

Concepts of independence and adulthood

He hono tangata e kore e motu: kāpā he taura waka e mutu

Connections between people cannot be severed, whereas those of the canoe-rope can.

Maintaining strong relationships is vital for the oranga (wellbeing) of whānau or family, regardless of the ups and downs of life and the many difficulties encountered. This whakataukāi reminds us to cherish and appreciate loved ones to ensure that we do not take one another for granted. When we understand this, it can assure individuals that they are not alone or isolated in times of need.

Becoming independent

Becoming increasingly independent will look and feel different for every rangatahi leaving our care. This will vary based on the extent of supports already in place or available, connections with whānau, hapū and iwi, family groups, disability needs, learning and communication needs, and their sense of confidence, identity and belonging.

The concept of independence also changes over time and takes time for every rangatahi. It is influenced by contextual factors such as culture, and physical, emotional, financial and social environments. Every rangatahi will have a unique story.

Western concepts of adulthood and independence do not always translate easily into Te Ao Māori (Tā te Māori titiro or Māori ways of viewing the world using mātauranga and mōhiotanga Māori) or Pacific ways of understanding both individual and collective age responsibilities and expectations (Va'aifetū guide refers). Māori frame the transitions through life (Tā te Maori tū – a Māori understanding of human development) in the context of whakapapa and whanaungatanga. Equally, the concepts of Tā te Māori whakaaro (valuing Māori critical thinking) and Tā te Māori mahi (Māori ways of work involving tikanga and kawa) are woven into a Māori understanding of growing up/human development.

Tā te Māori titiro is grounded in the understanding that tangata whenua knowledge comes from tīpuna, sits within kuia and kaumātua, and is expressed through teina/tuakana relationships, pūrākau, waiata and kōrero. Expectations and roles for rangatahi Māori as they grow up can occur at a younger or older age. Rangatahi Māori will always remain interdependent with whānau, hapū, iwi and hapori whether these connections, roles or responsibilities are realised as they leave our care.

For disabled rangatahi or tangata whaikaha, independence might not be about being able to live on their own, but about having a choice and control about where they live and making informed decisions about their life, finances, activities and routines. The concept of interdependence may be a better way of framing their view to ensure that the supports and connections allow choice and control.

Transitioning into Adulthood

Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights on the Child defines ‘children’ as persons up to the age of 18. Many countries define the ending of childhood at the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law – often referred to as the ‘age of majority’. This means that once a person attains this age, they are usually considered to be an adult. While the transition to adulthood is usually a gradual process comprising the gaining of new skills, confidence and abilities, many rangatahi are socially or culturally treated as an adult at different ages. Most rangatahi in New Zealand are generally considered to be ‘adults’ once they turn 18 and will then access adult services. Some of those adult rights, supports and processes may also start earlier. In New Zealand the age of majority is 20 years of age.

The process of gaining choice and control and becoming increasingly independent and being considered an adult is not always well aligned. For some rangatahi they may not be prepared or ready to navigate adulthood and be able to advocate for their needs and entitlements to adult services.

Setting up the Transition Support Service

The Transition Support Service was set up to help Oranga Tamariki kaimahi to prepare eligible rangatahi in our care to be increasingly independent as they move into adulthood. The Transition Support Service can also provide ongoing advice and assistance to eligible rangatahi once they leave the care of the Oranga Tamariki chief executive.

The supports and advice provided by the Transition Support Service work alongside other adult services to help rangatahi get the supports and advice they need up until their 25th birthday. The type, level and range of services available will likely change as rangatahi are discharged from care and move into adult services. For some rangatahi they will have support needs and will work with adult services throughout their whole life; for others, they will in their own time become independent. In all situations the goal is that the rangatahi can become increasingly independent and increasingly lead decisions as they grow and develop into adulthood.

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