



Māori whānau and Pasifika family experiences of sleep health messages

Why

Te Hiringa Hauora/Health Promotion Agency commissioned Malatest International to conduct small-scale qualitative research with 25 Māori and Pasifika parents and caregivers of children aged two years or under. The purpose was to understand experiences with commonly promoted healthy sleep messages.

How

Semi-structured in-depth focus groups and interviews were conducted with 12 Māori parents/caregivers from Auckland (6) and Northland (6) and 13 Pasifika parents/caregivers from Auckland. Participants included mothers (18), fathers (3) and grandmothers (4).

Limitations


As this is a small-scale qualitative study including participants from Auckland and Northland, the findings are suggestive, and may not reflect views of all Māori and Pasifika families and communities with children aged two years or under.

Awareness of healthy sleep messages

Participants expressed varied levels of awareness of the different sleep messages (below figure). Generally, safe sleep messages had higher awareness than messages promoting quality sleep.

Higher Awareness

- Encourage breastfeeding¹.
- Eliminate smoking during pregnancy and have a smoke-free home and car².
- Have a consistent but flexible nap and bedtime routine³.
- Always place babies on their backs to sleep⁴.
- Promote safe bed sharing by ensuring a separate sleep space⁵.
- Bassinets, cots and pēpi pods should be kept free...to prevent suffocation or over-heating⁶.



Lower Awareness

- Have a comfortable sleep environment that is quiet, warm and dark⁷.
- Under two year olds need cuddles and interaction for secure attachment and good sleep⁸.
- Observe unique sleep patterns and sing oriori to encourage sleep⁹.
- Have a baby in the same room as the caregiver for the first six months of life¹⁰.



Experiences with the healthy sleep messages

Families responded positively to messages that:

- Were useful, clear and straight forward.
- Promoted behaviours they agreed with.
- Reinforced common sense.
- Were believed to foster safe and loving relationships.

Messages did not resonate as well with families when:

- **Why a message was important was not communicated or understood:** Most participants noted that some of the recommended behaviours promoted within messages had not been maintained because they did not think they were justified.
- **They were impractical or challenging for their environment:** Some messages (eg, having a separate room, Pēpi Pod or wahakura) were impractical for families due to issues such as low income, inadequate housing and the range of people in and out of households. Impractical messages impacted on families confidence to implement and maintain recommended behaviours.
- **Advice was not always realistic for their wider family:** Some messages were seen as focusing on individuals rather than being understood and addressed within a family context (eg, smoking habits of their wider family).
- **They promoted multiple points:** These messages were seen as confusing and unlikely to influence long-term behavioural change.
- **Cultural contexts and lived realities were not recognised:** Living with babies in Māori and Pasifika contexts included life on marae and in communal settings that were not reflected in the messages.
- **Formal advice contradicted whānau views/practices:** It was common for advice received from family to take precedence over the recommended advice from health professionals.



Implications

The research suggested that effective healthy sleep messages for Māori and Pasifika families should:

- Be simple and clear.
- Provide understanding about why they are important.
- Be clear whether they are prescriptive for safety reasons or suggest approaches to consider.
- Resonate with Māori and Pasifika parents and families.
- Provide practical advice that align with te ao Māori and tikānga, and Pasifika worldviews, socio-cultural contexts and realities.
- Recognise that relationships matter - advice provided by trusted sources (eg, family or health professionals who have built a trusting relationship) are more likely to influence parents and caregivers' attitudes and behaviours relating to healthy sleep.
- Reach and engage families. Be non-judgemental, flexible and practical - a 'share and discuss' engagement style between families and health professionals is needed to acknowledge and understand conflicting advice, and allow for informative, non-judgemental, flexible and practical application of healthy sleep practice among families

Information and communication needs

Participants wanted information to be presented visually, via social media, YouTube videos and live engagement with medical professionals (eg, WhatsApp). Face-to-face engagement via wānanga and antenatal classes were noted as more effective forms of engagement for Māori and Pasifika families than pamphlets and written information. These engagement styles allow for more flexibility in messaging.

Participants wanted more information about:

- **Orioi:** Not all families had access to oriori. Access to and understanding of oriori was described as connecting to identity and consolidating strength in cultural identity.
- **Available support systems:** For immediate online access to GPs rather than travelling to a clinic, YouTube video clips etc. providing different examples of behaviours to support sleep and encourage healthy sleeping.
- **How to get baby to sleep:** Practical information about how to settle and re-settle babies – how to safely help babies cry themselves to sleep (within lived realities and contexts).
- **Risk factors:** Information about risk factors and why the behaviours in the messages are safer.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all our Māori and Pasifika parents, caregivers and families for welcoming us into your lives. It was a pleasure to get to know you and we thank you for graciously sharing your experiences of parenting and healthy sleep messages with us.

We wish you and your beautiful pēpē and tamariki all the very best for the future.

Thank you also to Te Hiringa Hauora for funding and support to complete this research.

Malatest International.

Citations for sleep messages

1. Encourage breastfeeding (National SUDI Prevention Programme: Needs Assessment and Care Planning Guide, <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-sudi-prevention-programme-needs-assessment-and-care-planning-guide>)
2. Eliminate smoking during pregnancy and have a smoke free home and car (National SUDI Prevention Programme: Needs Assessment and Care Planning Guide, <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-sudi-prevention-programme-needs-assessment-and-care-planning-guide>)
3. Have a consistent (but flexible) daytime nap and bedtime routine: This might include a bath, brushing teeth, a story then bed. Quiet activities are good before bed (Factsheet: Sleep tips for young children <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/sleeping/helping-young-children-sleep-better>)
4. Always place babies on their back to sleep (Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well: Active Play Guidelines for Under-fives, <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/active-play-guidelines-for-under-fives-may17.pdf> and National SUDI Prevention Programme: Needs Assessment and Care Planning Guide, <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-sudi-prevention-programme-needs-assessment-and-care-planning-guide>)
5. Promote safe bed sharing by ensuring a separate sleep space, for example a wahakura (woven bassinet) or Pēpi Pod (Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well: Active Play Guidelines for Under-fives, <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/active-play-guidelines-for-under-fives-may17.pdf>)
6. Bassinettes, cots, Pēpi Pods, and wahakura should be kept free of loose covers, bumpers, pillows, blankets and other objects, such as cuddly toys, that could cause suffocation or over-heating, and fitted sheets should be the correct size for the mattress and pulled tight (Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well: Active Play Guidelines for Under-fives, <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/active-play-guidelines-for-under-fives-may17.pdf>)
7. Have a comfortable sleep environment that is quiet, warm and dark (Factsheet: Sleep tips for young children <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/food-activity-and-sleep/sleeping/helping-young-children-sleep-better>)
8. Under two-year-olds need cuddles and interaction to feel secure and emotionally attached. Secure attachments contribute to good quality sleep (Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well: Active Play Guidelines for Under-fives, <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/active-play-guidelines-for-under-fives-may17.pdf>)
9. Observe unique sleep patterns and look for signs of sleepiness. Encourage sleep by singing oriori (lullaby) as a way of sharing Pūrākau (ancestral knowledge) (Sit Less, Move More, Sleep Well: Active Play Guidelines for Under-fives, <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/active-play-guidelines-for-under-fives-may17.pdf>)
10. Have a baby in the same room as the caregiver for the first six months of life. (National SUDI Prevention Programme: Needs Assessment and Care Planning Guide, <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/national-sudi-prevention-programme-needs-assessment-and-care-planning-guide>).