



strong families, STRONG COMMUNITIES

Twelve-year old Tangaroa has brought home a school friend, Tom, to share a family dinner on Friday night. It's a normal gathering by Maori standards with Tangaroa's parents, brothers and sisters, his grandmother, an uncle and several cousins eating together. By contrast, Tom's family do not always eat together and meals with his cousins or grandparents might only happen a few times a year. Tom is impressed that Tangaroa's family want to be together and enjoy each other's company so much.

The picture painted above shows some positive qualities of the extended Pacific family. Among these qualities are the strong ties linking different generations, our commitment to looking out for each other and ability to show love openly to family members. As well, our elders are treated with respect and have an important role in passing down knowledge.

Outside the extended family, we usually come together through the church, community or tribal gatherings.

The church is often the centre of the community, caring for community members and acting as the focus for celebrations like weddings and christenings. It gives us a strong sense of connection and belonging, which reminds us of who we are and where we come from.

By passing down our traditions, we help give our children a sense of who they are. In turn, this sense of identity makes them stronger people who can get the most out of the opportunities for a better life in Australia.



One child, two sets of rules

As our children grow, they come into contact with ideas and values that are at odds with our traditional beliefs and values. They see that there are different ways to dress and talk, and different rules by which some families manage their lives. This happens quite naturally when our children go to school and make friends from outside their community.

As parents, we need to understand the cultural pressures our kids face. Simana Kami (a well known Tongan entertainer) sums up the situation.

"You have to understand that when our children go to school, they will be spending eight hours a day with kids who think differently to the way we think. So don't be so hard on them. Maintain the traditions ... but keep an open mind. You have to wear two hats."

Preserving our culture

Because there are different influences on family life in Australia, preserving our Pacific culture can be a challenge. It is nevertheless a challenge we need to take on. Here are some tips for maintaining traditional culture:

- from the time they are born, talk and sing to your children in your own language. This will create a shared culture between you and your child

- share family stories about the life their grandparents or great grandparents led in the islands – stories of everyday activities such as catching and preparing food and special ceremonies. These stories tell of a different world and will capture your child's imagination
- teach them a meke, the tamure or a traditional dance or action song
- pass down Pacific legends, such as how the islands came to be occupied
- teach them traditional handicrafts such as tapa/masi stenciling or mat making
- tell your children the name of their clan or tribal unit, the hierarchy of the clan and its rules
- get the children involved in church activities like the choir or band
- encourage them to join cultural groups – Kapahaka, Island associations or community organisations to reinforce and celebrate traditional customs.

Other ways to build a strong and happy family

Passing on traditions to our children gives them a sense of identity and enriches their lives. Keys principles for building a happy family in any culture include:

- talking openly and honestly within the family
- making sure you spend time together as a family
- working as a team on family decisions and household chores
- supporting and encouraging each other.