

# Connecting through Kōrero

KŌREROHIA NGĀ MAHI WHAKAMOMORI  
KI TE HUNGA TAIOHI

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE



TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAIOHI/YOUNG PEOPLE

# Support for Taiohi



Whakamomori is the word that is used for suicide on the cover of this resource. We acknowledge that each hapū/iwi have their own kupu or word which means suicide.

**Mā te whakapono**

BY BELIEVING AND TRUSTING

**Mā te tumanako**

BY HAVING FAITH AND HOPE

**Mā te titiro**

BY LOOKING AND SEARCHING

**Mā te whakarongo**

BY LISTENING AND HEARING

**Mā te mahitahi**

BY WORKING AND STRIVING TOGETHER

**Mā te manawanui**

BY PATIENCE AND PERSEVERANCE

**Mā te aroha**

BY ALL BEING DONE WITH LOVE

**Ka taea e tātou**

WE WILL SUCCEED

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## Why should we kōrero about suicide with taiohi?



If you are concerned that taiohi in your life may be having thoughts of suicide right now, this resource will not be useful to you. Instead visit our [Worried about someone](#) webpage for more information.

Taiohi/young people know suicide is a big issue in Aotearoa, and they know that it affects all of us in some way. They may come across it through the media; they may know someone who has died by suicide or be supporting a friend who is feeling suicidal. They may have had thoughts of suicide themselves.

Although it can feel hard to kōrero/talk about the tough stuff, it's important that we can all have safe, open, honest and compassionate kōrero about suicide so our taiohi feel heard, supported and understood.

This resource is for parents, caregivers, teachers, counsellors, aunties, uncles, friends and other whānau. It's for anyone who cares about taiohi and needs tautoko/support and guidance to kōrero with them about suicide.







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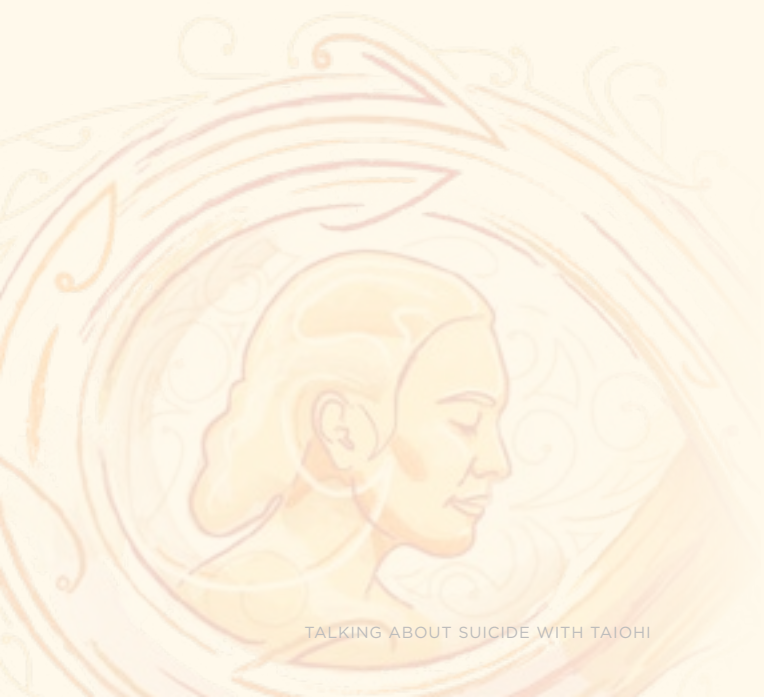
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**Āwhinatia** | HELPING OR  
ASSISTING

**& Manaakitia** | SHOWING  
COMPASSION

are important qualities for

**Kōrero tahitia** | LISTENING  
& TALKING  
TOGETHER

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# 1

## Before the kōrero



### SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Taiohi/young people can hear about suicide from a young age. Whether you are having a direct kōrero with them, or they are around when you are having a kōrero with someone older, it's important to acknowledge their presence and simplify language and details to help them understand. You might ask them how their tinana/body feels as distress in younger taiohi can often present in ways such as a sore puku/tummy. They may also be unusually clingy or angry. The way you provide reassurance and support may be slightly different. It may be less about having a direct kōrero and more about doing a fun activity together or suggesting they take a favourite toy to bed with them for comfort.

## When should I kōrero with taiohi about suicide?

Anytime is a good time to connect through kōrero manaaki/supportive conversations.

