



Ruawai College

Next review: Term 3 2028

Identifying and Responding to Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

This policy operates as a supporting policy under the **Child Protection** policy.

At Ruawai College, we have provisions in place to identify and report on suspected child abuse and neglect, as required by the Children's Act 2014 (s 14). We provide staff, and relevant volunteers and contractors, with clear definitions and indicators of child abuse, and train and support them to recognise and respond appropriately to child protection concerns. Staff are made aware of information sharing provisions and the school procedure for response, which includes responding to disclosures and to allegations against staff.

Child abuse definitions and indicators

Child abuse is defined as harm (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person (Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, s 2). Neglect is the most common form of abuse, and is defined as the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs.

See **Definitions of Child Abuse** 

See **Indicators of Child Abuse** 

We recognise that these resources are not a definitive guide and, when in doubt, we encourage everyone to consult with the designated child protection lead(s).

Training and supporting staff

We acknowledge that child abuse and neglect are more likely to be identified through indicators than received through direct disclosures.

To ensure staff are able to identify and report on suspected child abuse and neglect, we train staff to:

- recognise indicators of child abuse and neglect
- know how to respond if they have concerns about child abuse and neglect
- know how to respond if they receive a disclosure about child abuse or neglect.

How we train and support staff

- We share the school Child Protection policy and Identifying and Responding to Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect policy and procedure with staff at induction and at regular intervals (at least annually).
- We designate one or more staff members with experience and training in responding to child protection concerns to be child protection lead(s), and ensure they are accessible to all staff.
- We offer support as required through performance management and professional development opportunities.
- We ensure staff who are affected by a situation of abuse identification or disclosure are able to access wellbeing support for themselves from a relevant support person at the

school or through external support services.

Training is available for staff in child protection development/learning.

Training and supporting volunteers and contractors

School volunteers, and school contractors who have adopted our Child Protection policy, receive basic, role-appropriate induction on keeping children safe, including expected conduct and boundaries, and how to report any concerns. Regular or long-term volunteers and contractors may be invited to complete child protection training.

Sharing information and reporting suspected abuse

Our internal procedure (below) for sharing information about and reporting suspected abuse prioritises student safety and wellbeing, supports staff, and avoids compromising any legal process.

Staff members work with the school designated child protection lead(s) when responding to concerns. If the lead is unavailable or has a conflict of interest, an appropriate delegate will take their place. We involve external agencies where appropriate. Our designated child protection lead is the principal. The designated child protection lead is available to all staff, and has experience and training in responding to child protection concerns.

We actively partner and consult with whānau where safe and appropriate.

- If consultation may place a child at greater risk or compromise their safety, we do not consult.
- Consent from parents is not required to share information with regulated services (e.g. Oranga Tamariki, the police, health providers, education providers, social service organisations, and kaupapa Māori providers) if the intention is to prevent harm to children and the information is shared in good faith.
- We are not required to inform whānau when we seek advice about child protection matters, or make a report of concern.
- If we are unsure whether to inform whānau, we may seek guidance from Oranga Tamariki, the police, and/or our legal advisors.
- We document our reasons for consulting or not consulting with whānau and record this information.

Anyone with concerns about the immediate safety of a child should phone the police on 111. Everyone has the legal right to seek advice from, or report a concern about the safety of a child to Oranga Tamariki or the police at any time. Internal procedures do not limit this legal right.

School procedure for responding to child protection concerns

The procedure outlined below provides general guidance and should be adapted as necessary to reflect the requirements of the situation.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 Identifying or receiving a concern | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A concern may arise through observation based on the indicators of child abuse, or may be raised by another person or agency, including a family violence or social sector agency.• A concern may arise through intentional or accidental disclosure from a child. If a disclosure is made, staff support student safety and wellbeing and avoid compromising any subsequent investigation or legal process. |
|--|---|

Anyone who receives a disclosure is advised to:

- listen carefully to the child in a reassuring way
- ask open questions to clarify the concern
- let the child finish talking then let them know what will happen next (i.e. that others need to be told).

