3.10 Healing children and teenagers

Technically, giving spiritual healing to children and teenagers is no different to healing anyone else. Legally, giving spiritual healing to children and teenagers necessitates extra care.

3.10.1 Consent

Children are considered minors until the age of sixteen (16) and need the consent of their parents or guardians when it comes to receiving medical and dental treatment. The Care of Children Act 2004 specifies that children from the age of sixteen have the right to give, or refuse, consent to medical, surgical or dental treatment. 'Medical treatment' can be interpreted quite broadly as far as requiring consent is concerned, so we have taken this to apply to spiritual healing also. For the details, refer to section 5.4.2 Care of Children Act 2004 (COCA).

Note that foster carers (care givers) are not automatically legal guardians. In order to be able to provide consent for a child's healing session, they must have official documentation showing they have been appointed as a guardian by the Court, or have the permission of the child's parent or authorised social worker. If a foster child has been brought in for a healing session and the foster carer is not a legal guardian or have the required permissions, consent must first be obtained from one of the following:

- The child's biological parent(s)
- The child's social worker or a social worker acting of behalf of the Chief Executive of Oranga Tamariki. (However, if the Chief Executive does not hold guardianship, the social worker must first seek permission from the child's legal guardians.)

If you're unsure whether consent has been obtained or who holds guardianship, you should contact the child's social worker for clarification before proceeding with any treatment.

Whāngai care givers are not automatically legal guardians, either. *Whāngai* caring is a customary Māori practice where a child is fostered or adopted by a blood relation, usually a close family member. Traditionally in such a relationship, a couple's first child was often brought up by grandparents or adopted by one of the brothers or sisters of a parent, and often from birth. These children always knew who their natural parents were.[1] It is an informal fostering rather than a legal one. Regardless of the legal status, most *mātua whāngai* (foster parents) would consider themselves the effective "parents" of the child, making all parental decisions in practice, including that of giving permission to have spiritual healing. Most would probably not even think it relevant to divulge their *matua whāngai* relationship to us as

[1] Te Aka Māori Dictionary "whāngai" from https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/search?idiom=&phrase=&proverb=&loan=&histLoanWords=&keywords=whangai

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spiritual healers. If they did, we would need to decide whether to accept their permission to heal or whether to follow the legal requirements. As an SNZ Spiritual Healers and for those cases where we aren't told, we have Statutory Liability Insurance which covers us for unintentional breaches of New Zealand law resulting in prosecution.

3.10.2 Sick children

There is no specific law in New Zealand that says a parent or guardian has to take a sick child to the doctor. However, a parent or guardian who refuses or fails to treat a child in need of medical care may be charged with medical neglect. Remedial action can be taken to protect the child by the State through the Care of Children Act 2004 (COCA), Children's and Young People's Well-being Act 1989 / Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and the High Court's jurisdiction as *parens patraie* (parent of the country or homeland). Criminal action can be taken against the parent or guardian for failing to provide necessaries and protect from injury under s 152 of the Crimes Act 1961, or for wilful neglect under s 195 and 195A of the Crimes Act 1961 and that can result in imprisonment for up to 10 years. It should be noted that s 152 and 195 of the Crimes Act consider any person under eighteen (18) years of age to be a child and requires the parent of guardian to provide them with the necessities of life.

Spiritual healing is not classified as medical treatment under the law and a healer who treats a sick child whose parents have not sought medical aid, needs to be careful that they are not implicated in condoning such behaviour. Sometimes desperate parents, perhaps unhappy with a medical assessment of their child, may seek alternative healers looking for a 'cure' or support for their alternative approach. To avoid being seen as aiding and abetting any behaviour that illegal or is not in the child's best interest, healers need to be very careful what they say. The healer should always advise parents / guardians to seek the advice of their doctor in relation to a sick child and, if the parents refuse to do so, ask them to confirm in writing that the healer has advised them to seek medical advice.