- When someone they know or someone in their hapū, school or community has died by suicide.
- When they are supporting a friend through a difficult time.
- When someone they admire (e.g., a celebrity or YouTuber) has died by suicide.
- When they are watching a TV show or movie or reading a book that features suicide (e.g., *13 Reasons Why*).
- When they ask questions about suicide, such as “Why do people kill themselves?”.
- When you are worried a taiohi may be suicidal.

Let them know you are there to kōrero whenever they are ready. They might not be ready right now – that's OK. Keep checking in, and make sure they know of a number of different people and places they can turn to.

If you are worried that a taiohi may be considering their own suicide, then you need to act urgently. See [Worried about someone](#) for more information.

# 1

## Before the kōrero



If you need some support for yourself, see the [helpline section](#).



Somewhere like a car, where you are next to each other, or when you are on a walk can feel like a less intimidating place to kōrero.

## Am I the right person to kōrero with taiohi about suicide?

If you have a trusting relationship with the taiohi/young person and are in a good headspace to kōrero/talk about suicide, then you might be the right person.

Ask yourself:

- Am I in the right headspace to kōrero calmly and without judgement?
- Am I ready to truly listen?
- Can I accept they may not want to kōrero with me about this?
- Do I have the time and energy to have a kōrero that might be difficult and emotional?
- Do I understand that I can't provide all the answers about suicide? Do I know where I can find more information about suicide and suicide prevention?

If you feel someone else, like a kaumātua, cousin or counsellor may be a better person to have the kōrero, you can see if they are comfortable to reach out to the taiohi.

## Where to have the kōrero

It's important to find a place that is comfortable for you and the taiohi/young person you are having the kōrero/conversation with.

Try to have the kōrero kanohi ki te kanohi/in person whenever possible. Somewhere like a car, where you are next to each other, or when you are on a walk can feel like a less intimidating place to kōrero.



1

## Before the kōrero

Sometimes you may not be able to choose where to kōrero, especially if the taiohi initiates it or the subject comes up in a classroom situation. Use your judgement to decide whether it's OK to address the discussion right then or if it would be better to suggest another time.

### Looking after yourself

Whatever the kōrero/conversation about suicide might be, it can be difficult. You may find it distressing, so it's important to look after your own wellbeing.

It's always OK for you to get tautoko/support and guidance, advice or just chat with a friend if you need to. You won't be letting anyone down. Be kind to yourself and take time out when you need to. If you need some support for yourself see the [helpline section](#).







TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAIOHI

# **You can do it – here's how**





# Two guiding elements

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**1. Kia poare** | BEING OPEN

**2. Kia whakatika** | BEING DIRECT



## 2

## You can have the kōrero – here's how

### Manaakitia/listening with compassion

It's important to kōrero/talk about suicide in safe, supportive ways, no matter how challenging and emotional it may be.

Compassionate kōrero creates feelings of safety and allows us to be open and understanding with each other. You may find having kōrero about suicide in a compassionate way difficult, depending on your experiences or beliefs. It's important to take some time to think about how you can have an open mind and listen without judgement or blame.

Show compassion by:

- Listening carefully, without judgement. Try repeating key things back to the person to be sure you've understood, e.g., "Since Jessie died, you've been feeling angry and keep wondering what went wrong, eh?".
- Not making assumptions. You might think you know how a taiohi/young person feels about a situation, but let them tell you in their own words. Prompt them by asking "What are your thoughts about this?".
- Being mindful of your body language. Give the taiohi your full attention.



## You can have the kōrero – here's how

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### Two guiding elements

**1** Kia poare  
Being open

**2** Kia whakatika  
Being direct

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### Kia poare/being open

Show the taiohi/young person that you are willing to have open, honest kōrero/conversation.

- Let them know you understand this is a tricky topic, and that it can be hard for you to understand too.
- Listen to their thoughts and feelings and let them know it's OK to feel that way (even if you can't relate to their experiences and feelings).
- Try not to judge or shame the taiohi for how they think or feel.
- Thank and acknowledge them for being willing to kōrero.
- Be honest when they ask questions you don't have the answers to, and work together to find them.



## 2

## You can have the kōrero – here's how

### Kia whakatika/being direct

- You might be fearful that having a kōrero/conversation about suicide may plant the idea in someone's head, but this will not happen.
- It's OK not to use the word 'suicide' if you don't want to. You can use different terms, such as 'wanting to end their life' or talking about someone feeling 'deep sadness'. It can be helpful to mirror the words that the taiohi/young person chooses to use.
- Tell the taiohi why you are having the kōrero (e.g., "I know that the singer you like died by suicide, do you want to talk about how you feel about it?").
- Be direct, honest and up front. Don't be afraid of using the word 'suicide' but be aware explicit details can be overly distressing and unnecessary to the kōrero. Try to think about what the taiohi will be able to cope with and what they might not wish to discuss or learn about. We know some kōrero about suicide can pose a risk to some people. See ['kōrero to avoid'](#) section for more information.





TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAIOHI

# Connecting through kōrero

CONVERSATION STARTERS



# 3

## Connecting through kōrero

### Seeing or hearing about suicide in the media or a book/film or television

Taiohi/young people can be affected by reading about or seeing suicide on screen, online, in books or in the media.

Sometimes the messages about suicide can be confusing and suicide scenes can be extremely disturbing. Taiohi can find it difficult to make sense of thoughts and feelings about what they have seen or heard. Having open and direct kōrero/conversations can help taiohi challenge the messages and understand how we can all help prevent suicide.

#### Being open: Kia poare

- › “I’ve heard that lots of people are watching this TV series. Apparently it deals with some big issues and has some really graphic scenes. Have you seen it?”
- › “I noticed that you’ve just finished reading *13 Reasons Why*. I know that in the book, Hannah kills herself. Do you want to kōrero about that?”

#### Being direct: Kia whakatika

- › “Are you OK after watching/hearing/seeing that?”
- › “It’s important you kōrero with me or someone else if you’re feeling upset about what you’ve seen/read/heard. It can really help.”

# 3

## Connecting through kōrero

### Taiohi supporting taiohi

Taiohi/young people are most likely to turn to a friend if they're going through a difficult time, are suicidal or have made a suicide attempt. This can be very challenging for the friend.

Help your taiohi understand they can't fix this or solve it alone. Brainstorm other supports that are available for their friend, and make a plan for what to do if their friend needs help urgently.

#### Being open: Kia poare

- › "I see that you've been spending a lot of time with Aroha. Is she doing OK?"
- › "You seem worried about Charley at the moment. What's worrying you?"

#### Being direct: Kia whakatika

- › "You are a wonderful friend, but you don't have to handle this on your own. We can go and kōrero with the school counsellor about Masina together."
- › "We need to get Matias some help so he can be safe. I know you promised not to tell, but It's really important to get him the help he needs."

### 3

## Connecting through kōrero

### Dealing with flippant comments about suicide

Just like anyone, taiohi/young people can use careless language about suicide that might be hurtful to someone who is going through a difficult time. 'KYS' and 'KMS' are common expressions that stand for 'kill yourself' or 'kill myself'. When a taiohi uses such phrases, they may not be thinking about what they're saying or they may be using dark humour as a way to cope with tough things in their life.

#### Being open: Kia poare

- › “It’s not OK to make jokes about suicide. I know you didn’t mean to be hurtful, but words can really hurt. What else could you have said in that situation?”
- › “I’ve heard you make quite a few jokes about killing yourself lately, and I’m worried. Can we kōrero/talk?”

#### Being direct: Kia whakatika

- › “Instead of saying ‘KYS’, what else could you have said?”
- › “It seems like you’re going through a tough time. How can I help?”



TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAIOHI

# **Kōrero to avoid**





## 4

## Kōrero to avoid

Whānau and friends are often concerned about some of the risks involved with having kōrero/conversations about suicide. To help increase your confidence, here are some things to know.

### Avoid kōrero that makes suicide seem like a reasonable choice

Sometimes, after someone has killed themselves, people might comment that the person is “at peace”, “no longer in pain” or it being “their time”. Other times people see suicide as a logical response to tough situations, e.g., “the kids at school were mean as to him; what choice did he have?”.

#### Why:

- › When taiohi/young people hear these things, they may feel that suicide will bring peace from pain and is a natural response to challenging times. It's important not to suggest that suicide is an appropriate way to deal with difficult situations.

## 4

## Kōrero to avoid

### Avoid speculating about why someone tried to take their life

It's common to try to understand the 'reason' someone died by suicide and to look for a single cause, such as bullying or a relationship ending. Suicide is complex, and there is often no single reason; usually, it's a result of a combination of different feelings, actions and circumstances. It is never anyone's fault.

#### Why:

- › Trying to find one single 'reason' for someone's suicide does more harm than good. Whānau and friends of people who die by suicide can find speculation painful (because it can feel like they are being blamed). Understanding and tautoko/support and guidance, not judgement is what is needed.

### Avoid kōrero about methods of suicide

As much as possible avoid kōrero/talking about how or where the person died. If taiohi/young people are already having kōrero about the method, be honest but avoid any unnecessary details. Instead focus on tautoko/support for each other and enabling access to support.