We acknowledge that it is important not to:

- attempt to deal with the situation or make decisions alone
- formally interview the child (formal interviewing must be done by Oranga Tamariki and/or the police)
- ask leading questions or ask too many questions
- make promises that cannot be kept (e.g. confidentiality).

2 Documenting a concern

- We make factual notes as soon as possible about a concern, including:
 - the date, time, and who was present
 - what was said, seen, and heard – writing down what was said in people's own words
 - clearly distinguishing between facts and thoughts/conclusions.

3 Communicate with the designated child protection lead(s) and decide on next steps

- The designated child protection lead(s) will review any relevant information, consult with other staff as needed (e.g. principal and board, if not already involved), and decide on next steps, based on our [Child Protection policy principles](#) and all available information.

Next steps may include:

- seeking further information
- keeping a formal record with school information about the child
- considering who should or should not be informed, including parents/carers/whānau
- sharing information with or seeking information from external agencies (in line with information sharing provisions), including seeking external advice as needed, contacting Oranga Tamariki for advice, and/or making a report of concern to Oranga Tamariki or the police
- deciding what immediate and ongoing supports are needed for the child (at school and/or externally).

We may contact Oranga Tamariki for advice as they can provide guidance as to what needs to be done, including whether immediate action is required (e.g. calling the police). Contacting Oranga Tamariki is not making a decision about what has happened – simply sharing facts and allowing others to provide guidance.

- If we decide to contact Oranga Tamariki for advice, we contact them by phone (0508 326 459). This is usually done by the child protection lead(s) but

	anyone has a legal right to contact Oranga Tamariki. • If necessary, Oranga Tamariki investigates and advises relevant staff about any action that should be taken to support a student. Decisions about informing parents/caregivers about suspected or actual child abuse or neglect are made after consultation between the school and Oranga Tamariki.
	If no report of concern is warranted, the designated child protection lead(s): • review any other evidence to see if there are repeated concerns relating to a student or their family and decide if any combined evidence meets a higher concern threshold and should be reported • organise support for the student and/or partner with external agencies/social service providers to identify and address student needs.
4	Make a report of concern to Oranga Tamariki or the police A report of concern is recommended if it is believed that a child has been or is likely to be harmed, ill-treated, abused, neglected, or deprived. Reports of concern can also be made when there are serious concerns about a child's wellbeing. Reports of concern can be made by contacting Oranga Tamariki or the police. • In the first instance, we usually contact Oranga Tamariki by phone (0508 326 459) to report a concern. A report of concern can also be made to the police. We consult with Oranga Tamariki or the police to decide who informs parents/caregivers, and when. • Oranga Tamariki can also be contacted by email (contact@ot.govt.nz) – they do not have a form for reporting concerns. We keep all emails for our records and follow up if we do not get a response. • We ensure the student is supported and that there is a responsible adult at the school who is available to them throughout any investigation by external agencies. When Oranga Tamariki receives a report of concern, they may: • provide advice about support available to whānau • refer the matter to other social services, including our social services partners • complete a child and family assessment and/or investigation. A joint investigation with the New Zealand Police takes place when there are allegations of harm that meet the Oranga Tamariki-New Zealand Police Child Protection Protocol.
5	Keep accurate records • We keep and store all records together securely, including details about:

- what the concern is and how/why it arose
 - discussions, meetings, and phone calls (including dates, times, and who was present)
 - advice received from agencies (including who and when)
 - decision-making and reasons (including who was or wasn't involved/informed)
 - actions taken (including who did what and when).
- 6 Monitor and review
- We monitor the wellbeing of the student at school and review any further support needed for the student.
 - We follow up with Oranga Tamariki for further advice as needed.

Managing allegations

The school treats any allegation of abuse as a serious matter and takes immediate action, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the student. When an allegation involves a staff member, volunteer, or contractor under the authority of the school, we meet our legal obligations, including those relating to employment, health and safety, and privacy, and follow the principles of **natural justice**.