3.10.3 Suspected abuse

There is no law in New Zealand that makes reporting of abuse of children, adults or the elderly mandatory. However, some organisations have an employment policy which states it is mandatory. Best practice recommends that healers who identify or suspect abuse report their concerns to a statutory agency, the Police or Oranga Tamariki. Any spiritual healer would have a heavy conscience if such an incident isn't reported, and the client suffers further serious injury or death when it potentially could have been avoided if it had been reported. Protection is given to the person reporting the suspected mis-treatment, as long as it is reported in good faith (e.g. not given in vengeance).

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3.10.4 Recommendations

The following applies to healing children and teenagers:

- The healer should ensure that one of the child's parents or guardians is present. This serves to limit any opportunity for inappropriate behaviour towards the child or being accused of inappropriate behaviour afterwards.
- Ensure that the child and parent(s) understand what is involved with healing. Every child has the right to know what is going to happen to them and their body: *"No matter how big or small we are, tell us what we need to know in a way we can understand."*[2]
- Respect the rights of young ones and ask the child / teenager if they want healing before beginning. Stop during the healing, if the child / teenager asks you to or otherwise indicates that they don't want any more (e.g. moves off the healing bed or gets up out the chair).
- Get approval in writing from the parent to give any child / teenager under sixteen years spiritual healing. This also helps protect you in situations where parents have differing views about spiritual healing and what treatment is appropriate for their child. This document should be signed before treating or continuing to treat the child.
- It is important to ensure that the healing energy you are channelling is appropriate for your client, as often young people can be more open and more sensitive to energy. It should never be about how strong your healing energy is, but how appropriate it is. If you haven't already specified that the healing energy be appropriate for your client during your initial healing attunement, it is just a case of having that conversation with your healing guides as you are attuning ready for your young client.
- If any child / teenager under eighteen years old is not well, the healer should advise the parent to consult with the child's doctor in addition to the child receiving spiritual healing. Where the healer suspects the child is very ill, and the child / youth is not already under medical care or the parent(s) have refused to seek medical care for the child, the healer is strongly advised to ask one or both parents to sign a document stating that the healer has advised that medical treatment should be

[2] Kids Health "*Rights of every child in healthcare*", 2021, https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/childrens-rights-healthcare

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sought. This is especially important if the healer suspects the child may be suffering from a serious or terminal illness.

- If the healer suspects a child has been abused or neglected, it should be reported to the police or Oranga Tamariki.

See the example of a Consent and Disclaimer Letter for Children and Teenagers below. Such a letter needs only to be signed once and filed securely, unless the situation changes that requires a new disclaimer to be signed. (For example, the child becomes ill and the box acknowledging that the healer has advised the parent / guardian to seek medical advice for the child has not been ticked.)

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Consent & Disclaimer Letter for Children and Teenagers

By law, we must take particular care in the treatment of children below the age of eighteen years. We need the parent's or guardian's permission to heal any child under 16 years of age.

Spiritual healing supplements but does not replace treatment by a doctor or other licensed health care professional. If a child under 18 years of age is unwell, we must advise you as the parent / guardian to seek medical advice from a medical professional in relation to the child and to continue to follow your child's doctor's advice and treatment.

☐ *(Tick here only if this paragraph is relevant)* If you, the parent / guardian, have not already sought medical advice, we have advised you to seek medical advice for this child and by signing this document you also acknowledge that.

Child / teenager's name(s): _____

Spiritual healer's name: _____ has advised us as above and explained what to expect during and after the spiritual healing session. I give permission for my child to receive Spiritual Healing. This consent also covers future spiritual healing sessions.

Parents / guardians:

Name(s): _____ _____

Signature(s): _____ _____

Date: _____ _____

Spiritual healer's signature and date:

_____ _____ On behalf of *(organisation name)*

Group Exercise: Class Discussion

Discuss your or your organisation's current practice around children and young people. If part of an organisation, ensure everyone knows where the blank Consent and Disclaimer forms can be found and where the completed ones are securely filed.

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