



**Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga**
Ministry of Education

Aramai He Tētēkura

Arise our Future Generations

A guide to understanding
distress and minimising the
use of physical restraint



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minimising the use of physical restraint
February 2023

Acknowledgements

These guidelines are the result of a collective effort from ākonga, parents, caregivers, whānau, the disability and school sectors and experts. Physical restraint is a challenging topic for schools and whānau to navigate. We thank you for your respectful and honest discussions, perspectives and advice. Your contributions have been highly valued and have helped shape the content of these guidelines.

To the members of the Physical Restraint Advisory Group and the Youth Advisory Group, thank you for giving us your time, sharing your passion, knowledge, and perspectives, and coming together to navigate the complexities.

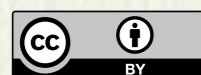
To those who provided feedback through our consultation process, thank you for your thoughtful and detailed submissions.

To those ākonga and whānau who were interviewed to inform these guidelines, thank you for your honesty and openness.

And thank you to those who shared their talents, expertise and cultural guidance that bring life and meaning to these guidelines.

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Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government



Karakia

Piki mai taku manu
Kake mai taku manu
Rere ki uta
Rere ki tai
Mātaitia rā ngā taonga a Tāne
Kia atawhaitia, kia tau
Kia whakawhenuatia ai
Whākina mai te ara
Kia puta ko tētēkura
Ki te whai ao
Ki te ao mārama
Tūturu whakamaua, kia tina
Haumi e, hui e, tāiki e!

Ascend my manu
Rise up my manu
Soar inland
Fly to the oceans
Watch over the taonga of Tāne
To respond with care
To settle and restore
Showing forth the pathway
For our children to emerge
From the realm of potential
Into fulfilment and growth
Hold fast, hold true
Unify, gather, resolve together

How to use our karakia

This karakia was composed by Tūrei-Hāmiora Ormsby (Ngāti Kahungunu) and Johnson McKay (Ngāti Rongomaiwahine, Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Mahuta).

Please use it freely as you watch over, respond to and care for ākonga.

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Rārangi kupu

Glossary

ākonga	student
aratohu	guidelines
atawhaitia	respond with care
mātāpono	principles
kaiako	teacher
kaiāwhina	support person
karakia	chant or prayer to set intention
kaumātua	elder, a person of status within a whānau
mana	intrinsic value and potential passed down inherently through whakapapa
mātaitia	watch and observe
tamariki	children
tangata	people

tangata whenua	people of the land, indigenous people
tapu	sacredness maintained through protective practices
te ao Māori	the Māori world including cultural practices, protocol, principles and perspectives
te reo Māori	Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	the Treaty of Waitangi
waiata	song
whakamana	give authority or effect to, to endorse or empower
whakapapa	genealogical connections to people, places and cultural values
whakawhanaungatanga	the process of establishing relationships
whakawhenuatia	restore and ground
whānau	extended family, family group
whanaungatanga	relationships, kinship, sense of family connection



“Take care of our children. Take care of what they hear, take care of what they see, take care of what they feel. For how the children grow, so will be the shape of Aotearoa.”

Dame Whina Cooper

Aramai He Tētēkura

Poipoia te pua atua
Ranea te rau o Tāne
He Pakiakia e tū ai
Kia taurite te tētēkura
E tipu, e rea
Tai atu ki te rangi

Nurture the potential of each student
Make abundant the interlocking branches
And uphold the strengthening roots
Adapted to each student's unique needs
To grow and develop
To their highest potential

Foreword

Tēnā koutou katoa, Mālō e lelei, Tālofa lava, Kia orana, Taloha ni, Fakalofa lahi atu, Ni sa bula vinaka, Namaste, Ni hao and warm greetings.

Physical restraint causes harm and hurt and is used disproportionately on ākonga Māori, disabled ākonga and younger ākonga.

These guidelines outline the legislation and provide practical approaches to embed positive environments and experiences in all school settings.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the Physical Restraint Advisory Group for the energy and commitment they brought to this mahi. The Group comprised parents, principals, disability and education sector representatives, teacher unions, peak bodies and the Teaching Council.

I'd also like to thank the hundreds of New Zealanders who made a submission, and the ākonga and whānau who took part in the research to inform this work. The feedback and information we received has been invaluable in shaping these guidelines.

The release of these guidelines is being supported with online training modules, webinars and resources for teachers and principals. These will be available in 2023 and 2024.

All existing support and training will continue to be available, including support for schools and kura from their local Te Mahau Office of Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga.

Ngā mihi nui

Iona Holsted

Te Tumu Whakarae mō te Mātauranga/
Secretary for Education

Introduction

Every ākonga has tapu, mana and potential. Ākonga are empowered when their uniqueness and diversity is nurtured and valued. We want our schools to be a place where all ākonga learn and grow. This happens when school communities respect and strengthen everyone's potential.

About these guidelines

These guidelines are primarily for school boards, leaders and staff but will also be useful for, and protect the interests of ākonga, parents, whānau and caregivers.

The guidelines outline the new legislation about physical restraint and physical contact in schools.

They also set out a practical approach to recognise and understand distress, focusing on minimising the use of physical restraint in schools. This includes eliminating the use of unjustified physical restraint.

The guidelines intend to complement rather than replace existing behaviour frameworks and initiatives available in schools. They should be read alongside the Education (Physical Restraint) Rules 2023.

We've called these guidelines Aramai He Tētēkura

We have called these guidelines Aramai He Tētēkura. This is a reference to a developing plant as it reaches upwards towards the light, seeking growth and knowledge.

A tētēkura is also a brave warrior, a chief and leader. The tētēkura is therefore an expression of the diversity and potential of ākonga and how they deserve to achieve their full potential and be our nation's future nurturers and protectors.

The young plant is rooted in the whenua, sustained, and supported by the individual rights that protect them. They are surrounded and supported by the many trees of the forest who are our whānau and school community. Just as the branches interlock in a forest to create a safe haven, so must whānau and school contribute to mana-enhancing strategies and proactive planning.

You will see this narrative explained throughout the guidelines. It underpins our guiding principles, an approach to understand and respond to distress and restore relationships and the learning environment following a challenging situation. This is defined by mātaitia, atawhaitia and whakawhenuatia - to recognise, respond and restore.

Other resources

Online training modules, webinars and resources will be available for schools, kaiako and kaiāwhina. All existing support and training, including in the use of safe holds, will continue to be available. Schools and kura can continue to get support from their local Te Mahau Office of the Ministry of Education.

