

Guidance to spot child harm, abuse and neglect

Playing your part in keeping mokopuna¹ safe.

We're asking everyone to play their part:

- **Learn the signs of abuse and neglect:** Know what to look for—changes in behaviour, unexplained injuries, withdrawal, or fear. If something doesn't feel right, don't ignore it
- **Be a safe adult for children and respond when you see harm:** Listen without judgement, believe what children tell you, and take their worries seriously
- **Take action if you see or think a child is being harmed:** Speak up, and don't assume or hope someone else will.

Talk with mokopuna if they seem sad, or fearful or stressed around someone, or they are avoiding them. Actively listen to what they're saying. Even if mokopuna don't open up and tell you what's going on, it's much better to check than to assume nothing's going on with them.

If mokopuna tell you that it's nothing but you're still concerned:

- check in with them again later
- continue to look for signs of concern
- share your concerns.

Learn the signs of abuse and neglect²

Know what to look for—changes in behaviour, unexplained injuries, withdrawal, or fear. If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and don't ignore it.

The signs below suggest the possibility of child abuse, but do not necessarily prove it is happening. But they are reasons to be concerned. Trust your instincts.

Physical signs

- unexplained bruises, welts, cuts, abrasions, burns, broken bones and fractures
- inadequate supervision, being left alone for unacceptable periods of time
- appearing not adequately cared for—for example, showing signs of poor hygiene, being malnourished, or not receiving needed medical attention
- bruising, lacerations, redness, swelling, bleeding or itching and pain in their genital or anal areas
- frequent physical complaints or prolonged headaches, nausea, abdominal pains, vomiting or diarrhoea.

¹ At Mana Mokopuna we have adopted the term 'mokopuna' to describe all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. 'Mokopuna' brings together 'moko' (imprint or tattoo) and 'puna' (spring of water). Mokopuna describes that we are descendants, and or grandchildren, and how we need to think across generations for a better present and future. We acknowledge the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflect that in all we do. Referring to children and young people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from, matters for their identity, belonging and well-being at every stage of their lives.

² This content is drawn from [Sport Integrity Commission Te Kahu Raunui](#)

Behavioural signs

Mokopuna may be trying to tell you about the abuse or harm that's happening but not have the words or understanding to tell you. Behavioural signs can include:

- appearing depressed or anxious, and may be withdrawn, aggressive or violent
- having sexual knowledge and sexualised behaviour not appropriate to their age
- being self-destructive—self-harming, suicide attempts, engaging in drug or alcohol abuse
- dressing inappropriately for the activity which may be to hide bruises or other injuries
- not being able to recall how injuries occurred or giving inconsistent explanations
- being wary of adults or a particular person
- having poor social skills or poor understanding of self-care or basic hygiene
- avoiding training or participating in sport or other recreation activities
- seeming overly wary of people beyond shyness, flinches or freezes, or is excessively vigilant.

Signs of grooming (online and in 'real life')

Even if a mokopuna is manipulated or pressured into keeping it a secret, there are signs of grooming you can look for in their behaviour. Look out for:

- secretive use of phones and tablets
- unexplained gifts
- inappropriate knowledge about sex for their age
- sudden changes in participation, such as avoiding training or activities
- becoming more withdrawn than usual
- fear of certain people, or places or areas
- developing wellbeing or sexual health problems
- developing mental health problems
- alcohol or drug misuse
- mokopuna spending time with a much older 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend'.

What is child maltreatment?

Child maltreatment refers to **any form of harm, abuse, or neglect** that affects mokopuna wellbeing in person or online.

It includes **all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment and violence, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, deprivation, and exploitation**, which results in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.³

While it is commonly grouped into **five categories (physical abuse, sexual abuse, exposure to violence, emotional or psychological abuse, and neglect)**, child maltreatment is not confined to a single type, event, or extent.

Many mokopuna experience multiple forms of maltreatment—it may occur frequently or intermittently and is often within a context of other forms of individual and structural harm.

Signs and indicators of abusive adult behaviours

Identifying abusive behaviours in adults is also important. Signs to look out for include if a person:

- is vague or inconsistent about the details of the cause of injury to mokopuna
- is violent, aggressive, attempts to injure, or intimidates, bullies or harasses mokopuna
- delays seeking medical attention for mokopuna
- fails to provide for the basic needs of mokopuna in their care, such as nutrition, medical and psychological care
- has unrealistic expectations of mokopuna
- may be unusually over-protective of mokopuna or has physical contact or affection that appears sexual or has sexual overtones
- seeks time alone with mokopuna or singles them out repeatedly for punishment, praise or gifts
- is jealous and/or controlling of mokopuna relationships with peers or other adults.

Grooming behaviours

Look out for incidents where someone repeatedly sets up ways to be alone with mokopuna:

- in a way that isolates them
- by using a position of authority, for example, in coaching or instructing relationships
- by seeming overly helpful, e.g., offering babysitting or childcare, or offering rides
- by encouraging children to spend time with them in secret, both in person or online.

Look out for people who could be manipulating relationships by:

- seeking to build unusual connections beyond their role (e.g. in a club or organisation)
- offering special treatment or gifts to certain children or their caregivers and whānau
- befriending mokopuna by acting like their best friend or someone cool to hang out with
- interfering with or manipulating mokopuna relationships with their friends or whānau
- rewarding and encouraging mokopuna to keep secrets, for example through special attention online or in person, or giving gifts secretly to imply favouritism.

Watch out for people who:

- blur the line between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, e.g., joking about grooming, being alone regularly with someone else's child and downplaying any concerns
- insist on physical contact with a child, such as hugging, tickling or touching them
- shift from acceptable to inappropriate boundaries (e.g. safe and appropriate touching to correct a swim stroke shifting to inappropriate touching)
- talk and/or joke about sexual topics, introduces sexual actions into conversations or situations around mokopuna
- use alcohol and other enticements and gifts
- provide access to adult material
- often walk in on mokopuna in changing areas, showers and toilets
- make a habit of undressing in front of children
- talk about their sexual fantasies or adult relationship problems with mokopuna.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guidance. Knowing what to look for and responding when a child needs help is one way adults can prevent harm. Every child has a right to safety, and we all have a part to play to make this right real for all children in New Zealand.