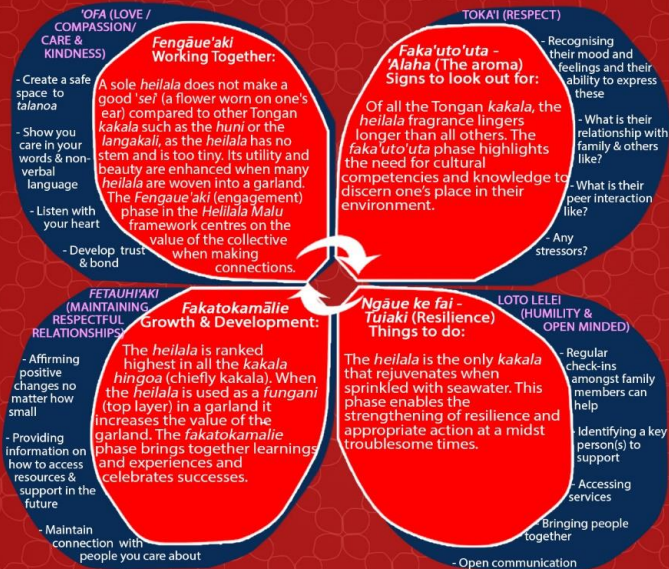


HEILALA MALU - TONGAN FRAMEWORK FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION



Recognising early warning signs is important to suicide prevention. Everyone has an important role to play in caring for those who are at risk of suicide. Based on the 'Suicide Prevention for Tongan Youth in New Zealand' study, the *Heilala Malu* Tongan Framework for Suicide Prevention was developed to help support suicide prevention efforts that are meaningful and effective for Tongans.

The '*Heilala Malu - Tongan Framework for Suicide Prevention*' is symbolised by the Kingdom of Tonga's national red flower or *heilala*. It is usually 1cm in diameter and represents eminence in *anga faka-Tonga* (Tongan culture). The value attributed to the *heilala* has significant historical origins in relation to *Kakala* (garland) making which, traditionally gifted to the King and adorned only by those of 'Eiki' (chiefly) rank. Today the inclusion of *heilala* within any garland signifies the status of a person or the type of occasion.

The *heilala* represents elegance and beauty and within the '*Heilala Malu* Framework for Suicide Prevention' metaphorically represents the value and worth of life itself. The *Heilala Malu* framework is underpinned by four core principles of the *anga faka-Tonga* and essential to Tongan youth suicide prevention:

- ❖ *Ofa* (Love, compassion, care and kindness)
- ❖ *Toka'i* (To give and receive respect)
- ❖ *Loto Lelei* (Humility and open minded)
- ❖ *Fetauhi'aki* (Maintaining respectful relationship)

APPROACH TO SUICIDE PREVENTION

The '*Heilala Malu* Framework' encompasses four core processes when working with someone who is at risk to suicide based primarily on critical processes within Social Work Practice:

- ❖ *Fengāue'aki* – Making connections by exploring and seeking to understand the views of the young person.
- ❖ *Faka'uto'uta* – Signs to look out for and making sense of the situation affords understanding of the young person in relation to their environment
- ❖ *Ngāue ke Fai* – Introducing optimistic energy, enhancing hope and motivation promotes steps forward and taking action
- ❖ *Fakatokamālie* – Celebrating progress and recognising areas for further work

WARNING SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Where threats are being made about killing oneself, we need to know how to respond appropriately. The following are warning signs (but not limited to) shared by Tongan youth themselves from the 'Suicide Prevention for Tongan Youth in New Zealand' study.

- ❖ **Closing up:** The inability and/or refusal to express or voice emotions and feelings.
- ❖ **Social isolation:** Choosing to be alone and avoiding family, friends and social activities. This also includes losing interest in favourite pastimes.
- ❖ **Alcohol and other drug use:** An increase in alcohol consumption and other drug misuse for temporary relief and to block out issues. This also includes other risk taking behaviours.
- ❖ **Juggling identities:** Pressures associated with walking between two or more ethnic identities and finding balance between Tongan and western expectations. Feelings of alienation and disconnect based on sexual orientation and gender identities.

- ❖ **Talk of ending their life:** Any mention of someone wanting to end their life, should be taken seriously. It is not a joking matter or one to be ignored.
- ❖ **Powerlessness:** Relates to feeling trapped, hopelessness and disconnect.

RISK FACTORS

As identified by Tongan youth in the 'Suicide Prevention for Tongan Youth in New Zealand' study, risk factors for suicide include:

- ❖ **Pressures:** Heavy family and cultural obligations mainly in relation to financial contributions and unmet cultural expectations.
- ❖ **Lack of time and little communication within families:** Minimal or no communication between young people and older members of the family.
- ❖ **Balancing identities:** Feelings of resentment and anger towards parents when they do not understand the pressures associated to balancing traditional Tongan and New Zealand worlds.
- ❖ **Shame and stigma:** The shame and stigma commonly attached to the loss of a family member to suicide, which may discourage families from talking about the event, grieving and healing as a family.
- ❖ **Maintaining self-control and keeping face:** Outwardly, pretending to be happy, but harbouring anger, hurt and pain within.
- ❖ **Hopelessness:** Believing there is no hope for the future with little expectancy that things can get better
- ❖ **Impacts of a suicide:** There is increased risk of suicide for those who have lost a loved one to suicide.
- ❖ **Expectations to achieve:** Unrealistic familial pressures for the young person to achieve academically or as an elite athlete.

SOLUTIONS: VOICES OF TONGAN YOUTH

- ❖ **Open and consistent communication in the family is key**
"Communication is the key like to everything. . . Just speaking to each other more often, asking them how they are, making sure you have that strong bond because it's really important. . . Making sure that everyone knows that you're there for each other"