



LeVa

Navigating through the  
waves of emotion:

# Depression



Our Pasifika people have long understood the moana and how to navigate our way through it in order to make it to safe shores.

Our feelings and emotions are like the moana. At times, the sea is calm and still, making navigation smooth and easy. Other times, the waves become rough and raging, with stormy conditions, making navigation harder. Our feelings and emotions can change like the waves, but - like our ancestors - when times are tough, we can use our knowledge, values, skills, collectivity to navigate safely through life's challenges.



/LeVaPasifika

## Depression

### Are we experiencing sadness or depression?

It's a normal part of life to sometimes feel sad, stressed and angry, especially when we've gone through really hard times - depression is more than this. Depression is being stuck with these feelings for a long time and we start losing hope and motivation. It's an emotion that can feel like we are alone in the deep moana and caught in a powerful current, struggling to stay afloat.

It's important to know that feeling depressed is not a weakness; it is a common experience and with the right help we can get better.

### Life stressors – What impacts our wellbeing?

There are many ways we can learn to navigate our way safely through the heaviness of depression. One of the first steps is to understand that different and multiple stressful events in life may lead to depression. Sometimes there's just no clear reason for depression and that's ok too.

These are some of the common challenges in life that can make us feel depressed. Remember everyone responds differently to life events.



## Signs of depression

Many of us know the signs that a storm is approaching – the clouds darken, the sea becomes choppy and there is a change in the air. There are also some common signs that tell us we might be experiencing depression.

If we feel really low and don't enjoy what we usually like – and this lasts for longer than two weeks, we may be experiencing depression. We may also notice having several of the signs listed below. However, it is important to remember this is a guide only and that we should seek the advice of a health professional or call 1737 if we think we may be experiencing depression.



### Our feelings

- » We feel unhappy most of the time.
- » We feel a sense of emptiness or numbness.
- » We are no longer interested in the things that we used to enjoy.
- » We feel lost and alone.
- » We feel guilty and unworthy.



### Our body

- » We might notice changes in our appetite, like not eating enough or eating too much.
- » We might notice gaining or losing weight in a short period of time.
- » We experience aches and pains that cannot be explained.
- » We have low energy and no motivation to do anything.
- » We feel tired most of the time.



### Our thoughts

- » We have negative thoughts about ourselves and others.
- » We find it hard to focus, make decisions or remember things.
- » We might have thoughts of self-harm or wanting to die.
- » We start thinking everything is 'too hard' and that things will not get better.
- » We believe that we are 'not good enough'.



### Our behaviour

- » Not getting things done at home, school or work.
- » We have trouble sleeping.
- » We don't take care of ourselves, like not showering, brushing our teeth or eating well.
- » We might hurt ourselves on purpose.
- » We might start using, or use more, alcohol or other drugs.



### Our relationships

- » We start pulling away from aiga and friends.
- » We feel less interested in seeing others.
- » We get easily annoyed or irritated with people.
- » We think other people do not like us or do not want to be around us.
- » We do not feel like attending family or social events.



### Our spirituality

- » We feel disconnected spiritually, from God, faith or a higher power.
- » We lose our sense of peace within ourselves or with the world around us.
- » We feel dissatisfied or experience a lack of meaning in life.
- » We pray less, start avoiding church or other activities that usually give us peace, joy and calm.

## Coping with depression

### Navigating our way to safer shores

Just as our ancestors had to face the fierce challenges of the moana, we must face the waves of depression. As our ancestors were able to arrive safely on our islands, we can work to get through depression to enhance our health and wellbeing.

The following are some tips to help us navigate through depression.

Remember, we can visit a health professional or call 1737 at any time if we feel our emotions are overwhelming and affecting our daily lives.



#### Take care of ourselves

We can face challenging journeys with more confidence when we look after our bodies.

- » Eating well can improve our mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing.
- » Sleeping well can help to give our brain and body the rest it needs.
- » Being active and moving more can help us to improve our mood, manage stress and sleep better.
- » Avoiding alcohol and other drugs helps us to think clearly and find longer-term solutions for our problems.



Check out the **Feel-Good** section of the **Mental Wealth** website for more advice on self-care [www.mentalwealth.nz](http://www.mentalwealth.nz)



#### Notice when our thoughts are drowning us

When we experience depression, we often get ourselves stuck in unhelpful thinking patterns. This may include doubting ourselves, worrying about things more than usual and thinking that we are not good enough. Practice noticing when these kinds of thoughts come up. When we can catch our unhelpful thoughts, we can learn to handle them differently and find new ways to cope. There are health professionals who are trained to help us manage unhelpful thinking patterns – reach out.

Check out **Aunty Dee** if you need help working through some thoughts and problems [www.auntydee.co.nz](http://www.auntydee.co.nz)





## Talanoa (talk) with people we trust

We are a relational people so connecting in with those we trust such as our aiga, friends and community can be really helpful. We can connect with others and be a part of a group, like a sports team or religious group, or even a depression support group; this can help us to feel like we are not alone. We can also get support from resources like those listed on the last page of this information sheet.

