

# THE DADS BOOK



**KIDS NEED DADS**  
ME WHAI PĀPĀ NGĀ TAMARIKI

**WELLINGTON | PŌNEKE**

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# KIA ORA DAD!

## **This resource is for you.**

Whether you're a new dad, been parenting for a while, a stepdad, or a grandad raising moko, this resource is here to help you along the way. Being there, listening, laughing, getting it wrong and trying again - your care, patience, and presence leave a lasting mark on your tamariki.

This isn't about being a perfect dad. It's about noticing what you're doing well, staying open to learning, and looking after yourself. Parenting has changed since you were a kid, and it takes courage to do things differently.

We hope this book provides you with practical ideas, everyday parenting guidance, encouragement for hard days and good ones, and a focus on looking after yourself, with support if you need a hand. Taking care of yourself helps you be the dad your kids can always count on.

Inside you'll find:

- Research-backed tips for parenting
- Ideas you can use right away
- Encouragement
- A support directory so you can get help when you need it

## **Ngā mihi for being here.**

### **You've got this!**

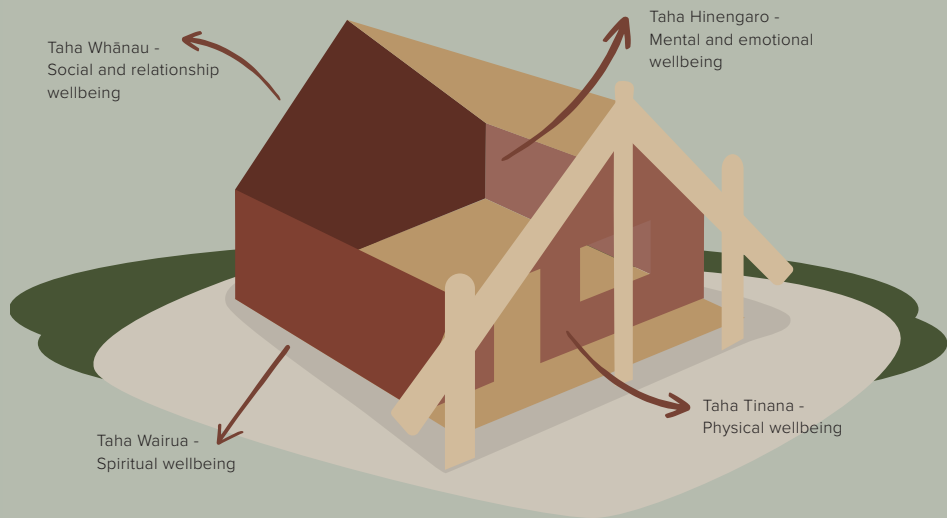
*Your KND team*

# AT THE HEART OF IT ALL, IS YOUR WELLBEING - TAMARIKI NEED DADS WHO LOOK AFTER THEMSELVES TOO

Developed by Tā Mason Durie, Te Whare Tapa Whā is a powerful model of hauora (health and wellbeing). It helps us remember that we need all parts of ourselves - mind, body, whānau and spirit, to stay strong. Like a whare, if one wall is weak, the whole house is compromised.

Reflect on the 'walls' or elements of your hauora and add more support to any that need it. Your tamariki rely on you to be well.

# TE WHARE TAPA WHĀ



Some ideas to strengthen each wall and area of your haurora:

## TAHA HINENGARO - MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

- Learn what supports your mental health - talk to your GP, Google, or ask your mates.
- Notice your feelings, and find healthy ways to process them.
- Reduce stress by checking in with all parts of your hauora.

## TAHA WHĀNAU - SOCIAL AND RELATIONSHIP WELLBEING

- Whānau (tamariki, mates, partners) give strength and connection.
- Kōrero - talking honestly helps your brain process, reduce stress, and plan ahead.
- Eat and spend time with people who uplift you.