Protecting the tapu and mana of ākonga

We want the experiences of ākonga Māori and disabled ākonga to reflect the educational rights of all ākonga. All ākonga should be treated with respect and be encouraged to respect each other's rights and values.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

One of the purposes of the Education and Training Act 2020 is 'to establish and regulate an education system that... honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi and supports Māori-Crown relationships.' School boards are expected to give effect to this in governing a school.

Section 127(1)(d) of the Act, provides that one of a school board's primary objectives in governing a school is to ensure the school gives effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its principles. This includes working to ensure that local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori are reflected in the school's plans, policies, physical spaces and local curriculum and focused on achieving equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori.

Ākonga Māori

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori are tangata whenua. Evidence shows that ākonga Māori are over-represented in the use of physical restraint in schools. To use these guidelines effectively, it is important to have insight into tamariki Māori wellbeing from a te ao Māori worldview.

Inherent in tangata whenua histories, there are many accounts that demonstrate how important tamariki are within Māori social structures. These narratives describe how tamariki are all born with a range of innate factors contributing to their wellbeing.

They include:

- › whakapapa
- › mana
- › personal tapu
- › whanaungatanga.

When these are nurtured and protected, their wellbeing will flourish.

If tamariki experience an act of hurt, harm or trauma, a violation of personal tapu or mana (or both) will occur. This can damage their personal and collective wellbeing and relationships. These harms must be addressed and prevented at both individual and collective levels, using practices that protect and restore.



Disabled ākonga

Evidence shows that disabled ākonga are also over-represented in the use of physical restraint in schools. To use these guidelines effectively, it is important to understand the unique place disabled people have in New Zealand.

A non-disabling society is a place where disabled people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and we all work together to make this happen. Disabled ākonga want to learn in places where their sense of belonging is enhanced, their identity, language and skills are strengthened, and their diversity is understood and valued. The expertise of parents and whānau offers significant insights and perspectives to creating positive and productive learning pathways for disabled ākonga.

The right to an inclusive education for disabled ākonga is found in section 34 of the Education and Training Act 2020. It states that people with disability have the same rights to enrol, attend and receive education at state schools as students who do not. This includes reasonable accommodations and individualised support to maximise academic and social development. These rights are consistent with the New Zealand Government's commitment to uphold the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

These guidelines honour ākonga Māori and disabled ākonga because they recognise diversity of strengths and needs, and the importance of school communities and whānau working together to support positive and safe learning experiences.

Your guide through the forest

Te Wao Nui

Protective & Supporting Canopy

Whānau and school community working closely together to provide a protective and supportive environment for ākonga to thrive.

Te Tētēkura

The Learner

Full of potential and each in need of firm roots that hold them firmly connected and a supportive canopy around them.

Te Manu Tāiko

The Forest Guardian

The manu tāiko is the kaitiaki of our forest and ensures whānau and kura work as one to protect ākonga and provide for their unique needs.

Ngā Aratohu

Supportive practices to recognise and respond to distress and use appropriate care and attention to restore wellbeing.

Ngā Pakiaka

The Roots

The nurturing and sustaining root system is the principles that ensure the rights of the child are secure.

Guiding principles

The manu tāiko is a sentry bird, the hōmiromiro. It has excellent skills of recognising and responding to distress in the forest.



The manu tāiko reminds us of the principles that ensure our ākonga thrive in the environments we create with them.

These principles consider the vision of Te Tiriti o Waitangi: that tangata whenua values and customs would be protected and all New Zealanders would have equitable rights under the law.

Poipoia te pua atua	Nurture the potential of each student
Ranea te rau o Tāne	Make abundant the interlocking branches
He pakiaka e tū ai	And uphold the strengthening roots
Kia taurite te tētēkura	Adapted to each student's unique needs
E tipu, e rea	To grow and develop
Tai atu ki te rangi	To their highest potential

Poipoia te pua atua

Sustain and support ākonga tapu and mana – their intrinsic potential and right to self-determination so they can be their full selves at school and in their learning and relationships.

Ranea te rau o Tāne

Strengthen trusting relationships, meaningful participation and communication with ākonga and their whānau.

He pakiaka e tū ai

Build on ākonga- and whānau-centred approaches that respond to their unique strengths and needs, recognising and valuing te ao Māori and disability perspectives.

Kia taurite te tētēkura

Recognise there are equity issues in our school system and remain open to resolving them.

E tipu, e rea tai atu ki te rangi

Work together as communities to create shared learnings that remove harm and inequities from our school system, so that all ākonga can thrive.





How you can use these guidelines



Ākonga and their whānau

- › Be confident that the harm caused by physical restraint is being addressed.
- › Be reassured by the preventative approaches that can minimise the need for physical restraint.
- › See where you can be involved and have a say in decisions that impact you or your whānau.



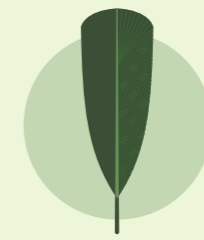
School leaders

- › Guide positive learning conversations with your staff.
- › Work with your school community to develop a policy on ākonga distress and the use of physical restraint.
- › Work with ākonga, parents, whānau or caregivers to develop support plans for ākonga who need them.
- › Meet your obligations under the Rules on the use of physical restraint.



Kaiako and kaiāwhina

- › Recognise and respond to ākonga needs.
- › Notice, recognise and respond to the signs of distress.
- › Reconnect with ākonga after a challenging situation or if physical restraint has been used.
- › Understand how different forms of physical contact are helpful.



School boards

- › Review how your school data and policy on the use of physical restraint align with:
 - your community's and school's values
 - your commitment to inclusion
 - your obligations under the Rules on the use of physical restraint.
- › Inform quality improvement initiatives and activities.



About the legislation

The legislation that underpins these guidelines

The Education and Training Act 2020 provides a framework regulating the use of physical restraint in New Zealand registered schools. Registered schools are bound by the Act and the Rules, and they must have regard for these guidelines.

The legislation provides the platform and direction to understand, recognise and safely respond to ākongā distress, and to minimise the use of physical restraint. This direction requires a shared vision, strong leadership, good planning, collaborative working, and a supportive and responsive learning culture.

Physical restraint is covered under sections 99 to 101 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

- › **Section 99** outlines the limits on the use of physical restraint in registered schools.
- › **Section 100** requires rules that describe the practices and procedures that employers, principals, teachers and authorised staff members follow relating to the use of physical restraint in registered schools.
- › **Section 101** requires guidelines to be issued on the use of physical restraint and behaviour management at registered schools.

