



LeVa

ATU
MAI

Protecting our Pasifika Children

This resource aims to help equip parents and caregivers with the knowledge and tools to protect our children from child sexual abuse.

Attention: This resource talks about the serious topic of child sexual abuse. Some descriptions may be upsetting, and we encourage you to read with care. If you suspect harm or abuse, or if you need support, the resources listed at the end of this factsheet can help.

Tokangaekina 'etau fanau ko 'etau mata'ikoloa

Safeguard the treasures that are our children

Tongan proverb

Key messages

- * Children are at the heart of Pasifika families and society. For parents and caregivers, there is a sacred duty to provide a safe and loving environment for a child to grow and thrive in.
- * Child sexual abuse is a serious and harmful issue that affects a child's growth, wellbeing and development impacting their lives as adults too.
- * Child sexual abuse conflicts with Pasifika values.
- * To help protect children, we need to understand the nature of child sexual abuse and recognise the signs.
- * Raising concerns of harm and abuse is important. If you suspect any form of harm or if you need support, explore our helpful resources and support links.

Children are tapu (sacred)

For Pasifika people, children are at the heart of family and society. When we nurture them well, children grow and carry on the wisdom, traditions and values of our culture.

Today caregivers and parents are still tasked with the sacred duty of nurturing our precious *oloa* (treasures) with care so they can reach their full potential. To fulfil this duty, we must protect our children from harmful threats and acts such as child sexual abuse.



Child sexual abuse goes against Pasifika values

Child sexual abuse contrasts with Pasifika values of love, respect, protection and nurturing of children.

Child sexual abuse violates the *va* (sacred space) that binds our families and communities together, disrupting the *tapu* (sacredness), *mana* (dignity), and innocence of children. It also disrupts harmony and connection with our children and their cultural heritage, diminishing their self-worth and identity. Child sexual abuse is NOT part of Pasifika culture. As parents and caregivers in a community, we must stand together against child sexual abuse.

Child sexual abuse prevents our children from reaching their full potential.

Child sexual abuse is a harmful act of violence that *threatens our children's ability to thrive*. Like the unwanted and destructive weeds that invade and cause damage to our young coconut trees, child sexual abuse can have long lasting impacts on the physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural and psychological wellbeing of a child. Such harm can shatter a child's sense of identity, self-worth and trust in others, having lasting impacts on their happiness and wellbeing in life.



Understanding child sexual abuse

Protecting our children from the serious threat of child sexual abuse means we need to be aware, alert and informed. Below are some important things Pasifika families should know.

Child sexual abuse (CSA) refers to any act by any person, whether a child, young person, or adult that involves a child in sexual activity or exposes them to sexual content. Children are not capable of giving informed consent to any form of sexual activity. Making a child engage in any sexual activity is abuse.

The person who harms the child is often someone they know and trust

In many cases, the person causing harm isn't a stranger, but someone close to the child like a family member, a friend or someone in a position of trust and authority. Twenty percent of children in New Zealand experience child sexual abuse (Child Matters, 2023).

Children often stay silent because of fear or shame

Children may feel scared, confused or think it's their fault. They might also be pressured by the person causing the harm to keep it a secret.

Silence and secrecy allow the abuse to continue

If we don't talk about child sexual abuse, it stays hidden, allowing the harm to carry on. It's important for us as families and communities to speak up, raise awareness and protect our children by bringing these conversations into the open.

Both boys and girls can be harmed

All children, whether they are boys or girls, need protection from harm. It's our job to keep them safe.

Talking to children about sexual abuse won't harm them it will protect them

When we have age-appropriate conversations with our children about boundaries and keeping safe, we help them understand what's okay and what's not. These open conversations can prevent harm.

Abuse often starts with grooming

Many times, the person who harms a child builds trust with them first, through a process called grooming. This can make it hard for the child to see the danger. For more on grooming, check out our 'Know your Village' resource.

Other young people can also cause harm

While many abusers are adults, sometimes other young people can harm children too.

Emotional and behavioural changes can be signs of abuse

It's not always physical signs that tell us something is wrong. A child who is being harmed may become withdrawn, anxious or fearful of certain people or places. If we notice these changes, we need to offer them our love and support and listen carefully.



Types of child sexual abuse

Protecting our children from the harmful threat of child sexual abuse requires being alert and educated about the signs and symptoms. The New Zealand Family Violence Survey (2019) found more than one in four females (26%) and one in nine of males (11%) experienced child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse may be non-contact and contact as described below.

Non-contact child sexual abuse

This refers to any form of sexual exploitation or inappropriate behaviour towards a child that does not involve physical contact and can include the actions below.

Showing sexual images or videos

Sharing inappropriate images, videos or content of a sexual nature with children through text messages, social media or email.

Talking about sexual things

Talking to a child about topics that are sexually explicit or graphic in nature. This can be via text messages, social media or email.

Requests for sexual content

Asking a child to send or share sexual images or videos which is a form of exploitation and a serious sign of harm.

Indecent exposure

An adult intentionally showing private body parts to a child.

Voyeurism

Secretly watching a child undressing or engaging in private activities without them knowing.

Invasion of privacy

Taking photos or videos of a child in private situations, such as bathrooms or changing rooms.

Contact child sexual abuse

Physical touch

Touching children in ways that make them feel uncomfortable or yuck. This can include touching private parts or excessive kissing.

Forced sexual acts

Making a child engage in any sexual act is abuse. Children cannot consent to sexual activity under any circumstances.

Grooming

A deliberate process by an adult to establish a connection with a child for the purpose of using them for sex or sexual acts.

Incest

Engaging in sexual activities with a child by someone who is a close family member, like a parent, sibling or other relative.



