

*An interagency guide*

# working together

to keep children and young people safe

*Me mutu tā tātou tūkino tamariki*

*Caring – Communities – Connected*



Everyone has a role to play in keeping our children and young people safe. At Child, Youth and Family we partner with others to help protect, support and care for children. Together we can help our children be:

safe

from harm and well cared for

strong

as part of a loving family and whānau

thrive

by helping children be the best they can be.

Talk to us about how we can help you.

**Child, Youth and Family**  
0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)

FOR ADDITIONAL COPIES PLEASE EMAIL [CyfCallCentre@cyf.govt.nz](mailto:CyfCallCentre@cyf.govt.nz)  
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# introduction

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Everyone has a role to play in making sure New Zealand children are safe and well cared for as part of their family and community.

We want the best for children and young people, and we work with them, their families and people in the community to help them to be safe, strong and thrive.

We do this by:

- ⋮ supporting families to care for their children
- ⋮ finding homes for children who can't live at home
- ⋮ helping young people who offend to take responsibility and move on in a positive way
- ⋮ providing adoption advice and support
- ⋮ raising awareness to prevent child abuse or neglect.

Every year we receive thousands of calls from people worried about a child or family. In many of these cases, the family just needs some advice or to be connected with the right support services. For others, our care and protection teams work with the family to identify the issues and to find a solution. For the more serious or complicated cases, we'll hold a family group conference where the family and other key people agree on a plan to keep the child safe and identify the support they need.

Our aim is to work with families and whānau to help them provide a safe and loving home for their children. When it's not safe for a child or young person to be cared for at home, we find other family members or caregivers for them to live with. Many of these children will return home once things are sorted out, while others will stay permanently with their caregivers or extended family.

As a professional, you play a valuable role in helping keep children safe. If you're concerned about a family who is struggling or you think a child may be at risk, call us on **0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)**.

It's our responsibility to look into these concerns and find the best way to work with the family. The earlier you talk to us, the earlier we can help.

**By working together, we can achieve so much more to make sure children and young people are well cared for and thriving as part of their family and community.**

*Me mutu tā tātou  
tūkinō tamariki*

## About this guide

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This book is for people in social service agencies, schools, healthcare organisations, community and other groups who have close contact with children and families. You may be the first to notice when things are not going right for families and when there are concerns about children.

This book is designed to sit alongside your own policies for protecting children to make sure we're:

**Caring** for children and young people, knowing the signs that something could be wrong, and how to help families be safe and strong.

**Communities** that work together to protect children and support families.

**Connected** so you know how and when to contact us, what we'll do next and how we work with families to keep children and young people safe.

*'I don't have any of my family living near me and I'm a single mother with four children under nine. I got worried as I wasn't coping and began taking my anger out on the kids. I felt whakama about telling anyone until a friend encouraged me to reach out and phone a lady at the Iwi Social Services. After talking to the lady, she put me in touch with whānau from the Kohanga Reo in my area. I now have a group of friends I can phone if I know I am not coping. This has made a huge difference to my own life, but also I can see my tamariki are much happier. As a mum it's good that I have someone to talk to when things get tough for me.'*

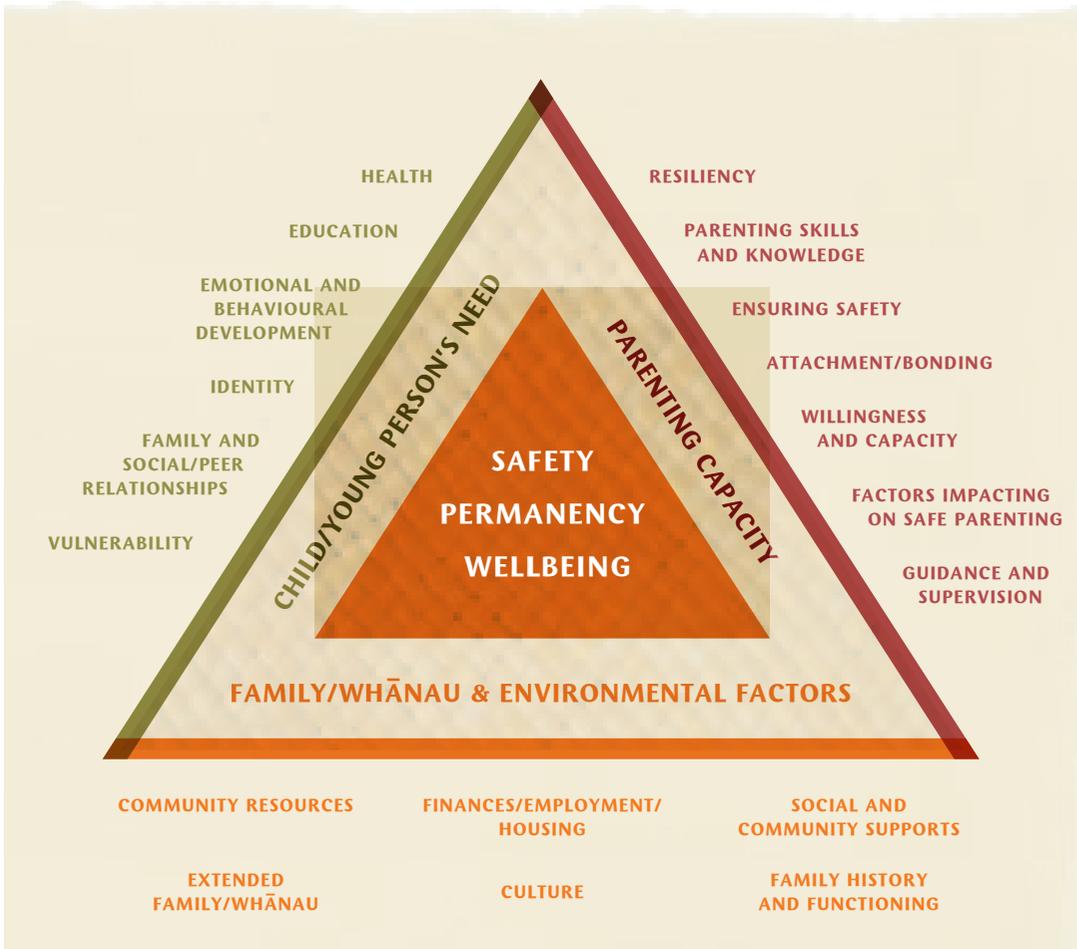
# Assessing family's wellbeing

When we are worried about children, we work with their whole family to understand their strengths and vulnerabilities. This involves assessing the child's needs, their parents' capacity to safely care for them, and the environment they live in.

Below is a diagram of the framework we use to guide our assessments. This helps us understand what's going on for the family, and the best way to help.

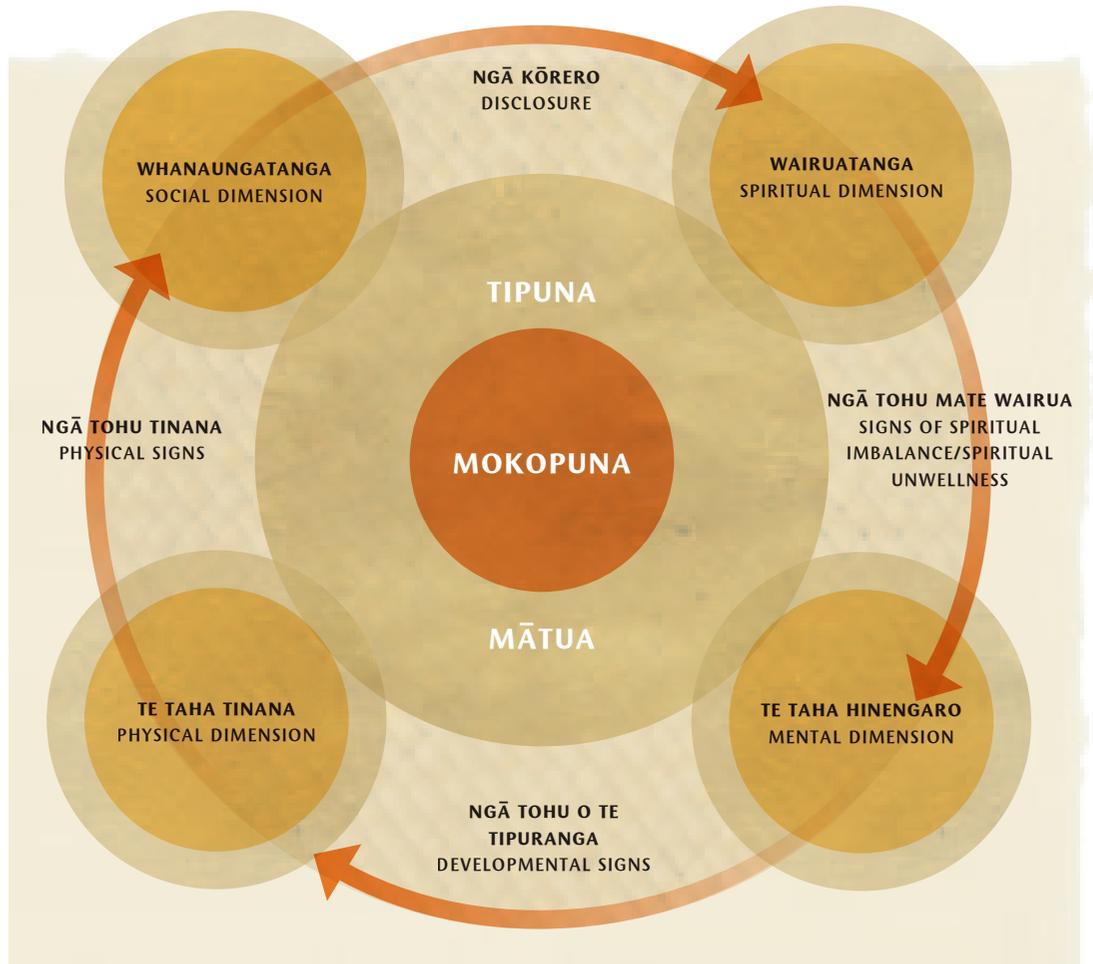
This and other assessment tools are on our practice centre [www.practicecentre.govt.nz](http://www.practicecentre.govt.nz)

## Assessment Framework



In a Māori context, the Te Whare Tapawhā model focuses on four areas of wellbeing that form the basic ingredients for good health. Paying attention to these four dimensions and the balance between them helps us to better understand and respond in ways that focus on the whole child: their safety, security and wellbeing. When these things are out of balance, a child’s wellbeing may be at risk.