## TAHA TINANA - PHYSICAL WELLBEING

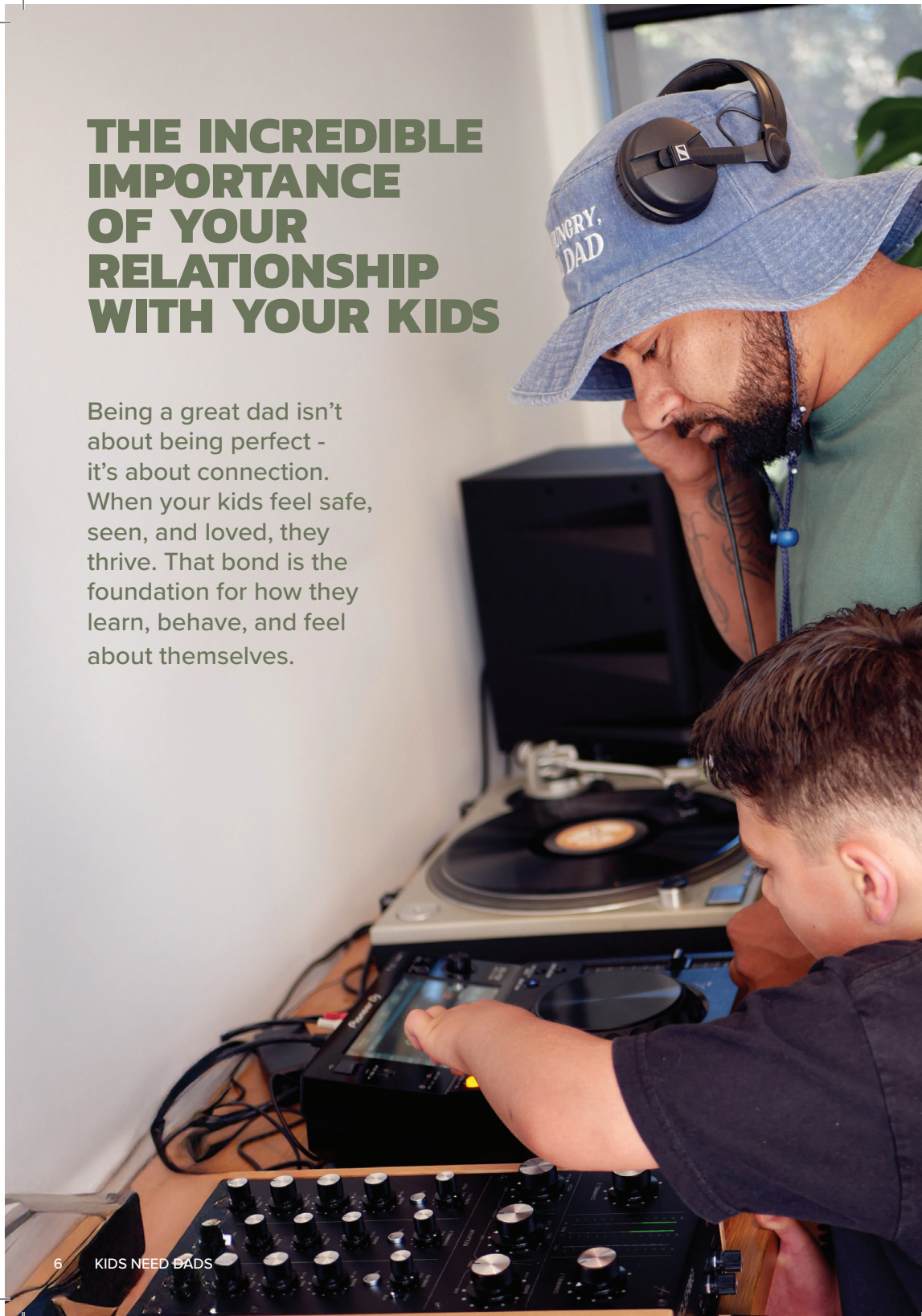
- Move your body every day - walk, stretch, kanikani, kick a ball.
- Drink water throughout the day.
- Create a night routine that helps you (and your whānau) sleep well.

## TAHA WAIRUA - SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

- Look to things that are meaningful for you - whakapapa, te ao Māori, faith, nature, connection...
- Get outside - notice the sights, smells, and sounds of te taiao.
- Pause in the day - take deep breaths, feel te rā (the sun) or the breeze, and reconnect to the now.

# THE INCREDIBLE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR KIDS

Being a great dad isn't about being perfect - it's about connection. When your kids feel safe, seen, and loved, they thrive. That bond is the foundation for how they learn, behave, and feel about themselves.



# BUILDING OR REBUILDING YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR KIDS

Three powerful ways to strengthen your bond: routines, play, and helping with big emotions.

## 1. ROUTINES - THE POWER OF PREDICTABILITY

Kids feel safest when they know what to expect. Simple routines reduce stress, build confidence, and help whānau life flow more smoothly.

Start with three basics:

- Morning routine
- After school, kura, preschool or Kōhanga Reo routine
- Evening and bedtime routine

Each with around 4 simple steps that your kids can manage and feel proud to contribute to, e.g. Mornings - clothes on, kai time, brush teeth, lunchbox in bag so you're ready to go!