If talking to someone is not helpful the first time around, keep reaching out to find someone who is trustworthy and supportive.

Check out **Aunty Dee's tips** on talking for more ideas  
[www.auntydee.co.nz/tips-and-help/talk](http://www.auntydee.co.nz/tips-and-help/talk)



## Let our culture empower us

There are many aspects of our Pasifika cultures that empower our sense of strength and pride. Connecting in with the traditions and practices of our cultures helps us to sustain a strong sense of who we are and where we belong. We need to be reminded of these positive truths when life gets us down and emotions like depression start to take over. Cultural practices can include koka'anga (Pasifika arts and crafts), practising a tau'olunga (dance), learning Pasifika songs or simply listening to our elders when they talk about our rich history.

Check out 'I AM' on [www.atumai.nz](http://www.atumai.nz) to explore Pasifika values, cultural benefits and create your own cultural legacy statement.



## Connect in spiritually

Connecting in spiritually can mean connecting in with something like our faith, religion or something that is meaningful to us. For some this could mean praying, meditating or spending time with nature. Connecting in spiritually can help to keep us grounded and give us a sense of peace.



## Learn to relax

Relaxing is a helpful way to deal with stress. Try listening to good music, going for a walk or taking a warm bath/shower.

Relaxation is more than unwinding. We can all learn to relax better by focusing on doing one task at a time and trying to stay in the present moment, like focusing on the here and now. For example, when we have a conversation with someone, we put away our phones, turn the tv off, remove distractions and pay our full attention to the person and conversation in front of us. If we are alone, we might try focusing on how it feels to breathe in and out slowly.



### Connect with aiga and friends

When we are feeling low, sometimes we withdraw from friends or our aiga, but this is the most important time to connect in with them because being alone can make us feel worse. Getting involved, spending time with them and even doing things for them can give us a feeling of purpose and wellbeing.



### Seek immediate help

Sometimes people who are experiencing depression can have thoughts of harming themselves or thoughts of suicide. If this happens, seek professional help immediately (GP, counsellor, mental health worker) and involve others we trust to support us through these difficult times.

Check out this resource that helps us develop a safety plan and cope with feelings of distress and suicidal thoughts.

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/OurWork/Downloads/Personal-safety-plan.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/OurWork/Downloads/Personal-safety-plan.pdf)

**If someone is in immediate danger of serious self-harm, call 111.**



## E vave taunu'u le malaga pe a tatou alo va'a fa'atasi

Our destiny is within sight when we  
paddle our canoe together

## Where to get help

Psychological talking therapy is highly recommended for treating depression. These interventions can be provided by health professionals such as psychologists, counsellors, or someone trained in talking therapies. Your GP or family doctor can also help recommend an approach for you and might suggest suitable medications if required. If you're at school or university, you may also be able to access a counselling or student wellbeing service.

You can also **text** or **freephone 1737**, New Zealand's free support service with qualified and confidential counsellors. Let them know what's going on for you or the person you are concerned about, and they can support you or provide you with a list of services in your area.

### Other helpful numbers you can call:

- » **Lifeline** – Advice and counselling support  
**0800 543 354** or text 'Help' to **4357**
- » **Youthline** – Online community and support for young people.  
**0800 376 633**, free text **234**, webchat at [www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz)
- » **What's UP** – Advice & counselling support for 5-18-year olds; 12 noon to 11pm.  
**0800 942 8787**
- » **Kidsline** – Advice & counselling support up to 14 years; 4pm to 9pm weekdays.  
**0800 54 37 54 (0800 KIDSLINE)**

NEED TO TALK?

**1737**

free call or text  
any time

## Free Online Tools and Resources

 <p>A one stop-shop to support young people to feel good and stay connected. <a href="http://www.mentalwealth.nz">www.mentalwealth.nz</a></p>	 <p>For when life sux, Aunty Dee can help you solve your problems. <a href="http://www.auntydee.co.nz">www.auntydee.co.nz</a></p>	 <p>E-therapy for young people who are feeling down, worried or stressed. <a href="http://www.sparx.org.nz">www.sparx.org.nz</a></p>
 <p>Culturally based tools to support Pacific young people to unleash their full potential. <a href="http://www.atumai.nz">www.atumai.nz</a></p>	 <p>Support for young people experiencing depression or anxiety. <a href="http://www.thelowdown.co.nz">www.thelowdown.co.nz</a></p>	 <p>A step-by-step approach for working through depression. <a href="http://www.depression.org.nz/get-better/the-journal">www.depression.org.nz/get-better/the-journal</a></p>
 <p>Learn mindfulness to develop better wellbeing. <a href="http://www.smilingmind.com.au">www.smilingmind.com.au</a></p>	 <p>Info and resources for queer and gender diverse youth. <a href="http://www.ry.org.nz">www.ry.org.nz</a></p>	 <p><a href="http://www.justathought.co.nz">www.justathought.co.nz</a></p>

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