**Te Whare Tapawhā – a model of whānau wellbeing**



**Te taha tinana** relates to the importance of good physical health and reinforces the need for optimal conditions for the child’s growth and development.

**Te taha hinengaro** reinforces the inseparability of the mind and body. Children need to emotionally attach themselves to people who will be there for them throughout their lives.

**Te taha whānau** places the child within the context of whānau and recognises them as part of a connected kinship system.

**Te taha wairua** connects the child to the spiritual side of life, reinforcing the importance of faith, belief, health and healing.

# caring

*For children and young people by recognising the signs that something might be wrong, and speaking up when you're worried.*



# Caring for children and young people

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*Take care of our children*

*Take care of what they hear*

*Take care of what they see*

*Take care of what they feel*

*For how the children grow so will the shape of Aotearoa.*

DAME WHINA COOPER

## Looking out for vulnerable families

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Every parent knows that raising children is a big job, and everyone needs a helping hand from time to time.

Families from any background can have problems that put their children at risk of abuse or neglect. Parents might feel stressed, there may be extra challenges in their family, or they might be trying to manage on their own.

There are some things though that can make families extra vulnerable, and there won't always be obvious signs of something being wrong. You might just have a sense that they are struggling.

Our more vulnerable families often have:

- ⋮ higher levels of deprivation, unemployment, housing struggles
- ⋮ parents who have grown up in a violent or abusive environment
- ⋮ family violence happening in their home
- ⋮ problems with drug or substance abuse
- ⋮ young mums raising children on their own, without support. This is more to do with the circumstances associated with being a young parent, like an unplanned pregnancy, low income or a lack of parenting knowledge
- ⋮ no support, and are socially isolated, particularly during times when there is a relationship break up, or breakdown in support from extended family
- ⋮ problems bonding with their children, or parents suffering from depression or mental health problems
- ⋮ unrealistic expectations or understanding of normal child behaviour, viewing children as disobedient or defiant. Normal infant and toddler behaviour such as frequent crying, soiling, noise and exuberance or aggressive behaviour can trigger harsh punishment
- ⋮ little children – they're more vulnerable and can get hurt easily.

## The earliest help is the best help

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Whether it's inside or outside work, as family members, friends, neighbours or workmates, we all have opportunities to support parents and help keep children safe. If we notice things starting to go wrong for a child or the people caring for them, there are some helpful ways to get involved – by listening and supporting them, or putting them in touch with people who can help.

The sooner we reach out, the sooner they can get help, and we might stop more serious problems happening down the track.

### **Some things to look out for:**

- ⋮ parents seem stressed or not coping
- ⋮ they are not able to live on the money they have
- ⋮ there are signs of drug or alcohol problems
- ⋮ parents don't have friends or family to help
- ⋮ adults are hitting or yelling
- ⋮ there are mental health problems
- ⋮ children are left home alone or seem to be neglected.

### **Ways to help:**

- ⋮ listen, and let them know you're there to help
- ⋮ provide encouragement and offer practical support
- ⋮ link them up with others who can offer the support they need
- ⋮ talk to someone experienced, for a different point of view or ideas for helping
- ⋮ if the family won't accept your help, let someone in the community know that you're concerned. This could be someone like a family support worker, or church leader.

### **Call Child, Youth and Family**

If you're worried about a child, give us a call. You will be able to talk to a trained social worker who will listen to your concerns. It's our job to work out what the problems are and whether we need to work with the family, or put them in touch with people in the community who can give them the right support.

**We've got more information about ways to help later in this book.**

# What is child abuse and how do I recognise it?

---

*“Child abuse means the harming (whether physically, emotionally or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect or deprivation of any child or young person.”*

This is the legal definition of child abuse, from the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989 (section 2).

While there are different definitions of abuse, the important thing is to think about the overall wellbeing or risk of harm to the child.

Often children are neglected or harmed when parents don't have the skills and knowledge to care for their children safely, or where the family system is not working well.

All types of abuse involve some form of emotional abuse. For example, a child who is physically assaulted will also suffer emotionally from the adult's behaviour, and will probably also experience neglect.

## Clusters of signs

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If you are concerned about a child, it's not so important to be able to categorise the type of abuse you think may be going on – it's normal to feel uncertain. However, if you notice a pattern forming or several signs that make you feel worried, this could be an indication that something is going wrong.

These clusters of signs may include:

- ⋮ physical signs
- ⋮ behavioural concerns
- ⋮ developmental delays, changes or signs
- ⋮ the child talking about things that may indicate abuse (sometimes called an allegation or disclosure)
- ⋮ the family environment.

Every situation is different, so it's important to consider the whole child's life and environment. Sometimes these signs could be the result of life events, such as divorce, accidental injury, the arrival of a new sibling and so on.

If ever you are concerned though, ask yourself the following questions:

**: What is going on in the family or child's life that could be affecting them?**

Is the child's behaviour a sign of abuse, or are there other things going on in the family?

**: How is the child's behaviour?**

Children can't easily describe what they are feeling, so their emotions often come out in their behaviour. If a child seems unusually difficult or withdrawn, aggressive or anxious, this may be a sign something is not right at home.

**: How is the child's development?**

If a child is suffering from abuse or neglect, this may affect their development in a number of areas. This should be assessed by professionals whether it is abuse or not, so they can get the right help.

**: Has the child or family hinted at, or said that something is wrong?**

The child may be looking for ways to tell you that something is wrong, so listen carefully and take what they say seriously.

**: Are there signs of family violence?**

People experiencing family violence may seem fearful or nervous, lack in confidence, and feel sad or angry a lot. Children need to be protected from family violence, so need the help of adults around them.

**: Do I sense the family is struggling, or the child is at risk in some way?**

You might have a feeling that things aren't right, but there are no actual signs of abuse, and you can't quite put your finger on the problem. If you're worried, talk to someone. Maybe talking with the family will put your mind at rest, or give you a steer on what's happening. Or you could talk with colleagues or others working with the family.

If you see something that concerns you, give us a call. We'll be happy to talk it through with you.

# The types of child maltreatment and spotting the signs

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This section gives you information about the different types of abuse, and the warning signs associated with them. It is an overview to help you understand what to look out for, but for more detailed descriptions check out the appendix section at the back of this book.

## Neglect

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Neglect is the most common form of abuse, and although the effects may not be as obvious as physical abuse, they are just as serious, leading to damaged self esteem and a lost opportunity to thrive in the world.

It can consist of:

- ✦ **Physical neglect** – not providing the necessities of life like a warm place, enough food and clothing.
- ✦ **Neglectful supervision** – leaving children home alone, or without someone safe looking after them during the day or night.
- ✦ **Emotional neglect** – not giving children the comfort, attention and love they need through play, talk, and everyday affection.
- ✦ **Medical neglect** – the failure to take care of their health needs.
- ✦ **Educational neglect** – allowing chronic truancy, failure to enrol children in school, or inattention to special education needs.

Children who are being neglected may show a combination of behavioural and physical signs. Like every type of abuse, look for an overall pattern which tells you something's just not right for this child, and think about what you can do to help.

- ✦ **Looking rough and uncared for** – kids might be extremely dirty and not have the right clothes to keep warm and dry. Neglected children may also be underweight or small for their age because they're not getting enough, or the right sort of food.
- ✦ **Persistent nappy rash or skin disorders** – can be an indication that children aren't being well cared for.
- ✦ **Out and about unsupervised** – if the child is left alone, or doesn't have a safe home to go to they might spend lots of time at the neighbours', steal food, or regularly hang out at school or on the streets. Neglected and abused kids are at greater risk of drug and alcohol abuse, and can drift onto a dangerous pathway to offending.
- ✦ **Falling behind in their school work and attendance** – sometimes coupled with poor speech and social skills, or other developmental delays is a sign that kids are not getting the support and nurturing they need.

- ⋮ **Indiscriminate attachment to adults** – strong attention and affection seeking, or a severe lack of attachment to their own parents can be a sign of neglect.

### Is it neglect?

The signs are not as immediate or obvious, but it's just as harmful. However, keep in mind that these signs may also be the result of other family circumstances. If you are concerned about a child, offer your help, put the family in touch with organisations that can help, or talk to Child, Youth and Family.

## Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is a pattern of behaviour where the child is rejected and put down. They may be isolated, constantly degraded and criticised, or negatively compared to others.

As emotional abuse is a component of all abuse and neglect, the signs are often encompassed in the other abuse types. You may often see the same indicators as you would for neglect, along with other signs that are particular to emotional abuse.

The effects of emotional abuse may only become evident as the child gets older and begins to show difficult or disturbing behaviours.

A child who is emotionally abused may show the following signs in addition to what you'd expect to see from neglect:

- ⋮ **Sleep problems like bed-wetting or soiling** – with no medical cause, nightmares and poor sleeping patterns.
- ⋮ **Frequent physical complaints** – real or imagined such as headaches, nausea and vomiting, and abdominal pains. This might coincide with the child being very underweight or dehydrated.
- ⋮ **Signs of anxiety** – including poor self esteem, being unable to cope in social settings and sometimes obsessive behaviour. Children who are abused are very sad and alone, and might talk about hurting themselves or ending their lives.

Look at the  
child's whole life.

THESE SIGNS COULD ALSO POINT TO OTHER THINGS GOING ON IN THE CHILD'S LIFE. DON'T ASSUME, BUT DO CARE ENOUGH TO OFFER HELP.

## Physical abuse

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Physical abuse is any behaviour which results in physical harm to a child. If you're worried about a child being physically abused, the signs to look out for are:

- ✦ **Unexplained bruises, welts, cuts and abrasions** – particularly in unusual places like the face, on their back or tummy, buttocks, or the backs of their legs. Also look out for the regularity of these injuries to see if there is a pattern forming.
- ✦ **Unexplained fractures or dislocations** – many kids are active resulting in bumps and breaks, but people need to be thinking about how and why these injuries happen. Especially worrying are fractures to the head or face, and hip or shoulder dislocations. Be very concerned if this is happening in young babies, who are less active and not moving around enough to accidentally hurt themselves.
- ✦ **Burn marks** – anywhere on the body are concerning, and if not easily explained need to be notified. Be mindful of burns in the shape of an object like a stove ring or iron, cigarette marks or rope burn.
- ✦ **The child or their parent** – can't recall how the injuries occurred – or their explanations change or don't make sense.

## Sexual abuse

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Sexual abuse is any act where an adult or a more powerful person uses a child or young person for a sexual purpose. This may be consensual or not, and can happen within or outside the family. Most sexual abuse is done by someone the child knows and trusts.

Sexual abuse may include physical sexual acts, or could be things like exposure to pornographic material and internet sites, or sexual conversations. It often begins with some form of grooming, which is when the person prepares the child for sexual contact by lowering their inhibitions and gaining their trust.

Encourage children to talk to you or another trusted adult if they feel bad or uncomfortable about any relationships – whether a friendship, a relationship with an adult, or an online interaction.

### Encourage children to speak up

As adults, we consider sexual experiences to be very private and we don't usually talk about them openly. It's useful to think about how private and extremely difficult it must be for a child to talk about these – especially if they are feeling confused, or are being threatened by the adult.

Children may not know what to say and use different words to express what is going on. Let them know that if they don't like an adult or online friend, the right thing to do is talk to you... and remember you can call us with any concerns.

One of the best things you can do is make it safe for children to speak up.

The following signs are an indication that a child may be being sexually abused, so talk to Child, Youth and Family or the Police straight away if you notice:

- ⋮ **Physical indicators** – like unusual or excessive itching, bruising, lacerations, redness, swelling or bleeding in the genital or anal area, and urinary tract infections. Also be concerned and ask questions if there is ever blood in a child’s urine or faeces, it’s painful for them to go to the toilet, or if a child or young girl is showing signs of being sexually active. When pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease is identified, abuse must always be considered, especially in girls under 16 years.
- ⋮ **Age inappropriate sexual play or interest** – and other unusual behaviour like sexually explicit drawings, descriptions and talk about sex can indicate this type of abuse.
- ⋮ **Fear of a certain person or place** – children might be trying to express their fear without saying exactly what they are frightened of, so listen carefully, and take what they say seriously.

Some children may purposefully try to make themselves unattractive, or try to feel clean through obsessive washing.

### Looking out for our children

The things to look out for in children will vary, and might not be specific to one particular type of abuse. If they are being maltreated, kids will show a range of signs that tell you they are sad, frightened, and not being cared for in a way that all children deserve.

Your job is to look at the child’s whole life, their behaviour, how they’re doing at school and with friends, and are there any particularly worrying signs that need a closer look.

If you’re not sure, talk to us or a service in the community who might know the family, and know the best way to help.

As well as the things we’ve talked about, keep a careful eye out for:

- ⋮ eating disorders and substance abuse
- ⋮ kids who are disengaged or needy of adult attention and acceptance
- ⋮ very aggressive behaviour towards toys, people or pets – they may be acting out what’s happening to them
- ⋮ children who don’t want to go home or be with certain people
- ⋮ feelings of low self worth and loneliness.

Let children know  
it’s ok to speak up.

ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO TELL YOU IF THEY FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE WITH AN ADULT. BY SPOTTING THE SIGNS EARLY, WE CAN HELP PROTECT OUR CHILDREN FROM HARM.

# Family violence... It's never OK

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Everyone in a family should feel safe and nurtured. Any behaviour which makes someone feel controlled or fearful is never OK. Family violence includes yelling and hitting, as well as threatening to harm people, pets or property.

Research shows that women and children are the most likely victims of family violence, although men can sometimes be victims too.

Family violence covers the range of abuse types – it is physical, emotional and sexual – and victims suffer in all these ways. Children might fail to get the love and attention they need because parents are caught up in their own troubles, or they'll be frightened and insecure from the violence they're seeing.

Children are always affected when there is violence in the family. Even if they are not being physically harmed themselves, they will be emotionally harmed. They may fall behind in school, bully others, or show a range of other behaviours and warning signs.

As well as children, you may be concerned about their parents or caregivers.

## **Some warning signs in adult victims:**

- ⋮ physical injuries including bruising in the chest and abdomen, injuries during pregnancy, multiple injuries, or patterns of a repeated injury
- ⋮ depression, headaches, sleeping and eating disorders
- ⋮ panic attacks, drug abuse and dependency on tranquillisers and alcohol
- ⋮ the person gives explanations that do not fit the other signs, and is fearful, lacking in autonomy or self worth.

## **Some warning signs in perpetrators include:**

- ⋮ isolates and controls their family, and may force them to move frequently
- ⋮ threatens, criticises, intimidates, and uses aggressive and physical abuse towards their partner and children
- ⋮ threatens to, or actually harms pets
- ⋮ is sexually controlling and may force sex on their partner
- ⋮ minimises and denies their own behaviour, or blames the victim for their own behaviour.

No one should ever feel scared or unsafe in their own family. Together, we can help stop family violence in New Zealand, and help children to be safe, strong and thrive in their own families and whānau.

# Ages and stages – the things to look out for

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In this section are some case studies of common scenarios at the different ages and stages of development, to help you work out what to do and how to help.

## Babies and under-twos

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Babies under two are the most vulnerable of all children, because they are fully dependent on adults to care for them. It is also easier for parents to become isolated at this time, since children haven't begun pre-school and they don't have as much contact with the outside world. This can make it harder for professionals or others in the community to spot when things are going wrong.

Babies and young children need to:

- ⋮ have a strong, loving relationship with a parent or caregiver
- ⋮ be fed when they are hungry
- ⋮ be kept warm, dry and safe from danger
- ⋮ be given help if they are in pain, scared or upset
- ⋮ have a routine and boundaries
- ⋮ have cuddles and interaction with other children and adults
- ⋮ always have a trusted adult looking after them.

Speak up to  
keep kids safe:

CHILDREN CAN'T SPEAK UP FOR THEMSELVES, AND FAMILIES WHO ARE STRUGGLING MAY BE TOO ASHAMED TO ASK FOR HELP. IF A CHILD NEEDS TO BE KEPT SAFE, THEY NEED SOMEONE TO SPEAK UP FOR THEM.

**Question: A baby has a bruise, should I be worried?**

It is unusual for a baby who's not walking or crawling to have a bruise. There may be a simple explanation for the occasional bruise, but remember that until they're able to move about it's hard for the baby to hurt themselves.

If something seems odd about the bruises, they are recurring, they are in an unusual place, or the caregivers' explanation doesn't seem quite right, there may be cause for concern.

If a baby has serious cuts and abrasions, or you suspect injuries around the head or face or a fracture, you should definitely call a doctor, also contact Child, Youth and Family or the Police.

Trust your instincts and give us a call if you're worried. It's the job of our trained social workers to assess whether the baby is safe, the family needs help or a community group can support them.

**Question: A baby seems floppy and unresponsive. Are they just ill or have they been harmed by an adult?**

Something is wrong if a baby is floppy, overly drowsy, pale, or has cold extremities. These signs are serious, and you need to get help urgently.

Call the doctor or 111 for emergency medical help.

These are also symptoms of dehydration, and it may be that the baby is being underfed, the doctor will be able to assess this.

This does not mean that they have been deliberately harmed by an adult, but it could mean the parents are struggling to care for them.

