

Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki

Exploring the context of middle childhood
in Aotearoa New Zealand



A Pocket Edition for
Parents, Caregivers, Teachers, and Social Workers
brought to you by



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

Poipoia te kākano kia puawai

NURTURE THE SEED AND IT WILL BLOSSOM

Why Middle Childhood?

The value of understanding and supporting children's holistic development during middle childhood is crucial. However middle childhood is often neglected in relation to the early childhood and youth stages of development.

Greater importance must be placed on developing good understanding specific to this age stage and our context of Aotearoa in order to support children in all stages of their development. In overlooking middle childhood, we may be missing a valuable window of opportunity to invest in children's development and set them up well for the future.

NZCCSS developed *Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki - Exploring the context of middle childhood in Aotearoa New Zealand* in order to provide a general overview of middle childhood. 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 Aotearoa.

About this Pocket Guide

This resource contains a brief overview of our more in-depth '*Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki*'.

It has been designed to support understanding of children's development during middle childhood among those caring for or working alongside tamariki and their whānau during, or in preparation for, this stage of development.



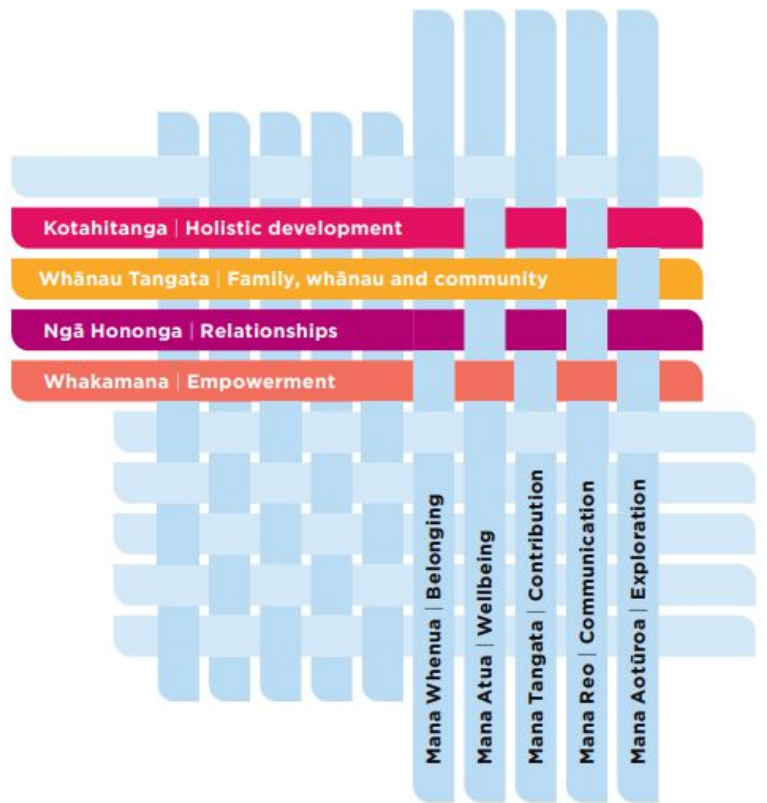
Te Whāriki

In considering the most appropriate way to frame this report, we decided that Te Whāriki (Ministry of Education, 2017) – 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.

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.



Find out more about Te Whāriki in our full report (see the QR code on the back cover).

Kotahitanga | Holistic Development

"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)

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 other dimensions across time and space" (Ministry of Education, 2017).

In this chapter we explore children's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development, models of development, programmes to support development, research and resources.

Ngā Hononga | Relationships

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)

Te Whāriki identifies Ngā Hononga 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 define their working theories". Te Whāriki maintains that relationships are not limited to those of today, but within a Te Ao Māori worldview include connections to people and places through whakapapa.

In this chapter we explore children's social experiences, and workforce education and training.

Whānau Tangata | Family & Community

"Poverty is your problem, it is everyone's problem, not just those who are in poverty."

- Rebecca, Te Puru, in *'This is how I see it' Children, young people and young adults' views and experiences of poverty* (Egan-Bitran, 2010, p.6)

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.

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.

Whakamana | Empowerment

"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 speak up when they see injustice or to offer support to those who need it."

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

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 (history). 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.

In this chapter we explore the 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.

Ngā wāhi hei arotahi | Areas to focus on

Below we highlight suggested areas where those caring for, working alongside and advocating for tamariki might focus to strengthen the Te Whāriki principles and improve outcomes for children during middle childhood.

We hope these ideas spark reflection about what it might look like to strengthen Kotahitanga, Whānau Tangata, Ngā Hononga and Whakamana within your mahi, home and community.

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 invest 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

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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • 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"> • Begin to connect actions with their consequences • Make plans and set goals • Can think about the meaning of information they hear or read • Gain understanding of complex forms of false-belief around 7-8 years (e.g. such as that another person might believe something untrue about another person or thing) • Can understand and give directions • Gain understanding of time e.g. tomorrow/yesterday/this afternoon 	<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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

Developmental Domain	5.6.7.8.	9.10.11.12.
Attention	<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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Friendship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May seek a "best friend" • Children tend to form friendships with children of the same gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are developing friendships based on shared interests
Social	<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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypical gender roles reflected in children's play (e.g. nurturing games, playfighting) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More likely to play with peers of the same gender
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friendships grow in importance • Friendship groups become more mix gendered again • Seeking greater independence from family
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention functions mature around 12 years • Focus increases between ages 8-12
		<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
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
		<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 • 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
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 • 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 • 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 • 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 • 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 • 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 • Moving away from reliance on parents

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 of our full Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki report.



Find out more

Use the QR code below to access the full Te Kōrero mō ngā Tamariki report and our Middle Childhood Resource Kete



Please contact Melanie Wilson at melanie@nzccss.org.nz for any enquiries or feedback.

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NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 100 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. Our mission is to call forth a just and compassionate society for Aotearoa, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

**Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website
www.nzccss.org.nz**