

Rise Up Policy Brief

2026



Making Practice Visible: Building Trust Through Transparent Child Protection Practice

Executive summary

Child protection systems rely on public trust, professional accountability, consistent practice, and community understanding. Yet many jurisdictions face a common challenge: how to make child protection practice more transparent and accessible while maintaining professional judgement, cultural responsiveness, and the complexity required for effective decision making.

Aotearoa New Zealand's experience demonstrates how transparency can become an important component of system strengthening. For nearly twenty years, Oranga Tamariki's public-facing Practice Centre has provided openly accessible practice guidance, policy information, and practice resources. This long-standing commitment to transparency created the foundation for the successful national implementation

of the Oranga Tamariki Practice Approach and Practice Framework, introduced to strengthen culturally grounded, relationship-based, and consistent practice.

The Practice Centre has evolved beyond a repository of guidance. It provides a shared platform for capability development, consistency of practice, public understanding, and accountability. New Zealand's experience suggests that transparency is not separate from good practice. Rather, transparency can be a mechanism through which good practice is strengthened, shared, and sustained.

This brief proposes that governments consider publicly accessible practice infrastructure as a core element of child protection system reform and identifies key principles for implementation.

The questions we sought to answer

- ✓ How can governments make child protection practice transparent in ways that build trust and strengthen accountability?
- ✓ What principles should guide public accessibility of practice guidance and decision-making processes?
- ✓ How can digital and practice infrastructure support consistent, culturally grounded practice across regions and communities?



A public health approach to child protection

This policy brief aligns with ISPCAN's public health and system-strengthening agenda and contributes to:

- Strengthening child protection systems and infrastructure.
- Building workforce capability and professional consistency.
- Promoting accountability and public trust.
- Scaling effective practices nationally.
- Supporting culturally responsive and community-centred services.

The problem: balancing transparency with complexity in child protection decision-making

Across many jurisdictions, child protection agencies are expected to make complex decisions that significantly affect children's lives. Public confidence in these decisions increasingly depends on transparency, accountability, and understanding. However, child protection systems frequently face tensions between:

- National consistency and local responsiveness.
- Technical practice knowledge and public accessibility.
- Organisational accountability and operational complexity.
- Cultural responsiveness and standardised approaches.
- Workforce capability and workforce variability.

Where practice guidance is difficult to access or understand, communities may struggle to understand how decisions are made, practitioners may interpret expectations differently, and organisations can find it harder to embed new ways of working consistently.

At the same time, increasing expectations for openness mean that governments are being challenged to explain not only what decisions are made, but also how and why those decisions are reached.

A practical solution: transparent practice infrastructure

Aotearoa New Zealand's experience demonstrates the value of creating integrated practice infrastructure built around three components:

1. A public-facing Practice Centre

The Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre publishes:

- Practice guidance
- Policy information
- Practice resources
- Professional tools and learning materials

The platform is openly accessible to practitioners, communities, partner agencies, families, and the general public. This transparency has been a central feature of Oranga Tamariki's practice environment for almost twenty years.

2. A national Practice Approach

The Practice Approach provides a shared vision for practice that is:

- Grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Relational
- Inclusive
- Restorative
- Mana-enhancing
- Child and whānau centred

3. A national Practice Framework

The Practice Framework supports social workers to organise:

- Assessment
- Analysis
- Reflection
- Decision-making

It creates consistency while maintaining space for professional judgement and responsiveness to individual circumstances.



Policy recommendations

Recommendation 1: **Invest in publicly accessible practice infrastructure**

Governments should establish accessible platforms that publish practice guidance, frameworks, expectations, and resources in ways that are understandable to both practitioners and the public.

Recommendation 2: **Position transparency as a system-strengthening strategy**

Transparency should be viewed as a mechanism for improving trust, accountability, consistency, and workforce capability, rather than simply a communications function.

Recommendation 3: **Embed practice reform through existing transparency platforms**

Where transparent infrastructure already exists, governments should leverage these platforms to support implementation of new models, frameworks, and practice reforms.

Recommendation 4: **Ensure cultural legitimacy and responsiveness**

Transparency initiatives should reflect the cultural context of the communities they serve and support culturally grounded practice rather than standardisation alone.

Recommendation 5: **Prepare for future digital and AI-enabled supports**

Governments should explore how emerging technologies can improve accessibility and consistency while maintaining professional judgement, transparency, and ethical safeguards.



Implementation considerations

Successful transparency initiatives require:

- **Leadership commitment**

Transparency must be supported and modelled by organisational leaders.

- **Governance**

Clear processes are needed to maintain content quality, accuracy, and currency.

- **Accessibility**

Information should be understandable to practitioners, families, communities, and partner agencies.

- **Continuous improvement**

Content must be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect evolving practice and evidence.

