

	Policy Name	Child Protection Policy
	Policy Category	Health & Safety
	Date Adopted	April 2026

Purpose

The Upper Waitematā Ecology Network (UWEN) is committed to the highest level of protection for all members of the community, and wants adults and particularly tamariki and rangatahi (*children and young people*) to thrive, feel a sense of belonging, and learn alongside other community members in a safe and welcoming space. UWEN is committed to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and the protection of all tamariki and rangatahi that engage in our mahi.

This policy guides the work of UWEN, contractors, employees, lead volunteers and any groups or individuals affiliated to or associated with UWEN or the groups that form the network. All leaders and persons of responsibility are expected to be familiar with and to follow this policy at all times when engaging with members of the community for the purpose of delivering projects or tasks aligned with UWEN.

Overview

This policy sets out the due process and procedures that establish the minimum level of care that must be provided to all vulnerable adults or young people under the age of 18 that connect with, engage in or attend events aligned with UWEN and its network groups.

The requirements of the Children’s Act 2014 and the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989 and subsequent or other legislation remain the overarching guide that governs the minimum level of care to be provided. UWEN intends to ensure that the protection offered to young people exceeds these minimum requirements and a welcoming, safe and caring environment is always provided.

Overarching principles

To provide the safety of our young people, UWEN will ensure the following steps are always followed:

- Ensure the interests and protection of children is held as the highest priority in all circumstances.
- Adhere to all legal obligations in regards to child protection, noticing and reporting suspected abuse of neglect and raising concerns or disclosures at all times.
- The Child Protection Policy will be made publicly available on the UWEN website, shared with member groups, leaders and contractors or employees when it is adopted and subsequently reviewed.

- Child Protection principles will be covered in all inductions for new employees, contractors, event leaders, community group leaders or any other person of responsibility leading UWEN (or network member group) events.
- Welcome parents / guardians to be involved in activities, events, courses or other work that their children may be attending and respect their involvement in any decision making process.
- Promote, support and deliver a culture where any person can raise concerns in a safe environment, knowing that there is no prejudice, vulnerability to reprisals or threat of negative personal circumstances for making a disclosure (whistleblowing).
- Seek advice from organisations or individuals with specialist knowledge when a situation arises that demands action for the protection of a child or children.

Recognising suspected abuse

As trusted and respected members of society, and as people the child may respect or connect with, all UWEN representatives must be mindful of any indication of abuse displayed by the children they spend time with as a result of their duties. Abuse can take many forms but typically falls within one of 4 categories; physical, emotional, sexual or neglect. Some of the most common or typical signs of abuse are listed as Annex A, this is not an exhaustive list and any significant changes in behaviour should be observed and reported if there is concern.

Responding to a child disclosure

Only a minority of children actively disclose issues of abuse, disclosure is more likely to happen by accident or through an adult of a child, or young person's behaviour, words and physical appearance.

When a child or young person discloses abuse, this needs to be taken very seriously. It is important that any disclosure is dealt with appropriately, both for the wellbeing of the child or young person, and also to ensure your actions do not jeopardise any legal action against the abuser.

There are a number of basic guidelines that should be followed to ensure the safe handling of any disclosures of abuse from a child or young person:

- Don't panic
- Remember the safety and well-being of the child or young person comes before the interests of any other person
- Listen to the child or young person and accept what they say
 - Look at the child or young person directly, but do not appear shocked
 - Don't seek help while the child or young person is talking to you
 - Reassure them that they did the right thing by telling someone
 - Assure them that it is not their fault, and you will do your best to help
 - Let them know you need to tell someone else
 - Let them know what you are going to do next and that you will let them know what happens

- Be aware that the child or young person may have been threatened
- Write down what the child or young person says in their own words – record what you have seen and heard also
 - Make certain you distinguish between what the child or young person has actually said and the inferences you may have made. Accuracy is paramount in this stage of the procedure
- Phone the Police on 111 if you feel someone is in immediate danger.
- Refer to Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children on 0508 326 459 if you are concerned about the welfare of a child, or a disclosure has been made.
- After making the referral to Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children, or the Police, look after yourself. Discuss the matter with a trusted colleague or member of the UWEN Governance team, remembering to protect the privacy of the child and parties involved in the disclosure.
- Inform a member of the UWEN Governance team or Network Manager as soon as possible

Disclosure by a child must always be actioned, the information should be gathered and shared with Oranga Tamariki or the Police and it is their role to investigate. It is not the role of a UWEN representative to make a decision about the seriousness of an incident or the investigation or follow up action needed.

