

Ko Wai Koe?
Let's
TALK

**25 Signs to Learn for
PEPEHA & MIHI**

nzsignlanguage.nz



Deaf
AOTEAROA
TĀNGATA TŪRI

Kia ora!

I'm Jon, a proud Turi Māori and Pasifika person
who whakapapa to Tainui, Ngaati Wairere
and Ngaati Maahanga.

I'm passionate about raising awareness of
New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and
celebrating the communities and cultures
that are an important part of who I am.

Through this booklet, I hope to celebrate identity,
promote inclusion, and encourage meaningful
connections across our communities.

The QR code below links to
this booklet in NZSL and the
featured 25 signs in action.



He Mihi

Ngā mihi nui to kaumātua and members of the Turi Māori community, past and present, for their mahi in developing Māori concept signs.

Māori concept signs in NZSL continue to be developed and strengthened through the leadership of Turi Māori. The signs used in this booklet reflect current learning and practice and will continue to evolve over time.



As with all languages, there may be variation in how signs are used across people and communities.

Introducing Yourself in Te Ao Māori

There are different ways to introduce yourself in Māori culture, depending on the context and the people you are with.

This resource introduces **pepeha** and **mihi**, and supports learners to share who they are using New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).

It recognises that people come with different backgrounds and levels of knowledge. Some people know their whakapapa well, some are still learning, and others may have ancestry outside Aotearoa.

You are encouraged to begin with what you know. Both pepeha and mihi are valid ways to introduce yourself and make connections.



What is Whakapapa?

Whakapapa can be translated as genealogy. It connects people, whānau, and communities across generations. The word whakapapa means “to place in layers,” showing how each generation builds on the one before it.

This idea helps explain how people are connected through shared ancestors and life stories.



Learning Your Whakapapa

If you are beginning your whakapapa journey, here are some simple starting points:

- Talk with your whānau; parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins
- Look at old photos, family notes, stories, or names you already know
- If you know your iwi or hapū, visit their website or contact them for guidance



As with most learning, whakapapa develops over time, and it is okay to begin with what you know.

Create Connections



It is Māori custom to create connections (whakawhanaunga). Introductions are an easy way to share the places, people and events that have helped make you who you are. This allows people to discover:

- You share a common ancestor
- You grew up in the same town or suburb
- You went to the same school
- Places you have both visited or lived in
- You know the same families
- You are related

Māori commonly use **pepeha** and **mihi** to do this.

Ko Wai Koe?

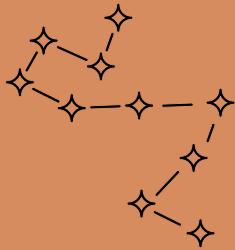
When people ask “**Ko wai koe?**”, it is an invitation to introduce yourself. On the surface it means “**Who are you?**”, but because wai means water, the question can also be understood as asking which waters you are connected to and where those waters come from.



What is a Pepeha?

Pepeha provide a structured way to introduce yourself when meeting others.

Pepeha root people to a place. Pepeha describe relationships people have with the land, their ancestors, and each other.



Pepeha Structure

Pepeha use important geographical features and communities to show who a person comes from.

- Waka – Ancestral canoe
- Maunga – Mountain
- Awa – River
- Iwi – Tribe
- Hapū – Sub tribe
- Marae – Meeting place



This reflects how Māori understand identity as part of a wider picture.

Pepeha template

Here is a template to help you build your pepeha and practise signing it in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL).



Ko _____ te waka.
_____ is the canoe.

Ko _____ te maunga.
_____ is the mountain.

Ko _____ te awa / moana.
_____ is the river / sea.

Ko _____ te iwi.
_____ is the tribe.

Ko _____ te hapū.
_____ is the sub-tribe.

Ko _____ te marae.
_____ is the marae.

An example of a
Turi Māori sharing
their pepeha in NZSL



What is a Mihi?

If you are not yet ready to use a pepeha, you can use a mihi to introduce yourself.

A mihi is a greeting and an acknowledgement of the people you are meeting with. It can also be used to acknowledge places you have lived in, or communities you are part of.

A mihi is included for learners who are still learning about their whakapapa, or whose ancestry is outside Aotearoa.



Mihi template

GREETING

(CHOOSE ONE)

Tēnā koe (1)

Hello / greetings to
one person

Tēnā kōrua (2)

Hello / greetings to
two people

Tēnā koutou (3+)

Hello / greetings to
three or more people

Kia ora

(any number)

Hello / informal greeting

MIHI



Nō _____ **ōku tīpuna.**

My ancestors are from _____ .

Kei te noho au ki _____ .

I live in _____ .

Kei te mahi au i _____ .

I work at _____ .

Ko _____ **taku kararehe**

_____ is my pet

Ko _____ **tōku ingoa.**

My name is _____ .

An example of a Pākehā
Deaf wahine sharing her
mihi in NZSL



When Might You Share Your Pepeha or Mihi?

Pepeha and mihi can be shared in many different settings, such as:

- At the start of a hui
- During whakatau
- In workplaces
- In reo Māori spaces
- In classrooms
- At community gatherings
- When meeting new people



Using a pepeha or mihi
help create connections
and is a distinctly
New Zealand way of
doing things.



