

Our Ancestors

Early observations of whānau

The following observations made by some of the European men who first visited New Zealand paint a picture of generally harmonious Māori family life where children were nurtured with a great deal of love and patience, and fathers had a key role in parenting.



Reverend Samuel Marsden (1765–1838)

CHAPLAIN, MAGISTRATE, AGRICULTURALIST, MISSIONARY

"I saw no quarrelling while I was there. They are kind to their women and children. I never observed either with a mark of violence upon them, nor did I ever see a child struck."

"The children are generally very easy, open and familiar at the first interview, and show an anxiety to pay every little attention in their power to the strangers. There can be no finer children than those of the New Zealanders in any part of the world. Their parents are very indulgent, and they appear always happy and playful and very active."

"The chiefs take their children from their mother's breast to all their public assemblies, where they hear all that is said upon politics, religion, war etc., by the oldest men. Children will frequently ask questions in public conversation and are answered by the chiefs. I have often been surprised to see children sitting amongst the chiefs and paying close attention to what was said. The children never appear under any embarrassment when they address a stranger whom they never saw. In every village the children, as soon as they learned any of our names, came up to us and spake to us with the greatest familiarity."



Richard Taylor (1805–1873)

MISSIONARY

"One of the finest traits I have noticed in the New Zealanders is that of parental love; the men appear chiefly to nurse their children, and are generally to be seen with one on their back covered up under their mats, the little things appear likewise sensible of their fathers' love for they seem principally to cling to them." (1839)



Joel Polack (1807–1882)

TRADER, LAND SPECULATOR, WRITER, ARTIST

"The boys are brought up almost entirely by the men; and it is not uncommon to see young children of tender years sitting next to their parents in the war councils, apparently listening with the great attention..."

"They also ask questions in the most numerous attended assemblies of chiefs, who answer them with an air of respect, as is they were of a corresponding age to themselves. I do not remember a request of an infant being treated with neglect or a demand from one of them being slighted."

"The children are seldom or never punished;"

"The father performs the duty of a nurse; and any foul action the embryo warrior may be guilty of, causes rather a smile than a tear from the devoted parent."

"...He (the father) generally bore the burden of carrying them continually within his mat, whose rugged texture must be very annoying to the tender infant"

Edward Shortland (1812–1893)

DOCTOR, ADMINISTRATOR, SCHOLAR, LINGUIST

“The chief aim, therefore in the education of children being to make them bold, brave, and independent in thought and act, a parent is seldom seen to chastise his child...”



George French Angas (1822–1886)

ARTIST, WRITER, NATURALIST

“Both parents are almost idolatrously fond of their children; and the father frequently spends a considerable portion of his time in nursing his infant, who nestles in his blanket, and is lulled to rest by some native song...”

“The children are cheerful and lively little creatures, full of vivacity and intelligence. They pass their early years almost without restraint, amusing themselves with the various games of the country”

(Above) **Hone Wiremu Heke Pokai and Eruera Maihi Patuone** – This lithograph of a painting by George French Angas appeared in *The New Zealanders illustrated*, published in 1847



Augustus Earle (1793–1838)

ARTIST, TRAVELLER, WRITER

“They are kind and hospitable to strangers, and are excessively fond of their children. On a journey, it is more usual to see the father carrying his infant than the mother; and all the little offices of a nurse are performed by him with the tenderest care and good humour.” (1832)

(Above) **Meeting of the artist and Hongi at the Bay of Islands, November 1827**

John Savage (1770–1838)

TRAVELLER, WRITER, SURGEON

— WHO WROTE THE FOLLOWING IN “*SOME ACCOUNT OF NEW ZEALAND, PARTICULARLY THE BAY OF ISLANDS AND SURROUNDING COUNTRY*” (1807):

“The children here appear to be treated with a great degree of parental affection. They are robust, lively, and possess, in general, pleasing countenances; their actions are totally unrestrained by clothing, or bandage, which must undoubtedly lay the foundation of their future hardihood and healthy constitution.”

Richard Cruise

MILITARY MAN

— WHO WROTE THE FOLLOWING IN “*JOURNAL OF A TEN MONTHS’ RESIDENCE IN NEW ZEALAND*” (1924):

“In the manner of rearing children, and in the remarkable tenderness and solicitous care bestowed upon them by the parents, no partiality on account of sex was in any instance observed. The infant is no sooner weaned than a considerable part of its care devolves upon the father: it is taught to twine its arms round his neck, and in this posture it remains the whole day, asleep or awake.”