Whatever the reason, signs like floppiness, unresponsiveness, rapid pulse and breathing are serious. It may indicate Shaken Baby Syndrome, so always get medical help straight away.

# What is Shaken Baby Syndrome?

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This is the name given to injuries that can happen when a baby is shaken. A single shake can cause bleeding in and around the brain. This can lead to permanent brain damage, leave a baby blind, deaf, paralysed, with seizures, delays in development, or even death.

Babies who have been shaken might be vomiting and could have signs of bleeding in their eyes. They might seem floppy and unresponsive.

There can be a delay between shaking and seeing the signs, so if you think a baby has been shaken, get medical help straight away, even if it doesn't look serious at first.

## **How can you help keep babies safe?**

- ⋮ Talk to the parents you work with about Shaken Baby Syndrome, and about making sure they never leave their baby with someone who has a problem with anger or violence.
- ⋮ Teach them how to handle their baby's head and neck with great care.
- ⋮ Help parents to make a 'crying plan'. Injuries to children, including Shaken Baby Syndrome, are most often caused because a baby won't stop crying and caregivers become frustrated and can't cope.

## **How to make a crying plan**

Talk to parents about what they'll do when their baby won't stop crying and they feel like they are at breaking point.

## **Know what's normal**

Crying is normal for a baby, they're not being naughty. It's the baby's only way of communicating. Almost every parent has times when the baby just won't settle and it's normal to feel frustrated, angry, confused and worried.

## **Walk away**

Let parents know it's ok for them to walk away if they need to calm down.

Talk to parents about who they will call when they are feeling frustrated – this could be a friend, family member or helpline that they know they can call anytime.

## **Do something to relax**

Plan with parents what they will do to help them relax:

- ⋮ Count to 10, and if they need to, count to 10 again.
- ⋮ Sit down and have a cup of tea in another room.
- ⋮ Take a bath or a shower.
- ⋮ Do something that will distract them.
- ⋮ Try not to keep thinking about what they can do to stop the crying. As long as they've made sure the baby is safe and their needs are met, it's ok to let the baby cry it out if need be.

## Younger children – pre-school and primary aged children

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### **Question: A child is turning up to school or kindy looking scruffy and dirty – what's normal, and what should I worry about?**

It's very normal for children to have bruises, scrapes and they may even look a bit dirty and unkempt to you. This doesn't mean they are not being well cared for. It can help to ask yourself the following things:

- ⋮ Does the child have suitable clothing for the weather? Do they have shoes and protection against the cold when needed?
- ⋮ Do they seem hungry, or are they taking food from others?
- ⋮ Is the child being kept adequately clean and hygienic? Remember that kids do get dirty, and people have different ideas about hygiene?
- ⋮ Over a period of time, does the child seem to be well cared for? How often does the child seem to be cold, hungry or dirty?
- ⋮ Are they reluctant to go home, or are younger children left to find their own way home?
- ⋮ Are they often sleepy at school?

If you're worried that the family is struggling to provide for their child, ask how they are doing and show that you care. Offer to help – you may be able to put them in touch with a social worker in their school, or community service that can help with food, clothing and other basics. They may just need some parenting guidelines, and there are groups that can offer tuition and support to parents.

You can give us a call, and we can put them in touch with people in their community.

### **Question: When is a bruise more than a bruise?**

This can be a confusing area as scrapes, bruises, cuts and even the occasional broken bone is part of being a kid.

There is no easy answer to this question, so trust your instincts and talk to us if you're in doubt. If you are concerned, think about the following things:

- ⋮ Are the injuries on several areas in the body?
- ⋮ Are they in unusual places – like the softer parts of the body such as the inside of arms and legs?
- ⋮ Is there a pattern to the bruises, scrapes or cuts, or do they look suspicious; for example bruises with defined edges or in the shape of an object?
- ⋮ Do the injuries reoccur?

- ⋮ If there are burns, do they look like there has been force, or immersion? Remember, a child would normally pull away from an accidental burn.
- ⋮ Fractures, head injuries and abdominal injuries are always serious and a cause for concern – you should always make sure the child has seen a doctor, and talk to the health professional about any worries.
- ⋮ What does the child say about how they got their injury?

Keep a record of when and where you notice these injuries, and ask the parents how they happened. If there seems to be a pattern over time, or the family’s explanations don’t add up, then contact us.

If you are worried, please don’t wait – call us, and we will assess the situation to see if the child needs help to be kept safe and well cared for.

**Question: A child is often missing from school or kindy, not turning up or away for days at a time. Should I worry about them?**

As a professional, you should talk to the family about why the child is away from school so often. There may be a valid explanation, such as the child’s health, in which case you are in a good position to get them extra support if needed.

It could also be a sign that the family is struggling or becoming isolated, especially if the family is very negative towards your enquiry. Families who are having trouble may not want professional help but it is our job to make sure all children are protected and kept safe.

**Question: I can’t put my finger on it, but the child doesn’t seem to be acting as I’d expect for their age. They seem immature, withdrawn and they are generally sad. What does this mean?**

Part of growing and developing is learning how to manage your feelings, but if something is going wrong in a child’s life it will come out in their emotions and behaviour.

If a child is withdrawn, aggressive, anxious, fearful or even overly responsible, it could be a sign that things are not right. It may not indicate abuse and could be the result of other life situations.

If there are life issues, such as a death or upheaval, the family will usually be responsive to your help. Be mindful of the child, and if possible work with the family to help them through. If you suspect it could be abuse, talk to Child, Youth and Family.

Look for clusters:

WHAT PHYSICAL, BEHAVIOURAL OR EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS ARE YOU SEEING? IS THERE A PATTERN EMERGING? DON'T ASSUME, BUT DO CARE ENOUGH TO TAKE NOTE AND CALL US IF YOU'RE WORRIED.

**Question: A child or young person's explanations for their injuries don't seem to add up. I'm not sure though, and I don't want to interfere.**

**Should I say something?**

Most children will readily give you an explanation for their injuries. If they don't seem sure of what to say, don't want to talk about it, or their explanations seem unlikely, it's concerning.

Many professionals feel anxious about coming to the wrong conclusions, and it's natural to feel uncertain about what's going on. You won't be entirely sure about what is happening in a child's life.

However, it's our responsibility to think of the child's safety and the law tells us this must always be our first consideration.

You are not interfering if you are acting with professional integrity, and even as a member of your community, it's your role to help keep children safe. Trust your instincts and talk through your concerns with us – it's our job to work out whether these concerns indicate abuse.

## Older children and teens

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**Question: A young person is self-harming and seems depressed. What's going on and how can I help them?**

Self-harming is not uncommon for young people, and sometimes it can be about abuse.

Whether or not this behaviour is a result of abuse, the young person needs professional help and a support network to surround them.

People who self-harm will usually try to keep it a secret. They might injure themselves in places that can be easily hidden, and will be very careful not to show the damage. Signs that a young person is self-harming include:

- ⋮ Unexplained cuts, bruises or cigarette burns, usually on the wrists, arms, thighs and chest.
- ⋮ Insisting on keeping fully covered at all times, even in hot weather.
- ⋮ Signs of depression, such as low mood, tearfulness, a lack of motivation, or interest in anything.

- ⋮ Changes in eating habits, or being secretive about eating, and any unusual weight loss, or weight gain.
- ⋮ Signs of low self-esteem, such as blaming themselves for any problems, or not thinking that they are good enough for something.

Self-harming and other destructive behaviour, like eating disorders or abusing drugs and alcohol, needs professional long-term help. As a professional you need to be mindful that young people in this space may be at risk of suicide. Talk to their parents and support them to seek help. There are also people like school guidance counsellors, and social workers in schools who can provide support. Just take action, and don't assume that it's not serious.

If this behaviour is part of a cluster of signs that makes you think the young person may be suffering from abuse, or the parents are not supporting them to get help, please call Child, Youth and Family.

**Question: A teenager is pregnant. When should I assume it's the result of a teenage relationship, and when should I worry that they may have been sexually abused?**

If a young woman is pregnant they will need help and support. The young woman needs an opportunity to talk about the circumstances with someone they trust. Her family will also need support. Pregnancy in younger girls should be followed up by professionals such as a school guidance counsellor, doctor or a social worker.

If you have any worries or concerns about her safety, or the circumstances around her pregnancy, call Child, Youth and Family or the Police.

It's everyone's  
role:

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEW ZEALAND WILL ONLY BE SAFE WHEN THE WHOLE COMMUNITY SURROUNDS THEM AND CARES. EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN KEEPING KIDS SAFE – SHOW YOU CARE AND OFFER YOUR HELP.

## When children talk about abuse

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A child may try to find different ways to tell you that they are suffering from abuse or neglect.

Talking about what has happened is really scary for children. This means that they may try to say things in a way that is tentative, vague or uses other people's names or places. Sometimes they'll say things very quietly or simply make hints.

They might act out with dolls or toys, or use words that are right for their age.

It's really important to listen to what they are trying to say, be understanding and take what they say seriously.

It is unusual for children or young people to make up situations of abuse. If a child tells you about abuse, here are some guidelines to follow:

### **1. Listen and be reassuring**

It's really important to make a child feel safe in telling you. Listen to them and be reassuring:

- ⋮ Accept what they have to say and make sure you don't say anything critical like, 'Why didn't you tell me sooner?'
- ⋮ Let them know it's good they told you about it.
- ⋮ Let them know it's not their fault.
- ⋮ Let them know it's not ok for things like this to happen to kids.
- ⋮ Tell them you will get help.

