

A book of
*Little
Matters*

More Safe More Thriving

Little Matters begins with a pretty simple question. What are the small, everyday things we do to be safe and thriving? *As people. As whānau. As Aotearoa.* The little habits, codes, practices, rules and tikanga we live by on a daily basis. They're the little matters. Stuff lots of us are already doing without even noticing.

Little Matters just says, hang on, this stuff is good. Maybe let's notice it. Share it. Do a bit more of it, this time on purpose.

Little Matters belongs to all of us. It's about sharing ideas, learning from each other, talking about what's working, and sharing what's tricky too. Right now, that looks like two things. The Little Matters social platform, and this book.

This book shares 10 examples of little matters. But there are probably hundreds more. Because every family will have their own, in their own culture and language. Little Matters will work when we each make it our own. Taking what fits, leaving what doesn't, adding more and sharing. It encourages us in the everyday stuff that helps us connect and thrive. And in doing that, we also help stop sexual harm before it happens. Because harm can grow in little things too. In silence. In shame. In the moments people are made to feel small, or like their voice doesn't matter. But, if harm can grow there, so can change. We can build a better culture, one little matter at a time.

Little Matters has a mission too:

Raising a future free from child sexual abuse.

The mission puts a focus on kids.

- 1 Because they matter most. We can all get behind that.
- 2 Because in doing it alongside them, us adults learn too. Whānau change communities, that changes culture.
- 3 Because culture change isn't an overnight job. Us adults carry it forward, the next generation carries it further.

So yes, Little Matters focuses on our kids. But the impact is more. It's changing the little things all forms of sexual harm can grow from. And it's future adults building an Aotearoa that is **more safe** and **more thriving**. It is big. But it starts little.

Because, little matters.

The mission starts here



We already do heaps to keep our kids safe. But if we rely on one thing too much, does that leave some gaps?

It's like with sunscreen. On its own, it's not enough. The hat, the shirt, the shade, they all do a bit. Same idea here.



Don't we have rules for this stuff?

Yes, and they matter. Like 'no means no.' Most of us know that rule. But there's a gap. People don't always say no with words. Sometimes they say it with their body, by turning away, freezing, or going quiet. Or someone decides the rule doesn't apply to some people. Like kids. A 'no' can be missed or ignored. So 'more safe' adds extra layers around the rules. Our little matters can be one of those layers. And they also help us become people who hear a 'no' even when it isn't said out loud.

Isn't it just about keeping our eyes peeled?

A lot of us were taught stranger danger, and that still matters. But it can leave a gap. Because harm can also come from people we know, like, and trust. People who feel safe. People who seem just like us. That can make harm hard to spot. So as well as keeping our eyes open, we need other ways to look out for our kids too. Little Matters can be one of them. They send a signal to friends, family and strangers that we're a connected whānau and we talk.

This feels like someone else's job?

We can sometimes think stopping sexual harm is a job for the police, or social workers. Someone else. But harm can grow long before they get involved. In what comes before. What sits around it. What shapes it. The everyday stuff. The way we talk. What we let slide and what we don't. It's the ground, the whenua that we all stand on. Those are things we can all do something about. The little matters are part of that. Each of us has a chance to shape them to serve good. After all, we want communities where every kid grows up more safe and more thriving. That's about shifting our everyday culture, a job for all of us. The good news is it starts with little matters.

Surprises are shared. Secrets get hidden.

“Some families have a code. No secrets. Because people that sexually abuse use secrets to trap people into being silent.”

It's little, but it matters.

little matter #1

No Secrets

What it is: Having a family code or tikanga about secrets so kids don't feel they need to hide anything from their adults and people can't use secrets to get away with harm.

How it can look:

- Having a family code of no secrets.
- Using birthdays and presents to teach kids the difference between secrets and surprises. Surprises come out into the open and everyone is happy. Secrets stay hidden.
- Making sure other adults know our whānau has a *no secrets* code too, so the message isn't only being said in private.
- Making it specific if we want to, like no secrets about bodies touching, or anything that makes you feel yuck.

More safe: People who sexually abuse use secrets to trap kids into silence. Having a code of no-secrets with the kids makes that harder. And when people hear a family does “no secrets”, it sends a signal: the kids are likely to tell if someone asks them to keep a secret, and the adults are listening, intentional, and connected. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: Brings us closer. Creates clarity for kids and removes any burden of keeping secrets. Takes some of the power out of secrets and shame. And we feel better knowing we've made it easier for them to come to us.