A sample policy is not included in these guidelines. The Ministry will work alongside the School Trustees Association and SchoolDocs to develop this.

The Rules outlined in legislation

Rules 1-3 set out the title, commencement date and definitions for terms used in the Rules. Under the Act, the Rules on the use of physical restraint set clear requirements for employers, principals, teachers and authorised staff members relating to the use of physical restraint in registered schools.

Rule 4 requires schools to:

- › have a policy on ākongā distress (including a complaints process), which has regard to these guidelines, by 7 May 2023
- › take reasonable steps to ensure whānau, ākongā, school staff and the school community know about the school policy.

Rule 5 details what school boards and managers need to do to authorise non-teaching staff to use physical restraint.

Rule 6 requires schools to make information available to the school community about these guidelines, the school policy on ākongā distress and the use of physical restraint, and the names and positions of authorised staff members at the school.

Rule 7 outlines to schools the requirements for keeping records and how long they need to be kept.

Rule 8 details the requirement for schools to have support plans in place for specific ākongā, and the need to obtain consent if physical restraint is part of the support plan.

Rule 9 details the requirements for schools to notify parents or caregivers when physical restraint has been used, and to offer them an opportunity to debrief, and the timeframes that these actions need to happen.

Rule 10 requires schools to:

- › monitor the wellbeing of ākongā and staff following an incident of physical restraint, to ensure physical and psychological support is provided
- › analyse records of physical restraint to identify and rectify any undesirable trends, ensuring they develop appropriate responses to minimise the use of restraint.

Rule 11 details what reporting employers and staff members must complete following an incident of physical restraint, who they need to go to and how to go about doing this.

Rule 12 details staff training and support requirements that need to be in place and by when.

A series of online learning modules will be made available to schools to support the training requirements.

- › **Rule 12(a)** requires that all teachers and authorised staff members complete the first online module on the content of the guidelines by 7 February 2024.
- › **Rule 12(b)** provides that, if staff complete subsequent modules by 7 February 2025, they will fulfil the requirement for training in identifying stress triggers, understanding unmet needs, and preventing, minimising, and responding to student distress. However, these modules are not compulsory. Employers should work with their staff to identify their current level of knowledge and determine the best training pathway for them.

What is physical restraint?

Physical restraint, in relation to an ākonga, means to use physical force to prevent, restrict, or subdue the movement of an ākonga (or any part of their body) against their will.

When physical restraint can be used

Physical restraint can only be used by kaiako or authorised staff members, if **all three** of these conditions are met (and only as a last resort).

1

The physical restraint is necessary to prevent **imminent harm**, including **significant emotional distress** to the ākonga or another person.

2

You reasonably believe there is no other option available in the circumstances for preventing the harm.

3

The physical restraint is **reasonable** and **proportionate** in the circumstances.

This means only applying as much force as is necessary, and for the minimum time necessary.

There may be times when you need to take proactive steps to ensure ākonga safety. (For example, reaching out to prevent ākonga from running onto a road or climbing somewhere that is unsafe.)

What is “imminent harm”?

In the context of legislation, imminent harm is an immediate threat that a person will cause and/or suffer harm which jeopardises the health and safety or wellbeing of themselves or others if protective action is not taken immediately.

What is “significant emotional distress”?

In the context of legislation, significant emotional distress means harm that is caused by the intentional acts of one person that significantly affects the emotional wellbeing of another person, to such an extent that they need intensive support to cope and recover.

Only authorised people can use physical restraint

Kaiako, including relief kaiako and people with a Limited Authority to Teach, are automatically authorised to use physical restraint under the Act. Other staff members, such as teacher aides, must be authorised by their employer — the school board, or the manager for a private school. The Act does not cover the intervention of an unauthorised staff member who physically restrains ākonga.

The requirements for authorising non-teaching staff are detailed in Rule 5.

Seclusion is prohibited

Seclusion is prohibited under section 98 of the Education and Training Act 2020. Seclusion is putting ākonga alone in a room they can't leave (or think they can't leave) against their will.



What is acceptable physical contact?

What is acceptable physical contact?

A lack of clarity about the difference between physical contact and physical restraint can create dilemmas for some school staff. Sometimes, careful contact to gently guide ākongā is helpful. Other times, physical restraint may be needed to prevent ākongā from imminent harm.

Careful contact is important for the wellbeing, cognitive development and learning of ākongā, especially for young ākongā.

Three principles help determine what acceptable physical contact is:

1. It is undertaken only if the ākongā is willing to be touched.
2. It is for the benefit of ākongā.
3. It is limited to appropriate areas of the body (unless it is a prescribed technique for a specific purpose) — generally shoulders, arms, hands and upper back.

Each ākongā has different needs and experiences

Think about these things when considering using physical contact in helpful ways:

- › ākongā individual experiences
- › your relationship with ākongā and their whānau
- › cultural, disability and religious needs and preferences
- › age-appropriate contacts
- › ākongā personality
- › support needs to help move or change position.

Consider non-verbal and verbal guidance and feedback

While physical contact is soothing and supportive for some ākongā, others may not want any form of physical contact.

Using non-verbal and verbal feedback enables positive and supportive expression without the need for physical contact.

Examples of non-verbal feedback

- › Give an authentic smile.
- › Use affirmative hand gestures.
- › Get down to the level of ākongā.
- › Use appropriate eye contact.

Examples of verbal feedback

- › Warmly use the name of ākongā.
- › Use comforting language, gentle tones and affirming words.
- › Use minimal instructions and short sentences.

Know the signs ākongā are open to physical contact

Ākongā generally show their willingness for physical contact through verbal and non-verbal cues. If ākongā are non-verbal, have limited language, or are becoming too distressed to talk, support them with other ways to express their willingness.

Signs that ākongā are willing to receive physical contact

- › Nodding and smiling.
- › Holding out a hand to invite or responding to handholding.
- › Coming forward to accept physical contact.

Signs that ākongā are not willing to receive physical contact

- › Shaking their head.
- › Hesitating to come forward.
- › Not engaging, or withdrawing.
- › Stiffness or nervousness.

If you sense ākongā are no longer willing to receive physical contact, stop.

Unconsented physical contact may affect ākongā wellbeing. Some ākongā will have past experiences that affect how they react to physical contact.

Always ask if ākongā want to receive physical contact

Always explain to ākongā that you are going to initiate physical contact and why. To check if they want physical contact, you could ask a question.

