

Creating mentally healthy workplace environments for Māori

WORKING WELL

 **Mental Health Foundation**
mauri tu, mauri ora OF NEW ZEALAND

This series of practical tools is designed to guide workplaces in Aotearoa New Zealand to become more culturally responsive by helping them to take positive steps to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for Māori employees. Evidence suggests culturally responsive workplaces have a positive influence on the mental health and overall wellbeing of Māori employees and gain from the social and economic benefits this can bring.

This first resource explores the concept of whānau (family and social connections) and provides context to the importance of whānau on wellbeing for Māori. We explain common cultural concepts and practices and provide practical tips for employers and employees to consider in their workplace to better meet the needs of Māori employees.

What do we mean by whānau?

Whānau translates as family and extended family. Māori view whānau as whakapapa relations, extended whānau (aunties, uncles and cousins) and wider social networks such as whānau ā kaupapa (family through a common cause, e.g., work colleagues, fellow sports team members).



The link between whānau and oranga (work and wellbeing)

Understanding the concept of whānau can help employers appreciate what contributes to the wellbeing of Māori. Te Whare Tapa Whā shows the connection between all areas of wellbeing including whānau and social wellbeing. The wellbeing of whānau impacts overall wellbeing and vice versa – overall wellbeing impacts whānau. Factors affecting the wellbeing of whānau and individuals have huge implications on the oranga and whare tapa whā of employees.



Top tips for employers

- Apply necessary wellbeing support strategies or cultural approaches/models like Te Whare Tapa Whā within your workplace to support positive hauora (health) and oranga (wellbeing) for your staff, their whānau and the organisation.

Top tips for employees

- Prioritise self-care to ensure you're looking after your own wellbeing and your whānau.
- Inform your employer of what tautoko (support) you need to take care of yourself and your whānau.

The importance of whanaungatanga in the workplace

Whanaungatanga is all about forming connections and strengthening relationships to enhance a sense of belonging and togetherness. This includes with the people we work with.

This concept is highly valued amongst Māori. It requires some time and effort to incorporate at work, but it brings many benefits for Māori and their workplaces because it helps to create a supportive and inclusive environment.

Top tips for employers

- Encourage whanaungatanga across your workplace as a regular practice and normal part of your work culture. This may include organising activities, work get togethers, e.g., kai tahi (shared lunch) or team building activities.
- Invite Māori to participate in decision-making or projects where Māori communities benefit. This could be working collaboratively with kaimahi Māori.
- Take a reciprocal approach of ‘give and take’ when engaging with Māori and demonstrate a two-way whanaungatanga approach.

Top tips for employees

- Engage and work collaboratively with others to demonstrate a two-way whanaungatanga approach. Try to share a deeper connection with those you work with and awahi them to understand the meaning of whanaungatanga.



Whānau roles and responsibilities

Many Māori hold roles and responsibilities outside of work as mātua (parents), kaumātua (grandparents) and kaitiaki (carers or caregivers). As well as this, many Māori hold other key roles within their whānau, hapū, iwi, marae or community groups. For some, this is part of their whānau and iwi tikanga (customs and practices). Maintaining and upholding tikanga in itself is huge and often takes precedence. Leave or flexibility arrangements may be required to balance whānau commitments.



Tangihanga – bereavement and leave

For Māori, bereavement can look a little different to other cultures. In Te Ao Māori the process of mourning a loved one is called a tangihanga. Also known as a tangi (to grieve/mourn), it's intrinsic in Māori culture, with many tikanga (customs/practices) and roles and responsibilities involving whānau at this time. The duration of a tangihanga from the time a person passes away to te ra nehu (burial day) can take 3–5 days or more, however this varies depending on the whānau pani (bereaved family), tikanga ā Iwi (tribal protocols) or other circumstances. The concept of whānau in this context includes those who may not have whakapapa (genealogical) links but may be a close friend, colleague, or knew the person through common interests.

Top tips for employers

- Provide flexibility options or culturally responsive practices, processes and policies that can support employees to balance work and life commitments. This can include allowance for employees to take leave to uphold their whānau responsibilities.
- If employees need to take bereavement leave, ensure they are aware of their entitlements, and if possible, offer them more days to cover the lengthy tangihanga process. If an employee has not been with their employer for six months, offer them leave in advance.
- Offer sick leave if employees are caring for whānau who are unwell.
- Show respect and tautoko for cultural customs and practices towards the employee and their whānau under such circumstances.
- Offer a return-to-work plan if the employee was closely impacted and requires tautoko to transition back into work.
- If you have cultural support available in your workplace, seek their guidance.

Top tips for employees

- Although it may not feel high priority, inform your employer as soon as possible if you are bereaved and require leave. By doing so, it helps to maintain good communication with your employer about what's happening for you and how they can support you at this time.

Whānau and mahi

Whānau are a key part of people's work life. For some, providing for their whānau is their motivation to work and whānau can play a part in the decision-making for someone's employment and career choice. Whānau may be involved in an employee's mahi because of their expertise or as whānau tautoko (family support) at job interviews, mihi whakatau and pōwhiri (formal Māori welcome) into a new job and workplace. It's also encouraged to offer whānau tautoko at a disciplinary hui. Alternatively, some employers welcome whānau of their employees to attend work Christmas or family day gatherings. Immediate whānau or extended relatives working together is also common within workplaces, industries or whānau-owned businesses and shows collective expertise in a particular kind of job or industry.

Top tips for employers

- Show that you are an employer who is supportive and accepting of employees bringing whānau to work by encouraging this in your workplace.
- Offer work from home options for whānau to balance caring for whānau and work commitments.
- Allow for whānau tautoko (support) at job interviews, mihi whakatau/pōwhiri (formal Māori welcomes) to a new job or workplace and offer the opportunity for whānau tautoko at disciplinary hui.



Top tips for employees

- Ensure open communication with your employer about your needs and the tautoko you require.
- If you have cultural support available within your workplace, talk to them if you require extra tautoko.
- Be aware of your employment rights and obligations as well as your workplace's policies and processes on flexibility.

Mental Health Foundation & Partner resources on Whānau Wellbeing

<https://mentalhealth.org.nz/te-whare-tapa-wha>

<https://mentalhealth.org.nz/five-ways-to-wellbeing>

<https://mentalhealth.org.nz/workplaces/open-minds>

<https://www.allright.org.nz/articles/whanau-and-wellbeing>

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand

www.mentalhealth.org.nz

October 2021

ISBN 978-1-98-855416-7 (print)

ISBN 978-1-98-855417-4 (PDF)

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