It's best not to question them about their experience, just listen and be reassuring.

The best response might be "thank you for telling me about that, now I need to talk to someone so we can make sure you're safe".

### **2. Write it down**

As soon as possible, write down what the child tells you, using the same words they say, and how you responded.

### **3. Don't question or interview the child**

Make sure you don't question the child further, as this may interfere with the information they've given.

### **4. Call Child, Youth and Family or the Police.**

Call Child, Youth and Family on **0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)** or the Police as soon as possible. You can ask for whatever advice, assistance and support you need.

### **5. Keep the child safe**

Make sure the child knows they are safe, and have done the right thing in telling you.

Don't let anyone who may be involved in the abuse know the child has said anything to you.

You can talk to Child, Youth and Family about how to manage this.

SECTION TWO: COMMUNITIES

*Knowing what to do to support children and young people so they can be safe, strong and thrive.*

# communities



# Your role in keeping children safe

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We all have a role to play in making sure our children are safe and surrounded by people who care. As friends, family and professionals, you are the best people to give a helping hand.

When we each play our part in looking out for children, we can do so much more to provide help early, stop things getting worse for families who are struggling, and make sure our children can grow up safe and strong.

This section talks about the ways you can help.

## What to do if you're worried about a child

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No doubt you will come across difficult situations in the course of your work, where you will wonder how things are for the child, but you may not be sure of the best thing to do.

Sometimes there are no black and white answers. Usually your instinct will tell you something is wrong, and you may have clues, but you won't know for sure.

The main thing is that you take notice and take action.

If there are problems, they are likely to go on until someone speaks up. Children cannot speak up for themselves and the people involved may be too ashamed, distressed or caught up in the situation to ask for help.

Don't hope that someone else will notice and do something about it. As professionals and members of our community, we are the ones who work with children, know them and their families, and play an important role in keeping them safe.

If you are worried about a child:

- ⚡ **Trust your instincts** – if you sense something is wrong, trust your instincts and don't be afraid of getting it wrong.
- ⚡ **Spot the warning signs** – familiarise yourself with the signs talked about in this book. If you'd like to know more, give us a call. We're happy to talk to you and your colleagues about recognising the signs and what to do if you're worried.
- ⚡ **Listen** – take notice and listen carefully to what people say. Are you picking up signs that the family is struggling or trying to ask for help?

- ⚡ **Talk to other professionals** – are your health and education colleagues working with this family? Are they also noticing signs that build a picture that something's not right, and they need professional help and support?
- ⚡ **Talk to Child, Youth and Family** – our social workers are trained to work out what kinds of problems a family might be having, and find the best ways to help keep their children safe. You might want to talk your concerns through with one of our hospital based social workers, someone from your local site, or our contact centre social workers.

**If you're worried that a child is not safe or being well looked after call 0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459).**

If you think a situation may be life threatening, phone the Police on 111.

## Offering help to families

All parents need a helping hand from time to time. When children are young, especially before they start school, it's easy for parents to become isolated and for problems to go unnoticed.

The more people there are looking out for children, the safer they'll be. Here's a useful saying:

*“five pairs of eyes for under fives”*

This involves five sets of eyes looking out for the little ones' safety and wellbeing. They might be a household member, someone from extended whānau, a healthcare professional like a Wellchild nurse or the family GP, a teacher, and someone from the community.

Even if you work with older children, as a professional working in your community you are in a great position to be a 'pair of eyes' looking out for our children and young people.

If you have concerns, sometimes all it takes is talking to the parents and offering your help. Whether as a friend or a professional you can:

- ⚡ **Share the load** – let them know that you're there to help, provide encouragement and offer practical help, like looking after the children so their parents can have time out.
- ⚡ **Be a listening ear** – as a professional you can often give great advice, but even just a listening ear is a great help.
- ⚡ **Offer encouragement** – sometimes all parents need is to be told they are doing ok.
- ⚡ **Find a family member** – offer to find them a family member who can help.
- ⚡ **Talk to someone** – if you're concerned about a child or family, talk to someone experienced in this area, it's very helpful to get their point of view and support.

- ⋮ **Put people in touch with those who are there to help** – sometimes parents have more serious problems and you don't know how to help. There are lots of groups in the community who provide support for families.
- ⋮ **If they don't want to accept your help** – let someone else in your community know you're concerned for them - maybe they can help.
- ⋮ **If you are worried about a child, give us a call.**

A family of any background or circumstances can have problems which mean their children are at risk of abuse or neglect. When you are working with families, watch out for:

- ⋮ Stress levels which mean they are struggling to care for their children. This can be an opportunity to offer your help.
- ⋮ Parents blaming, justifying, rationalising or minimising the situation.
- ⋮ Explanations that don't match the signs.

#### **People who can help**

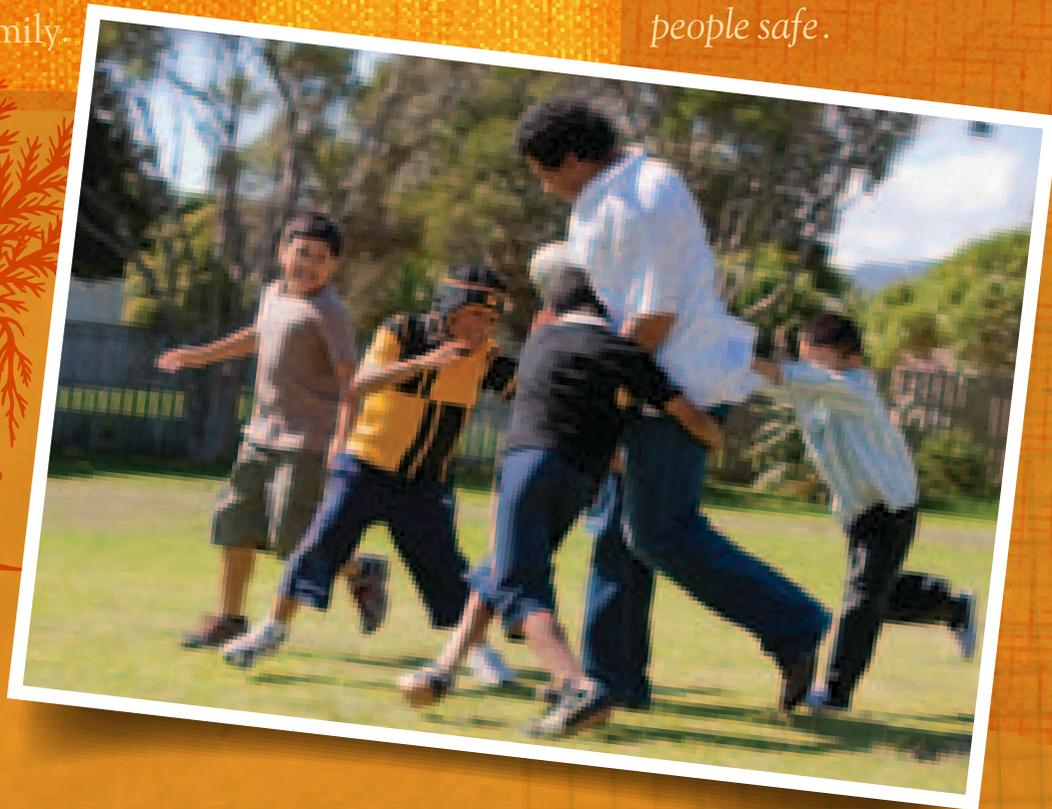
- ⋮ Barnardos for family counselling: 0800 4 PARENT (0800 472 736).
- ⋮ Barnardos for childcare: 0800 KIDSTART (0800 543 782).
- ⋮ Plunketline (24-hour help with any issues concerning parenting children under five): 0800 933 922.
- ⋮ Relationship Services (for help with family or relationship problems): 0800 RELATE (0800 735 283).
- ⋮ Healthline (24 hour health advice): 0800 611 116.

*“I am a budget advisor and one day I offered to attend a Strengthening Families meeting with my friend Sandi. At this meeting she was offered family therapy to help with her children's behaviour and she was keen to go. But when she heard that it was from a church organisation she closed up saying she didn't need a church to help her. I sat her down and discussed the pros and cons, encouraging her to give one session a try. Two months later Sandi and her family had completed the whole lot and become great role models for others in the group. Sandi even asked about other family activities as she was so grateful for all the parenting skills she'd learned.”*

# connected

with Child, Youth and Family.

*How to contact us,  
what we'll do next  
and how we work  
with families to keep  
children and young  
people safe.*



# Contacting us when you're concerned

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In this section, we'll tell you about when you should talk to us and what we'll do next.

YOU CAN CONTACT CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY ANYTIME BY CALLING:



0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)

When you call us, our specialist staff will listen to you and be able to give advice.

You can call us if you...

- ⋮ think a child or young person may be unsafe or in danger of harm
- ⋮ think a child or young person may be suffering from ill-treatment, abuse or neglect
- ⋮ are concerned about a child or young person and want some advice
- ⋮ are not sure whether you need to be concerned, and want to talk things through.

