

Growing up safe and well

Our position:

All mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand, and throughout the world, have the right to grow up in environments where they are safe, valued, and supported to reach their full potential.

What do we mean by growing up safe and well?

Growing up safe and well means that all mokopuna grow up safe, protected from harm and provided with the support they need to thrive. This includes protection from all forms of abuse and neglect, safe home and community environments that are free of all forms of harm, and access to inclusive and responsive wellbeing services. It means providing the care that mokopuna need or want and ensuring that our State care and protection and youth justice systems are safe for mokopuna, give effect to all mokopuna rights, and are rehabilitative for mokopuna and whānau.

All mokopuna should be able to live in safety and without fear, with the support of a community they are a part of that values their wellbeing. They should have access to inclusive, responsive, and timely mental health resources and supports if they want them. They should be included in all aspects of society and their voices should be valued. They should be given the care and protection needed to grow and develop safely. Where mokopuna interact with State care and protection and/or youth justice systems, these systems and those working within them must make decisions and act in ways that protect mokopuna at all times, support mokopuna to harness their inherent strengths and prepare them for safe return to their whānau, wider whānau network and society.

Why does growing up safe and well matter for mokopuna?

Mokopuna tell us that growing up in loving, safe, and supportive whānau and community environments is fundamental to their happiness and growth. They flourish when they are safe, free from fear and have healthy relationships and strong support systems. When mokopuna grow up safe and well, they are more likely to be able to live the lives they want to, and flourish to their full potential.

In safe environments, mokopuna are protected from harm and can focus on their development and living life as a child or adolescent – and all the special

opportunities that this precious time of life should provide. This reduces the likelihood of issues that impact the lives of mokopuna like poor health, educational setbacks, and involvement in the justice system. Providing emotional and mental support helps mokopuna build resilience and self-esteem, which are crucial for their development, wairua, and giving them the strongest opportunity to live their best lives.

Mokopuna need inclusive and equitable environments to feel valued and capable. These environments help them build strong identities and encourage them to contribute to their communities. This is important for all mokopuna, and especially imperative for mokopuna whaikaha, mokopuna Māori, Pacific mokopuna, Rainbow mokopuna, and resettled mokopuna.

When mokopuna enter the State care system, it is because they have not been safe within their own whānau, so it is imperative that the State provides them with an environment where they can grow up safe and well and return to the safe and sustainable care of whānau. Fair and supportive youth justice systems ensure that mokopuna who make mistakes have the opportunity to learn and grow and reach their full potential, rather than being punished, marginalised and stigmatised.

How do we know when mokopuna are growing up safe and well?

We will know mokopuna are growing up safe and well when:

- All mokopuna are safe, free from all forms of abuse, neglect and harm, and are living in homes and communities that are safe and nurturing.
- All whānau and communities are equipped to prevent and respond to family violence and child abuse, including sexual abuse and violence.
- All mokopuna have access to the wellbeing services they need.
- Schools and communities are inclusive and equitable, and mokopuna are actively learning about healthy and safe relationships from infancy, throughout childhood and adolescence.
- Mokopuna receive the care and protection they need, and when in the care of the State, they are safe and free from all forms of abuse, neglect and harm.
- The youth justice system values inherent strengths that exist within all mokopuna, and prioritises rehabilitation and reintegration.

Why does all mokopuna growing up safe and well matter for Aotearoa New Zealand?

Every child has the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment, and survive and develop to reach their full potential, as made clear under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Ensuring that all mokopuna grow up safe and well is essential for mokopuna to be able to experience all of their rights, in all circumstances, at all times, and for a healthy and prosperous society.

Safe and supportive environments lead to healthier mokopuna. This reduces the strain on healthcare systems and lowers long-term healthcare costs. Mokopuna who feel safe and supported are more likely to fulfil their potential in school, can help them in the jobs they want, and ultimately support economic stability.

That economic stability is also strengthened when whānau can participate in the workforce and wider community without the burden of family violence or inadequate wellbeing resources. Investments in childcare and family support services increase workforce participation and reduce reliance on government assistance.

Addressing family and sexual violence and supporting mental health reduce crime and social issues which leads to safer communities. Mokopuna who have appropriate care and protection are more likely to remain safe in the care of their whānau, less likely to engage in criminal behaviour and develop strong cultural values and a sense of community involvement.

Supporting the mental health of mokopuna is crucial to their development. When mokopuna grow up in nurturing environments, they learn to manage stress, build resilience, and develop healthy coping mechanisms. This can prevent mental health issues later in adulthood which in turn can reduce the need for future mental health services.

What should we do?

Let's commit to making this future a reality. Mokopuna growing up safe and well means strengthening families, whānau and communities so they are places where all mokopuna are protected, supported, and given the opportunity to thrive. This benefits all of Aotearoa New Zealand. Whānau are equipped to love, nurture and support their mokopuna, schools become better places for learning, neighbourhoods become safer and more vibrant, and our economy grows stronger with more skilled and healthy workers.

Every mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand has the right to grow up safe and well. As a country we must commit to a future where all mokopuna are safe, where every whānau feels supported and is well resourced, where our communities collectively prevent and respond to child and family harm, and where cultural heritage and identity is honoured and preserved.

GLOSSARY

The explanations below are provided to support readers of this position statement, they are not intended to be interpreted as definitions.

Aotearoa	Term in Māori often adopted as a name for New Zealand
Kupu	To talk, to speak, word
Mokopuna	When we use the kupu 'mokopuna' in our work, we are referring to all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand
Mokopuna whaikaha	Disabled children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand
Resettled whānau	Families who have migrated and settled in Aotearoa, used in the context of refugees or immigrants
Te Tiriti o Waitangi or Te Tiriti	The founding legal document of Aotearoa New Zealand, signed in 1840
Wairua	Emotional, spiritual wellbeing
Whaikaha	To have strength, to have ability, otherly abled, enabled
Whānau	<p>Whānau is often translated as 'family', but its meaning is more complex.</p> <p>It includes physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions and is based on whakapapa. Whānau can be multi-layered, flexible, and dynamic. Whānau relationships include those with whāngai (foster children) and those who have passed on. There are roles and responsibilities for individuals and for the collective. The structure of whānau can vary from immediate family to much broader collectives. The most important features of whānau that distinguish it from family and other social groupings are whakapapa, spirituality, and the responsibility to marae and hapū.</p> <p>Whānau is also used as a metaphor for close friends or associates, intended to be inclusive and build a sense of group unity. Whānau begins with the individual. The relationship between the individual and the whānau is subtle and complex. Individuals have rights of their own, but they exist because of the whānau and have responsibilities to the whānau.</p>