

# HOW TO BUILD POSITIVE MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUNG MĀORI MENTEES



All young people experience challenges along the road to adulthood, and for young people from Māori backgrounds, an increased amount of challenges can be met. These might include lower levels of education, increased health issues, or language barriers.

As a mentor, you will not only have the opportunity to impact your mentee's path, but also to learn more about your mentee's cultural heritage.

In order to gain a better appreciation and understanding of another culture, you need to first reflect upon your own culture and what it means to be an individual from your community. With this level of self awareness it is appropriate to explore the traditions, history and challenges of another culture.

Preparing yourself in this way will allow you as a mentor to bring a sense of confidence about yourself, and respect of your mentee's background. These qualities will aid in the development of rapport and building of your mentoring relationship. Cultural awareness leads to cultural safety which in turn will establish a secure environment for you both to grow.

## SOME ASPECTS OF MĀORI CULTURE

The brief information below is only intended to offer some clues about Māori culture. As you build a relationship with your mentee, seek to learn more about these aspects of their culture as it relates to them, while remembering that today's young people, regardless of their ethnicity, are also influenced by a wide range of sources from music to fashion to family and culture.

Māori can define themselves by their iwi (tribe), hapu (sub-tribe), maunga (mountain) and awa (river). Whanau is the name given to family – the term embraces immediate family, in-laws and all those connected by blood ties.

The following have been identified as important to Maori identity:

- A relationship with the land (which provides a sense of belonging).
- Spirituality (which provides a sense of meaning, connection and purpose).

- Ancestral ties (which provide ancestral-based wisdom and appropriate guidelines for living).
- Tikanga Māori (customs which carry values and cultural practices unique to Māori people).
- Kinship ties (which carry obligations to contribute to the well-being of the family and extended family).
- A sense of humanity (which involves a sense of belonging to a wider community).

### Māori

The name "Māori" originally meant "the local people" or "the original people" as opposed to the new arrivals – white European settlers – the "pakeha". With the arrival of European settlers, the word Māori gradually became an adjective for the "Māori people". This change took place before 1815.

### Tangata Whenua

Tangata whenua signifies "the local people", "the local people of the land or ancestral land". Tangata signifies "human being", whenua signifies "land" or "ancestral land"

### Marae

The term Marae describes a communal area that includes a whareniui (meeting house) and wharekai (dining room). The Marae provides a focus for social gatherings, food, and cultural and spiritual life. The Marae is considered a sacred place, and there are specific rituals involved in entering a Marae.

### Kohanga Reo

Although between 10 and 20 percent of Maori people speak fluent Māori, it is listed as an endangered language. In recent years, the introduction of Māori language nests (kohanga reo) has revived the Māori language. At kohanga reo, preschool children are encouraged to speak in Māori. Primary and secondary schools build on this early immersion by including Māori in the curriculum. Māori language has a logical structure, and, unlike English, has very consistent rules of pronunciation.

### Tikanga Māori

Tikangi Māori are the customs and traditions which have been handed down through time and are associated with the Māori worldview. They can be described as general behaviour guidelines for daily life and interaction with Māori culture. Tikanga Māori include daily greetings, formal welcomes, behavioural protocols for Marae and Tangihanga (funerals) and so on. Tikanga Māori differ from one tribe to another.

## Korero Māori

The traditional Māori world is an oral culture. Emphasis is on the spoken word. Stories of the ancestors have been handed down the generations this way. They include Māori oral traditions about ancient peoples and gods who inhabited New Zealand from the beginning of time.

## Karakia

Karakia, or prayer, is an important component of Māori culture. Karakias are said before meetings, before eating food, and may even be said before a medical procedure.

## Mana

Mana has been defined in English as “authority, control, influence, prestige or power”. It is also honour. Traditionally there are three kinds of Mana.

1. The Mana a person was born with. This is the Mana that comes from Whakapapa, the family or the genealogy of the person.
2. Mana that is given to you. This is the recognition that people give for your deeds and actions. Humbleness is a very highly valued trait in the Māori world.
3. Group Mana. This is the mana that a group has, for example the mana of a marae.

## Traditional arts

Māori culture includes traditional and contemporary arts. Traditional arts such as carving, weaving, kapa haka (group performance), whaikorero (oratory) and moko (tattoo) are practised throughout the country. Practitioners following in the footsteps of their tipuna (ancestors) replicate the techniques used hundreds of years ago, and also develop new techniques and forms. Today Māori culture also includes art, film, television, poetry, theatre, and hip-hop.

## Haka

The haka has become a unique form of national expression. The word “haka” means a dance, or a song accompanied by dance. The origins of the haka are rooted in the folklore and legend that reflects Māori heritage. In pre-European and early contact times, the haka was used as a part of the formal process when two parties came together. To most people, the haka is a war dance or challenge.