## Useful hints for when you call

When you call us it helps to have as much information to pass on as possible. It is often helpful to write down all the information you want to give us, and then check off your list as you talk it through:

This might include:

- ⋮ your concerns
- ⋮ details of incidents including dates
- ⋮ details about the child or young person and their family, for example names and addresses
- ⋮ the reasons why you think this child is at risk, or suffering abuse or neglect
- ⋮ if you're aware of any other times when the family or child has been involved with us or the Police.

You may have been keeping a diary of events, and noticed patterns or clusters of signs emerging. Please share with us as much information as you have about your concerns.

## Speaking up for children and young people

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Child abuse is really hard for most of us to think about and we struggle to believe it might happen to someone we know. While there may be other reasons for the signs you are noticing, the most important thing is to make sure that children are safe.

They are vulnerable and rely on adults in their family and community to protect them.

### **We need to speak up because:**

- ∴ children may be scared or don't know how to speak up for themselves
- ∴ the people they should be going to for help may be the ones who are harming them
- ∴ as adults, we're responsible for protecting our children and young people.

## Some frequently asked questions

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### ***What if I get it wrong?***

Don't be afraid of getting it wrong or try to deal with your worries alone. Sometimes people feel worried about calling us, wonder if they are interfering, and try to find other reasons for what they are noticing.

By referring to this guide and getting to know the signs of abuse, you can feel more confident about the signs you are seeing.

It's Child, Youth and Family's responsibility to assess what needs to happen to keep the child safe, and the law will protect you for acting in good faith. Your responsibility is to act in the best interests of the child, and talk to us if you're worried.

### ***Could I make things worse?***

By talking to us you are putting the decision about what to do in the hands of experienced professionals who will assess the concerns and make decisions about what needs to happen next. If it turns out the family doesn't need help, we won't stay involved. But if they do, we'll work with them to make sure their children are kept safe and well cared for.

If you feel a child is suffering or unsafe, and your call helps prevent this, you have already made a positive difference to their life.

### ***Will my call be treated as confidential?***

If you ask us to, we'll keep the details of your call as confidential as possible. Although the law doesn't allow us to guarantee total confidentiality, we wouldn't normally release the name of a person who reported a concern.

As a professional, it's good to keep in mind that the child's safety is the most important thing of all and it's often helpful to talk with the family about your concerns, and how we and others can help them.

We know that calling us could be worrying for you. We're here to help and you can ask the social worker any questions you have.

# How we respond

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When you call us with concerns, a social worker follows up your call to assess what needs to happen to keep the child or young person safe.

There are a range of ways we can respond, to find out the family's problems, strengths and solutions so that they can be strong.

Depending on your work and your involvement with a child or their whānau, we may include you in some of our work.

## 1. The Contact Centre

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When you call **0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)** you will be able to talk to trained social workers. They will ask you questions to find out what's going on with the family or children you're worried about. They will:

- ⋮ enter the information you give us into our Child, Youth and Family database
- ⋮ make an initial assessment, where you may be asked for more information.

Our contact centre social workers are trained to make an assessment of the child and family's situation, and whether we need to do anything further to make sure children are safe.

Depending on the information received, they might:

- ⋮ pass the information to a social worker already involved
- ⋮ make a note of your call, and contact you to let you know how we have responded to your concern.

If the social worker thinks the child is in immediate danger, we will act on your call within 24 hours.

If we need to look into the matter further, the contact centre will refer your call to the local Child, Youth and Family site office, where social workers follow up your concerns.

## 2. A social worker looks into your concerns

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A social worker will carry out a safety assessment to find out what may be happening and the right way to help. If the family needs some support, but there are no immediate concerns for the child, we'll put them in touch with groups in the community who can help.

If we're at all worried about the children though, we'll work out the best way to support the family while keeping the child safe. Depending on our level of concern, we might partner up with someone in the community to link the family to the right services, or continue working with the family ourselves.

We always work with families to help them find their own strengths, so they can care safely for their children.

This process can take a little while, so don't expect immediate results. We will contact you within four weeks though to let you know how we followed up on your call. You can phone our contact centre anytime to see what's happening with your report of concern.

### **Investigations**

In very serious situations of abuse, we carry out a formal investigation with Police.

We have a special protocol in place with Police to make sure we are working closely together to both protect the child, and hold the perpetrator to account.

An investigation involves us:

- ⋮ consulting with the Police and agreeing what actions need to be taken in the investigation plan, including whether we need to get more evidence and how we'll do that
- ⋮ working with the Police to establish the facts
- ⋮ engaging directly with the child or young person to establish their safety and wellbeing. This is usually done in consultation with Police as part of the investigation plan.

## 3. How we work with families

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### **The whānau agreement**

A family/whānau agreement is a contract or written agreement with the family. We will make a family/whānau agreement when we want to provide a minimum level of intervention, to keep the child or young person safe.

The agreement can last for up to three months. When we are coming to the end of that time, we will take a look at the agreement and see how we are getting on with meeting the goals for the child, and what happens next.

### **Family group conference**

The family group conference is at the heart of the way we work with families. It ensures that the whole whānau is supported to make their own decisions about the best way to take care of their children.

It is a formal meeting where family and extended whānau come together with professionals to talk about the concerns we have for their child. Together, they come up with a plan to ensure the child can be kept safe and well cared for, and that the family gets the help they need.

### **When children need to come into our care**

Whenever possible, we support families so they can care safely for their own children.

However, there are times when children aren't safe at home and they need to live somewhere else for a while.

The only reason social workers or the Police can remove children from their home is to make them safe. When they take a child or young person into care they must have good reason to believe the child or young person has been, or is in danger of harm, and the Family Court must agree with this.

### **Finding a safe and caring home**

Our first priority is to find family members or someone they know well to care for them. We look for people within the child's whānau, hapū or iwi.

When there is no one in the extended family who can provide the right care and support for the child, we have foster carers who open up their home to children and young people. Whether whānau or non-whānau, all foster carers are assessed before a child or young person is placed with them.

### **Work with families so their children can return home**

As soon as children come into our care, we begin planning for them to return home. We work with families so they can make the changes they need for their children to be safe and well cared for with them.

Depending on how serious the issues are, children can be away from home for just a short time or for a while, as we work with their family to help them make the changes they need.

If they can't make these changes, and it's not safe for the child to go home, we work to find the children a home for life with extended whānau or a family where they will be cared for and nurtured.

### **About our practice**

We have a set of policies and systems that guide the way we support families and care for kids. You can read our policies and information that informs our day to day work on [www.practicecentre.govt.nz](http://www.practicecentre.govt.nz)

**For more information about the ways we work with families, including the Family Group Conference and the Family Court, pick up one of our brochures from your local site, or go to [www.cyf.govt.nz](http://www.cyf.govt.nz)**

# Fostering young lives

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One of the biggest ways in which our community partners with us, is through the many foster parents who open up their hearts and homes to care for children.

We have around 4000 foster parents who provide day to day care for children when they can't live at home. Around half our foster parents are looking after children from their extended family.

Foster parents take on this important job because they care about children and young people. We provide financial support to cover the costs of looking after a child, and foster parents have their own social worker to support them in their role.

## Finding children a home for life

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Our goal for all children and young people who come into care is that they can have a home for life, where they are safe, secure and able to thrive.

Our first priority is for children to return safely to their parents, but when this isn't possible the thing that makes the biggest difference is having a safe and stable home, where they can form strong attachments and grow into secure adults.

When we know children are not going to be able to return to their parents, we need to find them a home for life in a family where they know they belong. A 'home for life' is a legal process, where foster parents usually become additional guardians, often in addition to their birth parents.

When extended family or foster parents make a commitment to giving a child a home for life, the child comes out of Child, Youth and Family care and into the care of their new family.

### **Our home for life support package**

Home for life parents are extended family or foster parents, assessed and approved to care for children by Child, Youth and Family.

Giving a child a lifelong home is the greatest commitment that foster parents can make, which is why we have a support package to help them as they take this big step.

The support package includes:

- ⋮ a dedicated support person to help families walk through the legal process, and for three years after they receive a home for life
- ⋮ a \$2500 upfront payment to contribute to the child's individual needs
- ⋮ full financial entitlements through Work and Income
- ⋮ a baby care starter pack for families giving a home to under twos
- ⋮ access to supports like respite care, counselling, or help with mediation if needed
- ⋮ support to ensure contact with the child's family is working well.

To find out about the different ways you can care, check out our website, or ask for our 'ways to care' brochure by calling us on 0508 CARERS (0508 227 377).

# What you can expect from Child, Youth and Family

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We are here to help you, and you can talk to us whenever you have concerns about a child.

We're also happy to come to your organisation to talk about ways we can work together to keep kids safe.

As well as the services outlined in this guide, you can expect Child, Youth and Family to:

- ⋮ provide a courteous and sensitive response to your concerns
- ⋮ tell you the outcome of your report of concern, unless we are not able to do so
- ⋮ keep your confidentiality wherever possible.

If you're not happy with the service you've received, we'd like to know about it so we can put it right for you. The easiest way to sort out a problem is to contact your local office. Either talk to the person you've been dealing with or ask for the manager.

## Making a complaint

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If we can't sort the problem out straight away, you can make a formal complaint by:

- ⋮ calling Child, Youth and Family toll free on **0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)**
- ⋮ filling out a feedback form, available from your local office or our website [www.cyf.govt.nz](http://www.cyf.govt.nz)
- ⋮ emailing us at [complaints@cyf.govt.nz](mailto:complaints@cyf.govt.nz)
- ⋮ faxing us on (04) 916 0222.

