

## MAORI FAMILIES: THE SUPPORT SYSTEM

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According to the definition of the Anthropologist, Margaret Mead, Maori Society is likely to fall within three phases of adaption and acculturation. The postfigurative which is when the future repeats the past. An example of that is when I ask for the whenua or afterbirth of my grandchild and bury it in a special place so that he will always have links to papatuānuku, earth, mother. The second is the cofigurative when the present is the guide to future expectations. An example of that is fighting for bilingual schools; the expectation being that people of the Maori race can maintain their culture and identity in a white-dominated, mono-cultural society. The third phase is the prefigurative where the elders have to learn from children about experiences which they have never had, such as my grandchildren explaining to their grandfather that Russia or America could blow up the world in under 15 minutes.

This definition for me serves to demonstrate how young Maori society is in terms of adaption and acculturation, and the wide differences to be found in three generations. This is a key perception for the understanding of child abuse in Maori families. Important also is the acceptance that violence begets violence and that often the most tortuous form of abuse need not necessarily be physical. With these points before you, I would have you consider the following and decide who is the abuser and who is the victim.

1. Child abuse for Maori families has to do with experiencing the frustrations of social ills such as unemployment, like wanting to work for your family but being put on a scheme for 6 months then made to stand down for the next 6 months, and having nothing for children for Christmas, like having inadequate housing - having your 3 bedroom state house full to overcrowded with your 6 children, your sister and her baby, an unemployed brother plus your father, then having to put your mother in a rest home because there's no room in the house.
2. Child abuse for Maori families comes from a sense of loneliness and isolation in a dominant culture life-style which offers so much but puts strictures and controls on how and whom can attain.
3. Child abuse for Maori families comes from realising there is no going back to a past only a slow movement forward to no future.
4. Child abuse for Maori families comes from the conflict of love and hate. Love for a child who affirms your past, your present and your future, and hate for that same child who because of television, books, films, advertising and peers highlights your inadequacy, your guilt, your inability to cope.
5. Child abuse for Maori families is wrapped up in valuing 'Taonga' such as histories, genealogies, spirituality and then having your guts twisted by someone who maintains it's all a myth and tries to sell you another myth.
6. Child abuse in Maori families has to do with waiting for a Ngata, Buck, or Pomare to surface, to show the way out of this dilemma, then one day realising they are here, but they married pakeha women and

and their perception has changed.

7. Child abuse for Maori families has to do with the growing anger that gnaws at the pit of your stomach when you know you can't speak on the marae because your father is still alive and your Maori is not good enough but you have to sit and listen to non-Maoris speak, in English, and see your father nod his head in approval.
8. Child abuse for Maori families is not coping in the city, dreaming - then planning to go home and build on land where you were born which has provided your identity, then being told you can't do that - the Town and Country Planning Act doesn't allow it.
9. Child abuse for Maori families comes from watching the hope fade out of your 5 year old's eyes when you say "Yes, son - you are a Maori".
10. Child abuse for Maori families has to do with realising there are no more tears left to cry, your back's against the wall, and the only way out is to fight.

Who is the abuser and who is the victim? I put it to you that there is a good argument for seeing the Maori family as the victim, and the dominant culture - the abuser.

So much subtle violence is being perpetrated against a young, attempting to adapt culture. It seems inevitable that this generation will absorb the hopelessness, the anger, the powerlessness, the resentment caused by observing the play that is being enacted before them. It seems inevitable that they will abuse the new generation.

For you see, the symptoms of abuse against any individual are:

- Loss of self-esteem and confidence
- A dependence on something or someone
- A change in personality, a withdrawal, a sort of brooding moodiness
- A desperate clamour for attention
- An acting out against other members in the same family
- A feeling of guilt
- Signs of bruises and welts

It is my contention that Maori families are exhibiting all these symptoms now. Statistics such as those for unemployment, attendances in mental institutions, prisons, hospitals and the growing street-crime-rate bear this out.

We have diagnosed a problem. Is there a treatment plan? I want to pose seven points to you which I consider are real issues in any child abuse case, regardless of who is the abuser or who is the victim. These 7 points are important. They are:

1. Questioning, probing and confronting the adult
2. Where permanent damage is likely, removing the 'at risk' person
3. Relieving pressure points for the adult
4. Realising that permanent separation is a drastic step and to be avoided unless absolutely necessary
5. Developing support systems for both an adult and the child
6. Affirming all the positive aspects of the relationship, the loyalty, the individuality, the uniqueness, the bond between parent and child, the fun

7. Educating both the adult and child to develop a new awareness and perspective, an acceptance of changes and an acceptance of changes that can't be made.

I want to take those seven points and look more specifically at the dominant culture, the abuser, and the Maori family - the victim.

The first point was:

Questioning, probing and confronting the adult. Adults are in a powerful position in any society. But in this day and age of democracy and enlightenment, attitudes, prejudices and practises are likely to be challenged. You, the adult in this case can expect that from your colleagues, other members of your society and of course the 'child' (the Maori society) - you will be challenged. Your feelings of superiority, your attitudes to Maori people, coming to terms with your racist views and realising that even your institutions are geared to keep the 'child' in an inferior position. Looking at and checking how you negatively stereotype and put down, generally perpetuating within Maori society feelings of powerlessness and worthlessness.

