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*Barriers and Blockades*

**Ngā Tauārai**



As you plan to raise your baby as a Māori language speaker, it is a good idea to become familiar with some of the 'barriers and blockades' you might come across along the way.

Talk to people that have already experienced it with their children. Read books and look at websites about raising bilingual children. Once you have an idea of what the barriers might be, you can plan for how you will deal with them. Here are just a few that you might meet.



### **Māori in the home, English outside the home**



Māori speaking families sometimes suddenly start speaking in English when they are out in public. The two main causes for this are:

- they don't want to appear rude by leaving other people out of the conversation
- they become shy about speaking Māori in public.

Remember that speaking Māori is a special skill and is something to be proud of. All around the world, different languages are spoken. Speaking Māori is part of being a citizen of the world.



### **The whole family turns to English when visitors arrive**



Speaking English when you have visitors over may not seem like a big deal. But as your baby grows, they will notice this. It is natural that your baby will want to try out the new words and phrases they have heard from visitors. Here are some suggestions for dealing with this situation:

- Let your visitors know that you are raising your baby as a Māori language speaker. Some will ask you why. Explain to them (with tact and consideration) the advantages your baby will have from having two languages. This way, no one will feel left out or uneasy.

- If your visitor speaks Māori, speak Māori to them and ask them to speak Māori to your baby.
- If your visitor doesn't speak Māori, speak English to your visitor but continue to speak Māori to each other and to baby. You may need to explain to your visitor that it is important for your baby's language development that you keep speaking Māori to one another.
- As soon as your visitor leaves, go back to speaking Māori only.

### English is easier



As you raise your baby with Māori language, you will notice that they will have times when they 'play' with English and will want to practise their English on you.

Children need to be able to express themselves by speaking. They will do this in whatever language is easiest for them. Children that do not have enough language to express their ideas and feelings can become frustrated. This can sometimes show through as negative behaviour.

The solution is to make sure that your baby has lots of positive experiences with good quality Māori language. This will help them learn the language they need to express their thoughts, feelings and ideas.

### Going to an English medium early childhood centre

Lots of parents now choose to send their babies to early childhood centres from a very young age. If you decide to send your baby to an English medium preschool, they play, build friendships and interact with others in English. Things that seem to be fun to your baby are in English. The other children speak English. Their caregivers or teachers speak English. The language they learn to use for play and learning activities will be English.





Of course, Māori can offer just as much fun to your baby. At home, you will need to show your baby this by joining in play activities with them. It is important that you encourage your baby to play and have fun in Māori.



### **Not enough Māori language bedtime reading material**



Sometimes parents find it difficult to find suitable Māori bedtime story books. Some will resort to English books and stories.

Reading to your baby, even during your pregnancy, is a great way for your baby to hear you speaking Māori. When your baby is born, a bedtime reading routine can be really helpful to their development. It provides a good opportunity to use Māori language in your baby's daily routine. It also shows your baby that Māori language is a source of fun, enjoyment and closeness with you.



### **You have older children who you have bonded with in English**



Families nowadays come in all shapes and sizes. You may be in a situation where you have other children living with you as part of your family. If your relationship with these children is one where you speak English to each other, it can be really hard to change the language spoken in your home to Māori. It can be even harder to maintain it. But that doesn't mean it can't be done!

Building a Māori language environment in your home works best when everyone is on board – even the kids! You will need to talk with your older children. Explain to them that you want your new baby to grow up with two languages, Māori and English. Tell them that you want everyone in the house to try to speak Māori only to baby, so that baby can learn the language. Make them feel important by telling them that they have an important part to play in helping you achieve this goal.

If your older children already speak Māori, tell them how special they are and what a wonderful gift they have. The more encouragement you can give, the more likely you are to gain their support.

If your older children do not speak Māori, explain to them that teaching baby will be an exciting chance for you all to learn together. You will find that most children will pick up the language quite naturally and quickly just from hearing you speak it regularly in the home. Play games in Māori with them so that they see Māori language as fun.



You may need to give them a gentle reminder every now and then when they break into English. But remember that encouragement and praise for your children when they speak Māori will produce the best results!

If you take the time to include your older children in this journey and make them feel like they have an important role to play in baby's language development, it is likely that they will respond in a positive way. The decision to raise your new baby as a Māori language speaker can have benefits for the whole family.



## -Tips-

- Start reading Māori language stories to your baby at bedtime from as early as possible. This is something that a less fluent speaker could do easily.
- Don't expect much response at first. As long as your baby is interested and looking at the pictures or book, then baby is soaking it in.