## 2. PLAY - MORE THAN JUST FUN

Play strengthens your bond with your kids, boosts their learning and helps them feel loved. Just 15 minutes a day can support better behaviour and connection.

Through play, your actions say: "I'm here. I care."

Try: reading a book, dance, kicking a ball, hide and seek, drawing, crafts, or heading outdoors together. Keep it light and stay in the moment. Small moments = big impact.

Find more play ideas and information on page 8.

## 3. BIG EMOTIONS NEED GENTLE RESPONSES

Meltdowns aren't really about the small thing that triggered them, whether it's a spilled drink, a change in routine, or a toy being taken. The meltdown is your child's way of expressing what they can't put into words - "I feel unsettled," "I'm overwhelmed," "I don't feel in control," "Things feel hard," or any number of things.

One of the most powerful things you can do for your child is help them understand and process their emotions in healthy ways. That's how they learn to calm down, build resilience, and feel safe - even when life feels hard.

Find more information about supporting tamariki emotions on page and teen emotions on page 12.



## BRINGING PLAY TO THE DAY!

When you play with your kids, you're not just having fun - you're building a strong, loving relationship that helps them feel safe, confident, and connected. Through play, kids learn how to communicate and kōrero, take turns, solve problems, try new things, and bounce back when things go wrong. It supports their learning, their friendships, and their sense of who they are.

**LOW OR NO  
COST PLAY  
ACTIVITIES:**

Active/physical play - when you have the energy

Creative play - when it's time to stay in, or at home

Outdoor/nature play - when you want to be outside

Quiet time activities - when you need a wee bit of calm

Fun or silly play - when you want to brighten things up

**MAKE AN OBSTACLE  
COURSE TO RUN, DANCE,  
BIKE, SCOOTER, BALANCE  
OR DANCE THROUGH**

**GET THE BALL OUT**

**PUT THE MUSIC ON  
- SING AND DANCE LIKE  
NO-ONE'S WATCHING**

**HAVE A GOOD OG WHEELBARROW  
RACE - YOU COULD COMBO THIS  
WITH YOUR OBSTACLE COURSE**

**TRY KEEPY-UPPY USING A BALLOON,  
HACKY SACK OR ROLLED SOCK WHEN  
YOU CAN'T FIND THE BALL**

**GET THE LEGO OUT!**

**BAKE SOMETHING  
TOGETHER - SCONES,  
PANCAKES OR PIKELETS**

**CHALK ART THE  
DRIVEWAY, PLAY HOP  
SCOTCH OR 2 OR  
4 SQUARE**

**USE CARDBOARD BOXES TO GET  
CREATIVE - ROCKETS, HOUSES,  
CARS - ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE**

**BUILD A FORT - USE BLANKETS,  
CHAIRS, PEGS - READ, EAT KAI OR  
WATCH A MOVIE SNUGGLED IN**



**LIE ON THE GRASS  
AND NOTICE SHAPES  
IN THE CLOUDS**

**HEAD TO THE BEACH,  
RIVER OR OFF ON A WALK**

**HAVE A PICNIC  
ON THE LAWN**

**EXPLORE LOCAL PLAYGROUNDS  
- FIND YOUR FAVOURITES**

**CREATE A NATURE HUNT LIKE  
- HUNT FOR:**

Something red  
Something kōwhai  
(yellow)

Something spiky  
Something creepy  
4 manu (birds)

**READ A BOOK TOGETHER**

**LET YOUR KIDS TEACH  
YOU A TRICK - FROM  
SCHOOL OR ONLINE**

**PAINT, DRAW, COLOUR,  
STICK - LEAVES MAKE  
FOR GREAT ART WORK  
PROJECTS**

**DO PUZZLES -  
MAKE YOUR OWN BY CUTTING UP  
ARTWORK OR MAGAZINE PICTURES**

**TRY SOME YOGA, STRETCHING  
TUMMY BREATHING OR MEDITATION  
FOLLOWING AN ONLINE TUTORIAL**

**TELL A SILLY STORY  
TOGETHER USING ONLY  
ANIMAL NOISES**

**PLAY INDOOR TENNIS -  
USE A BALLOON AND  
SPATULAS**

**SHOW YOUR TALENTS  
- CREATE A DANCE,  
A PLAY OR KARAOKE**

**INVENT A SECRET HANDSHAKE  
- THIS CAN BE USED AS PART OF  
YOUR BEDTIME OR GOODBYE RITUALS**

**PLAY SOME OG FAVOURITES  
- DUCK DUCK GOOSE, SIMON SAYS,  
TAG, HIDE N SEEK, CHARADES**

# BIG EMOTIONS NEED GENTLE RESPONSES

Kids and teens can have big emotions that they don't yet know how to express. What looks like a meltdown over something small is often about feeling unsettled or overwhelmed. Your calm response helps them feel safe and learn to manage their emotions.