Better Aotearoa: A generation growing up with less silence, less shame, and more thriving is a good thing for all of us.

If we can say elbow, we can say vulva.

“Say anus or vulva like we say elbow. No shame or confusion. People that sexually abuse use shame to trap kids into being silent.”

It’s little, but it matters.



little matter #2

Real Words

What it is: Using the real names for genitals in the language we speak. If we speak English, that would be penis, vulva, and anus. Clear words. Said with confidence.

How it can look:

- Saying the words the same way we’d say elbow, knee or nose. No whispering. No nervous little laugh.
- Using the same words across wider whānau, and in other places where it makes sense, so kids hear the same words.
- Keeping the way we talk relaxed so that we show bodies aren’t anything to be ashamed about.

More safe: Clear words make it easier for kids to tell if something is wrong, and easier for adults to understand. And when people hear kids using proper words without anyone flinching, it sends a clear signal: there’s an adult around who is teaching, listening, and paying attention. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: Kids learn bodies are normal, questions are normal, and no one needs to be awkward. It helps with everyday health stuff too, removing embarrassment about seeing a doctor. Bodies stop feeling weird or shameful. What a relief!

Better Aotearoa: Better boundaries. Easier conversations. Easier to get help, of all kinds. Less shame about things that are normal. More clarity about our own bodies.

If kids have questions, they're ready for answers.

“They can learn in the playground, from a song on the radio... or from home. When we give simple, honest answers, age appropriate of course, it builds trust and shows them home is where we have real talk.”

It's little, but it matters.

little matter #3

Real Talk

What it is: Giving kids the info they need about bodies, relationships, or... the world!

How it can look:

- Simple, honest, age-appropriate answers when kids ask about bodies, sex, and relationships, or anything really.
- Answering the actual question that's being asked. Not the full adult version. But also, not a confusing birds-and-bees story. Just the truth, sized for the child.
- If they ask something like “where do babies come from” ask them what they've heard, and work from there.
- Doing it in everyday moments, answering as it comes up, not saving it for one Big Talk.
- Reading a book together, one that's made for kids.

More safe: If the truth doesn't come from us, it'll come from somewhere else. Honest answers mean less confusion, less shame, and more chance kids come back when something feels off, instead of trying to piece it together alone, or worse, from the internet. And when people can see this is a home where awkward things can be talked about, it sends a clear signal: the adults are listening, the kids are likely to ask, and things are less likely to stay hidden. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: Home becomes the place where awkward questions can be asked without it feeling like a big deal. And it helps build stronger connections with whānau and mates that last into adulthood.

Better Aotearoa: Less shame. More clarity. A culture where people can talk about bodies and relationships, reducing the space for harm. And just being able to talk about all the things that matter makes life work better.

Everyone's body is tapu and deserves care.

“No one's allowed to touch people in ways that make them feel uncomfortable.”

It's little, but it matters.

little matter #4

Protect Tapu

What it is: A word that helps us understand the sacred, precious value of bodies and that we're all worthy of care. Some people also talk about certain parts of the body as extra tapu.

How it can look:

- Saying clearly that no one gets to touch people in ways that make them feel confused, uncomfortable, or yucky.
- Teaching kids that it's not just about not hurting each other, but about protecting each other's tapu.
- Playing a tickle game where kids choose when to stop, and we listen, and remind them: you said stop, so I stop. Your body is yours, you decide when to stop.

More safe: Tapu helps kids understand boundaries through care, not fear. It lifts the line above “just a rule” and into something we stand for. And when people hear a whānau talk about bodies being tapu, it sends a clear signal: these kids are being raised with care, limits, and body autonomy. That can help stop harm from happening. If people think they have a right to other people's bodies, that's where harm grows.

More thriving: Protecting tapu goes both ways. There's an increased awareness of our own value, and the value we place on others. That creates stronger foundations for confidence, respect, and relationships.

Better Aotearoa: A culture with a stronger sense that every person has value, is precious, and has rights over their own body is a better culture for everyone.

Every child is born with their own mana.

“A right to stand tall, be respected, and to choose. You gain mana by respecting other people’s mana.”