- › “I can see you feel sad, would you like a hug?”
- › “Tino pai! Want a high-five?”
- › “Can I help to move your wheelchair to a quiet space?”

You can also encourage ākongā to use visual aids and assistive technology to initiate or accept offers of physical contact.

Some ākongā may need help learning boundaries for acceptable physical contact. You could redirect ākongā where appropriate:

- › “I don’t like it when people grab my legs like that — what about if you hold my hand instead?”
- › “I don’t need a hug – how about a high-five?”

How physical contact can support ākongā

To develop skills

- › Guiding the hand of ākongā in the right position to hold a pen.
- › Demonstrating a technique or safe way to perform a task during physical education.
- › Physically supporting ākongā to attempt something new — for example, climbing.

To provide emotional support

- › A pat on the top of the arm, back or shoulder to give reassurance.
- › An arm around the shoulders of a distressed or hurt ākongā.
- › Holding their hand to accompany them somewhere.
- › A ‘high-five’, fist-bump or handshake to acknowledge an achievement.

To aid and assist

Particularly if it has been professionally prescribed for personal care, functional mobility and positioning, hygiene, and nutrition and safety.

- › Administering first aid or helping an injured ākongā.
- › Helping ākongā get down from playground equipment.
- › Helping ākongā to change clothing or go to the toilet.
- › Using aids and equipment intended to safely handle or transport ākongā — for example, hoists, transfer belts and boards, slings, car seats and harnesses.

What is acceptable physical contact?

(continued)

To support positioning and posture

- › Wheelchair and seating systems to support proper body position, balance or alignment.
- › Professionally prescribed moving and handling techniques, posture equipment and devices.

To support communication

- › Guiding their hand to turn on their communication device or to help hold picture cards.

When contact cannot be used

Some forms of contact, and when and where they occur, are considered unhelpful and potentially harmful, and they do not meet the Teaching Council's standards and codes.

Contact should not be used in the following situations.

- › For the benefit of the kaiako or other school staff.
- › To fulfil the emotional and physical needs of kaiako or other school staff.
- › To compel, punish or correct ākonga — this is considered corporal punishment and is prohibited.
- › To deny, limit or remove prescribed equipment and assistive technology as a disciplinary action, or use these outside of their specific and approved purposes.
- › When alone with ākonga in a room with

the doors closed.

If you're unsure about any use of physical contact

Educators: Ask for guidance from colleagues, the parents, whānau or caregivers of ākonga or your professional leader. You could also check out your own school's policy, rules and expectations around physical contact.

If you're unsure about a colleague's use of physical contact, talk to your professional leader or principal about it, and see the Teaching Council's [Conduct and Competence Processes](#).

Parents, whānau or caregivers should be advised that if they are unsure about the use of physical contact, they should talk to the school principal.





Building a culture of care in schools

Building a culture of care in schools

A supportive and caring school culture promotes whole-of-school wellbeing. This supports understanding, recognition and safe responses to ākongā distress and minimisation of the use of physical restraint.

To build this culture, schools need a shared vision, strong leadership, good planning and collaborative working.

What is a supportive and caring school culture?

A supportive school culture has proactive, mana-enhancing teaching and learning practices that support participation, belonging and wellbeing. This ensures ākongā have what they need and supports kaiako to know what to do.

In a supportive school culture, connections between ākongā, their learning environments and their relationships with others are recognised and planned for.

A supportive school culture:

- › supports all ākongā wellbeing, and grows their sense of belonging, engagement and achievement
- › strengthens connections and relationships between ākongā
- › builds, maintains and restores partnerships with whānau and the school community
- › values and prioritises relationships and connections between kaiako and ākongā
- › recognises how school and classroom environments may contribute to ākongā distress
- › provides a motivating, engaging and reflective teaching environment for kaiako and kaiāwhina that supports their wellbeing.

For resources, programmes, initiatives, and frameworks that support schoolwide approaches, see [Appendix 1](#).

Other aspects of school culture that may contribute to ākongā distress

Even with a strong focus on a supportive school culture, there may be other aspects—both within and outside the school context— that contribute to ākongā distress.

It is important that kaiako and other school staff are confident and capable to recognise this early, understand what might be contributing and respond in helpful and safe ways.

The next sections of the guidelines provide practical and proactive strategies and approaches that can be used in school and classroom settings to support ākongā through distress.

Suggestions from ākongā Māori and Pasifika, disabled ākongā and their whānau.

I have a sense of belonging when:



- ✓ we celebrate different cultures in class
- ✓ we celebrate our differences, talents and uniqueness
- ✓ I can be proud of who I am
- ✓ school is a safe space
- ✓ I have friends
- ✓ I am supported to learn in my own way
- ✓ I feel confident to ask for help when I need it
- ✓ other tamariki understand there are different ways of learning and engaging with others
- ✓ there are different options for communicating with kaiako, kaiāwhina and other tamariki.

Source: Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the physical restraint rules and guidelines

Suggestions from ākongā Māori and Pasifika, disabled ākongā and their whānau.

I feel respected and understood when kaiako and kaiāwhina:



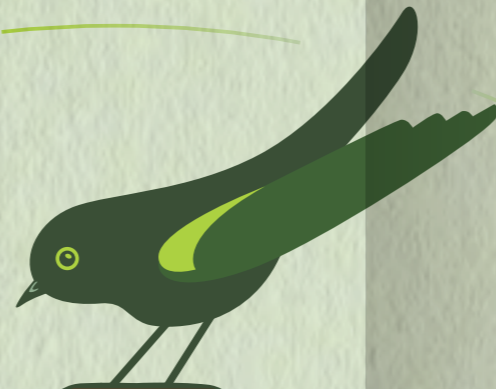
- ✓ know our names and how to pronounce them
- ✓ celebrate our differences and value us and our ethnicities, disabilities, gender identities, sexual orientation, and faiths
- ✓ include me in classroom activities without putting me on the spot
- ✓ spend time making personal connections with us and our whānau
- ✓ listen to what we have to say
- ✓ respect us and have our interests at heart
- ✓ acknowledge our talents and interests
- ✓ ask for and value our opinions and input
- ✓ act quickly and positively when I am being bullied.

Source: Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the physical restraint rules and guidelines



A practical approach to recognise and respond to distress

A practical approach to recognise and respond to distress



Mātaitia: Recognise

The better you know ākonga and their whānau, the easier it will be to learn about them. Recognise the signs that they are becoming overwhelmed or struggling. Work with them, their whānau and their peers on things that can help.