Karawhiua!

Give it a go and learn these 25 SIGNS



Kāinga

Home





Pepeha

Māori introduction





Mihi

Greeting, acknowledgement



Ngā mihi

Thanks



Waka

Ancestral Canoe





Maunga

Mountain





Awa River





Iwi Tribe





Hapū

Sub-tribe



Marae

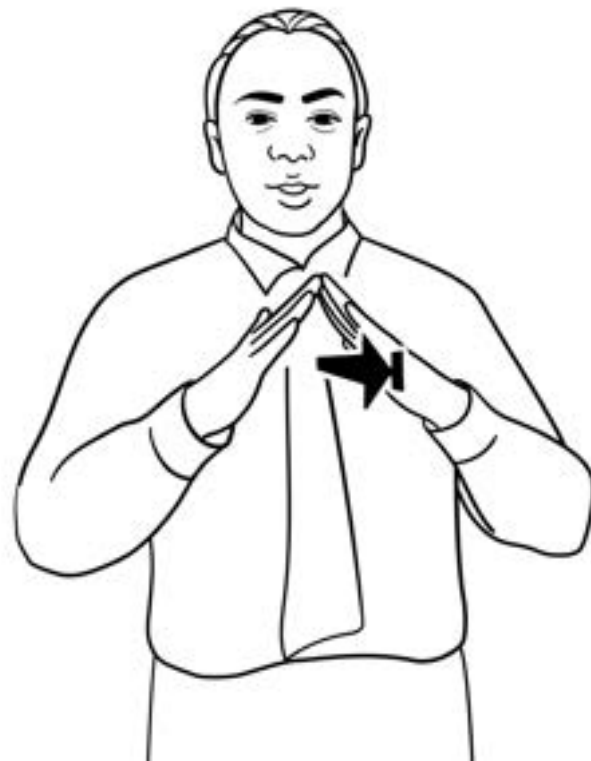
Open area in front of
the whare nui





Whare nui

Meeting house





Whānau

Family





Ahau

Me





Ingoa
Name





Tupuna/Tipuna

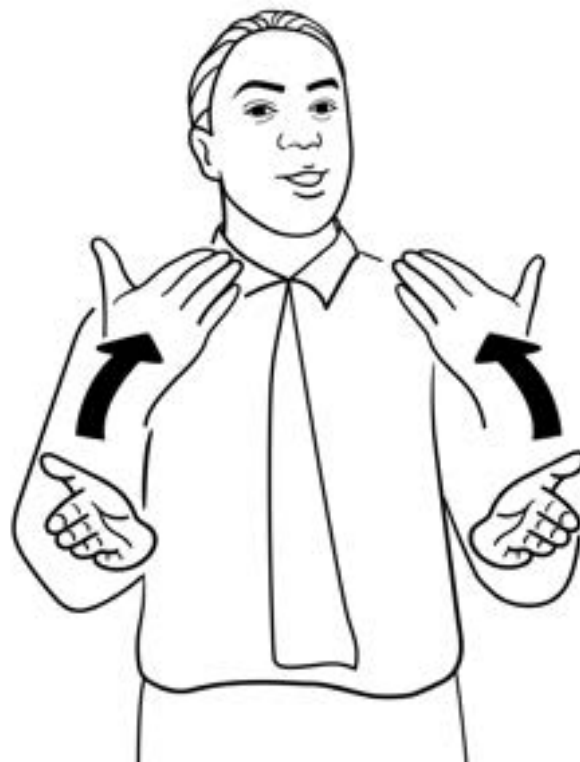
Ancestor





Haere mai

Welcome





Manuhiri

Visitors





Whakapapa

Lineage in layers





Kaikōrero

Speaker, narrator





Kia ora

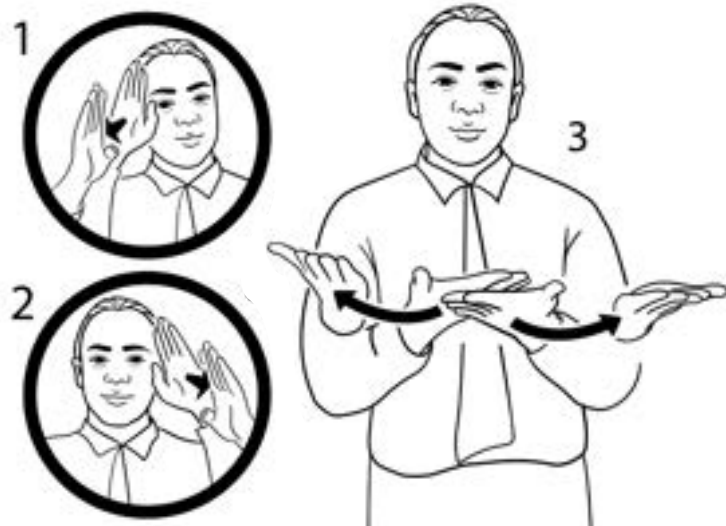
Hello, be well, cheers





Tēnā koutou katoa

Greetings to you all



Whanaungatanga

Relationships, kinship,
and a sense of belonging





Koro

Elderly man,
grandfather





Kuia

Elderly woman,
grandmother



Ka kite

See you



How to interact with Deaf people

Deaf communication is visual. A few small adjustments can make conversations easier and more inclusive.