## HELP THEM NAME IT

Instead of shutting feelings down (“You’re fine”), try naming the emotions:

“That didn’t go how you wanted - you’re really frustrated, aye?”

This builds their emotional language and supports them to calm by helping their brain make sense of what they’re feeling - processing their emotions.

## BE THEIR CALM

When your child or teen is upset, they need your steady presence - even though it’s hard to keep your cool sometimes, it’s important that you do.

“I can see you’re angry. I’m here. You’re safe.”

Stay close and calm, even when they’re yelling or lashing out. That’s how they learn to return to calm too.

## TEACH REGULATION TOOLS

Support your child or teen to find calming tools that work for them. Talk about these when you’re all relaxed, and practice often (e.g. at bedtime or during play).

Breathing exercises are a must-have - tummy breathing supports us all to calm down. Actively relaxing - Some kids (and adults) need to be active to work through big emotions. Try jumping or stomping emotions out

Mindfulness strategies - becoming very ‘present’ is a great way to engage the full use of our brain in order to start to calm down. Some options are:

Name 5 things you can see – This brings us back to the present moment

Feeling your feet on the floor, in your shoes, in your socks - this helps to ground us.

Having a calm place to go - some kids like to have a calm spot where they can head to when they want to settle their emotions. Have some fun creating this - some cushions, a book, fidget spinners, reminders to practice their tummy breathing... Note: this is not a “naughty” spot - it’s a safe space to reset.

## CONNECT DAILY

Kids regulate better when they feel connected, so be sure to spend at least 15 minutes each day playing. As well as this practice listening and chatting together, sit together to eat kai as much as possible and have some rules about screen use - theirs and yours too!

## TALK ABOUT FEELINGS OFTEN

You can help your child or teen understand emotions and build emotional language just by chatting about your own or commenting on books or shows you’re watching:

“I felt tired today. What about you?”

“She looks sad aye? I wonder what could help?”

**REMEMBER:** You’re not trying to raise kids who never get upset. You’re raising tamariki who know that emotions are normal, and what to do when they show up.

That’s powerful stuff - lifelong skills and learning.



## **CO-PARENTING: KEEPING IT ALL ABOUT YOUR KIDS**

Co-parenting can be hard, especially when the relationship with your co-parent is strained. But your kids are at the heart, and that's where your focus needs to stay.



### **SPEAK KINDLY**

Kids love both their parents. Avoid saying negative things about their other parents in front of them - it protects their wellbeing and strengthens your bond with them.

### **AIM FOR CONSISTENCY**

Kids thrive on rhythm and predictability. Try to agree on a few basics across homes:

- Bedtimes
- Healthy kai
- Screen time limits

It doesn't need to be exact - just "close enough."

### **KEEP COMMUNICATION CHILD-FOCUSED**

Even if it's tough, keep messages calm, clear and about your tamariki.

Stick to facts and logistics, like:

"Ari's toe looks infected, he's all good but just taking him to the dr."

"Poppy needs a practice ball for soccer - does she have one?"

Text is usually best or use a co-parenting app. Pause before replying if emotions run high.

### **AVOID PUTTING TAMARIKI IN THE MIDDLE**

- Don't send messages through them
- Don't ask them to choose sides
- Get support if you're struggling

### **TWO HOMES CAN STILL BE ONE TEAM FOR YOUR TAMARIKI.**

# NEW BEGINNINGS: WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Becoming a dad - whether it's your first time, or you're stepping into parenting with fresh eyes - is massive. Life shifts. Priorities change. This is a chance to really think about who you want to be as a parent, and what matters most.

If your partner is pregnant, think hard about how you want to show up for them. Work together on building a safe, loving whānau for your baby to grow and thrive. Choose your whānau values together.

Your values become the roots or foundations of your parenting. Write them down, make a poster - come back to them when things feel messy.



# START WITH YOUR VALUES

## WHAT KIND OF DAD DO YOU WANT TO BE?

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## HOW DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED?

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## WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES?

A quick google search will offer loads of different values

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Your values, or the shared values you have with your partner provide a solid place to grow in positive ways. And if you're co-parenting, choose the values that will support you to parent at your best.

# MĀTAURANGA AND TŪPUNA PARENTING: DEEP ROOTS, GENTLE WAYS

For Māori, or those raising tamariki Māori, parenting is a powerful time to reconnect with whakapapa and indigenous wisdom.

