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Understanding the Legends and Fairytales

Hei Ara Whai Oranga



Some parents have fears about what will happen to their baby if they learn more than one language. Here are a few reasons why some people choose not to speak Māori to their children.

I don't want my baby to miss out on English.

Your baby won't miss out on English. For most of us it would be nearly impossible to grow up in New Zealand without learning to speak English. Your baby's English will not suffer as a result of speaking Māori. It is more likely that their language skills will be better and they will develop good communication skills. The most important thing is the quality of language that your baby hears is good quality. Make sure that your baby is surrounded by good quality English and good quality Māori.

Phrases

He karakia mō te wā kai
(a prayer for mealtime)

Whakapaingia ēnei kai
hei oranga mō ō mātou tinana.
Whangaia hoki ō mātou wairua
ki te taro o te ora,

Amine.

**I don't speak Māori
so I can't teach it to
my baby.**

There are still things that you can do. Your baby will notice the way you treat Māori language. If you don't speak Māori, you can still plan for how your baby will learn the language.

The more your baby is surrounded by Māori the quicker they will learn to speak. Your baby also needs to learn that both parents



support them to speak Māori, so it is important that both you and your partner bond with your baby in Māori. There is no better way to do this, than by using the language yourself.

Most children have very few Māori language role models around them. Choosing not to speak Māori to your baby takes away one of those Māori language models. This lessens your baby's contact with the language. Teaching your baby to speak Māori is also a big load for your partner to carry alone.

If both you and your partner speak Māori you have a real advantage. You could turn your home into a Māori speaking environment. Your baby needs to see you and your partner speaking Māori together. It shows your baby that Māori is a language that adults speak too.

**I learnt later in life, and I turned out fine,
so my baby can learn later too.**

Most parents want things to be better for their children than what they had when growing up. If you have learnt Māori as an adult, you will know how hard it can be to learn another language. Adults often have lots of other commitments and



priorities. This can make it hard to find the time needed to learn a language. There is also no guarantee your baby will want to learn Māori as a teenager or adult.

Research shows that the earlier a child begins to learn a language, the better. Children tend to be more willing to make mistakes and less worried that they won't understand or be understood – all really important things for successfully learning a language.

We need the quality of language to improve. We also need the number of places where Māori is spoken to increase. This will only happen if we raise kids who speak Māori as their first language and that use it as their normal means of communication.

If my baby speaks English really well, then they will pick up Māori easily.

If this is true, then the opposite is equally true - speaking Māori really well may help your baby to pick up English easily. English

language is everywhere in New Zealand and takes little effort to learn for most children.

Although it's not too late to speak Māori to your baby when they are older,



it will be much more difficult. You will have already established language bonds with your baby in English. Your baby is likely to resist changing the language that they have come to feel confident in speaking.

Your baby will pick up lots of messages about Māori language from the way you use it. By using Māori language, you are telling your baby how you feel about the language and its value.

Making the decision to raise your baby with Māori language is a big step. But it is a step that can lead to a wonderful and exciting journey for you and your baby.



-Tips-

- Take your baby to as many places as possible where you can hear Māori spoken naturally i.e. the marae, Māori concerts, kapa haka competitions, etc.
- Make picture books for your baby by pasting pictures on to coloured paper or card. Large A4 pictures that are simple and brightly coloured are best. You can use pictures from magazines, catalogues, greeting cards, etc.