So that relevant employment agreement provisions for dealing with concerns or complaints about staff members can be observed, any child abuse or neglect concerns involving staff members must be reported to the principal, and any allegation involving the principal should be reported to the board chair. Anyone who meets the definition of a discloser (i.e. staff members, contractors, members of the board, and volunteer workers) also has the option to use protected disclosure to raise concerns without fear of retaliation – see **Protected Disclosure**.

We follow a fair disciplinary process, uphold the rights of staff to respond to allegations, and seek independent advice. We follow our procedure for **Assessing and Responding to Concerns and Complaints** ("Matters involving staff"). Additionally, in these circumstances:

- We report allegations of child abuse by staff members to Oranga Tamariki and the police.
 - It is the responsibility of these authorities to assess any evidence and investigate whether child abuse has occurred.
 - During an investigation by Oranga Tamariki or the police, the school does not conduct its own internal investigations that may prejudice an external decision.
- We protect any actual or potential legal action by following the advice of authorities in terms of contact with students, whānau, and those facing allegations.
 - The school may take steps to prevent contact between that person and students at the school.
 - If there is insufficient evidence for a criminal prosecution, and following the advice of authorities, the school may conduct its own internal investigation.
- Abuse and neglect are classed as a serious breach of the Code of Professional Responsibility | Ngā Tikanga Matatika under the Teaching Council Rules 2016 (Part 3).
 - If we have reason to believe that a teacher has engaged in this type of serious misconduct, we make a mandatory report to the Teaching Council of Aotearoa.

Allegations against other enrolled students at the school are managed according to the nature of the situation and the ages of the students involved. We follow our school procedure for responding to child protection concerns as needed, and follow relevant school policies and procedures, such as:

- **Assessing and Responding to Concerns and Complaints** ("Matters involving students")

- **Bullying and Harassment**
- **Responding to Student Sexual Behaviour Concerns and Incidents**
- **Responding to Digital Incidents**
- **Behaviour Management.**

For allegations against others under the authority of the school (e.g. board members, volunteers, contractors), we follow our school procedure for responding to child protection concerns, along with managing the matter according to who is involved – see **Assessing and Responding to Concerns and Complaints** ("Managing the concern or complaint").

Cooperating with authorities

We cooperate fully with any Family Court, Oranga Tamariki, or New Zealand Police investigations or enquiries, and ensure the rights and safety of the child are upheld. If Oranga Tamariki or the police asks to interview a child at school, we recognise that child has the right to a support person present. If this is required, we ensure a familiar and trusted adult (e.g. parent, teacher) is present during the interview, unless Oranga Tamariki or the police advise otherwise. We understand that the role of the support person is to focus on the safety and wellbeing of the child.

Record-keeping

We document concerns, incidents, conversations, decision-making, advice received, and actions taken (including rationale) and keep this information securely. Access is limited to authorised staff and kept in accordance with our privacy and school records retention and disposal policies.

The principal assures the board that all staff receive child protection training to enable them to be vigilant, have knowledge and awareness of the indicators of neglect, potential or actual abuse, and to report any concerns, suspicions, or allegations of suspected abuse immediately in accordance with the school Child Protection policy. See **Review Schedule and Board Assurances**.

Related policies

- **Child Protection**
- **Protected Disclosure**
- **Privacy Policy**
- **School Records Retention and Disposal**
- **Sharing Student Personal Information with External Agencies**

Legislation

- Children's Act 2014
- Oranga Tamariki Act 1989
- Children, Young Persons, and their Families (Oranga Tamariki) Legislation Act 2017
- Teaching Council Rules 2016
- Privacy Act 2020

Resources

- Ministry of Education | Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga: **Reporting suspected abuse or neglect of children and young people by adults** 
- Oranga Tamariki | Ministry for Children:
 - **Contact Us** 
 - **Identify abuse** 

- Safeguarding Children | Tiakina ngā tamariki: [Resources](#) 
- Child Matters: [Resources](#) 
- Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand: [Make a report](#) 

Hei mihi | Acknowledgement

SchoolDocs acknowledges our use of resources and advice from Safeguarding Children Aotearoa.

Release history: [Term 1 2026](#), [Term 3 2022](#), [Term 2 2022](#)

Last review	Term 3 2025
Topic type	Core