

All mokopuna have the right to be safe

All children in Aotearoa New Zealand have the right to be safe and protected from being hurt or badly treated, in all the spaces they live their lives. It is fundamental to respecting the mana of mokopuna (children), their inherent dignity as people.

This right is set out in Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention), which New Zealand agreed to in 1993.

Put simply, the Children's Convention is a promise to promote, respect, protect and uphold the rights of all children under the age of 18. The Government is ultimately responsible for meeting this promise, but we all have a role to play.

Children's rights apply holistically. This means thinking about the right of all mokopuna to be safe together with other rights, such as their rights:

- to be guided and, as far as possible, cared for by their parents, whānau and communities (Articles 5, 7, and 9)
- when separated from parents following abuse or neglect (Article 9)
- when they are in alternative care (Article 20)
- to be protected from sexual exploitation (Article 34)
- to be protected from torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (Article 37) and
- to be supported to heal from violence (Article 39).

There are four key rights that guide how all other children's rights - including the right to be safe - are understood and applied. These are the Guiding Principles of the Children's Convention:

- **Non-discrimination** – all rights apply to every child, without discrimination; so this means every child has the right to be safe from violence, without discrimination (Article 2)
- **Best interests** – the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration in all actions concerning them. This includes the prevention of, responses to, and healing from violence (Article 3)
- The right to **life and maximum possible survival and development** (Article 6) – being hurt or treated badly can result in a breach of the most fundamental of rights – the right to life. It can also undermine the right of every child to develop to their full potential.
- **Participation** – the right of children to have a say, be listened to and be respected as an active participant in their own lives and the things that are important to them (Article 12).

The United Nations' expert group on children's rights is concerned about New Zealand's persistent levels of harm to children

When the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child assessed New Zealand's situation relating to children's rights in 2023, it was very concerned about the persistent rates of abuse, neglect and violence against children in our country, especially the higher risk faced by Māori, Pasifika, rainbow children, and children with disabilities.

The UN Committee was concerned that there are not enough child-friendly reporting channels or services, including mental health services, available to support children who have suffered violence, trauma or abuse to heal.

The UN Committee recommended:

- better data on violence against children to inform a comprehensive strategy to prevent and combat all forms of violence against children
- strong, well-resourced multidisciplinary and multisectoral responses to address all cases of violence against children
- awareness-raising, promotion of reporting, and access to assistance, protection and support
- child friendly, multidisciplinary and multisectoral services to help children heal from violence
- investment in culturally-specific, community-based initiatives to equip families and communities to prevent and respond to cases of child abuse, neglect and violence.

Learn more

Read the full text of what the UN Committee says on this topic in relation to New Zealand [here](#).

Read a child-friendly version of this document in English and te reo Māori, [here](#).

There is more detailed information about the right of every mokopuna to be safe here:

[United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child General comment No. 13 \(2011\) The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#)

Read our mokopuna voices report presenting the direct views of mokopuna who are healing from family and/or sexual violence, [here](#).