Creating a family safety plan

Helping protect tamariki from sexual abuse

A family safety plan brings together everyday actions that help keep children safer at home, away from home and online. Talk about it with your whānau and the people who care for your children. Adults are responsible for protecting children. Abuse is never a child's fault, even if they did not say no, leave or tell someone.

If a child is in immediate danger, call Police on 111.

Keep conversations open

Have short, calm conversations about bodies, relationships and safety as part of everyday life. Use words that suit your child's age, development, language and communication needs. Welcome questions and use correct names for body parts, including penis and vulva, so children can explain clearly if something happens.

Help children name their feelings and notice when something worries them. Explain that feelings are only one clue: unsafe behaviour can sometimes feel pleasant or confusing, or cause no warning feeling at all. They can tell you about anything, even if they liked the person or did not feel upset at the time.

Respect bodies and privacy

Show children that their boundaries matter. Let them choose whether to hug or kiss someone, and stop tickling or play when they want it to stop. Respect gestures and other ways of saying no. Everyone in the whānau, including adults and older children, should follow the same boundaries.

Explain that private parts are private. Necessary help with washing, toileting or health care should be explained and respectful. Give children privacy suited to their age and support needs, and encourage them to tell a trusted adult if any care or touch worries them. Protect children from exposure to sexual activity and sexual content.

Make it safe to tell

Explain the difference between privacy, a short-lived surprise such as a birthday gift, and being asked to hide something from people who help keep them safe. No one should ask a child to keep touching, sexual messages or private images secret.

You could say: "You can always tell me, even if someone said not to, or you think you've broken a rule. I will listen and help you." Avoid blame or punishment when a child asks for help.

Build a circle of trusted adults

Help your child identify several adults they can approach, including someone outside the household. Make sure they know how to reach them. Practise asking for help in a way that works for your child, whether through words, signs, pictures or a communication device. If someone does not listen, encourage them to tell another adult. Adults must act on concerns.

Plan for time away from home

Know who is caring for your child, who else will be present and what supervision is provided. Before sleepovers, camps, sport or other activities, ask about sleeping arrangements, bathroom privacy, device use and how concerns are handled. Make a plan for your child to contact you or another trusted adult and be collected if needed.

Share your family's boundaries with caregivers, relatives and new partners. Apply them consistently. Pay attention to secrecy, pressure for private access or repeated disregard for a child's boundaries, rather than judging safety by how friendly or helpful someone seems.

Include online safety

Talk regularly about the games, apps and people your child interacts with. Agree on privacy settings, age-appropriate supervision and what to do if something feels wrong. Review settings together as their needs change.

Explain that they can ask for help if someone requests sexual images, sends sexual content, asks for secrecy or threatens them. Respond calmly, even if they have already replied or shared something. Seek help from Netsafe or Police. Online harm is not the child's fault.

Respond to concerns promptly

If a child tells you about abuse, listen calmly, take them seriously and reassure them that they are not to blame. Avoid leading questions, repeated questioning or promising secrecy. Explain that you need help to keep them safe. Do not confront the person involved. Record what the child said in their own words and seek advice promptly.

Call Oranga Tamariki on 0508 326 459, free 24 hours a day, or contact Police if you are worried about a child. You can ask for advice even if you are unsure. Call 111 for immediate danger. A family plan supports prevention; concerns about actual or suspected abuse need professional help.

Review your plan together

Agree who your child can contact, how adults will respond and what arrangements apply across households. Revisit the plan when caregivers, relationships, activities or online use change. Seek guidance about healthy sexual development or any behaviour that concerns you.

Support and further information

CAPS Hauraki | 07 868 8644
reception@capshauraki.co.nz
Safe to talk | 0800 044 334 or text 4334
Free, confidential sexual harm support, available 24 hours a day.

HELP Auckland | Keeping children safe
Netsafe | Online safety for children and young people
Stop It Now | Creating a family safety plan US resource
Child Safeguarding Week | Safety conversations
Oranga Tamariki | Advice and reporting concerns
Links and contacts checked October 2026.