



LeVa

Navigating through the
waves of emotion:

Anxiety



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 moana 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 of the moana, but - like our ancestors - when the waves are rough, we can use our knowledge, values, skills, spirituality and collectivity to navigate our way through safely.



/LeVaPasifika

Anxiety

Are the things we worry about out of control?

Anxiety is a normal human emotion that can feel like the ever-changing waves of the moana. It can be described as worry, feeling nervous or uneasy about something. Many people can experience anxiety when they are faced with a new or unknown situation, or when a stressful event happens. For example, some people feel anxious when they sit a test or have to speak in front of big crowds.



Helpful anxiety

It is normal and even helpful to experience anxiety sometimes as it helps us perform better by making us alert and motivated. An example is when we are preparing to win a race. It is also helpful when we are faced with situations that are stressful, frightening or dangerous, such as when we need to run away from a dangerous threat. During these challenging situations, our bodies go through physical changes such as our heart beating faster, breathing faster, and muscles tensing up. This response is known as 'fight or flight', and it is our body's natural way of preparing to quickly react so we can feel safe again.



Unhelpful anxiety

Sometimes, we might continue to feel high levels of anxiety thrashing about like waves threatening to take us under. We can feel this way, even when the danger has passed but our minds trick us into believing it is still there. When this happens, anxiety can become unhelpful because it leaves us feeling stuck and struggling, and it makes us blind to our own strengths and the positive supports around us.

When the massive waves of anxiety overwhelm us, it can take over our lives. As a result, we may avoid or stop doing the things that give us joy, like spending time with the people we care about and who care about us. It can stop us from going to work or school or get in the way of our relationships with aiga and friends. Some of us might still do the things that we enjoy, but we may feel tense and fearful while doing them, which can drain our energy.



Signs of anxiety

Can you see a storm approaching?

There are many ways we can navigate safely through the crashing waves of anxiety. But first we must learn to notice the signs in ourselves and our surroundings. As our ancestors learned to look for signs of a dangerous storm approaching, we too can learn to look for the signs of our worries and anxieties.

Everyone experiences anxiety differently. There are some common signs to let us know that the waves may get rough and we need to start preparing to calm the waters. Look out for these signs:



Our body

- » Our heart starts beating faster.
- » Our chest feels tight.
- » We feel tense in our bodies and may start feeling aches and pains.
- » We feel sick in the tummy.
- » We may start getting headaches or feel dizzy.
- » We have trouble sleeping.



Our feelings

- » We always feel worried.
- » We may start feeling more annoyed, irritated or restless.
- » We could feel overwhelmed and 'out of control'.
- » We may even start feeling sad and depressed.



Our thinking

- » We might have trouble concentrating and find it hard to stay focused.
- » We start thinking and believing only bad things will happen.
- » We start doubting ourselves eg What if I can't do this? What if I fail? What if nobody likes me?



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 may even start taking our feelings out on others and end up hurting them.



Our behaviour

- » We find it hard to chill out and relax.
- » We might notice changes in our appetite eg not eating enough or eating too much.
- » We may begin to avoid situations or places that are stressful, or feel stressed while we are in these situations and places.
- » We find it hard to make decisions.



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 and/or start avoiding church or other activities that usually give us a sense of peace, joy and calm.

Coping with anxiety

Navigating our way to safer shores

Just as our ancestors had to face the fierce challenges of the moana, we must face the frightening waves of anxiety. As our ancestors were able to arrive safely on our islands, we also can get through anxiety and live life to its fullest potential.

Here are some tips to help us navigate through anxiety.



Take care of ourselves

We can face challenging journeys with more confidence when our basic needs are met, and we build ourselves a solid foundation.

- » 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 boost 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



The power of our thoughts can keep us afloat

Being aware of our thinking and noticing unhelpful thoughts help us understand what increases our anxiety and makes things worse. When we can catch our unhelpful thoughts, we can learn to handle them differently and find new ways to cope. One way of doing this is to note down our thoughts on paper (or phone/device) and then figuring out which thoughts make us feel better or worse.



Connect in spiritually

Connecting in spiritually can mean connecting in with something like our faith, or religion, or something that is meaningful to and bigger than us. For some of us 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.



Breathe

Taking slow deep breaths can help us to interrupt the physical cycle that causes our hearts to beat faster, our tummies to feel sick, and our bodies to tense up. When the currents of anxiety are strong and overwhelming, slowing down and taking deep breaths can allow us to clear and calm our minds so we can make wise decisions and navigate to safety.

- » **Try practising this** – breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds; hold your breath for 4 seconds; and then breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds. Repeat these steps at least three times.



Inhale
4 seconds



Hold
4 seconds



Exhale
4 seconds



Talanoa (talk) with people we trust

We are a relational people so connecting in with our aiga, friends and support people can be really helpful. Talking with people that we trust and that are supportive can help us to understand what's going on. We can talanoa with our aiga, friends, a counsellor, church leader or elder. We can connect with others and be a part of a group, like a sports team or religious group; this can help with feelings of loneliness when we are anxious. We can also get support from online communities or resources like those listed at the end.

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

Check out **Aunty Dee's** tips on talking for more ideas
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 anxiety 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 to explore Pasifika values, cultural benefits and create your own cultural legacy statement.



Surviving a storm builds resilience

When we avoid situations that make us feel anxious, things might seem okay for a short time, but it can actually make our anxiety worse in the long term. Sometimes facing our fears can help us to realise things are not as bad as we might think. When we realise we can survive a storm, we can see these situations as opportunities for learning, growing and gaining confidence.



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 anxiety. 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.

NEED TO TALK?



free call or text
any time

If you want to talk to someone confidentially or ask questions, try these free numbers.

- » **Anxiety helpline** – Anxiety New Zealand Trust's free helpline
0800 269 4389 (0800 ANXIETY)
- » **Youthline** – Online community and support for young people.
0800 376 633, free text 234, webchat at **www.youthline.co.nz**
- » **What's UP** – Advice & counselling support for 5-18-year olds; 12 noon to 11pm.
0800 942 8787
- » **Kidslines** – Advice & counselling support up to 14 years; 4pm to 9pm weekdays.
0800 54 37 54 (0800 KIDSLINE)

Free Online Tools and Resources

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

Published in July 2020 by Le Va, Auckland, New Zealand.

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ISBN: 978-0-9951015-8-6 (PDF)

Recommended citation: Le Va (2020). Navigating through the waves of emotion: Anxiety. Auckland. New Zealand.

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