

## Frankly, can I be trusted?

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Kia ora. I am a Qualified ECE Teacher with Full TeacherRegistration. [picture of docs]

I am the father of four sons ...and a I have a grandgirl!!! [picture]

My Aunty – she was there when I was born! [picture]

...and now I'm there for my grandchildren (twin girls are on the way!) [picture]

...but frankly, can I be trusted? [picture]

November, 1991, Christchurch Civic Creche – a male teacher is suspended pending an allegation of sexual abuse. A meeting is called with the parents.

- ▶ Workshop Task One: a) How do we keep children safe in an ECE setting? [in groups of three or four, share ideas]

You have probably heard already at this summit reference to the devastating implications of a media-frenzied accusation of child abuse from a male in the ECE sector. The Peter Ellis saga is the most infamous case in New Zealand history, one that polarised NZers over his guilty conviction versus his innocent plea. That was over 20 years ago. The number of men teaching in ECE dropped from over 2 percent to under 1 percent in a very short space of time.

- ▶ b) How do we keep ourselves safe in an ECE setting? [group work]

I personally know of a man who with his wife owned a centre at the time of this incident. They were both qualified ECE teachers, respected in the industry, and yet he was treated very disrespectfully by some members of the public. When some would phone to enquire about the centre's services, on hearing a man's voice they would just hang up, or even worse launch into a tirade of verbal abuse and accusations. As a centre owner and manager, when I answer the telephone, the caller sometimes hangs up, and I wonder whether some people in our society still have an issue with a man working in an ECE centre.

- ▶ Workshop Task Two: What happened in a situation that made you feel 'unsafe' in an ECE setting?

Surely New Zealand has got over its 'men in ECE' phobia?

July, 2012, Pamapurua School, south of Kaitaia – Deputy Principal James Parker hits the headlines for 15 years and multiple accounts of sexual abuse of boys. Oh no, here we go again guys. Is it time to back off, to quit, to give up on the career move to teach young children? Even though there a paedophiles in operation and although they are often caught and prosecuted, it's the high-profile cases such as Ellis's and Parker's that draw attention to men who are

teachers and often one can ask oneself: "Frankly, can I be trusted?"

Some of you will have stories to tell and may even be able to talk to this topic more fluently or academically than myself. Others may find what I have to say a little shocking or perhaps too personal. Some things I will say will of necessity not be too specific, and I will not disclose too many details.

Scenario one: In 2002, as I became a teacher, I was faced with the challenge of whether I could be trusted with the care and protection of children. Initially I focused my teaching career on primary-aged children by doing a Bachelor of Education at the University of Auckland and concurrently added to that the Graduate Diploma in Secondary School music teaching. One day, when finishing a practicum in a primary school, there was a boy of about 9 years of age, whom I had bridged a gap with through maths. He had changed from struggling how to relate to school, his peers and his teacher to actually enjoying learning. On my last day, this boy came running up to me and threw his arms around me in a big hug of appreciation. His teacher, who was my AT, and 2 or 3 other children, were standing there, and I realised at that point that it was safe and I was trusted as well as appreciated by that child. Can you relate to that? How would you have felt – comfortable or awkward?

Scenario two: Ten years later, now in the ECE sector, I was working as a senior and had all of the usual responsibilities that a qualified teacher has, including changing nappies. As a fully registered ECE teacher and the father of four children, I had no issue with my role, neither did the parents, and neither did the other qualified teachers. However, one day when an issue arose with one of the unqualified teachers, I suddenly felt very vulnerable and open to an accusation or allegation. It would have only been out of spite or revenge with no basis whatsoever, but would have no doubt ruined my career if the teacher had made up some story about me. The fact that she was under a cloud over her unprofessional behaviour caused me to be even more wary. What would you do?

Scenario three: I know of a man in the teaching profession who, when his children were younger, faced a shocking and unexpected moment when a thought came into his mind to sexually abuse one of his own children. He immediately rejected the thought. Does this mean that man is a paedophile at heart? Are we evil if a thought enters our mind? Or are we only at fault if we act on that thought? Have you ever had a thought like that come into your mind? If you did, what would you do about it?

Quoting from the New Zealand Herald, December 8, 2012:

"One of the families impacted by James Parker is a Kaitia solo mother and her damaged son. She said that when Parker appeared in court he told people he was not a monster. He is a monster, she said, but his crimes were even more unforgivable because instead of using his intelligence and knowledge to turn away from a situation, he used it to create one."

► Workshop Task Three: What policies and procedures could we promote

and put in place to protect us personally and to provide protection over the position of blokes in ECE settings?

What I have discovered is that it doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of me. What matters is that I can trust myself – that makes me trustworthy – and although I go to great lengths to ensure that I am accountable to my peers when with children, I also know in my own mind that I am a safe person, even if noone else is around.

I am safe!!! [picture]