Atawhaitia: Respond

Respond with the kind of support ākonga need to feel settled again. If they're too overwhelmed, respond with calm, clear communication that keeps everyone safe.



Whakawhenuatia: Restore

Give everyone time and space. Be there for ākonga, restore connections, and support integration back into classroom and peer activities.



Mātaitia: Recognise

This section gives guidance to understand distress and recognise what ākonga need to thrive, including information about support plans.

Identify and understand distress

Work alongside ākonga and their parents, whānau and caregivers to identify the unique signs that ākonga are stressed or not coping, so you can respond early and appropriately.

What is distress and when may it occur?

Distress is an expression of an unmet need or want. It occurs when the level of stress exceeds ākonga ability to cope and recover without support. Distress can present as visible behaviours to others. The factors that lead to distress may seem unremarkable to other people.

Daily stressors ākonga can experience

Some ākonga may experience daily stressors that can overwhelm them if not understood and addressed through careful consideration of the physical environment, curriculum delivery and their relationships with others.

- › certain sounds and sights
- › being asked to do something they cannot do
- › fear of disappointing or upsetting others
- › perceived loss of control
- › being excluded from a group or activity
- › not having access to assistive technology or other supports
- › unexpected events or situations
- › unsettling interactions between peers.

Noticing the signs ākonga are experiencing distress and paying attention to what is going on in the learning setting will help kaiako to be proactive in their planning for future situations.

What can make ākonga feel upset and distressed at school:

- › being excluded at lunch and intervals
- › experiencing sensory, emotional and social overstimulation
- › not having enough movement breaks
- › a change in routines or a change in kaiako or kaiāwhina
- › not understanding what they're being asked to do
- › feeling pressured or pushed to finish a task before they're ready
- › being put on the spot or left behind
- › feeling no one is listening to or believing them
- › not understanding what they're being told off or punished for.

Source: Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the physical restraint rules and guidelines.

Signs ākonga are experiencing distress

Ākonga often show noticeable signs when they are experiencing stress or distress. This includes those who may have witnessed or been involved in the distressing situation.

Signs can include:

- › disengaging, lack of concentration or avoiding work tasks
- › restlessness
- › making noises and disrupting others
- › talking fast, excitedly or loudly
- › repeating other people's words or sentences
- › rocking or pacing
- › hand movements, clenching fists and jaws
- › breathlessness or flushed face
- › hurting themselves
- › arguing or swearing.

Suggestions from ākonga Māori and Pasifika, disabled ākonga and their whānau.

What helps me feel calm/helps me when I'm stressed:



- ✓ kaiako staying calm and reassuring me
- ✓ kaiako letting me do something different or fun, or offering me things that will help me
- ✓ giving me responsibility for something, or asking me to help so I can focus on that
- ✓ using fidget toys, squeeze balls or other tactile objects
- ✓ chilling out in the sensory room, or going somewhere cosy and quiet for a power-nap
- ✓ using noise-cancelling headphones
- ✓ going outside for fresh air or a run around the field
- ✓ talking to friends that I trust, or calling my whānau if I need to.

Source: Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the physical restraint rules and guidelines.

Support planning for ākongā

Investing in relationships between kaiako and other school staff, ākongā and whānau is a vital part of building a supportive environment where ākongā can thrive. Working in collaboration to develop a clear and tailored support plan is essential to ākongā learning and wellbeing at school.

Support planning is essential to help school teams to understand the diverse strengths and needs of ākongā. It helps teams to create safe and inclusive learning environments that respect the mana of all. It is also helpful to describe and understand triggers which are unique to a particular ākongā that may result in them experiencing distress.

Working together to develop the right support plan is vital to ākongā learning and wellbeing at school, especially for those who experience distress.

Appendix 2 has an example of a support plan template.

Establish trusted relationships

Building trusted relationships between kaiako and other school staff, ākongā and their whānau is essential to support planning. Everyone involved has a part to play, and different perspectives contribute to a fuller picture of the best ways to support ākongā.

Planning includes:

- › clarifying priorities for ākongā and their whānau
- › agreeing on shared protocols and the best ways to communicate together
- › checking on privacy concerns and any restrictions on sharing information
- › sharing details of any available support and how to access it.



“It’s all about planning. So, having a very clear plan before anything happens, you know, ‘When you feel this way, try this’. Maybe go and find a squeeze ball or something like that. ‘I can see you’re getting agitated; let’s find your squeeze ball.’ Have a very clear plan about what you do to de-escalate, because the kids don’t want to be like that.”

Source: Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the physical restraint rules and guidelines.

Suggestions from ākongā Māori and Pasifika, disabled ākongā and their whānau.

I feel supported in my learning when kaiako and kaiāwhina:



- ✔ are kind and funny and put me at ease
- ✔ take time to explain things or give me extra time to complete activities
- ✔ use different ways to help me learn
- ✔ help me to catch up when I am behind on schoolwork
- ✔ know how I like to take part in the classroom - for example, having the option to do class presentations in front of my kaiako only
- ✔ let me learn about things that I’m interested in
- ✔ let me have breaks to move around
- ✔ praise the things I’ve done well by giving me social time and rewards.

Source: Engaging with tamariki and whānau to inform the physical restraint rules and guidelines.

Develop a good support plan

Good support planning recognises the important connections between ākongā, their learning environments and their relationships with others, and it identifies potential responses to various situations. This allows school leaders, kaiako and kaiāwhina to be better prepared to quickly, confidently and effectively respond in challenging situations.

Things to think about when developing a support plan

There are some key aspects for support planning.

- › Strategies or routines that help support ākongā to engage in learning and with

their peers. What works and why? What can we do more of?

- › Specific aspects of everyday routines and activities that contribute to distress and known signs of distress. What are the specific triggers? What do we know about how ākongā feel at this time?
- › Strategies that can be used to support ākongā during challenging and escalating situations. How can we help calm the situation? Who has the trusted relationship? What might we do to prevent this situation occurring again?
- › Whānau preferences for supporting and helping. How can we learn about what works in the home setting? Do our agreed strategies enhance culture and mana?
- › When the plan will be reviewed. When will we come back together? What might trigger a review?

Below are some strategies that could be included in a support plan.

- › Identify signals, symbols, calming cards, a social story.
- › Establish a quiet place.
- › Offer choices and distractions.
- › Validate their feelings.
- › Reflect back what they are communicating.
- › **Collaborative and Proactive Solutions.**
- › Identify safe physical contact.