TIPS

- Get attention by waving or using a light tap
- Face the person and keep your face and hands clear
- Maintain eye contact and avoid looking away while someone is signing
- Make sure lighting is good so signs can be seen clearly
- One person signs or speaks at a time, especially in groups
- Ask for clarification if you miss something — repeating or rephrasing is normal
- Use gestures, pointing, or writing if needed
- It is okay to walk between two people who are signing — there is no need to duck.

Shared Values: Deaf Culture and Te Ao Māori

Deaf culture and te ao Māori share values that support connection and community. Some examples include:



Kanohi ki te kanohi

(Face to face communication)

Direct, face to face communication is important in both cultures.



Storytelling

Both Deaf and Māori communities use stories to share experiences, knowledge, and memories.



Community spaces

Deaf clubs and marae are both places where people gather, build relationships, and feel a sense of belonging.

4^{TO}10 MAY 2026
20 years



[NZSIGNLANGUAGE.NZ](https://nzsianlanguage.nz)

Every May, Deaf Aotearoa organises
NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE WEEK –
a celebration of one of the country's
official languages.

AN AOTEAROA WHERE
ANYONE CAN SIGN
anywhere

NZSL Week is a chance for the Deaf community
to stand proud as Deaf, and to celebrate their
language and culture.

It also works to break down barriers, fears
and misconceptions. NZSL Week lets Deaf
New Zealanders put their hands up and be seen!

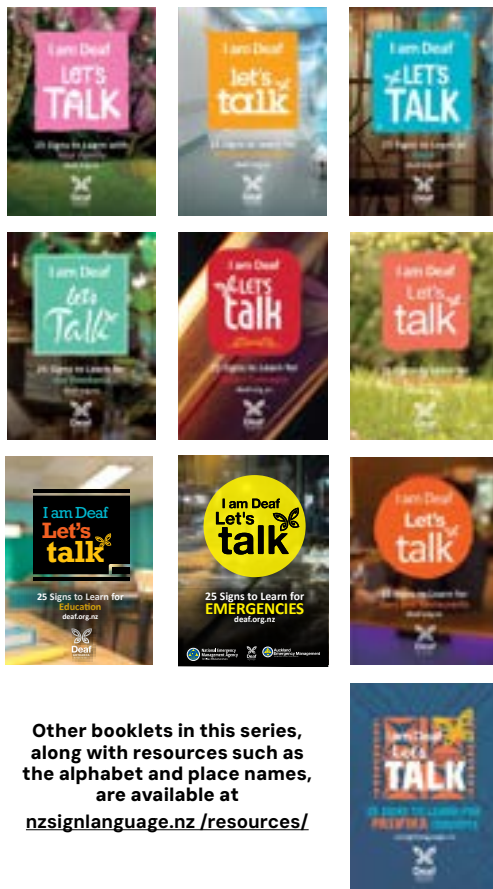
Our vision for NZSL Week is to increase
awareness and understanding of NZSL
and the Deaf community, and to empower
and strengthen the Deaf community.

Learn more at

[NZSIGNLANGUAGE.NZ](https://nzsianlanguage.nz)



@deafaotearoa



Other booklets in this series, along with resources such as the alphabet and place names, are available at nzsignlanguage.nz/resources/

25 Signs to Learn for PEPEHA & MIHI

This is one of a series of booklets designed to introduce you to NZSL. It gives you a practical opportunity to quickly learn some basic vocabulary relevant to your environment.

Learn these signs and use them as often as you can. Tell your friends about them and share the wonderful gift of NZSL. Then you'll understand why 20,000 New Zealanders use it every day!

OTHER BOOKLETS AVAILABLE:

- 25 Signs to Learn with Your Family
- 25 Signs to Learn for Medical Situations
- 25 Signs to Learn at Work
- 25 Signs to Learn for the Weekend
- 25 Signs to Learn for Māori Concepts
- 25 Signs to Learn for First Signs Families
- 25 Signs to Learn for Bars and Restaurants
- 25 Signs to Learn for Emergencies
- 25 Signs to Learn for Education
- 25 Signs to Learn for Pasifika Concepts

Ngā mihi nui for taking the time to learn.

We encourage you to keep practising and using pepeha and mihi in NZSL. By doing so, you are supporting connection between Deaf people/NZSL users and te ao Māori.

Deaf Aotearoa would like to thank all those who play a part in promoting New Zealand Sign Language each year. Particular thanks to Jon Tai-Rakena, Jenny Reid (graphic design), Becky West (illustrations), and Te Rōpū Kaitiaki for their support.

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**NEW ZEALAND
SIGN LANGUAGE WEEK**

TE WIKI O TE REO TURI
ANNUALLY DURING MAY

4^{TO} 10 MAY 2026

20 years



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