#### Why:

- › When people are already thinking about suicide, hearing about a method can get them thinking "this would be a good way for me to kill myself. I know it works."

## 4

## Kōrero to avoid

### Avoid kōrero about suicide as a selfish act or the way that it has harmed those left behind

Although anger and shame are understandable reactions to a suicide, it's important to remember that emphasising these feelings increases the stigma, or sense of disgrace, about suicide. This can, in turn, make it difficult for whānau who have lost someone to suicide to share their feelings and can be harmful for people who have had, or are having suicidal thoughts.

#### Why:

- › Stigma around suicide often causes people to hide suicidal feelings and avoid seeking support. Also, whānau who have been bereaved may be less likely to talk about their feelings and get the tautoko/support they need. This is important because those who have recently been bereaved are at a higher risk of suicide themselves.



4

## Kōrero to avoid

### Avoid presenting suicide as criminal or sinful

Some religions and cultures consider suicide to be sinful or criminal. You might share these views, but when you are having kōrero about suicide with taiohi/young people, think about the impact such views could have on them.

#### Why:

- ▶ Presenting suicide as sinful or criminal can make people less likely to reach out for help when they're going through difficulties because they think they will be judged.





TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAI OHI

# Responding to pātai | QUESTIONS





# 5

## Responding to pātai/questions

If you're worried about answering tricky questions, remember it's best to be open and honest. You don't need to know all the answers, and it's OK to say you're unsure. Here are some suggested ways to respond to some tricky questions.

### What is suicide?

- › "Suicide is when somebody kills themselves on purpose."
- › "Suicide is when someone makes their tinana/body stop working."

### Why do people kill themselves?

- › "There isn't an easy answer to that question. There can be all sorts of reasons, but people who kill themselves have lost hope that their lives will get better."
- › "People who want to die by suicide feel a lot of emotional pain. They feel that dying is the only way to end their pain. The pain can also stop them connecting with support and other things that can help them stop hurting."

# 5

## Responding to pātai/questions

### How do people kill themselves?

- › “Different people try to end their lives in different ways. The important thing is to try and help so that people no longer want to make that decision.”
- › “The way people die isn’t as important as supporting people to see a different way out of their pain.”

### Whose fault is it?

- › “It’s nobody’s fault. However, there are things we can all do to take care of each other and make sure anyone else we know who is feeling sad knows that there is help available.”
- › “It’s not your fault. You didn’t cause this. Suicide is never caused by just one thing. It’s multi layered, the outcome of many factors coming together.”



TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAIOHI

# Where to turn for help



## 6

## Where to turn for help

### If someone you care about is in crisis:

- Call your local mental health crisis assessment team or go with the person to the emergency department (ED) at your nearest hospital.
- If they are in immediate physical danger to themselves or others, call 111 and stay with them until support arrives.
- Remove any obvious means of suicide they might use, e.g., guns, medication, car keys, knives, rope.
- Try to stay calm and let the person know you care.
- Keep them talking: listen and ask questions without judging.
- Make sure you are safe.

### If someone needs some extra support to help them through a tough time, or if you are seeking support because you are supporting someone else:

- Need to talk? Free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor.
- Lifeline 0800 543 354 or 09 522 2999 or free text 4357 (HELP).
- Youthline 0800 376 633 or free text 234.
- Samaritans 0800 726 666.
- Kidsline 0800 54 37 54.

For more useful suicide prevention resources visit  
[www.mentalhealth.org.nz/suicideprevention](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/suicideprevention)



TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE WITH TAIOHI

# Useful resources



# 7

## Useful resources

### Online fact sheets

- [Suicide: worried about someone?](#)
- [Suicide: coping with suicidal thoughts](#)
- [Suicide: after a suicide attempt](#)
- [Self-harm](#)
- [Suicide: supporting someone online](#)

### Downloadable resources

- [Tihei Mauri Ora – supporting whānau through suicidal distress](#)
- [Are you worried someone is thinking of suicide?](#)
- [Worried about someone online](#)
- [Having suicidal thoughts and finding a way back](#)
- [Personal safety plan](#)
- [See you tomorrow Eh! NO one wants to lose a mate – Te Rau Matatini](#)
- [Preventing Suicide for Pasifika – top 5 tactics](#)

### Videos

- [Video interviews with kaumātua and kuia sharing their whakaaro and insights around suicide prevention and their experience of supporting communities, individuals and whānau](#)
- [Living through suicidal thoughts](#)



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