Physical restraint as a last resort

Sometimes, a plan may identify physical restraint as a last resort. If this is the case, teams will need to ensure that:

- › all other possible strategies have been explored, including environmental modifications or adaptations that prevent harm and improve safety
- › it is for responding to escalating distress that would result in imminent harm

Please contact your local Te Mahau Office of the Ministry of Education who will support you if physical restraint is identified as part of a support plan.

- › there is informed consent from parents, whānau and caregivers
- › frequency is monitored and reviewed with the intention to minimise and, when possible, eliminate.

Parents, whānau and caregivers must give their consent if the use of physical restraint (as a last resort) is included in the support plan (see the sample consent form in [Appendix 3](#)).

Information about the positions and holds that would be used, if physical restraint was needed, must be included in the plan.

Parents, whānau and caregivers must be informed of the possible impacts of physical restraint and how these will be managed.

Even if consent is not included in the plan, kaiako and authorised staff may still use physical restraint if it is required to prevent imminent harm.

Consider these things for an individual support plan

Who

Who the ākonga has a trusted relationship with, and who could be called upon at short notice to help — for example:

- › another teacher or support staff member
- › peers
- › a sibling
- › a mentor
- › a guidance counsellor.

What

What strategies can help — for example:

- › signals, symbols, calming cards, a social story
- › a quiet place or break-out room
- › offering choices and distractions
- › validating their feelings
- › reflecting back what they are communicating
- › problem solving
- › places or activities
- › physical contact.

Where

Where physical changes need to be made to the environment:

- › Think about physical modifications or adaptations that prevent harm and improve safety.

When

When the plan will be reviewed:

- › When you'll come back together and review how the support plan is going, including what everyone has agreed they will do.
- › What could trigger a review.

You can find a support plan template in [Appendix 2](#).



Atawhaitia: Respond

This section outlines ways to respond confidently and calmly to challenging situations, and provides guidance if you have to use physical restraint.

Respond effectively to distress

There will be times when ākongā feel overwhelmed. You'll need to guide ākongā through these challenging situations, while being calm and confident.

Notice the signs that ākongā are not coping

You'll most likely notice signs that ākongā are not coping.

Signs can include:

- › frustration or irritation
- › discomfort
- › distraction or restlessness.

How you and others respond makes a difference.

Build rapid rapport and connection

Connect with ākongā using verbal and non-verbal techniques, and pay attention to your own emotional responses.

Slow down and communicate calmly and simply

- › Be aware of your breathing, tone, pitch and speed of speech.
- › Maintain a low, calm tone of voice.
- › Communicate using appropriate words or visuals that are minimal, clear and explicit.
- › Use supportive phrases — “I'm here to help. When you are ready, we can...”
- › Actively listen — nod and repeat key phrases to show you hear what they are saying.
- › Use visuals and gestures to communicate, such as an OK sign.
- › Validate their emotions — “I can see you are feeling really frustrated.”

Be mindful of your body language

- › Approach ākongā from the side, rather than front on — this is less confronting.
- › Maintain a calm presence and provide reassurance.
- › Keep an appropriate distance — close enough to let ākongā know you're there, but making sure they don't feel trapped.
- › Use appropriate eye contact — direct eye contact can be challenging and intimidating.

Create a safe space and get support

- › Create space and use silence and non-action as an opportunity for
 - ākongā to gather their thoughts
 - you to pause, observe, and prepare for any further action that may be needed.
- › Ask other ākongā to move away or leave the classroom if necessary. Be aware how this may impact others.
- › Use your school's agreed process for getting support.

If the situation continues to intensify

Constantly reassess the situation. Consider these things if the situation continues to intensify.

- › Take all threats seriously, and act in accordance with your school's emergency management plan.
- › Keep everyone safe — move yourself and others further away if the situation continues to escalate. Know how to safely do so.
- › Remove potentially dangerous items.
- › Request or signal for adult help.
- › Be aware of health or disability issues.
- › Contact whānau if possible.
- › Call the police if needed.

Avoid these responses with ākongā:

- › challenging or threatening ākongā with a consequence — “If you don't do x, then I will...”
- › talking over ākongā or contradicting what they say, even if you think they're wrong
- › over-questioning ākongā
- › shaming or disrespecting ākongā
- › using physical restraint, unless there is imminent harm and no other alternative is available.
- › disagreeing, arguing with or interrupting ākongā.

Please note: These guidelines don't look at responses to extreme violence or traumatic incidents. These are covered by other policies and guidelines.

If physical restraint is used

To use physical restraint, **all three** of the conditions under the legislation must be met. If you're in any doubt, if you are not authorised to use physical restraint, or feel you are in physical danger, get help from colleagues or call the police.

Physical holds require training and cannot be taught in these guidelines.

If you think an ākongā requires safe holds, your local Ministry of Education team can work alongside you to discuss a range of supports. Support may include tailored advice, guidance and training on de-escalation strategies, and/or safe holds to support the team around the ākongā.

Never use these unsafe restraining techniques

The following types of restraints are unsafe, cause harm and must never be used:

- › restraint that constrains breathing or communicating, including speaking and sign language
- › face-down restraint
- › immobilising through pressure points and pain holds
- › using manoeuvres such as tackling, sitting, lying on or kneeling on a person
- › headlocks or putting pressure on the chest or neck
- › bending joints back.



Whakawhenuatia: Restore

This section provides guidance on how to support ākonga after a challenging situation, and what you need to do after a situation involving physical restraint.

How to support ākongā after a challenging situation

Knowing how to support after a challenging situation, where physical restraint may or may not have been used, is key to recovery for everyone involved.

Ākongā recover when reconnections are made and they feel secure in their learning environment again. This can take time. Know that relationships are key — what you say and do matters.

Reconnect and restore to help ākongā feel safe and calm

Immediately after the situation consider these things:

- › Monitor wellbeing of ākongā, kaiako and kaiāwhina and anyone else who may have been affected by the situation.
- › Give everyone time and space to settle.
- › Ensure ākongā have access to what they need to self-regulate.
- › Use karakia, waiata, te reo or support from kaumātua.
- › Offer ākongā food or drink.
- › Make sure that someone with a solid connection with the ākongā can stay nearby.
- › Reinforce calming strategies ākongā might know or have in their support plan.

Support ākongā to re-engage with classroom activities

Gently and discreetly support ākongā to re-engage with classroom activities. Refer to any support plans for any strategies that may support this process.

You can:

- › facilitate activities and include peers
- › suggest things you know they'll enjoy and can do
- › reduce learning demands.

