



Kelston Dental Care

Children's Action Plan: Identifying, Supporting and Protecting Vulnerable Children

Summary

Ensuring the wellbeing and safety of children, including the prevention of child abuse or maltreatment, is a paramount goal of Kelston Dental Care.

As a dental healthcare provider, we regularly interact with children and young people. We recognise our responsibility to:

- Identify signs of possible abuse or neglect
- Respond appropriately to concerns
- Report suspected abuse in accordance with New Zealand law
- Support vulnerable children and their families

The process for responding to a concern about a child is outlined in Section 10 of this policy.

The interests of the child will be the paramount consideration in any action taken in response to suspected abuse or neglect.

Kelston Dental Care commits to supporting:

- Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children
- New Zealand Police

We will report suspected abuse or neglect as per the procedures in this policy.

Designated Person for Child Protection (DPCP)

Name: Dr Renalda Raniga

Role: Designated Person for Child Protection

The DPCP is responsible for:

- Maintaining and reviewing this policy annually
- Supporting staff who raise concerns
- Liaising with Oranga Tamariki and Police
- Ensuring training requirements are met

Staff will not assume responsibility beyond their training or competence. Kelston Dental Care commits to providing appropriate training.

Policy Author: Dr Renalda Raniga

Date Created: 01 March 2026

Next Review Date: 01 March 2029

This policy is reviewed annually and formally updated every 3 years.

This policy is published on our website at _____. A digital copy is also available in the practice manual and staff room. Address: 4 Archibald road, Kelston, Auckland 0600.

1. Purpose, Scope and Principles

This policy supports staff to respond appropriately to potential child protection concerns, including suspected abuse or neglect.

It applies to:

- Dentists
- Dental assistants
- Oral health therapists
- Reception and administration staff
- Contractors
- Students and volunteers

This policy applies to all children under 17 years encountered in our practice, including:

- Patients
- Siblings accompanying patients
- Children of adult patients

Contact details for agencies and services in our community are provided as an appendix to this policy.

Our Principles

Kelston Dental Care recognises that:

- The safety and wellbeing of the child is paramount
- Exposure to family violence is a form of child abuse
- Early intervention reduces harm
- Not all vulnerable children require statutory intervention
- We must work collaboratively with community agencies

We aim to maintain strong working relationships with child protection agencies and local support services.

2. Definitions

Child – Any person under 17 years of age who is not married or in a civil union.

Child protection – Activities to ensure children are safe where abuse or neglect is suspected or identified.

Disclosure – Information shared by a child, caregiver or third party about abuse or neglect.

Physical Abuse – Non-accidental physical harm (e.g., bruising, fractures, burns, strangulation).

Sexual Abuse – Contact or non-contact sexual activity involving a child.

Emotional Abuse – Persistent behaviour that harms a child’s emotional wellbeing (e.g., humiliation, threats, exposure to violence).

Neglect – Failure to meet basic needs (physical, emotional, supervisory, medical, educational).

3. Recruitment and Safety Checking

As an organisation funded by Health NZ, Kelston Dental Care complies with the Vulnerable Children Act 2014. All staff working with children undergo safety checking including:

- Identity verification
- Police vetting
- Reference checks
- Interview process

We maintain a workforce restriction process in accordance with the Act.

4. Training

Kelston Dental Care commits to:

- Including child protection in staff induction.
- Providing refresher training every 3 years
- Training staff to recognise oral indicators of abuse and neglect
- Educating staff about reporting obligations

Dental professionals are uniquely positioned to identify:

- Facial bruising inconsistent with explanation
 - Torn labial frenum in non-ambulatory children
 - Untreated dental decay indicating possible medical neglect
 - Repeated missed appointments
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5. Identifying Child Abuse and Neglect

Every situation is different. Staff must consider:

- The child's overall presentation
- Behaviour
- Developmental stage
- Caregiver interactions

Staff must not act alone and should consult the DPCP.

Signs of Possible Abuse

Physical Indicators

- Unexplained facial bruising
- Burns
- Bite marks
- Injuries inconsistent with explanation
- Multiple injuries in various healing stages

Behavioural Indicators

- Fear of a particular adult
- Flinching during examination
- Age-inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Extreme withdrawal or aggression

Indicators of Neglect

- Poor hygiene
- Severe untreated dental disease
- Chronic missed appointments
- Inappropriate clothing
- Developmental delays

Family Violence Indicators

- Child present during violence against adult

- Child used as "weapon" in adult conflict
 - High co-occurrence with physical abuse
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6. Responding to Concerns

Kelston Dental Care will:

- Act on recommendations from Oranga Tamariki and Police
- Not inform caregivers before consulting authorities if doing so may place the child at risk
- Maintain a confidential child protection register separate from clinical notes

Staff involved in cases will be offered support.

7. Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Under sections 15 and 16 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989:

Any person who believes a child has been harmed or is at risk may report concerns to Oranga Tamariki or Police. If done in good faith, they are legally protected.

Information may be shared:

- With the DPCP
- With Oranga Tamariki
- With NZ Police
- Where there is serious risk to health or safety

All records must comply with Privacy Act and Health Information Privacy Code requirements.

Staff who report concerns in good faith are protected from civil, criminal or disciplinary proceedings under sections 15 and 16 of the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989.

8. Child-Safe Practice Guidelines (Dental Setting)

To maintain child safety:

- Clinical rooms should remain open or visible wherever possible, an open door policy for all spaces should be used (this excludes toilets)
- Parents/caregivers are encouraged to remain present during treatment (unless clinically inappropriate)
- Staff avoid unnecessary one-to-one isolation
- Physical contact must always be clinically justified and explained
- Consent must be obtained for all procedures
- Staff must not transport children unless in emergency situations

Visitors and contractors must be supervised.

9. If a Child Discloses Abuse

If the child is distressed:

- Stay calm
- Listen without interruption
- Reassure the child
- Use open-ended prompts: “What happened next?”
- Do not promise confidentiality

If not in immediate danger:

- Re-engage child in normal activity
- Record disclosure immediately

If in immediate danger:

- Contact Police immediately (111)
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10. Recording Requirements

Document:

- Exact words spoken
- Date, time, location
- Observations
- Names of relevant staff
- Actions taken

Records must be factual, objective and confidential.

11. Decision-Making and Reporting Process

Step 1

Discuss concern with the DPCP immediately.

Step 2

If reasonable belief of abuse exists:

Notify:

Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children

Phone: 0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459)

Or contact:

New Zealand Police

Emergency: 111

Step 3

Follow advice from statutory agencies.

12. Allegations Against Staff

All allegations against staff must be escalated to management immediately.

Management will:

- Ensure immediate child safety
- Consult Oranga Tamariki or Police
- Follow employment law obligations
- Offer the staff member opportunity for representation
- Consider removal from duties during investigation

Kelston Dental Care will not use 'settlement agreements' where these are contrary to a culture of child protection. Some settlement agreements allow a member of staff to agree to resign provided that no disciplinary action is taken, and a future reference is agreed. Where the conduct at issue concerned the safety or wellbeing of a child, use of such agreements is contrary to a culture of child protection

13. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Kelston Dental Care commits to:

- Annual policy review
 - Ongoing staff training (next scheduled: _____)
 - Collaboration with community services
 - Creating a culture where child safety is everyone's responsibility
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14. Related Documentation

- Health and Safety Policy
- Privacy Policy and Health Information Privacy Code Compliance
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Recruitment and Induction Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Professional Development Policy

Appendix: Local Support Services

Kelston Dental Care — Community Referral Contacts

The following services are available to support vulnerable children and families/whānau in our community. Staff should consult with the Designated Person for Child Protection before making referrals.

Support Services Contact Information

Service	Purpose	Contact Details
Oranga Tamariki - Ministry for Children	Statutory child protection services	Phone: 0508 FAMILY (0508 326 459) Email: contact@ot.govt.nz General mailing address: Oranga Tamariki National Office, PO Box 546, Wellington, New Zealand
New Zealand Police	Immediate danger, criminal matters	Emergency: 111 Non-emergency: 105
Strengthening Families	Multi-agency coordination for families with complex needs	Phone: 0508 326 459
Whanau Ora	Whanau-centred support and navigation	Phone: 0800 875 285 Email: tpk.tamaki-makaurau@tpk.govt.nz
Local Family/Whanau Counselling	Counselling and therapy services	Phone: 0508 326 459 Email: contact@ot.govt.nz
Budget Services - Work and Income	Financial support and advice	Phone: 0800 559 009
Mental Health Services	Adult and child mental health support	Crisis: 1737 (free text or call)
Social Workers in Schools (SWiS)	School-based social work support	Phone: 0508 326 459 Email: contact@ot.govt.nz