



Bonding with Baby

He Reo Aroha



Building language bonds

A lot of people believe that babies begin to learn language before they are born. If you talk or sing to your baby while you are pregnant, they will feel the vibrations of your speech. New mums and dads are often amazed at how their babies recognise their voices so quickly.

From birth, your baby will be listening carefully to everything you say. They will listen to all the sounds around them to try and make sense of their world. If you want your baby to speak Māori as their first language, they need to hear Māori language as early as possible. This means from the time your baby is born, or even better, during your pregnancy.

Talk to your baby as often as you can so that you build a 'language bond'. The language your baby hears most often and feels most comfortable with will be the language that your baby speaks first. If you speak Māori often enough, you will form a Māori language bond with your baby. They will feel comfortable and confident about hearing and speaking Māori.

Phrases for waking-up time

- Are you awake, my baby?
- Kua oho mai koe, taku pēpi?
- You are so beautiful!
- Tō ātaahua!
- Stop crying, darling.
- Kāti te tangi, taku pēpi.
- Go back to sleep now.
- Hoki atu ki te moe.



Your home as a Māori language environment

The key to language bonding is using the language:

- as often as you can
- as well as you can
- naturally and
- lovingly.

The best place for this to happen is your home. There, your baby can build language bonds with the people who love them.

If you don't speak Māori, it's okay. A Māori language bond can be made between your baby and a Māori speaking grandparent, neighbour, friend, relative, other adult or child. You will just need to make sure that your baby gets to see and hear that person as often as possible. They should speak to baby in Māori as a normal part of their everyday life and activities. The more people your baby can build a Māori language bond with the better.

Language role models

Language role models are very important for teaching your baby to speak. Such role models are people who set good examples for how to speak. In English, there are language role models everywhere – on the television, the radio, relatives, friends, at the shops, at the park. Most people in New Zealand speak English easily and naturally. This isn't the case with the Māori language. You will need to make a real point of finding good Māori language role models for your baby. Plan to let your baby spend as much time with them as possible.



You will need to talk to the people you want as language role models. Ask them to support you in teaching your baby to speak Māori. Don't expect that just because someone can speak Māori, they will. Chances are you will need to ask them to.

Tell them how important it is to you that your baby learns to speak Māori. Ask them to help you with this by speaking in Māori to your baby. For many people, including native speakers, it is not natural anymore to speak Māori all the time. Native speakers are people who have grown up with Māori as their first language. For some native speakers it may be an effort to get used to speaking Māori all the time to your baby. But that is exactly what you need them to do – to speak only in Māori to your baby.

While that might sound a bit 'hard-out', keeping it up is really important for your baby to feel safe and confident in using Māori.

Your role as a parent

If you speak Māori to your baby, it is important that you use the language anywhere and anytime. You can do this by reading to your baby in Māori on a regular basis.



You can buy Māori language story books or borrow them from the library. You can also help your baby learn by singing songs in Māori and using as much Māori as often as you can.

Once your baby is able to speak, ask them what the Māori word is for something, or how you should say something in Māori. Your baby's confidence in using Māori will grow if they see that you are keen to learn the language and that they can teach you.

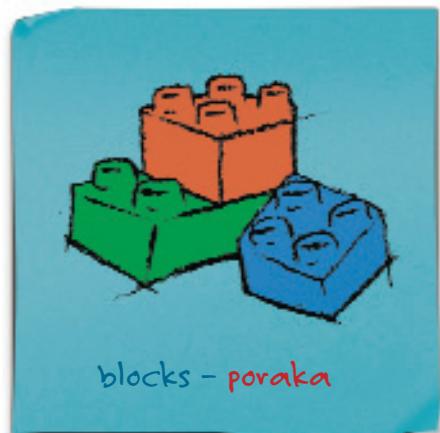
Planning for baby's education

Bilingual education programmes can support the Māori language bonds that your baby will build with people who love and care for them. These programmes are now offered in many early childhood centres throughout New Zealand.

Bilingual education comes in a number of forms – through kōhanga reo and other Māori language early childhood services, bilingual classes, kura kaupapa Māori (Māori immersion schools and preschools) and other Māori language primary schools, and wharekura (Māori immersion secondary schools). Many Māori speaking kids today learn the language through kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa Māori.

You might think it is too early to think about your baby's education before they are even born! But it is never too early to plan. If you are thinking about enrolling your baby in a kura or bilingual class, you will need to prepare for it. You can help your baby by speaking Māori to them at home from a very early age. (You probably spoke the same language as your teacher when you started school.) It makes sense that kids in Māori medium classrooms should speak Māori before they start school.

This means you need to think about how to prepare your baby for this type of schooling – otherwise they will be starting on the back foot. Speak Māori at home as much as possible so that your baby feels comfortable with the language by the time they start school. Give your baby the best chance to succeed.



Planning for your baby's language development

Language bonding, using the language as often as you can, and bilingual education are some of the keys to raising a Māori-English bilingual child. All of these things need to be planned. If not, English will very quickly become the only language that your child will speak.



You will need to decide how committed you are to doing this. Be realistic. Know what you can do easily and what you can't. You will need to think about how to overcome the difficult parts. Talk about those things with friends or others who have also made the choice to raise a bilingual child. You have to be committed to get there and it won't always be easy, but it will be worth it.

Making sense of two languages

Even if you are speaking to your baby in Māori all the time, your baby will also hear English all around them. This means your baby will be dealing with two languages. How quickly your baby learns Māori will depend on the amount of contact your baby has with the language.

So if your bilingual baby takes a little longer to speak and doesn't seem to know all the words that the books say they should do by 18 months of age, that's okay. Your baby is learning two languages and their brain is sorting out how each one works.

During this time your baby will be trying to make sense of the languages they are hearing. Your baby will be listening and

watching everything around them very carefully. They will be noting the sounds, words and sentences for each language.

This helps your baby to develop the skills that will help them in learning a whole lot of things later, like reading and maths. So it is okay if your baby seems to be taking longer than expected to say their first word or to string a sentence together. Once your baby has 'cracked the code' you won't be able to stop them talking!

Becoming bilingual in Māori and English doesn't 'just happen'. You will need to plan for it if you want your baby to grow speaking both Māori and English, and to gain the benefits of being bilingual. Be realistic about what is possible in your home. Know what you want for your baby and plan the path towards it.

-Tips-

- Encourage friends and family to talk and play in Māori with your baby as much as possible.
- Remember, the language your baby hears most often and feels most comfortable with will be the language they speak first.