Reporting suspected abuse

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

If you are concerned about the welfare of a child or if a disclosure has been made then this must be reported to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children on 0508 326 459 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) or by emailing contact@ot.govt.nz.

The person making the report should try and gather as much information as possible to identify the child, to share their observations and the action (or inaction) that generated the concern.

In cases of suspected abuse, the privacy rights of individuals are removed when there is reasonable belief of harm to a minor.

If a child is participating as part of a partnership with a school, the school contact should be notified.

Safety checking

In order to offer the best level of protection to young people attending events or working with or alongside UWEN representatives, all leaders (paid or voluntary), contractors, or people of responsibility will be subject to the requirements set out in the UWEN Safety Checking Policy. This includes (but is not limited to) the following safety checks and risk assessments before any leadership work is undertaken in a sole charge position, where parents or guardians are not in attendance;

- Proof of identity (photo ID required)
- Evidence of any name change (if any)
- Police Vetting results
- 2 verbal references, including one from a former manager or supervisor
- Previous 5 years work experience with any gaps identified, where they have not been employed, evidence of what activities they have been undertaking.
- Notes from an interview that also includes questions relating to working with children and vulnerable adults.

Regular safety checks every 3 years in the form of a Police Vetting submission and ensuring any name change had been documented and any other reasonable checks felt by the Governance team to be appropriate, for as long as the person is engaged in work that brings them into sole charge contact with children under the age of 18.

Safe working practices

When parents or guardians allow their children to attend UWEN events or activities, they are placing their children in the care of the leader of that event, this places the burden of responsibility onto that person for the time the child is in their care, and on UWEN for having safe practices and procedures in place. The following is a guide for best practice and is not an exhaustive list. Any UWEN contractor, employee, leader or volunteer should seek assurance and ask questions of either their colleagues or a trusted organisation (such as Oranga Tamariki or Child Matters) for clarification.

- Only adults that have been safety checked by UWEN should ever be in a one-on-one situation with a child. This scenario should be avoided wherever possible, regardless of whether the adult has been safety checked or not.
- Every adult leader or key individual working for or aligned with UWEN should have read and understood the contents of the Child Protection Policy before they engage in any work with children
- UWEN staff or volunteers will never place themselves in a position where they have to attend or run an overnight stay with children as part of their paid or voluntary duties.
- Images of children should only be captured, stored and used where the child (or adult if the child is under the age of 14) have given express permission. Images should not be stored or shared on any publicly accessible device or storage system and only used for the purpose of reporting, capturing stories or recording actions.
- Parents / guardians should always be offered the opportunity to stay and work alongside their child and welcomed to attend any UWEN event that their child is participating in.
- Leaders should ensure that no child is left in an unsupervised, one-on-one situation with another (non safety checked) adult at any time.
- Children under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult at all events.
- Contact and communication with children outside of the organised event or activity should be limited to essential information sharing only and another adult (either a teacher, parent or guardian or UWEN colleague) should be included in the correspondence. Contact by phone, messaging or any other means of

communication is discouraged unless a parent or guardian or teacher is also included and should be limited to emergency or urgent information sharing only.

- The leader of an event should always have contact details available for an adult responsible for the child.
- Physical contact with children under the age of 18 should only ever be for an emergency, health and safety or medical treatment processes, and, wherever possible, only take place in full view of another responsible adult
- Children under the age of 16 will not be allowed to undertake trapping, monitoring or other field work without being accompanied by an adult.
- Standard safe working ratios are 1 adult to 10 unsupervised 14 – 18 year olds. Risk assessments for each activity or event will stipulate a higher ratio dependent on the activities being undertaken.
- The giving and receiving of gifts or any tokens of appreciation between children and UWEN representatives is not permitted.

UWEN recognises that the work that is undertaken by staff, contractors and volunteers often puts individuals in unique and challenging positions. The overarching premise of these safe working guidelines is that should a situation arise that a child is put in any danger or risk of abuse or neglect, that immediate action must be taken to mitigate that risk.

If an individual feels that they may have inadvertently or accidentally breached these guidelines at any point, they should report this to the Network Manager or a member of the UWEN Governance team within 24 hours with an explanation of the situation that occurred. If the event occurred on public land, an approach may then be made with the relevant contact.

Summary

This Policy, in conjunction with the suite of policies and procedures that exist and legal requirements, aims to give the highest level of protection from abuse and neglect for young people engaging in voluntary work for UWEN. It is the responsibility of every leader, employee or contractor to ensure they do not willingly or accidentally expose any child to harm and they must take positive action if they believe any child is at risk of harm.