## Māori and Raising Children

Children are seen as the children of the whole whānau – not just of their mother and father. The terms for mother and father – whaea and matua – are also used to mean aunt and uncle. Children were raised in, and supported by, a wider whānau that included grandparents, aunts and uncles as well as parents. Today that situation has changed due to family members working longer hours, living away from home etc. Adult-infant bed sharing is common due to the belief it may have physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits for the child.

## SOME TRADITIONS AND TABOOS IN MĀORI CULTURE

Māori culture has a rich history of prohibitions and restrictions that inform the day-to-day life of Māori. Many of these are linked to food, but extending to practices surrounding birth and death, fishing and harvesting, menstruation and haircuts. Some of these are recognised among New Zealand society today, while others are less often practised. The following are a small selection of commonly practised traditions and taboos:

- Do not sit on food preparation or eating surfaces or use food except for eating (i.e. not in games or art etc).
- Pillows are only for heads.
- Shoes are removed before entering a Marae. This is just one element of the rituals involved with entering a Marae.
- The head is the most sacred (tapu) area of the body. Ask for permission before touching the head. Passing over a person's head is believed to strip away the person's sacredness (tapu).
- Direct eye contact is kept to a minimum as it may signify disrespect or confrontation.

## CHALLENGES

Māori youth today are living in culturally complex and socially diverse environments and often navigate multiple identities. While an understanding of the Māori historical context is important, awareness and acknowledgement of contemporary issues in their lives is also necessary, to ensure programmes which serve them are relevant and sensitive.

In the 1990s, a focus developed on reducing socio-economic inequalities between Māori and Pākehā. Programmes were introduced in the hope that these would increase positive social outcomes for Māori, but young Māori still face poorer social outcomes compared to many of their peers, such as high rates of suicide, unemployment and poor academic achievement outcomes. The impacts of these experiences remain wide-reaching, as recently noted by Spoonley in a newspaper article celebrating the work of renaissance leader the late Dr Ranginui Walker.

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*We are presented with a paradox. Iwi and corporate Māori organisations now have much greater resources at their disposal, but Māori households and individuals remain amongst the most deprived in Aotearoa. This is compounded by educational underachievement and often, poor health.*”

(Spoonley, 2016)

## COMMUNICATING WITH MĀORI YOUTH

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- Confirm what your mentee likes to be called, write down their name and ensure you have the right pronunciation.
- Use clear and uncomplicated language. Steer away from using jargon or acronyms.
- Do not attempt to copy your mentee's way of speaking, this is inappropriate in any culture.
- Genuinely listen, watch out for the non verbal cues which may provide information as to your mentee's feelings.
- Use questioning carefully, do not probe. Use indirect questions as direct or blunt questions may be considered confrontational.
- Your mentee may seek knowledge by presenting information for confirmation or disapproval.
- Silence/s may provide your mentee with a chance to listen and prepare an answer. The length of your mentee's reply may be something that you need to be flexible with.
- Follow your mentee's lead on the amount of eye contact to use. In some indigenous cultures it is considered inappropriate or rude to look someone straight in the eye.
- Your mentee may not initially offer opinions. They may prefer to listen to others and wait to share their view.
- Use verbal (oh, yes, mmm) and non verbal (nod head, lean forward) cues to show you are listening, while providing space and time for your mentee to share.
- Let your mentee's actions guide you on the appropriate amount of personal space to provide.

## STRATEGIES TO BUILD THE RELATIONSHIP

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- Do some research and be aware of special occasions and dates relating to your mentee's background, whether it cultural or religious.
- Although you may not understand certain cultural differences, respect your mentee's culture.
- Try and find something that you both have in common to help build rapport and the relationship.
- Depending on individual circumstances, your mentee may feel uncertain about where they fit into their Māori culture and balancing Māori culture with other aspects of their life. Let your mentee know that everybody fits into more than one place in life and they have the power to choose the places and people where they feel most secure.
- Be aware of any cultural boundaries that exist: if you are uncertain ask your programme coordinator.
- Whanau/family is important in Māori culture. If within programme boundaries, seek to make yourself known to your mentee's family.
- Be sure to get involved in programme activities: encourage your mentee to develop friendships with the other mentees in the programme.



## REFERENCES & FURTHER INFORMATION

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There are many websites which provide information about Maori history, customs, traditions and protocols. A good place to start is:

- Te Ara - [www.teara.govt.nz](http://www.teara.govt.nz)

The encyclopedia of NZ - a complete guide to our people, environment, history, culture and society.