The world of a child is a world of friendship and fun - Maori society also has values that can compliment and enrich your world.

The second point was:

In serious cases remove the 'at risk' child. In terms of the present Maori/pakeha relationship, that is what the Maori people want - an opportunity for temporary respite to catch up with and self-determine the future, realising that there has been changes in the structure of the Maori family since the contact period, a mere 180 years ago. During this respite, to have the dominant culture accept that this is only temporary - the right to have the Maori News for longer than 5 minutes, the right to have culture groups, trade training schemes, scholarships - these are merely stepping stones to catching up with the future rather than stumbling blocks for all.

The third point was releasing pressure points for the adult.

In this case an important realisation for you the adult is that the 'child' is in no position to threaten. The 'child' is powerless, few in number, unsophisticated in terms of waging war. So Maori families want to release that pressure - we are not a threat to you - so don't feel threatened.

We want to release the pressure in you or the fear that we may not want to stay in the family. We want to be New Zealanders - we want to be one-family, but we want individuality. First names like Hemi, Hine, Hana are special but that doesn't mean we want to break up the family, so let that stress go - we can be one family if we value one another. We want you, 'the adult' to let go of the fear that you have a black sheep in the family, and realise that even though this child is different from other children, the needs are the same. Let go the pressure of trying to beat 'the black sheep' into shape. We are more 'the same' than different - so release that pressure. There are other pressures to be released in the adult. This could require therapy but an abusing adult has to expect that. There are advocates for the child who want to build bridges rather than tear them down, so the therapy is likely to be pleasurable.

The fourth consideration was:

Realising that separation is a drastic step and a loss to both the child and

the adult - something to be avoided unless absolutely necessary. When I was a child I would fantasize about being a member of the Royal Family - a princess riding in a gold carriage, having a father that was a king, and being able to command all. Now I set aside childish things and realise that I can't change my family of origin and they can't change me. You are pakeha and can't change that. I am Maori and can't change that but we are a New Zealand family and separation would be devastating for all.

You would feel incriminated when adults of the world accuse you of - "How could you have allowed your uniqueness, your intra-relationship with Maori people to get to this stage - one of total assimilation or total annihilation". And I - useless for me to try to get you to return my Maori land that has been in your family for all these generations. Useless for me to tell you to go back to where you came from. Useless for me to opt out and try to return to the past. More productive to the relationship to accept our strengths, build on those and avoid separation.

The fifth consideration was:

Developing support systems for both the adult and the child. When an adult is accused of child abuse, that individual needs the support of an understanding community, needs people who help build bridges, who allow the adult some relief from child care and who praise and give approval for all the positive aspects engendered in the family.

When we consider pakeha people and the support systems they have in the parent role there are many but there are some notables. Quite a few of you, and I certainly include those seated here, are learning the Maori language and trying to understand and appreciate where the Maori family is at. This is worthy of praise and approval. I think of myself and others like me, as bridge builders and would offer that to support the adult in you. As for a supportive community - there will be no greater support system than the Maori family for a pakeha adult, when they, the Maori, can feel a genuine desire to understand, appreciate and experience.

Support systems for the Maori family are all the precepts that your western society is based on. They are democracy, acceptance, tolerance, compassion and freedom. (A good ear also to hear and appreciate what is being said). Pakeha people have to hear Maori people say, "we want jobs, we want better education, we want to retain our language, our maraes are important to us. The land that we have now - please hands off"! The whanau system which is the extended family and more, is our greatest asset. It is our strength, our identifier, our problem solving system, our connection with the past, so help us preserve it.

The sixth consideration was:

Affirming all the positive aspects of the relationship, the individuality, the uniqueness, the loyalty, the bond between parent and child, the fun. It is my belief that we as Maori and pakeha can enjoy all these values as a family, living in this country.

Individuality - well one can look to our native bush for an apt analogy. Every tree is different, the colour, the size, the shape, the flower, the smell - this makes for a richness. The trees are stately, they are grand, they have a history, they are close and intertwined, they offer peace, security and a sense of gratitude for a power and intellect greater than that of man. Contrast this with the man made pine forests that we are preoccupied with growing - all the same, all in straight lines, no beauty - they desecrate the land, have a

short life span and are grown only in terms of practicalities - for money. The native bush offers an analogy of uniqueness which we as New Zealanders can well afford to stand still and observe.

Talking about fun in any relationship - I went to watch a football match in Pukekohe last year, Auckland playing Counties. The people who sat on the side of the hill sat in small family-like clusters. As I looked closely I noticed that almost all groups had Maori and pakeha individuals in them - they were mixed. There was a general feeling of fun and comradeship. I found no feeling of antagonism, hate or negativity - so it's not impossible to have fun and be one.

