

## **Please tell my parents ...**

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A letter from a baby to the people of Southland.

Please tell my parents about smoking in pregnancy and how it affects babies' lives. Please make it positive or they will worry. Don't just tell people they should quit because this could make them turn away and I could miss out. I know my parent want to protect me so please take time to explain why smokefree is best for me. Please be sure they know it is the very best way to make me strong before I am borne.

My parents need to know that oxygen keeps me alive. Anything that slows down the oxygen I need will harm me. If this happens before I am borne then I won't develop in a healthy way. All of me needs that oxygen, especially my brain. If my oxygen supply is slowed or stopped after I am born, I may get sick or suffocate and die.

My parents need to know that smoking in pregnancy takes oxygen away from me. I don't get as much as smokefree babies. I have to do my best with what I get. I adapt as best I can, but all my vital organs and systems are affected. This is how smoking weakens me. It weakens my reflexes that protect my breathing. It weakens my chances of being healthy. If I am short of oxygen as I develop, I can never be as strong as smokefree babies. Please tell my parents this.

My parents need to know that the placenta or whenua doesn't get enough oxygen, either, if they smoke. It has to work harder for me and may not last the full 40 weeks. If it 'gives up' early, I will be borne early and my low birth weight will be a sign of my risk. This is not good for me. If I am not ready to be borne, it will be a struggle for me and I may not even survive. I may look cute being tiny and in an incubator. And you may feel safe with all the doctors and nurses and big machines looking after me. But I will be frightened for my life. And that life may be short. Please tell my parents that I want to be a bonny bouncing baby.

My parents need to know that the poisons in smoke cross the placenta and reach me. They stay inside the water bag that is supposed to protect me. I have to swallow nicotine. They also need to know that nicotine prefers me to my mother. It is more concentrated around me. Nicotine is used in weed killers. No wonder smoking weakens me. My parents need to understand this. No nicotine is good for me but those patches are far better than keeping on smoking, especially if they help my parents to quit. Make sure they understand this, too.

My whole family or whanau needs to know that smoking makes me sick. It messes with my immune system and with breastfeeding. I may end up on a bottle and I don't want that. These things mean I may get sick a lot more often and a lot more seriously than smokefree, breastfed babies do. My parents may not know that smoky air damages my breathing tubes. It is harder for oxygen to reach my lungs. Also, because I breathe a lot faster than grown-ups, I take in a lot more smoke than they do. And I'm only little. I need to take smokefree breaths. Please tell my whole family to be smokefree for me.

Please tell my parents that you will support them to make me strong. I know I need them for everything when I am new and I know that they will do their best for me. But if they do smoke or are struggling with breastfeeding, be sure they get the support they need to protect me.

This is my one chance for a strong start to life. I cannot wait for others to be ready. Babies do not keep. We grow and change in response to our care. Please tell my parents that I love them for everything they do for me. When I am big and strong and all grown up, I will thank them for protecting me when I was new.