We'll contact you within one week of receiving your complaint to talk to you about how we'll manage it.

We try to resolve any formal complaint within four weeks of receiving it – if it takes longer, we'll let you know.

We will treat your complaint confidentially and only discuss it with the people involved in sorting it out. There are some issues we may not be able to help you with, such as decisions made by the Family Court – we'll tell you if this is the case.

*"I meet regularly with the principal at our local school, so we can talk about any children she's worried about, and I can make sure we are doing all the right follow ups.*

*"It's so important that we work together because we know and care very much about the same families."*

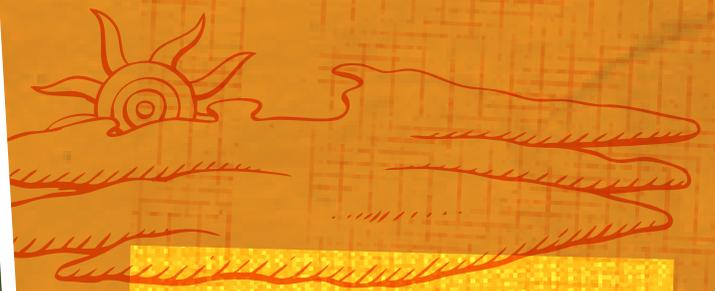
SITE MANAGER

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CHILDREN WHO ARE NURTURED WITH  
LOVE AND CARE AND HAVE A STRONG  
SENSE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE HAVE THE  
FOUNDATIONS TO LEAD FULFILLING LIVES.

WORKING TOGETHER  
TO KEEP CHILDREN AND  
YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE



caring  
communities  
connected



## Appendix 1

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# A closer look at the signs

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In the earlier section we described the types of abuse, along with some signs you may see associated with these. However, a child may show a range of physical, emotional and behavioural warning signs that could indicate any kind of abuse or neglect.

This section gives a detailed description of the warning signs. It's important that you seek professional help if you think that what you are seeing is concerning and keep track of any clusters or patterns that are emerging.

## The physical signs of abuse and neglect

---

A detailed description of the physical signs that may indicate some form of abuse:

### **Bruises and welts**

It's relatively normal for children over two to have bruising on places like their knees and arms, as part of their normal play.

Suspicious bruising could include:

- ⋮ bruises on the softer parts of the body such as on the insides of the arms and legs or on the buttocks are less likely to be the result of normal childhood activities
- ⋮ several bruises at the same time, but on several different parts of the body. It would be unusual for a child to accidentally receive bruises all over their body at one time
- ⋮ black eyes can be accidental but it's always best to think about it in the context of what else is going on with the child. Any head injury can be serious so seek help for the child straight away.
- ⋮ The shape, size and colour of bruises can reveal their cause. It is important to report your concerns so a properly trained doctor can examine the child and take any necessary action.
- ⋮ Most schools and early childhood centres keep an incident log to note injuries. Sometimes a pattern of injuries or bruises can appear which may indicate abuse or perhaps something else, like co-ordination problems. Either way, this will help you to get the right assistance for the child.

### **Mongolian blue spots**

Mongolian blue spots can be easily mistaken for bruises, but are actually natural birth marks, and are not a sign of abuse. These marks, typically a slate-grey colour, are found in 15-20 percent of European babies and almost all babies with darker skin. They are typically found over the lower back, but may cover an extensive area. These marks may or may not fade with time.

### **Cuts and abrasions**

Cuts and scrapes are a natural part of childhood accidents. If you notice repeated cuts and abrasions, this may be a cause for concern. Scratches can be a sign a child or young person has been harmed, or has harmed themselves using finger nails or sharp implements.

If you see cuts appear in a pattern, this could indicate self harm in an older child.

Cuts and bruises around the mouth of an infant or the tearing of the attachment between the lip and the gum is concerning and should be investigated.

### **Scalds and burns**

Burns are caused by dry heat, and scalds are caused by wet heat or hot liquids. Most burns and scalds are accidental, and will usually be superficial since the child will pull away from the heat.

Burns due to abuse are often deeper, as the child may have been held there. Suspicious burns include:

- ⋮ cigarette burns that are circular and frequently multiple
- ⋮ an identifiable mark from an object
- ⋮ burns in areas of the body that can be hidden, like the soles of the feet or back of the neck
- ⋮ scalds which involve immersion. If this is deliberately done, it will usually leave a distinctive margin, rather than splash marks. For example, you might see scalds on hands and feet with a 'glove or stocking' like appearance, or a saddle mark where a child has been made to sit in hot water.

### **Fractures**

While fractures in children are common due to normal accidents, they are very uncommon in infants or babies before they can walk.

Fractures could be suspicious, so make sure the child has seen a doctor, and talk to the health professional about any worries.

Keep a record, if there seems to be a pattern over time, or the family's explanations don't add up, then please contact us.

### **Head injuries including shaken baby syndrome**

Head injuries are serious and can result in severe disability and even death. The great danger from head injuries is bleeding into or around the brain. Significant bleeding is indicated by:

- : irritability
- : vomiting
- : increasing drowsiness
- : loss of consciousness
- : fits
- : irregular breathing.

Any of these signs are serious and urgent help should be sought.

Skull fractures are rarely caused by falls of less than a metre high.

Shaking a young child or baby can also result in severe head injuries. Bleeding visible at the back of the eye strongly suggests a shaking injury.

### **Abdominal or stomach injuries**

Abdominal injuries are a common cause of death from abuse, and are usually due to a blunt force being applied either accidentally or deliberately. Bruising may not be evident. Signs of significant abdominal injury include pain, restlessness, fever and vomiting. These signs may also mimic those of a head injury and urgent medical attention should be sought.

### **Genital injuries**

The detailed assessment of genital injuries requires specialist skills. If required, Child, Youth and Family or the Police will make a referral to a DSAC (Doctors for Sexual Abuse Care) trained doctor.

### **Sexually transmitted infections**

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) occurring in children and young people could also indicate sexual abuse. Non-sexual transmission of STIs is rare except in newborn babies, up to a few weeks of age.

### **Pregnancy**

Pregnancy in younger girls should be followed up and the young woman given an opportunity to discuss the circumstances around the pregnancy with a trusted person.

Child, Youth and Family or the Police should be consulted immediately if the young person indicates the pregnancy is the result of unwanted sexual contact, or they are young.

### **Failure to thrive and malnutrition**

Failure to thrive (FTT) is when a toddler fails to grow in the first three years of life. This may appear as a form of malnutrition, and could be because of emotional abuse or neglect.

Fluctuations in growth are not uncommon, particularly with an illness. The signs of 'failure to thrive', however, may include strange eating habits, hoarding and stealing food, or a steady fall-off in growth. These signs are concerning and a further assessment will be needed – please contact Child, Youth and Family.

### **Dehydration**

Dehydrated infants are typically drowsy and quiet, pale with cold extremities, and have a rapid pulse and breathing rate. If you notice these symptoms, the child is very unwell and urgent medical attention is required.

### **Inadequate hygiene and clothing**

An active playful child will often have a natural level of dirtiness. But a young child who is continually dirty, appears unhygienic and unkept, is hungry or doesn't have warm clothing, may be neglected. Children who are constantly dirty will suffer from physical symptoms such as skin infections and severe nappy rashes, which can develop into life-threatening infections. Constant cases of nits or scabies is a concern and should be looked into.

A child without adequate clothing or nourishment could become inactive, have poor circulation, chilblains and be generally unwell.

### **Poisoning**

Accidental poisoning is relatively common in toddlers and children aged 2-4 years. Deliberate poisoning is rare, but a victim is most commonly 2½ years old. It may be the result of using a poisonous substance to try and sedate an overactive or uncooperative child. A child suffering from deliberate poisoning may have an unexplained set of symptoms, particularly if these are repeated and increasing in severity.

## **Behavioural signs of abuse and neglect**

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A detailed description of the behavioural signs that may indicate some form of abuse:

### **Aggression**

Most children can behave aggressively in some circumstances. If a child shows a pattern of aggressive behaviour or language, or is frequently aggressive, this needs to be looked into further. They may pick on siblings, peers, other adults, animals or property. This behaviour can be a child or young person's response to an abusive environment, or it could be their way of dealing with other difficult life circumstances.

### **Withdrawal**

Children and young people can withdraw from social contact for a number of reasons.

Younger children exposed to emotional abuse and neglect may show passivity and watchfulness and they may isolate themselves from others. This can sometimes look like 'frozen watchfulness', where the child or young person stares into space, almost mesmerized, in a trance-like state.

If a child flinches or withdraws from physical approaches by adults, especially if they are reprimanded or told off, it may be a cause for concern.

### **Anxiety, fear and regression**

Anxiety may be linked to one particular environment or person; or it may be general, reflecting a loss of self-esteem and confidence. Anxious children can regress to more immature behaviour and emotions. Some examples are bed-wetting in a child who has previously been dry at night (a frequent consequence of any form of abuse), the reoccurrence of thumb sucking, temper tantrums, nightmares and separation problems.

Fear of unusual situations or unknown people is common for many young children and is a normal developmental stage. Less common is a persistent fear of familiar people or situations, or a fear of something they previously enjoyed.

This should be taken seriously. If possible, talk it through with the child's parents.