The bond of loyalty to the family is strong: every New Zealander, Maori, Pakeha, Samoan or whatever thrilled to the participation and success of our athletes at the Olympic Games. I felt a surge of pride when watching one sports event - I think it was the swimming - there was just a short glimpse of the New Zealand contingent doing a haka to spur on their fellow swimmer, all of those in the haka were pakeha, so I do feel a growing bond of awareness and genuineness between some Maori and some pakeha. Like any family, we have to watch carefully the outside factions that could put stress on this relationship.

The seventh and most important part of the treatment plan for me is education.

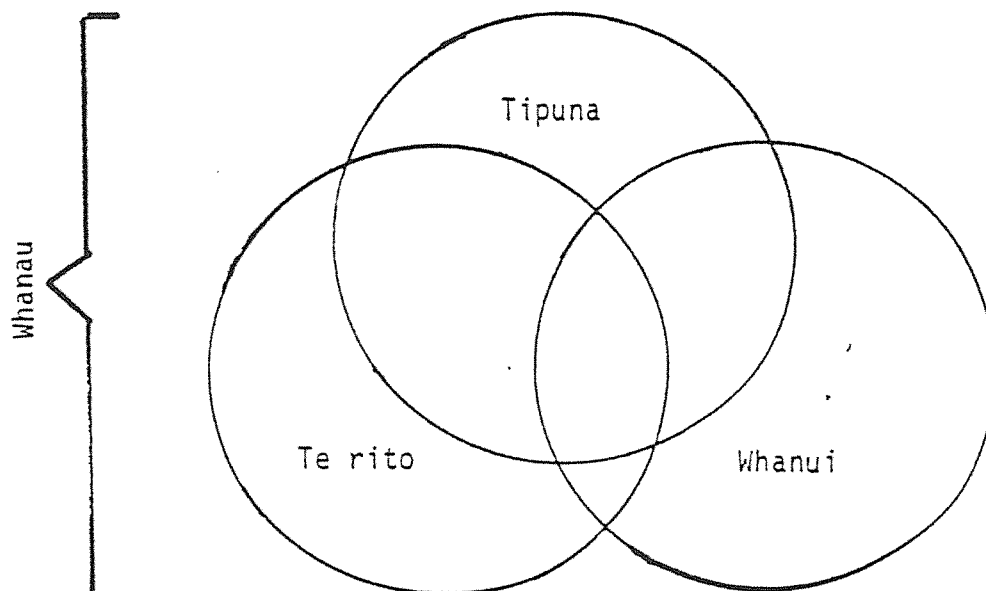
As one realises education can be from parent to child or child to parent, I am also aware that the 'child' (Maori families) have a lot of self-learning to do.

We have to:

- shake off the yoke of dependence
- self-determine our own future
- pull together in one direction
- realise our cultural assets and our cultural strengths and build them

That brings me to the Maori whanau. As stated before, for me this is our greatest asset.

The whanau to Maori people is beyond the definition of 'nuclear' and 'extended family'. My personal description of this Maori concept of whanau can be represented as such; three components that are inter-related :



that provide balance, identity and cohesiveness to the working whole.

One component is related to Tipuna and whanau members who have passed on. This provides the spiritual and emotional well-being to the family. It is from ancestors that Maori whanau develop their identity. Whakapapa (genealogies), family histories and stories of tipuna and loved ones are important - they provide a cohesive power for all those people who can trace their genealogy back to certain tipuna.

The next component represents Whanui or tribal families. Most Maori people recognise the tribal names to whom they have links or ties. The fact that the actual connection may not be known is immaterial - the more important issue is to know whether the connection is made on the individual's mother's side or father's side. The whanui component is a way of developing and having a more personal relationship with a wider group of people. Again the strength of the whanui-links are maintained by whakapapa, family histories, waiata, haka and hui opportunities.

The third component is the whanau Te rito - the closer family, which generally refers to an individual's family of orientation such as great grandparents, grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews and cousins. This part of the whanau provide the immediate nurturance and the physical and emotional support. Members of the whanau te rito on both the mother's side and father's side are usually known to all individuals.

So these three components make up the whole known to the Maori as The Whanau. If for any reason any of these components are fragmented or lost then the whanau may experience stress, strife, dissonance or loss of identity.

To keep the system balanced most whanau have their own value systems such as traditions, marae rituals and obligations. These are always related to tribal identity.

So we have shared some moments learning about the concepts of the Maori whanau. Education is important in any child abuse case - it highlights another way of doing, seeing, appreciating and understanding. There can be no room for blame, criticism, accusations or guilt.

At the beginning of this presentation I said that the dominant culture was the 'abuser' and Maori families the 'victims' and have continued to use this analogy right throughout. I look around this conference and see most participants are of the dominant culture and I know that you are here because you care. You are 'bridge builders' rather than 'calabash breakers', so I would like you to take a big breath and let go totally of the inappropriate label of 'abuser' as you breathe out. Together we have shared and exchanged concepts in this education experience and we have gathered to support all efforts to reduce child abuse, be they Maori or pakeha. This cause needs us all as 'bridge builders'. I can't function effectively without you, or you without me; for my uniqueness is wrapped up in yours and yours in mine. No reira, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.