

Introduction to the Oranga Tamariki Practice Framework

Our practice framework enables us to undertake the practice shift that is framed by Te Tiriti o Waitangi, based on a mana enhancing paradigm for practice and draws from Te Ao Māori principles of Oranga.

Supporting relational, purposeful and restorative work to happen in collaborative and trusted ways

The practice shift includes a focus on tamariki in the context of their whānau / family, hapū and iwi, with whakapapa and whanaungatanga enacted to enhance mana tamaiti. We partner with whānau / family, and we work in partnership with external agencies. Our work is therefore relational, purposeful and restorative. Our Oranga Tamariki practice framework enables us to express our practice shift in ways that are accessible to our kaimahi. It also supports us to work in collaborative and trusted ways with our partners.

A practice framework to help us strengthen people's inherent mana

Practice frameworks are used in iwi, NGO, social work, health, and community organisations. Mostly, these are toolkits for frontline staff, promoting the practice vision set by the organisation. Our framework offers more as we seek to apply Te Ao Māori principles within our social work practice, which is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi / Treaty of Waitangi and the intent of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989.

At its core, the framework supports working in ways that recognise and value the inherent mana of the people we work with. It encourages:

- an understanding of tamariki as being intrinsically and irrevocably connected to their whānau
- an understanding of whakapapa as foundational to wellbeing
- a Te Ao Māori informed framing of oranga as an outcome of our practice.

Our practice framework helps us advocate for doing the right things for tamariki and rangatahi, whānau / family. Hardwired into the framework is the valuing of whānau / family narratives, knowledge and perspectives, alongside the views and reports from colleagues and professional partners, and access to Te Ao Māori knowledge and research. Our framework integrates into practice indigenous and professional knowledge with research and evidence, practice theories, values, ethical principles, with the practice skills needed for best practice. The framework outlines what we expect from our people and what tamariki, rangatahi and whānau can expect from us. It helps us to understand, and to advocate for tamariki and rangatahi, whānau / families being our partners, and those we work with in partnership to understand our unique statutory practice contribution. The framework supports us to work in more collaborative and trusted ways in partnership by drawing from similar values and principles, while recognising we each have unique roles, contributions and obligations.

The practice framework is our practice map – it brings together and explains the mana-enhancing paradigm. It is a supportive toolkit, providing a clear understanding of what underpins our practice (core values, principles and the knowledge we need, preferencing Te Ao Māori knowledge and practices), and how this informs our interventions with tamariki and rangatahi, whānau / family (the skills and tools we use, practice models that guide us, and encouraging us to be reflexive learners).

A practice framework that informs and supports our work and drives change

Importantly, the practice framework is for everybody who works for Oranga Tamariki. Non-frontline roles use the practice framework as a guide to better support practice and galvanise the support social workers need – including supervision, leadership and training, to do their best work. The practice framework creates a strong practice line of sight for the whole organisation and, most importantly, enhances the experience of the people we work with. We use the practice framework to identify our key strengths as practitioners and the areas where we need more support.

How we use the framework

In the practice framework we can see the core elements of practice called out in the domains, with values, rights and ethics strongly promoted at the heart of our practice. We can use the framework flexibly, moving from values and principles (that help us formulate and express rights-based ideas and opinions) to the range of knowledge available that help us understand each practice situation, and encourage us to value the narratives from whānau and family experiences, alongside the insights and opinions, observations and professional knowledge.

Professional reasoning and balancing and synthesising information are practice skills supported by the framework. By promoting practice models that guide our work, we are encouraging decision-making that is a shared endeavour with tamariki, rangatahi and whānau / family – our key partners. The framework helps us explain our analysis and practice decisions.

We can use the practice framework like a map that guides us and our supervisor – just like using a map to navigate and travel. Through the 5 connected domains a set of core ideas are promoted:

“Values lie at the heart of my work, and I can be more confident in explaining what I draw on in my practice. This helps me to connect knowledge and theories with ways of practising. This helps me to think about and explain what I am doing and why I am doing so, and encourages my work to be relational and with a clear purpose. It helps me to understand and work with the pressures of poverty, family violence, and abuse.”

The framework helps us explore what we bring to the work and how that shapes our thinking and responses. Asking ourselves this is as important as asking ‘how did I reach that decision?’

We need to understand what is happening in each practice encounter, and the framework guides us to consider the various and sometimes conflicting views and information we gather. To build a shared understanding about what is happening and needs to happen, we need to balance and weight information and we need to stay curious and be open to new information. The framework helps us to slow our practice down, and invites us to ask ‘what am I drawing on here?’ We have an ethical duty to be clear about how we reach the decisions needed in practice. This helps us to work respectfully and collaboratively and to continually learn. Our practice grows by asking ‘how am I using the practice framework?’ and ‘what is this showing me and my supervisor about my practice?’ Ongoing learning is hardwired in, and we always strive to deepen our practice.

A set of simple practice framework prompts is available to help us use the framework.