Tūpuna parenting is grounded in gentleness, respect and closeness. Pēpi are tapu, born with mana, carried close, and never physically punished. Tamariki learned through curiosity, guided by loving, present adults. We know this through the words and sentiment of whakataukī, waiata, oriori and other generational wisdom and by studying the observations from early colonial settlers.

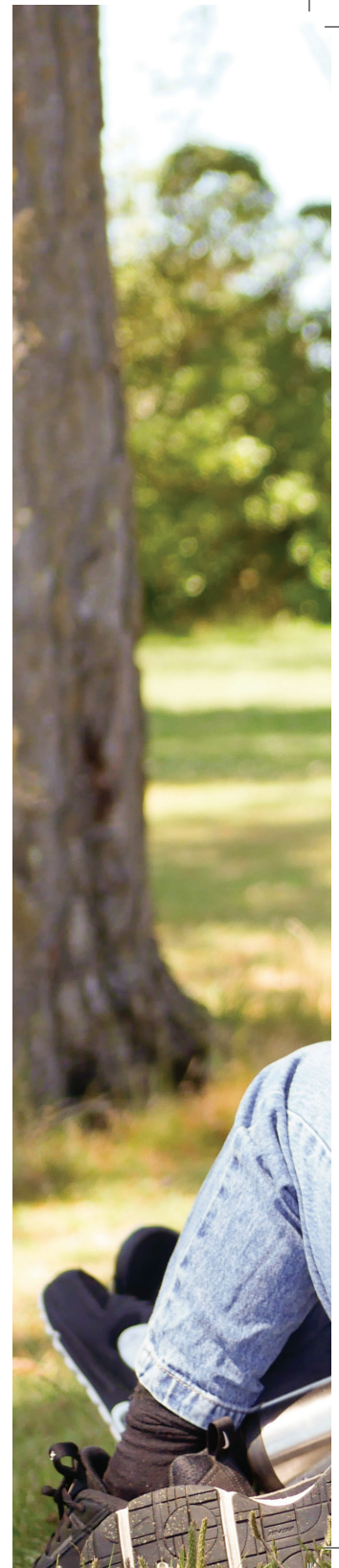
## You might explore:

- Kōrero with whānau or elders about your whakapapa and parenting traditions
- Practices like whenua burial, whānau involvement at birth, intentional naming
- Learning waiata, karakia, and te reo Māori - not as extras, but anchors

## If this interests you, check out trusted sources like:

- Tūpuna Parenting: [www.tupunaparenting.maori.nz](http://www.tupunaparenting.maori.nz)
- The mahi of Tā Mason Durie, Te Puni Kōkiri, and Brainwave Trust

When tamariki are connected to their culture - through language, whakapapa, traditions and community - this supports them to thrive. Culture builds identity, belonging, and resilience, and acts as a powerful protector against life's adversities.





# MAKING GOALS THAT STICK WITH SMART STEPS!

Do you have some goals you'd like to achieve but don't know where to start? A goal without a plan is really just a wish, and that can leave you feeling stuck or frustrated.

## SMART STANDS FOR:

### SPECIFIC

What exactly do you want to achieve?

### MEASURABLE

How will you track your progress?

### ACHIEVABLE

Is it realistic for you right now?

### RELEVANT

Does it matter to you and your family?

### TIME-BOUND

When will you do it by?

SMART goals give you a framework to turn those wishes into real, achievable steps. Instead of vague intentions like "I'll spend more time with my kids" or "I want to get fitter," SMART goals help you get clear on what you want to do, how you'll do it, and when.

For example, instead of saying "I'll be more present with my kids," you could make it SMART: "I'll play a board game with my child every Sunday afternoon for the next four weeks."

SMART goals make things feel more doable and motivating, while giving you a sense of progress you can actually see. They're a simple way to create change that lasts - in your wellbeing, in your parenting, and in your everyday life.

## REFLECTION

A goal I have:

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What's one small step I can take today towards that goal?

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# UNHEALTHY BEHAVIOUR AND ADDICTION

Addiction can take many forms - alcohol, drugs, work, sex, or porn. It's often a way people try to cope with stress, pain, or difficult emotions. But addiction affects your ability to be the dad you want to be.

## HOW IT IMPACTS PARENTING:

- **Emotional distance** - harder to connect with your tamariki
- **Inconsistent routines** - mealtimes, bedtimes, and play can fall away
- **Safety risks** - tamariki may see or experience unsafe things
- **Poor communication** - secrets and stress build up
- **Negative role-modelling** - kids learn and normalise what we do

## BEING A GOOD DAD, DESPITE ADDICTION

Being a good dad isn't about being perfect, it's about being present, safe, and loving.