It’s little, but it matters.

 little matter #5

Respect Mana

What it is: Understanding how mana can guide how we expect to be treated and how we treat others.

How it can look:

- Learning that every person is born with their own mana, kids included. The strength and authority that comes from our ancestors. Our worth is not something we have to earn.
- Showing kids that we grow our mana by respecting other people's mana. That means uplifting, not standing over.
- Imagining that when we talk to people, their grandparents are right there with them, and letting that shape how we speak.
- Giving kids choices that let them feel their mana. Who they hug. Whether their photo's taken. The clothes they wear.

More safe:

Mana helps kids know they have a right to choose, to have a voice, and to set boundaries. Any time society treats some people as less important, it creates room for harm. Mana pushes back on that. And when people can see a child being raised to know their worth, it sends a clear signal: this whānau is connected, the adults are listening, and the kids know their mana. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving:

When kids feel their mana recognised, they value and protect it. And they start noticing other people’s mana too. That makes for better relationships now, and later in life. It turns sex and consent from pressuring someone to say yes, into looking inward and asking, “am I respecting their mana, and mine?”

Better Aotearoa:

As a nation, we already talk about and value mana. A deeper understanding and practice of it looks like greater respect for every person’s mana, and their right to be.

Online is real life, just with screens.

“Online is real life, with real good and real harm. So take an interest in what the kids like, show them we treat people kindly, and if people act weird, talk about it together. That’s how we make it safer.”

It’s little, but it matters.

little matter #6

Respect Online

What it is: Building respect for the online space, the same as we would in the rest of our life. Like the ocean, there’s so much good there, but also danger.

How it can look:

- Taking an interest in what kids are watching, playing, following, and creating. Making it something we do together.
- Knowing a bit about the apps or games they use. Kids share more when they think we get it, or at least part of it.
- Encouraging our kids to come to us when they need to. If they think we’ll freak and take away access, they may hide things.
- Like road safety, or swimming, starting at the shallow end. Being with them for their first steps, building things up at the right speed. Young: use filters, keep devices in family spaces. Older: stay connected with their online relationships.
- Babysitter rules for phone use and taking pictures of kids.
- Showing kindness. Don’t say things we wouldn’t say in person.
- Helping kids spot what’s not *real life* online. Porn isn’t realistic. Influencers and leaders that feed off anger or shame, or tell us we’re not good enough, are just chasing follows and clout.

More safe: When it’s not just about rules and settings, and it becomes something we share, we build more layers of protection. Kids are more likely to come to us early if something feels off. And when we stay interested and involved, they’re not left to navigate that space alone. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: When we move from policing to treating it as part of life, it can become something we can enjoy, question, laugh about. And kids know to block the stuff that makes them feel angry, unworthy, or anxious. Something us adults need to learn too!

Better Aotearoa: People can get bolder with bad behaviour online than they ever would in person. And what happens online, doesn’t stay online. It spreads through culture and society. So, lifting the standard there lifts the standard everywhere.

When kids know their voice matters

“Kids can ask heaps of questions, it can get annoying. But knowing they feel safe to ask, and that their voice matters? It’s priceless.”

It’s little, but it matters.

 little matter #7

Feeling Heard

What it is: Looking for ways to put “everyone’s voice matters” into practice, and also making sure our kids know they can come to us for anything.

How it can look:

- Looking up when kids talk to us. Putting things down. Listening.
- Having a family shorthand for "I want to talk about that, I can't right now, we'll come back to it" so bad timing isn't a shut-down.
- Having little family hui, where kids get to lead parts, ask questions, and have a say.
- Encouraging kids to ask a quieter sibling or cousin what they think. Like ideas for building a fort.
- Stepping in when we hear playfighting that has gone too far and seeing if they are listening to what the other person wants.

More safe: Kids are more likely to come to us if something is wrong. People who do harm often count on kids not feeling heard, and try to be the one they can talk to. So when people can see a family that listens to their kids and takes their voice seriously, it sends a clear signal: these kids are heard, and the adults around them are listening. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: Trust and connection stay intact. Kids bring us the easy stuff, the random stuff, the annoying hundred questions, and later, because that pattern is already there, the harder stuff too. It also shapes what they'll give and look for in relationships later: partners who value each other's voices.

