

Being a safe adult for children and young people

It's important that children and young people feel listened to and believed, and know that their worries will be taken seriously. Take action if you see or think a child is being harmed. If they tell you about harmful situations, support them to navigate the journey and get the help they need.

Talking regularly with children and young people about keeping safe is one of the most important ways adults can help protect them from harm. These conversations help tamariki and rangatahi understand what safety feels like, recognise when something is not right, and build confidence to communicate with trusted people if something's not right. Just as importantly, they help children know that the adults in their lives will listen and support them.

These conversations don't need to be perfect. What matters most is making sure children know they can talk to you, and that you will listen and take their concerns seriously.

Make safety part of everyday conversations

Talking about safety works best when it happens naturally in everyday moments. Conversations in the car, at bedtime, or after something comes up in a story or online can help children feel comfortable asking questions and sharing worries.

Small conversations over time are often more effective than one big "safety talk". They help children see that talking about safety is normal and that support is always available.

"It's the daily conversations and building a strong connection with somebody that ensures someone will just be able to open up to you slowly."¹

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Use simple and age-appropriate language

It's important to normalise safety checks early.

Children understand safety best when adults use simple language that matches their age and stage. Younger children need clear messages that help them understand their rights and know they can ask for help.

As children grow older, conversations can include topics like healthy relationships, consent, peer pressure, and online safety.

The aim is to build understanding without creating fear.

Help children understand what safety feels like

Children are more likely to speak up when they understand what feeling safe means.

Talking about safe and unsafe feelings helps children learn to trust their instincts and recognise when something does not feel right.

Let them know that secrets that make them feel worried, scared, or uncomfortable should always be shared with a trusted adult.

Help children know who they can talk to

Children need to know who they can talk to if they feel worried or unsafe. This might be a parent, caregiver, teacher, grandparent, coach, or another trusted adult.

It's important that children understand they can keep telling trusted adults until someone listens and helps. This reassures them that their safety matters.

"That's probably like one of the hardest things for young people, is knowing that they have to actually find help if they need it. Like they have to talk to people that will talk to other people to get that help."²

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Listen with empathy and understanding

When a child shares something worrying, staying calm and listening carefully without judgement helps them feel safe. Thanking them for telling you and reassuring them that they have done the right thing builds trust and encourages them to keep talking.

A calm, empathetic response lets children know they will be heard and helped.

(Safe support looks like...) “someone who is genuine with me. A person that listens and understands me, someone who loves and cares.”³

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Follow through on what you've said you'll do

Trust grows when adults do what they say they'll do. Taking action on any commitments you made, and checking in with them shows a child that they matter, they've been heard, and they can rely on you. If plans change, be honest and explain why. Keeping children informed along the way helps build trust and a sense of safety.

“..not only being there for the moment, like that follow up is really important for me.”⁴

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Keep the conversation going

Talking about safety is not a one-time conversation. As children grow, regular check-ins help them know that talking about worries is normal, and what support is there.

When children feel listened to, believed, and supported, they are more likely to speak up when something is wrong.

Helpful resources

- [Responding to disclosures](#)
- [Parenting Place | How to talk about keeping safe](#)
- [I'm worried about my kids | Are You OK](#)
- [Safeguarding training opportunities.](#)

1,2 & 4 “[A place to talk peacefully](#)”: Mokopuna voices on healing from family violence and sexual violence in Aotearoa
3 Mana Mokopuna ‘Dear Adults’ engagement with mokopuna (2026)