Taking honest steps toward change builds trust and connection again.

Use the SMART goal guide on page 22 to support your first steps.

You'll find a list of support services in the centre of this pukapuka.

**You're not alone. There is help.**

*“Each day's a new day. Keep trying, keep stepping up, and remember - it's not just about you, it's about your kids. Keep your focus on them.”*

- STORM, PŌNEKE



*“Even from a distance, I can still show up with love.”*

- BEN, ŌTAUTAHI

## **WHEN YOU'RE NOT WITH YOUR KIDS**

There are times when being with your kids just isn't possible, but that doesn't mean you stop being their dad.

**LOOK FOR WAYS TO CONNECT WITH YOUR TAMARIKI, THESE CAN INCLUDE:**

- **Writing letters or drawing pictures** - even a few lines can be a real treasure
- **Record voice notes** - if possible ask co-parents or caregivers to record a message from you while you're on the phone and share this with tamariki. This can act as a comforting reminder of you
- **Record songs, karakia, books or tell a pūrākau (story)** - ask co-parents or caregivers to record these while on the phone or online and incorporate them into your tamariki routines such as bedtime
- **Make a special memory album or box** - write down or draw pictures of your memories of your kids. Store special shells or stones you've collected together or have made you think of them - gift this to them when you reconnect

**IF YOU CAN, CONNECT MORE REGULARLY OVER THE PHONE OR ONLINE**

Kids love this time to connect with you - they want your full attention and this to be a shared experience, rather than be bombarded with questions about school or if they're helping around the house!

Being child-led or tamariki-centred is a really important way to keep your contact positive. Try to:

**Ask open questions:**

*"What was the best part of your day?" or "Tell me about your day."*

**Reflect on what they say:**

*"That sounds fun!" or "That must've been tricky."*

**Share a little about yourself too:**

*"I had a mean apple today. It reminded me of that time you and I..."*

**Share memories:**

*"I was thinking about when we went to the river..."*

**Find shared moments:**

*"The stars are really bright - I'll look up to them at 7, maybe you can too - we can make a wish together!"*

**These small things help tamariki feel safe and connected. It reminds them that you're their dad, and part of their world.**

**Your effort matters. And your kids will remember.**



## **KEEPING THEM SAFE FROM HARM**

Family violence happens across all communities, but Aotearoa has one of the highest rates in the OECD. Research shows around 70% of family violence happens in homes where children live (Brainwave Trust, 2021; Cram, 2014).

## THE IMPACT ON KIDS

It's important not to minimise family violence because of the significant impact it has on kids - it can last their lifetime. They are affected by family violence or the threat of family violence, even when they're not the direct target. The definition of family violence includes kids who are:

- Seeing it happen
- Hearing it happen
- Trying to intervene
- Or living with its effects, like stress, fear, or disrupted routines

Of particular concern is the impact on kids' brains - brain development can be impaired in response to the stress they are placed in while they live in a home where there is family violence. This can detrimentally affect their:

- Ability to learn and concentrate
- Mental health e.g. anxiety or depression
- Sleeping and eating habits
- Ability to trust and maintain friendships

## SEEING THE FEAR IN THEIR EYES AND THE WORRY WHEN VOICES RISE SHOWS HOW MUCH CHILDREN NEED SAFETY AND CALM.

The sooner violence is recognised and addressed, the better the outcome for kids. Things that support recovery include:

- Stable, loving relationships with whānau who are safe and kind
- Cultural connection - whakapapa, language, customs, song, dance
- Strong role models who show what respectful relationships look like
- Skilled professional support, when needed

If family violence is part of your story

- Acknowledge it - facing it honestly is a powerful first step
- Get help - talk to someone you trust, or contact a support service - you'll find a list in the centre of this book
- Prioritise your kid's safety and healing. Rebuilding trust takes time, but it is possible.

If family violence has been part of your story, that doesn't mean it has to define your future. You can break the cycle. Support is out there, and change is possible.

# WHAT DOES A LOVING AND SAFE RELATIONSHIP LOOK LIKE?

A healthy relationship is built on respect, trust, open communication and shared responsibilities. In a healthy relationship both parties feel safe, valued and able to be themselves, without fear.