Document produced	November 2025
Date approved	April 2026
Signed by Chair	
Date of next review	April 2028

Linked and supporting documents

[Safety checking Policy](#)

Annex A – Possible signs of abuse

Extracts from Oranga Tamariki website - link here:

<https://www.orangatamariki.govt.nz/worried-about-a-child-tell-us/identify-abuse/>

Indicators of Emotional Abuse

There may be **physical indicators** that a child is being emotionally abused. Some examples of this are:

- Frequent psychosomatic complaints (e.g. headaches, nausea, abdominal pains)
- Prolonged vomiting or diarrhoea
- Has not attained significant developmental milestones
- Dressed differently from other children in the family
- Has deprived physical living conditions compared with other children in the family

There may also be **behavioural indicators** that child or young person is being emotionally abused. Some examples of this are:

- Suffers from severe developmental gaps
- Severe symptoms of depression, anxiety, withdrawal or aggression
- Severe symptoms of self-destructive behaviour – self-harming, suicide attempts, engaging in drug or alcohol abuse
- Overly compliant; too well-mannered; too neat and clean
- Displays attention seeking behaviours or displays extreme inhibition in play
- When at play, behaviour may model or copy negative behaviour and language used at home

There may be **indicators in adult behaviour** that could indicate emotional abuse. Some examples of this are:

- Constantly calls the child or young person names, labels the child or publicly humiliates the child
- Continually threatens the child or young person with physical harm or forces the child to witness physical harm inflicted on a loved one
- Has unrealistic expectations of the child or young person
- Involves the child or young person in “adult issues”, such as separation or access issues
- Keeps the child or young person at home in a role of subservient or surrogate parent

Indicators of Neglect

There may be **physical indicators** that a child or young person is being neglected. Some examples of this are:

- Inappropriate dress for the weather
- Extremely dirty or unbathed
- Inadequately supervised or left alone for unacceptable periods of time
- Malnourished
- May have severe or persistent skin disorders or rashes resulting from improper care or lack of hygiene

There may also be **behavioural indicators** that child or young person is being neglected. Some examples of this are:

- Demonstrates severe lack of attachment to other adults
- Poor attendance or performance
- Poor social skills
- May steal food
- Is very demanding of affection or attention
- Has no understanding of basic hygiene

There may be **indicators in adult behaviour** that could indicate neglect. Some examples of this are:

- Fails to provide for the child or young person's basic needs, such as housing, nutrition, medical and psychological care
- Fails to enrol a child or young person in school or permits absenteeism
- Leaves the child home alone
- Is overwhelmed with own problems and puts own needs ahead of the child or young person's needs

Indicators of Physical Abuse

There may be **physical indicators** that a child or young person is being physically abused. Some examples of this are:

- Unexplained bruises, welts, cuts, abrasions
- Unexplained burns
- Unexplained fractures or disclosures

There may also be **behavioural indicators** that child or young person is being physically abused. Some examples of this are:

- Is wary of adults or of a particular individual
- Is violent to animals or other children or young people
- Is dressed inappropriately to hide bruises or other injuries
- May be extremely aggressive or extremely withdrawn
- Cannot recall how the injuries occurred or gives inconsistent explanations

There may be **indicators in adult behaviour** that could indicate physical abuse. Some examples of this are:

- May be vague about the details of the cause of injury and the account of the injury may change from time to time
- May blame the accident on a sibling, friend, relative or the injured child or young person
- Shakes an infant
- Threats or attempts to injure a child or young person
- Is aggressive towards a child in front of others
- May delay in seeking medical attention for a child or young person

Indicators of Sexual Abuse

There may be **physical indicators** that a child or young person is being sexually abused. Some examples of this are:

- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing
- Bruises, lacerations, redness, swelling or bleeding in genital, vaginal or anal area
- Blood in urine or faeces
- Sexually transmitted disease
- Unusual or excessive itching or pain in the genital or anal area

There may also be **behavioural indicators** that child or young person is being sexually abused. Some examples of this are:

- Age-inappropriate sexual play with toys, self, others
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual knowledge
- Comments such as "I've got a secret", or "I don't like (*relative/friend*)"
- Fire lighting by boys
- Fear of certain places e.g. bedroom or bathroom

Some examples of this in older children or young people are:

- Eating disorders
- Promiscuity or prostitution
- Uses younger children in sexual acts
- Tries to make self as unattractive as possible

There may be **indicators in adult behaviour** that could indicate sexual abuse. Some examples of this are:

- May be unusually over-protective of a child or young person
- Is jealous of a child or young person's relationships with peers or other adults or is controlling of the child or young person
- May favour the victim over other children
- Demonstrates physical contact or affection to a child or young person which appears sexual in nature or has sexual overtones