Better Aotearoa: People are too often made to feel small, and that their voice doesn't matter. That not only creates space for harm, it's bad for wellbeing. It also means we end up with a country that's only shaped by some voices. But if more people think to ask "I want to hear what you have to say", we're able to build a better Aotearoa.

Owning mistakes is just doing better.

“We can all do wrong. If we get called out on it, we can listen and do better. We don’t need to lose it or get defensive.”

It’s little, but it matters.

little matter #8

Owning Mistakes

What it is: Adults showing kids that we all get things wrong, and we can own it, say sorry, and do better.

How it can look:

- Role modelling owning mistakes, whether with the kids or in front of them with our partner. “I got that wrong. I’ll do better.”
- Owning mistakes before we get called out, just because we’ve realised something didn’t feel quite right.
- Making owning mistakes a part of all parts of life. Whether in sports, doing art or homework. We don’t lose it, we just use it as a chance to be better.
- Talking about doing good, rather than being good, so we can separate what we do from who we are.
- Make asking for help feel normal, not a failure.

More safe: It shows children something vital: adults are not automatically right just because they’re adults, popular, or well liked. That makes it easier to speak up if something feels wrong, even when the person doing the wrong thing is someone everybody else thinks is good. And when people can see a whānau where adults own mistakes and aren’t above being questioned, it sends a clear signal: No one is above being called out. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: It builds self reflection and responsibility instead of defensiveness. It also helps lift the stigma on help-seeking. We all need help sometimes. For anger, addiction, mental health, grief, parenting, sport, work, life. Owning mistakes and seeking help become normal parts of improving ourselves, not a failure.

Better Aotearoa: A culture that can admit fault, repair harm, and get better is safer than one built on denial and frustration. We can have more productive conversations and interactions. And we make it easier for people to be the best version of themselves so that we’re living our best lives.

We all get all the feelings. Boys. Girls. Everyone.

“Worried, excited, mad? Name it. Talk about it. Because when we can name our feelings, it’s easier to tell when something feels wrong. And we can ALL be both soft AND strong. Boys, girls, everyone. No one needs to bottle things up.”

It’s little, but it matters.

little matter #9

Learning Feelings

What it is: Learning that our feelings are there for a reason. They are a message that’s telling us what’s going on. We need to learn what they mean, and how to navigate and express them.

How it can look:

- Naming feelings in the moment. *"You look frustrated. Is that how you're feeling?"* Sometimes we think we're feeling one thing, but it's actually something else. *"Are you angry, or hurt?"*
- Asking where they feel it in their body.
- Growing the words we have for feelings by naming what we think other people might be feeling, on TV or in real life. Then saying *"we would have to ask them to know how they are feeling"* so we learn not to assume how someone feels.
- Breaking down the boxes we get put in e.g. Dad showing that boys can cry and be tender. Girls can be tough, and strong.
- Reading books about emotions together, like Aroha's Way.

More safe: When kids can name what they feel, it’s easier to tell when something feels wrong. It also stops those old gender boxes becoming traps. Shame, silence, toughness, “don’t be too much”. Those ideas can all be used against people. And when people can see feelings are being talked about and taken seriously, it sends a clear signal: these kids are being helped to understand what they feel and say when something feels off. That can help stop harm.

More thriving: Our live better when we don’t bottle things up. Learning feelings gives kids better words, better self-knowledge, and better ways to handle what’s going on instead of letting it harden into harm. It helps us connect with each other better too.

Better Aotearoa: Adults who can navigate their feelings tend to make better friends, partners, parents, teammates, and leaders. Aotearoa is better when people aren’t put in boxes, where anyone can be a leader, and leaders can be tender and empathetic, which makes them strong.

It's in the little everyday stuff.

“It’s not about big serious sit-downs with the kids. It’s about the little everyday stuff. It’s about listening to them. It’s about spotting those openings, like a funny look or a question when they see something that upsets them or makes them curious. And it’s about casual check-ins in the car or at the beach, or going for a walk.”

It’s little, but it matters.

little matter #10

Little & Often

What it is: Weaving little matters into daily life so they feel normal and casual, instead of waiting for one big serious talk.