The Equality Wheel over the page outlines behaviours seen in positive relationships and includes:

- No violence present at all
- Respect - listening, valuing opinions and treating each other with kindness
- Trust and support - supporting each other's goals and respecting each other's boundaries
- Honesty and accountability - owning mistakes, communicating truthfully
- Responsible parenting - sharing parenting responsibilities with care and mutual respect
- Making decisions together, sharing tasks fully including financial
- Being able to negotiate and be fair - a commitment to finding solutions that work for both people



# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP 'EQUALITY WHEEL'



Relationships that model these safe, respectful behaviours are where tamariki thrive.

Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs. (n.d.). Equality wheel.  
<https://www.theduluthmodel.org>

# CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR AND WHAT TO DO

It can be helpful to think about your kid's behaviour as their communication. So that yelling, hitting out, breaking things, not listening and backchat are meaningful messages that you need to spend some time on, when you're calm, decoding.



## BEHAVIOUR IS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG

Icebergs can sometimes be seen above the water (tips of the icebergs) but underneath is a much larger ice mass. The challenging behaviour you're seeing is the iceberg tip, but it's being caused by something deeper and bigger. A checklist of what might be contributing could include:

### CHECKLIST

- Tiredness or hunger
- Too much noise or stimulation
- Feeling left out, rejected or unseen
- Big feelings that felt unmanageable and got out of control like embarrassment or disappointment
- Change of stress at home or school
- Needing connection
- Feeling unsafe or confused
- Past trauma being triggered
- Needing to feel acknowledged
- Feeling like things are too out of control - seeking some autonomy again

*Based on the general "iceberg" metaphor commonly used in psychology and education. Adapted by KIND, 2025.*

## **THIS IS ALL ABOUT BEING CURIOUS, NOT FURIOUS!**

Reflecting on what's contributing to your child's behaviour is a great starting point in being better at supporting them. If your child is old enough, in a calm moment you might ask:

"You know how you threw my book yesterday because you were really angry, I wonder if that was because..."

Come to this calmly, non judgementally and look to understand what was going on for them. Come up with a plan together.

"I get it. I also wonder if next time we try something new to support you like - a big awahi (cuddle) on the couch? Or running around outside together?"

Acknowledge that you're learning too, and if you lost your cool, apologise for this and commit to doing better.

## **IF CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IS HAPPENING AT PRESCHOOL OR KURA - WE CAN ADVOCATE FOR OUR KIDS**

We can feel embarrassed hearing that our child is struggling at school or preschool. You might feel defensive, judged, or unsure what to do next.

But here's the thing: the best support for your kids happens when you work with their teachers, as a team.

Remember too, behaviour is just your kids way of saying,

"Something's not working for me here."

It could be tiredness, sensory overload, feeling different from other kids, change at home, or needing more support socially or emotionally.



*“When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it’s our job to share our calm, not join their chaos.”*

- L.R. KNOST

### **TIPS FOR WORKING WITH YOUR CHILD’S SCHOOL OR PRESCHOOL**

- Come to things curiously - “What have you noticed? What seems to trigger the behaviour?”
- Share insights from home - You might see patterns, strengths, or stressors that they don’t
- Be honest and open - if there’s something going on at home that could be affecting your tamariki, it helps to share this (in confidence)
- Work as a team - ask what strategies they’re trying and share about what works at home
- Keep your child at the centre - you all want them to be their best

Schools have access to people and resources to support your child or teen, and they come with great ideas and are excellent advocates if additional support is needed e.g. learning support, neuro-diversity assessments, etc.

He waka eke noa – we are all in this together.



# PARENTING TEENAGERS: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Teenagers are often described as confusing, moody, or hard to reach, but behind the slammed doors and one-word answers is a young person going through one of the most intense periods of growth and change in their life. Parenting teens can be challenging when we don't fully understand their development, and its impact. With a little understanding it's much easier to enjoy our teenagers, and notice that they're great people to hang out with and learn from.



## **UNDERSTANDING THE CHANGES OF THE TEENAGE BRAIN**

During adolescence, the brain goes through massive development, much like it does from newborn to pre-school change, but not many of us are aware of this. At this time our teen's brain is pruning away unused connections and strengthening those that are used most. The emotional centre of the brains fully active and very sensitive, while the part of the brain responsible for rational thinking, planning, and self-control - is still developing.

This means teens may feel things more intensely, take more risks, and struggle to think things through before acting. It doesn't mean they're broken or irresponsible, it means they are learning and may need support with planning, time management and emotional care. And for us, we need to come to this part of our parenting with lots of empathy.

## **THE IMPORTANT ROLE YOU STILL PLAY**

Even when our teens roll their eyes or shrug you off, they still need their parents and caregivers. In fact, they need you just as much as they did when they were small - they just need you differently.