Consider taking these next steps

- › Let a colleague, team leader or principal know what has happened. Decide together what your next steps will be and the support you need.
- › Connect with parents, whānau or caregivers to share information about the situation and how you might work together on this. Follow up what's been agreed in the support plan, or consider if a support plan is needed.
- › Give yourself time and space to calm and reflect.
- › Debrief with your school leaders or colleagues and plan what needs to happen next for you — everyone responds to stress differently.
- › Reflect on:
 - how you feel, what help you need, what you've come to understand about your response
 - the actions you took, what worked and didn't, and what you would do differently next time.
- › Reflect as a team on how the school's policies and practices supported the situation. Reflect on any environmental factors that could be improved.

If physical restraint has been used, refer to [What to do after a situation involving physical restraint?](#)

Keep an eye on ākongā wellbeing

Ongoing distress may result from what happened, particularly if physical restraint was used. This can affect the ākongā involved, as well as others who witnessed the situation.

Keep an eye on the wellbeing of ākongā in the days and weeks following a situation. Watch for absences from usual activities, changes in their interactions, or concerns from peers, whānau or other teaching colleagues.

Signs of ongoing distress could include:

- › withdrawing from friends
- › competing for attention
- › not sleeping or eating
- › reluctance to attend school
- › becoming less interested in schoolwork
- › running away or hiding
- › being argumentative
- › struggling to stay involved in usual activities.

Ākongā may feel more settled if you regularly check in with them and their whānau. If they continue to show signs of distress, involve whānau and decide together what other support they might need.

Keep an eye on kaiako and kaiāwhina wellbeing

Staff members may be affected by what happened. School managers need to ensure affected staff receive support. This could include debriefing, emotional support, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP services), additional breaks or help with workload.



What to do after a situation involving physical restraint

If physical restraint has been used, you have an obligation under the legislation to notify the following people.

Notify the principal or school manager

The principal or the delegated manager must be notified as soon as possible. This will help to support ākongā, staff and anyone else affected by the situation.

Notify parents or caregivers

Parents or caregivers must be notified as soon as possible after physical restraint has been used — at minimum before their tamariki return to their care. This enables them to understand what has happened and to monitor tamariki wellbeing at home.

Parents or caregivers must be provided with a reasonable opportunity to actively participate in a debrief. This must occur within three working days (or later by mutual agreement).

A debrief allows parents or caregivers and the school the chance to discuss what happened and to prevent something similar from happening again. This might include reviewing how the situation was managed, or creating and updating a support plan.

The process of the debrief can help restore relationships through shared problem solving and joint decision making.

Parents or caregivers can also access support from the Student Rights Service, or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Notify the Ministry of Education

Schools must notify the Ministry when physical restraint has been used, via the online incident reporting form or the Student Management System (if this functionality is available). Keep a copy of the notification and ensure it is kept secure, as per the Privacy Act 2020 and the Official Information Act 1982.

Access the online form from the main Community Portal. To access the online physical restraint incident reporting form, your delegated authoriser can assign the ESL (Education Sector Logon) role 'physical restraint school user'.

Online learning material is available to help you navigate your way through the online physical restraint incident reporting form, via the following steps.

1. Log in to the Education Learning Management System with your Education Sector Logon (top button)
2. Use the search function and search 'Online Physical Restraint Incident Form'.

Notify the school board

Report the use of restraint and analysis of trends to your school board (or manager for private schools). If the principal considers that the use of restraint was unjustified, they are responsible for following up with the employer (school board or manager) and subsequent reporting to the Teaching Council.

See [Appendix 4](#) for a checklist of actions following the use of physical restraint.

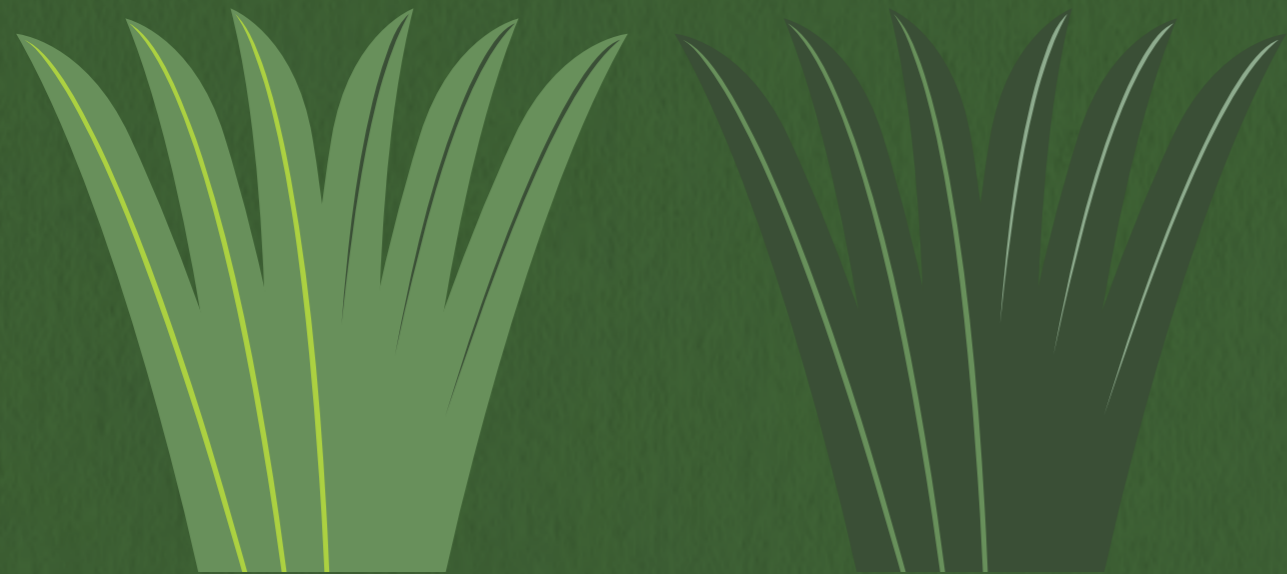
See [Appendix 5](#) for a sample debrief form.



Closing karakia

He manu ā-nuku, he manu ā-rangi
He manu tāiko nā Tāne i te wao nui
Nukunuku kia tau
Nukunuku kia wātea
Mātaitia e Tāne
Atawhaitia e Tāne
Whakawhenuatia e Tāne
Whākina mai te ara
Kia puta ko tētēkura ki te whai ao
Ki te ao mārama
Haumi e, hui e, tāiki e!

