

2

**A Gift for Baby**  
**He Koha Aroha**



## Languages around the world

Speaking more than one language is normal. While in New Zealand most people speak only one language, in lots of other countries this is unusual. Many people around the world are bilingual and many are multilingual – that is, they can speak three or more languages. At sometime in our lives, most of us wish we spoke another language. Adults often think it is too late to learn another language and wish that they had been given the chance to learn when they were young.



## Learning as an adult

In fact, it isn't too late to learn as an adult. You can learn another language at any age. Adults actually have some advantages over children when it comes to learning another language. As adults, we:

- already know a language that we can use to read, write, ask questions and get help
- tend to be more disciplined about learning
- have lots of different ways that we can learn
- can be highly motivated to learn quickly
- can use resources like libraries, people and money.

All of these things are advantages to learning another language as an adult.

## Learning from birth

But, learning two languages from birth is a better and more natural way to become bilingual. For bilingual kids, speaking two languages is normal, natural and easy. Bilingual children can move comfortably between the languages, and they do it all the time.

Learning a second or third language is fun, but there are also lots of benefits to speaking more than one language. More and more parents in New Zealand are learning about those benefits. Not all of those parents speak two languages themselves. But lots of them are now choosing to raise their children to be bilingual.

In New Zealand, our education system gives the option of learning through Māori and English. Bilingual and Māori language immersion classes can be found in many schools throughout the country. Children can now do all of their schooling in the Māori language. Māori is an official language of New Zealand. It is also a good language choice for a bilingual child growing up in this country.



## The benefits of being bilingual

Why are so many parents choosing to raise their kids bilingually? There are lots of advantages in being bilingual. Children who are bilingual understand two cultures. They enjoy a real sense of belonging to cultures. Knowing that they have a choice of languages to communicate in helps children's self-esteem and confidence. Research also shows that bilingual kids have better thinking skills and greater mental agility. Who wouldn't want this for their baby?

As children grow to become adults, being bilingual can mean having a better chance at earning more money. Being bilingual often leads to better problem-solving skills, stronger communication skills and added confidence. This often leads to higher salaries and better job opportunities.



### Do you want your baby to:

- be comfortable in two cultures
- be open to other cultures
- be able to mix easily with other kids
- have good problem-solving skills
- have good thinking skills
- be a creative thinker
- learn other languages easily
- enjoy other cultures
- feel a strong sense of belonging in their own country and culture?



These are some of the reasons why parents choose to raise their kids bilingually. It's natural for parents to want the best for their children. Bilingual children have a headstart in these areas.

### The gift of language

If you decide to raise your child to be bilingual you will be giving them a headstart in life. However, the benefits your baby enjoys from being bilingual will depend on how well they speak those languages. Giving your baby good language role models is really important. You are the first and most important role model that your baby will have.



### Phrases: for feeding time

- Are you hungry, baby?  
Kei te hiakai koe, pēpi?
- Don't bite! - kaha e ngau!
- Is your tummy full?  
Kua kī tō puku?
- This side now.  
Ki tēnei taha i nāiane.

So, how can you help your baby to speak well? The easiest way is to speak well yourself. No matter what language you speak to your child, try to always speak properly – even if you think your baby can't understand you. If you speak only one language, speak that language well. If you can speak two languages, speak both of them as well as you possibly can.



If you don't speak Māori but you know someone who does, ask them to speak Māori to your baby as often as they can - and as well as they can. Give your child the best chance to really benefit from being bilingual. You can do this by making sure that the role models your baby has for both languages are good ones.

Language is one of the gifts that we give our children. Your baby's language will be a reflection of your language. You, as a parent, are your baby's number one teacher. You can make your gift the Māori language.

### -Tips-

- Remember, the language you speak to your baby will be the language that your baby learns to speak, so be sure to set a good example.
- Speak Māori to your baby as part of your daily routines like nappy changing, feeding and bathing time so that it becomes natural for you both.