How it can look:

- A check-in in the car. A chat while peeling the potatoes.
- A post-playdate debrief. Who was there? What happened? How'd it go? Was it fun?
- Spotting openings like a funny look or question, when they see something on TV or out in public.
- Using things that pop up during the day to open a chat about feelings, or mana and tapu. A kiss on TV. Someone being rude to the person at the checkout. Equally, someone showing kindness, standing up for a friend, or checking if another person is okay.

More safe: When listening, and chats about feelings, bodies, friends, safety, and the world are already part of normal life, kids don’t have to suddenly build a bridge back to us in a crisis. That bridge is already there. And when people can see that talking-and-listening rhythm, it sends a clear signal: the adults are listening, the kids are talking, and nothing is too awkward to bring up. That can help stop harm from happening.

More thriving: It takes the pressure off everyone. Conversations stop feeling huge and weird. They just become part of the family rhythm. Much easier. Much better. And that rhythm travels into the teen years, adulthood, and the whānau they build later.

Better Aotearoa: A culture built on little, ordinary check-ins is a culture where hard conversations don’t get left until crisis. That is better for kids now, and better for the adults and communities they grow into.

Our little matters build three things that help make us more safe, and more thriving.

Some little matters lean harder into one than the others. But they all do a bit of all three. That's the point. Clearer. Kinder. More connected. Better for whānau life now, and better for the kind of country we're building over time.



Clarity.

Removing confusion and shame, and the places secrets can hide.



Respect.

A compass for how we treat others, and how we expect to be treated.



Connection.

Building relationships where kids know they can come to us, and their voice matters.

Showing

our LMs build protection.

Sharing

our LMs grows the kaupapa.

Supporting

our whānau shift culture.

Show

Little Matters help us be more safe, and more thriving. But when other people can see and hear them, that's when they really start to do more. On the fridge. At school drop-off. In the group chat. On the sideline. Said out loud in front of other people. Because then people get the message. They can see we talk, we listen, we don't keep secrets, we're connected, and we're on to it. And that is one of the biggest ways our little matters help protect us, and our kids.

Share

Little Matters belongs to all of us. These 10 are a start, not the whole list. Over on **@LittleMattersNZ** on Instagram and Facebook, we can share ideas about what's working. We can share what's tricky. We can share our own little matters. We can suggest any we'd like to see in the next edition. Little Matters starts working, when we share.

Support

Lots of parents are already doing little matters, maybe not by that name, but in their own way. For some wider whānau, a few things might seem off at first. Like a kid not having to give aunty a hug. Or "no secrets" said in front of uncle. Especially in a strong culture of collective care. The "it takes a village" kind. The best thing we can do is ask questions. Understand why parents are doing certain things. Then we can see they're for all of us to support, and be part of. Not something that excludes any of us.

Some helpful resources

www.netsafe.org.nz Aotearoa's independent online safety organisation. Free help and advice for staying safe online.

www.sexualwellbeing.org.nz Aotearoa's largest provider of sexual and reproductive health services. Information about relationships, bodies, and sexuality.

www.tupunaparenting.maori.nz A kaupapa for raising pēpi and tamariki with traditional Māori parenting practices.

www.raisingchildren.org.nz Info and short video clips on the everyday stuff of raising kids. Newborns through to primary school.

www.courageclub.co.nz A podcast for brave chats about kids, disability, and sexual safety. Hosted by Emily Writes.

www.thelightproject.co.nz Helping whānau and young people navigate porn and the online sexual world.

www.KeepItRealOnline.govt.nz Practical advice for keeping kids safe online. First devices, porn, grooming, bullying.

Get involved

Does your team, group, organisation, or whānau want to get involved? Create your own little matters, run workshops, make some content? Get in-touch.

Or just head over to @LittleMattersNZ on Facebook and Instagram, and simply share your own little matters in the comments. Easy



@LittleMattersNZ



Watch on YouTube

Kupu Whakawhetai

Thanks to everyone who contributed their time, knowledge, and mātauranga to Little Matters. To the parents and caregivers who shared their experiences and reflections. To the researchers and practitioners who offered insight and guidance. And especially to those who have long worked in this space for their expertise and leadership, including Ngā Kaitiaki Mauri, Rachel Harrison, and Mel Calvesbert.



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If you're in immediate danger, call **111**.
Safe to talk – Sexual harm helpline 24/7, free, confidential.
Call **0800 044 334**, text **4334**, or visit **safetotalk.nz**.
They'll listen, support you, and connect you to local services if you want.

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