Signs of child sexual abuse

Recognising the signs of sexual abuse and acting quickly can help protect our children from harm. While *these signs don't necessarily mean a child has been sexually abused*, they do indicate that it's important to seek advice from a trusted person or professional to ensure the child receives the support they may need. Children who have been abused may show a range of changes, as shown below.

Physical injuries

- ✿ Bruises or swelling in the genital area.
- ✿ Bloody, torn, or stained underclothes.
- ✿ Finding it hard to walk or sit down.
- ✿ Frequent urinary or yeast infections.
- ✿ Pain, itching or burning in the genital area.

Changes to mood

- ✿ Unhappy most of the time.
- ✿ Having a sense of emptiness or numbness.
- ✿ Not very responsive.
- ✿ Anxious, ashamed and guilty.
- ✿ Feeling dazed or confused.
- ✿ Having a sense of guilt and feeling like it is their fault.

Changes in thinking

- ✿ Finding it hard to focus.
- ✿ Thinking of self-harm or wanting to die.
- ✿ Thinking that they are to blame.
- ✿ They may think something is wrong with them.
- ✿ Believing the world and people are not safe.





Changes in behaviours

- * They may have a fear of bedtime, constant nightmares or bed-wetting.
- * Being overly protective and overly concerned for siblings. Assuming a caretaker role beyond their years.
- * Shrinking away or seeming threatened by physical contact.
- * They do not want to be left alone with a particular person.
- * They are no longer interested in the things they used to enjoy.
- * They may hurt themselves on purpose.
- * Starting to use alcohol or other drugs.
- * Having trouble controlling their emotions, eg. meltdowns, aggression, defiance or rebellion.
- * *Sexualised behaviours* including sexual language, touching themselves or others inappropriately, showing interest in sexual content, playing sexual games, acting out sexual behaviours that seem too mature for their age, or asking detailed questions about sex that don't fit their level of understanding.

Spirituality

- * Feeling disconnected spiritually from God, faith or higher power.
- * Losing their sense of peace within themselves or with the world around them.
- * Feeling dissatisfied or experiencing a lack of meaning in life.
- * Praying less, avoiding church or other activities that usually give them peace and joy.





Protecting our children - creating a safe haven

As parents and caregivers, the safety of children takes priority. Below you will find some practical tips and advice to create a safe environment both in the physical and online world.

Open communication

Encourage children to share their thoughts and feelings openly, without fear of judgement. This helps to build up trust and helps address concerns. See our *Talanoa to Protect* factsheet.

Educate about safety

Teach children about personal safety in both online and offline settings. Cover topics such as meeting strangers, *setting boundaries and learning how to stay safe online*.

Know their friends

Get to *know your children's friends and their parents*. Knowing the network of trust and support around your child adds an extra layer of safety.

Set boundaries

Clearly define limits on where your children can go and what they can do. Make sure they understand the reasons why.

Monitor online activities

Keep an eye on your child's online presence, including social media. Discuss potential risks and guide them toward behaving responsibly. *Consider using parental control apps* to guide responsible use.

Teach about body parts

Empower children with the understanding that their bodies belong to them, and private parts cannot be touched by someone else. Teach them they have a right to say *no to any physical contact that makes them feel uncomfortable*.

Stay informed

Stay up to date on your children's activities, interests and potential challenges. This allows you to address risks quickly and effectively.

Be a safe space

Ensure children know they can always come to you with any concerns or fears *without fear of punishment*. Being a trusted adult who listens is key to keeping open lines of communication.



LeVa

ATU
MAI

Reporting abuse and knowing where to get help

If you need to talk to someone now, help is available. Confidential support is available for those feeling unsure and needing to talk to someone about child sexual abuse.

If someone is in danger

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call the Police on 111.

If you or a young person needs someone to talk to

Safe to talk

Free support for those impacted by sexual harm.

Call: 0800 044 334

Text: 4334

Email: support@safetotalk.nz

Live webchat: www.safetotalk.nz

Youthline

Free youth helpline service & face-to-face counselling.

Call: 0800 376 633

Text: 234

Email: talk@youthline.co.nz

1737

Free, confidential support from trained counsellors.

Call or text: 1737

If the young person is in an unsafe environment

Oranga Tamariki

Free call: 0508 326 459

Email: enquiry@ot.govt.nz

Support for those who have experienced sexual abuse:

Victim Support: 0800 842 846

Rape Crisis: 0800 88 33 00

HELP: Call: 24/7, 0800 623 1700 (24-hour HELpline)

Email: gethelp@helpauckland.org.nz

Text: 8236

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP): 022 344 0496

** The images in this resource were generated by AI*

More information from Le Va



Le Va

Growing the Pasifika mental health and addiction workforce

www.leva.co.nz



Equipping young people to look after their mental health

www.mentalwealth.nz



Shaping resilience in young people with digital mental health tools

www.auntydee.co.nz



Preventing violence by supporting families to have respectful relationships

www.atumai.nz

Learn how to help prevent suicide

Le Va	Supporting community-based suicide prevention for Pasifika families www.leva.co.nz/our-work/suicide-prevention
LifeKeepers	Equipping all New Zealanders with skills to prevent suicide www.lifekeepers.nz
Mana Akiaki	Fostering te ao Māori approaches to suicide prevention training www.lifekeepers.nz

Other great learning opportunities through Le Va

Mana Restore	Enhancing mental health literacy in online gaming www.manarestore.nz
Global Pacific Solutions	Igniting community collaboration for wellbeing solutions www.leva.co.nz/gps
Faiva Ora	Championing equity for Pasifika people with disabilities www.leva.co.nz/our-work/disability-support/faiva-ora-leadership
Engaging Pasifika	Improving the quality of health services through cultural competency www.leva.co.nz/our-work/engaging-pasifika/