Soaring within the heavens, settling on the earth
The sentry bird of Tāne in the great forest
Moves through the forest
To bring calm and clarity
Seeing and watching
Responding with purpose
Restoring and reconnecting
Disclosing the pathway
To advance the tētēkura from the spiritual realm
Into the world of light
Unify, gather, resolve together!



Appendices

Appendix 1: Links and resources for building a culture of care

Appendix 2: Support plan template

Appendix 3: Sample consent form

Appendix 4: Checklist – following an incident of physical restraint

Appendix 5: Sample debrief form

Appendix 1:

Links and resources for building a culture of care

Build supportive school and classroom environments

A supportive school and classroom culture reduces the likelihood of incidents of imminent harm. Positive cultures support ākonga to become valuable and active contributors in their communities. Useful links include:

- › [Positive Behaviour for Learning \(PB4L\)](#) – a systematic approach involving a suite of 10 initiatives. These include universal whole-school change initiatives, targeted group programmes, and individual supports. The Restorative Kete Books are open-source resources containing downloadable practical tools. Refer to kete books 1 to 3.
- › [The Hikairo Schema for Primary: Culturally responsive teaching and learning](#) – helps kaiako to develop new and innovative ways of facilitating culturally sensitive and inclusive learning settings
- › [Wellbeing@school](#) – provides practical, evidence-based tools for reviewing school culture from a wellbeing and/or inclusion perspective
- › [Universal Design for Learning guide](#) – outlines classroom approaches for meeting the diverse and variable needs of all ākonga
- › [Best Evidence Synthesis programme](#) – publishes trustworthy evidence about what works and what makes a bigger difference in education
- › [Inclusive Education website](#) – has practical guides for kaiako to help plan for the diverse learning and wellbeing needs of all ākonga
- › [Collaborative planning for learning](#) – outlines approaches for parents, whānau, ākonga, and kaiako to work together collaboratively for learner-centred education
- › [Sparklers](#) and [Pause Breathe Smile](#) – have mindfulness games and breathing exercises.

Build trusting relationships between ākonga and kaiako

Ākonga learn best when they experience positive relationships with their kaiako. Useful resources include:

- › [The Effective Teaching Profile](#)
- › The New Zealand Curriculum [Effective Pedagogy Section](#)
- › [Putting student relationships first](#)
- › [Teaching for positive behaviour](#)
- › [Incredible Years Teacher programme](#)
- › [PB4L Restorative Practice.](#)

Be culturally responsive

Helpful resources include:

- › [Development of Te Kotahitanga](#)
- › [Cultural diversity principle](#) in The New Zealand Curriculum
- › [Effective Support for Culturally Responsive Teaching.](#)

Understanding and responding to distress

- › [Lives in the Balance](#) provide tools and approaches to understand and respond to ākonga distress.
- › [Mona Delahooke](#) has blogs, videos, podcasts to help kaiako and whānau understand distress in ākonga.
- › [Tilting the seesaw](#) supports those adults working with ākonga aged 5-12 years who have autism.

Appendix 2:

Support plan template

There are many ways a support plan can be developed—this is an example that covers key aspects of a support plan. This can be adapted as needed.

Student name	
Date	DD / MM /YY
Next review date	DD / MM / YY
Team members	Whānau, student, teachers, teacher aide etc
Whānau/family information	Agreed protocols for sharing information and communication (frequency, mode, approach)
Strengths and needs	What strengths can be enhanced to support learning and wellbeing? Learning, sensory, social, communication, medical and personal care, self-regulation
Proactive strategies – learning environment, home environment, teaching and learning, peer relationships	
What is working well? What can be further enhanced and generalised?	

Recognise and respond to signs of distress				
Stress Triggers	How the ākongā feels	What we see	Support, strategy, approaches and resources (minimising distress)	Calming techniques, physical contact (maximising wellbeing)
e.g. Transitioning from task to task	e.g. › Confused › Anxious › Panic › Lost	e.g. › Shut down › Standing still › Crying › Melt down	e.g. › Visual timetable › First and next › Simple and slow language › Prompting by other ākongā › Material, resources and table set up for task	e.g. › Reduce language or say nothing › Give the child time to regulate › Provide calming toy or sensory resource e.g. apple › When the ākongā has calmed, show visual and ask if they are ready to go back to the task.
Names of people who can help in situations of distress	Name trusted adults, friends and classmates, siblings or other whānau at the school, kaumatua, internal or external counsellor, or mentor and how they can help			
Any additional information				

If the use of physical restraint has been identified as being part of this support plan, please complete the physical restraint consent form.

Appendix 3: Sample consent form

If the use of physical restraint has been agreed to form part of a support plan, you will need to get consent from parents or caregivers. This form can be adapted to align with your school values and approaches.

Consent for including physical restraint in a support plan	
Name of student	
Teachers and authorised staff members working with the student who are trained to use physical restraint	
Physical holds that may be used, if necessary, to prevent imminent harm	
Any physical, health or psychological conditions that may be impacted by physical restraint and how these will be managed	
Any steps being taken to eliminate the use of restraint for this student	
Actions to be taken following an incident of physical restraint (must include notification of parents/caregivers and monitoring of student wellbeing)	
This form will be reviewed (circle one): weekly/monthly/every term/every six months/annually	
Signatures	Date
Principal or principal's delegate:	/ /
Parents or caregivers:	/ /

Appendix 4: Checklist – following an incident of physical restraint

TASK	COMPLETED	NOTES
Has the principal/delegated manager been notified of the incident?	<input type="radio"/>	
Have whānau been notified?	<input type="radio"/>	
Has a debrief with whānau been booked?	<input type="radio"/>	
Has the Ministry been notified via the online physical restraint reporting form?	<input type="radio"/>	
Has a review meeting been scheduled?	<input type="radio"/>	
Have any referrals been made?	<input type="radio"/>	
Does a support plan need to be developed or reviewed?	<input type="radio"/>	
Does your school policy on physical restraint need to be reviewed?	<input type="radio"/>	
Signed	<input type="radio"/>	
Date / /		

Appendix 5: Sample debrief form

This form can be adapted to align with your school values and approaches.

Date of debrief	
Time of debrief	
Date of incident	
Attendees at the debrief	
Who was involved in the incident?	
What led up to the incident?	
What approaches/strategies were used - how effective were they?	
What would we do again or differently?	
Next steps/agreed actions	
Principal or principal's delegate signature	Date
	/ /

Mātaitia: Recognise



Use this space to record your notes



**Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga**
Ministry of Education



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government

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