- **Sustainability**

Dedicated resources and infrastructure are required to maintain public-facing practice systems over time.

Country case study: Aotearoa New Zealand

For nearly twenty years, Oranga Tamariki has maintained a publicly accessible Practice Centre, making practice guidance visible beyond the organisation. When it introduced its new Practice Approach and Practice Framework, the organisation built on this established foundation rather than creating separate implementation channels – using a trusted, existing platform to support workforce capability, organisational learning, and national consistency. The same infrastructure that supported transparency became a vehicle for national implementation, capability development, and embedding practice change.

Reported benefits include shared practice expectations, easier access to guidance and resources, improved consistency across a national workforce, stronger support for workforce development, and increased public visibility of child protection practice.

Implementation has not been without challenges. User research found that practitioners often need information quickly in time-critical situations and can struggle when guidance is hard to find, overly complex, or poorly connected to practical action.

Oranga Tamariki has had to balance competing priorities – consistency versus professional judgement, comprehensiveness versus ease of use, and the needs of new versus experienced practitioners – insights that continue to shape ongoing user research and development. **A key lesson is that transparency is not a one-off project: it requires ongoing governance, content management, and continuous improvement, sustained by embedding it into normal business practice.**

While no formal economic evaluation exists, analytics show significant value. Between May and July 2026, the Centre attracted 11,709–15,193 users monthly, over 57,000 page views, and 54–61% engagement. The Practice Framework, practice tools, and guidance on unsupervised children rank among the most visited pages, reflecting both workforce and public demand. International engagement – from the US, Australia, UK, Canada, Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines and China – suggests the platform also contributes to global knowledge-sharing in child protection.

Emerging principles for publicly accessible child protection practice

Drawing on New Zealand's experience and international dialogue during the Rise Up Policy Forum, the following draft principles are proposed:

1. Child protection practice should be understandable to the communities it serves.
2. Practice expectations should be publicly accessible wherever possible.
3. Transparency should strengthen trust, not simply provide information.
4. Accessibility should extend beyond practitioners to families, communities, and partner agencies.
5. Cultural responsiveness should be embedded within transparent practice systems.
6. Transparency should support professional capability and consistency.
7. Public information should be regularly reviewed and maintained.
8. Digital innovation should enhance, not replace, professional judgement.
9. Transparency requires organisational commitment, governance, and leadership.
10. Accountability and learning should remain central objectives of transparency initiatives.

Conclusion

Child protection systems depend on trust, accountability, consistency, and public understanding. Transparency alone does not create better practice, but it can create the conditions that enable better practice to flourish.

Aotearoa New Zealand's experience suggests that publicly accessible practice infrastructure can strengthen workforce capability, support national consistency, improve public understanding, and provide a foundation for future practice innovation.

Policymakers should consider transparency not as an adjunct to child protection reform, but as a core component of effective and trusted child protection systems.



References and further information

1. Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre: [Home](#) | [Practice Centre](#) | [Oranga Tamariki](#)
2. Oranga Tamariki Practice Approach: [Our practice approach](#) | [Practice Centre](#) | [Oranga Tamariki](#)
3. Oranga Tamariki Practice Framework [Practice framework](#) | [Practice Centre](#) | [Oranga Tamariki](#)

Mana enhancing is an approach grounded in Te Ao Māori (the Māori worldview) that uplifts a person's dignity, spiritual authority, and well-being. It focuses on recognising personal strengths, building respectful relationships, and empowering individuals and families (whānau) rather than focusing on deficits.

[Mana-enhancing paradigm](#) | [Practice Centre](#) | [Oranga Tamariki](#)

To be *grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi* means that an organisation, policy, or framework bases its core values, operations, and decisions on the foundational promises and principles of Aotearoa New Zealand's 1840 founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi. It ensures respect for Māori rights, authority, and partnership

[Te Tiriti o Waitangi frames our practice approach](#) | [Practice Centre](#) | [Oranga Tamariki](#)

Child and whānau centred means recognising that children do not exist in isolation. Their safety, wellbeing and development are connected to their family, whānau, culture, relationships and community. A child and whānau centred approach places the child at the heart of decisions while working collaboratively with whānau to strengthen safety, wellbeing, resilience and long-term outcomes. This approach recognises that sustainable change is most effectively achieved when children, families and wider support networks are actively involved in planning and decision making.

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This policy brief accompanies the Rise Up Policy Forum session [Making Practice Visible: Building Trust Through Transparent Child Protection Practice](#) that took place in Melbourne in 2026.

The [ISPCAN Rise Up Policy Forum](#) is a global initiative to catalyse progress in child protection through a public health and system strengthening approach. It brings together governments, researchers and practitioners in a community of practice and learning, to build on and translate into action the pledges made during the 2024 Ministerial Conference on Ending Violence Against Children.



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