Teens are wired for independence, but they're also wired for connection. They need safe adults who stay steady when things feel chaotic. Your calm presence helps regulate their emotions, your belief in them shapes their self-worth, and your boundaries give them a sense of safety - even when they protest.

Small, regular acts of connection matter more buying them new things! Showing interest in their world - even if it's just checking in with them over kai times at the end of the day, head to their netball or soccer game (whatever they're up to), and chatting to them as you ferry them around - are signals that you're there, and you care.

# NAVIGATING THE TRICKY STUFF

Teen years can bring some challenging behaviours - mood swings, risk-taking, defiance, withdrawal, and it can feel personal, but it's not. Often, these tricky behaviours are signs of something going on beneath the surface: big emotions they don't know how to express, social pressures, school stress, needing your time while also needing to be independent and developing their sense of who they are. This can all be really confusing.



So how do we respond in a way that keeps us close, while still holding boundaries to keep them safe?

Here are five powerful ways to show up during the messy moments for your teen:

### **STAY STEADY, NOT REACTIVE**

When your teen's emotions are big, they need you to be grounded. Take a breath, pause before responding, and speak calmly. Your steadiness helps calm their storm.

### **GET CURIOUS, NOT FURIOUS**

Try to understand what's behind the behaviour instead of focusing only on the behaviour itself. Ask yourself: What might this be about? What are they trying to tell me without words? Gently chat with them about what you're noticing, and wondering. "I wonder if you're feeling worried about your test tomorrow? I'm here if you want to talk, or if you need some quiet time, I can bring you a milo."

### **HOLD BOUNDARIES WITH KINDNESS**

Teens need limits - it helps them feel safe. But the way we hold those limits matters. Stay firm but warm: "I hear you're upset, but this rule is important because it keeps you safe." It's okay to renegotiate a boundary too - this lets your teen know you're listening to them, but the new limits still need to keep them safe.

### **DON'T LET THE DOOR CLOSE**

When they pull away, keep the connection alive in small ways - a quick check-in, a shared joke, an offer to drop them somewhere. Let them know you're always there, even in silence, and when things are calm, talk about ways to keep things positive - what can they say next time so you have a better understanding, or what's a better way for you to respond?

### **REPAIR WHEN THINGS GO WRONG**

You won't always get it right, and that's okay. What matters most is coming back together afterwards: "I got frustrated earlier and I'm sorry. Can we try again?"



## **STEP-PARENTING: BUILDING SOMETHING NEW**

Being a stepdad can be one of the hardest, and most important, roles you'll ever take on. You're stepping into a whānau with its own history, routines, and relationships, and trying to find your place in a way that feels respectful, steady, and real.

There's no one-size-fits-all approach. Some kids might warm to you quickly. Others might keep you at arm's length for a long time. Some days you might feel like you're part of things, and other days you may feel like a complete outsider.

This is all pretty normal, and it doesn't mean you're failing. It means you're human, and doing something brave.

Here are five ways to navigate step-parenting with patience, respect, and aroha:

### **START SLOW AND EARN TRUST**

Relationships take time, especially when there's grief, loyalty, or change involved. Focus on building trust rather than being a 'parent.' Just being there matters more than taking charge.

### **BACK THEIR BOND WITH THEIR OTHER PARENT**

Even if things are complicated or out of sorts with their biological parents, try not to speak badly about them. Tamariki need permission to love both their parents, and your support here builds huge trust.

### **BE A STEADY ADULT, NOT A REPLACEMENT PARENT**

You don't need to be "just like their dad" - you bring something unique. Your job is to be a safe, kind, reliable adult in their life. That's enough. More than enough.

### **TEAM UP WITH YOUR PARTNER BEHIND THE SCENES**

Talk privately with your partner about rules, routines, and how to back each other. That way, your role feels clearer, and the tamariki don't feel caught in the middle.

### **NOTICE THE GOOD - EVEN IF IT'S SMALL**

Connection often grows in quiet moments. A shared laugh. A ride to practice. A quick "how was your day?" You might not get thanks, but they notice more than they show.



# SUPPORTING DADS, STRENGTHENING FAMILIES



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## **BE PART OF WHAT COMES NEXT**

This book was created to strengthen the wellbeing of tamariki by supporting the adults who guide them. Every idea in these pages is shaped by research, real whānau stories and the understanding that safe, connected relationships between parents and their tamariki build strong, positive lives.

If this mahi speaks to you, we'd love you to stay connected. Share the book, explore our resources, or join our growing community. And if you're able, a koha or donation helps us to continue creating tools that uplift families across Aotearoa. Your support, in any form, truly matters.



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