāti Whare, Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Whakaue,
Ngāti Rangiwewehi, Tūwharetoa, Tainui,
Ngāpuhi LLM, LLB Waikato

Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of NZ
Justice of the Peace (JP)

Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

(Proverbs 22:6)

At NZCCSS we view all children as precious taonga, each with unique talents, dreams, and potential. This doesn't pause between the ages of five and 12, disappearing from view. Even so, Aotearoa New Zealand has a well-established early childhood sector and a strong youth sector focussing on teenagers, but very little in between. Where is our middle childhood sector?

We created this guide because we frequently heard from our members that while there may be information available about middle childhood, it is often scattered and not easily accessible to those working with children, let alone parents. Our research showed us that this information is generalised and lacks the local Aotearoa context that is vital for effective support for our tamariki. This gap is particularly evident in the training of professionals who work with children this age. They are not given many opportunities to learn the specific knowledge and skills needed to understand and address the unique challenges and opportunities of middle childhood.

We wanted to bridge these gaps by bringing together comprehensive information about middle childhood in one accessible resource. Our aim was to create a valuable tool for parents, educators, and caregivers. Our hope is that this guide will not only enhance our understanding of middle childhood, but also empower us to make a meaningful difference to the sector and to the lives of tamariki during this crucial stage of development.

Nikki Hurst

Kaiwhakahaere Matua | Executive Officer

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Inoi Whakamutunga

Kia tau ki a tātou katoa
Te atawhai o tō tātou Ariki, a Ihu Karaiti
Me te aroha o te Atua
Me te whiwhingatahitanga
Ki te wairua tapu
Ake ake ake,
Āmine

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with you all
Forever and ever
Amen



Working for a fair and compassionate future for all.

Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki

New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services

PO Box 12-090, Thorndon

Wellington 6144, Aotearoa New Zealand

Email: eo@nzccss.org.nz | www.nzccss.org.nz



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