### **Sadness**

Although children can experience sadness from time to time, acute or ongoing sadness indicates that something is not right for the child or young person. They may show sadness by being constantly quiet and withdrawing from social contact. Older children frequently reveal emotions through their drawing or writing. Many children and young people find it difficult to talk about their sadness, and they may need time and encouragement to express themselves.

### **Overly responsible**

As part of their normal development, many children will attempt to model adult behaviours. When this behaviour is extreme and consistent it could be a sign the young person is seeking parental attention and approval.

Sometimes children and young people who consistently act older than their years have developed these behaviours as the result of unrealistic parental expectations, or to avoid emotional, sexual or physical abuse. Exaggerated concern for younger siblings may be an attempt to protect them from abuse.

Wherever possible, talk through your concerns with the child's parents.

### **Attachment problems**

Children who are loved and nurtured show a positive attachment to parents and caregivers in their lives. Sometimes abuse or neglect results in a lack of attachment.

Behaviour that indicates an attachment problem includes indiscriminate affection-seeking from any available person, even strangers.

### **Obsessions**

Repeated behaviours are relatively common in children, and are often present in children with Autism. Some extreme or very persistent behaviours or obsessions may be a reflection of rigid parental expectations or abuse.

An obsession with cleanliness or washing or other repetitive actions can be a cause for concern. It is important not to make assumptions though, as the behaviour may be due to other reasons, such as a death in the family.

### **Drug and alcohol abuse**

Substance abuse in children and young people may occur for a number of reasons, including adolescent experimentation.

Parents may include children in their own drug or alcohol habits, sometimes to gain the child's cooperation or to encourage illegal activities.

Older children or adolescents may use drug and alcohol abuse as a way of expressing defiance and anger, or they may use it as a method of escape.

It is important to consider the possibility of abuse of any child or young person found to be abusing drugs, alcohol or solvents.

### **Depression and suicidal thoughts**

Young people in care may suffer a variety of emotional issues such as depression, especially as a result of past abuse or neglect. Some signs that a young person may be suffering from depression include:

- ⋮ feeling sad, grumpy or miserable most of the time
- ⋮ feeling restless or lacking in energy
- ⋮ crying, or getting angry or upset for no reason
- ⋮ losing interest in things that they used to enjoy
- ⋮ cutting off from friends and family
- ⋮ feeling worthless or guilty about things
- ⋮ losing or gaining a lot of weight
- ⋮ having sleep problems
- ⋮ thinking about death or having suicidal thoughts.

Suicidal thoughts, actions or self-harm can occur even in younger children. They may hint at or talk about thoughts of suicide, or even make a plan.

Depression can be overcome but needs professional help.

If you suspect suicidal or self-harming tendencies, get help urgently – contact Child, Youth and Family or the Police immediately.

## **Developmental signs of abuse and neglect**

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### **Global delay**

Global delay is the term used when the child or young person's general development is below average. This can be caused through a head injury as the result of abuse, or can be a result of severe neglect in early childhood. Delays or different behaviours can also be due to other factors such as Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Seek a professional assessment if you are concerned about a child's developmental delay.

### **Specific delays**

If delays are a result of abuse, it is more common to see delays across several areas of development. A child may experience delays in speech, language, movement (motor), vision or hearing.

They may also experience social delays, including cognitive (thinking) delay, a delay in building attachments to parents, or in developing a sense of self-worth. This may be a result of emotional abuse, or being exposed to constant and unpredictable chaos or violence.

There may also be unusual developmental patterns such as the unusual development of speech or a withdrawal into a fantasy world.

## Family signs of abuse and neglect

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Family violence, addictions to drug and alcohol, mental health problems or a failure to bond well with their children are all factors that impact on a family's ability to care safely for their children.

When these things are present, children are at greater risk of abuse and neglect.

Below are signs of family behaviour that could indicate all is not well.

### **Unrealistic expectations**

Unrealistic expectations of an older child's ability to care for younger siblings may indicate neglect. It can cause stress and anxiety to children who are not capable of taking on these responsibilities.

### **Humiliating**

The humiliation of children or young people is a powerful form of emotional abuse. Children may be subjected to fierce and personal criticism, often in front of siblings or peers, or they may be given demeaning tasks to carry out. The purpose of humiliation is often to exert control over a child or young person.

### **Isolating**

Sometimes families isolate their children and young people from other family members or outside contact. When a family, or an adult and child, are isolated it is hard for them to get support, which makes them more vulnerable to harm or neglect.

If a family isolates themselves from help – for example failing to keep appointments or refusing to let a social worker visit, they may be attempting to gain control over their lives by avoiding external scrutiny. Sometimes these families move frequently, which you can notice in their school and health or welfare records.

Sadly isolation like this often happens before serious or fatal episodes of abuse. It must be treated seriously, and we need to ensure the children are safe.

### **Dependency**

Sometimes families can become reliant on professionals or agencies that enter their lives to help them overcome abuse, harm or neglect.

Professionals can unsuspectingly become involved in meeting the increasing demands from parents for practical and emotional support.

This focus on the parents often overshadows the children's needs and the parents sometimes compete with their children to be the main subjects of concern. By law, the safety of the child should always be our primary focus.

# Protocols for reporting abuse

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This book sets out the things you can do to help keep kids safe, people to talk to, and how to contact us if you're worried about a child or family.

Many organisations have their own internal protocols, to make sure everyone knows what to do if they're concerned.

If you'd like to build a plan, or update the one you have, we're very happy to come and talk with you about the best steps and processes to have in place.

We're also happy to talk to your people about what we can all do everyday to protect and care for children, or you might like some of our 'keeping kids safe', and 'everyday family' brochures.

Just call our contact centre on **0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)**, or ask to be put through to your local site.

We'll be happy to help.

## Contacts

There are lots of groups who help and support families. For help, further information and resources check out:

Alcohol Drug Helpline	<a href="http://www.alcoholdrughelpline.org.nz">www.alcoholdrughelpline.org.nz</a>	0800 787 797
Barnardos New Zealand	<a href="http://www.barnardos.org.nz">www.barnardos.org.nz</a>	0800 4 BARNARDOS 0800 422 762
Brainwave Trust	<a href="http://www.brainwave.org.nz">www.brainwave.org.nz</a>	09 528 3981
Campaign for Action on Family Violence NZ	<a href="http://www.areyouok.org.nz">www.areyouok.org.nz</a>	0800 456 450
Child Matters	<a href="http://www.cps.org.nz">www.cps.org.nz</a>	07 838 3370
Child, Youth and Family	<a href="http://www.cyf.govt.nz">www.cyf.govt.nz</a>	0508 FAMILY 0508 326 459
Citizens Advice Bureaux	<a href="http://www.cab.org.nz">www.cab.org.nz</a>	0800 FOR CAB 0800 367 222
Families Commission	<a href="http://www.nzfamilies.org.nz">www.nzfamilies.org.nz</a>	04 917 7040 09 985 4106
Family and Community Services (FACS)	<a href="http://www.familyservices.govt.nz">www.familyservices.govt.nz</a>	04 916 3300
Jigsaw	<a href="http://www.jigsaw.org.nz">www.jigsaw.org.nz</a>	04 385 7983
Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand	<a href="http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz">www.mentalhealth.org.nz</a>	Auckland 09 300 7010 Wellington 04 384 4002 Christchurch 03 366 6936
National Youth Helpline (Youthline)	<a href="http://www.youthline.co.nz">www.youthline.co.nz</a>	0800 376 633
NetSafe	<a href="http://www.netsafe.org.nz">www.netsafe.org.nz</a>	0508 NETSAFE 0508 628 723
New Zealand Family and Foster Care Federation	<a href="http://www.fostercarefederation.org.nz">www.fostercarefederation.org.nz</a>	04 566 0294
New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse	<a href="http://www.nzfvc.org.nz">www.nzfvc.org.nz</a>	04 916 3720
New Zealand Police	<a href="http://www.police.govt.nz">www.police.govt.nz</a>	04 474 9499
Office of the Children's Commissioner	<a href="http://www.occ.org.nz">www.occ.org.nz</a>	0800 224 453
Parent to Parent New Zealand	<a href="http://www.parent2parent.org.nz">www.parent2parent.org.nz</a>	0508 236 236
Problem Gambling Foundation of New Zealand	<a href="http://www.pgfnz.co.nz">www.pgfnz.co.nz</a>	0800 664 262
Royal New Zealand Plunket society	<a href="http://www.plunket.org.nz">www.plunket.org.nz</a>	0800 933 922
S.K.I.P	<a href="http://www.skip.org.nz">www.skip.org.nz</a>	04 916 3385
Victim Support	<a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.nz">www.victimsupport.org.nz</a>	0800 VICTIM 0800 842 846
Women's Refuge	<a href="http://www.womensrefuge.org.nz">www.womensrefuge.org.nz</a>	04 802 5078
Youthlaw	<a href="http://www.youthlaw.co.nz">www.youthlaw.co.nz</a>	0800 UTHLAW 0800 884 529
Youthline	<a href="http://www.youthline.co.nz">www.youthline.co.nz</a>	0800 376 633

## My contacts

Use this page to start your own list of local contact names, addresses, emails and phone numbers for staff at Child, Youth and Family, the Police, health and other related services in your area.

Name and organisation:
Phone:
Mobile:
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**Call Child, Youth and Family on 0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459). We're here to help.**

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child, youth  
and family

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