



# Information sheet

# COPING AFTER A TSUNAMI

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**Many people in Samoa, Tonga and American Samoa, as well as in New Zealand, will experience acute stress following the tsunami - this is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. Most people will manage, and when social needs are met, distress will subside over time. However, there are some people that will have more profound reactions, particularly later on sometime after the event, and will require assistance.**

Psychological distress is a normal response to the tsunami. Distress is not only experienced by people directly impacted by the disaster, it is also experienced by people witnessing injuries and distress to others, and people all around the world concerned about family and friends. Those who have lost loved ones, or have been seriously injured, will need particular support and care.

## NORMAL REACTIONS

Fear, confusion, shock and disbelief are normal reactions to a disaster. Horror and grief often set in when the extent of loss is realised.

People react in different ways. Normal reactions to the tsunami may include:

- emotional reactions - guilt, crying spells, sadness, apathy
- cognitive reactions – nightmares, poor concentration, intrusive thoughts and memories, self-blame, confusion, disorientation, indecisiveness, worry
- physical reactions – difficulty sleeping, upset stomach, exaggerated startle response, ‘jumpy’, tension, fatigue, aches and pains, nausea, change in appetite, loss of concentration, breathlessness, shakiness, muscle weakness
- interpersonal reactions – distrust, conflict, withdrawal, irritability, on edge
- anger and blame is common and some may become angry at God
- children exposed to images and witnessing distress may show similar reactions as well as become clingy or angry.

***These reactions are part of the normal process of recovery. For most people these feelings will subside in the first few weeks or months.***

*This information sheet has been written as a result of the high demand from New Zealanders making enquiries to Le Va for information and assistance regarding their mental health and wellbeing. It is therefore intended for people living in New Zealand who have been impacted by the tsunami in some way.*

*Fa'anoanoa, Fa'anoanoa  
Talofa I Samoa e  
Ua maua I le mala*

*I grieve I grieve  
Alas for Samoa  
Caught by disaster*

## POSITIVE WAYS OF COPING

At times like this we have an enhanced appreciation that family and friends are precious and important, so spend time with them. Here are some other actions and activities you might find helpful.

- Connect and communicate with others: increase contact with groups, especially others coping with the tsunami, and involve yourself in community support and response relief efforts.
- Increase religious commitment: praying and talking to God or with clergy helps process grief.
- Look after your health and the health of your family: get adequate rest, eat healthy meals and avoid alcohol or other drugs.
- Avoid allowing children to view shocking media images: encourage them to talk or use drawings to express their feelings.
- Return to your normal daily routines and activities as much as possible: particularly for children.
- Take time out: schedule tension and anxiety-reducing activities into your day, such as going for a walk, listening to music, praying, meditating or breathing exercises.



## WHEN TO ASK FOR EXTRA HELP

Sometimes, after the disaster, stress can be ongoing and affect your physical and mental health and wellbeing. It's important to ask for help if you:

- are not getting enough sleep, or are having difficulty falling or staying asleep
- feel very distressed, irritable, on edge, panicky, experience angry outbursts or are agitated much of the time
- feel hopeless, in despair, miserable or that you can't go on
- have trouble concentrating, are distracted and cannot do your usual tasks
- feel your health is not so good
- have new symptoms.

For children, withdrawal, aggressive behaviours, difficulties at school, problems separating from parents or going to sleep may indicate the need for help.

## FOR NEW ZEALANDERS SEEKING HELP

There are a number of ways that you can get help for distress related to the tsunami. You can talk to your General Practitioner or phone your local mental health services available at your District Health Board. To find contact details of services in your area, visit the webhealth website [www.webhealth.co.nz](http://www.webhealth.co.nz)

The following organisations can also provide some assistance (as at 7 October 2009).

ORGANISATION	TELEPHONE	WEBSITE	DESCRIPTION
Victim support	<b>Free 24/7 helpline</b> (0800) 842 846	<a href="http://www.victimsupport.org.nz">http://www.victimsupport.org.nz</a>	Victim support provides support for people living in New Zealand who have suffered a loss or have been affected by the earthquake and tsunami in Samoa or Tonga.
Lifeline 24/7	<b>Free 24/7 helpline</b> <b>Auckland</b> (09) 522 2999 <b>Nationwide</b> (0800) 543 354	<a href="http://www.lifeline.org.nz">http://www.lifeline.org.nz</a>	Lifeline's counselling service provides 24-hour a day, 7 day a week counselling and support. Calls are confidential and free and you will speak with a trained Lifeline counsellor.
Mensline	Sunday to Friday 6.30pm to 10.30pm <b>Auckland</b> (09) 522 2500 <b>Nationwide</b> 0800 MENSLINE (0800 636 754)	<a href="http://www.mensline.org.nz">http://www.mensline.org.nz</a>	Mensline is a confidential and free telephone counselling service tailored to meet the counselling and support needs of men. Mensline operates Sunday to Friday 6.30pm to 10.30pm.
0800 Kidslines	Staffed between 4pm and 7pm on school nights by trained counsellors <b>Auckland</b> (09) 522 4223 <b>Nationwide</b> (0800) 543 754	<a href="http://www.kidslines.org.nz">http://www.kidslines.org.nz</a>	0800 Kidslines is a free and confidential telephone counselling service for children. It operates between 4pm and 7pm school nights by trained year 12 and 13 volunteer counsellors called Kidslines Buddies.
Youthline	<b>Freephone</b> 0800 376633 <b>Text</b> 234 <b>email</b> <a href="mailto:talk@youth.co.nz">talk@youth.co.nz</a>	<a href="http://www.youthline.co.nz">http://www.youthline.co.nz</a>	Free and confidential support for young people through the Youth Help Line 24/7.
Lowdown website	<b>Text</b> 5626	<a href="http://www.thelowdown.co.nz/">http://www.thelowdown.co.nz/</a>	Website, text and message board that helps young people understand depression.
Depression helpline	<b>Freephone</b> (0800) 111 757	<a href="http://www.depression.org.nz">http://www.depression.org.nz</a>	Helping people understand depression and a way through.
211 Helpline	<b>Freephone</b> (0800) 211 211	<a href="http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory/">http://www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory/</a>	Provides access to community services that can help families with grief and loss.
Skylight	<b>Freephone</b> (0800 299 100)	<a href="http://www.skylight.org.nz">http://www.skylight.org.nz</a>	Supporting children, teens and their families through tough times of loss, trauma and grief.

For more information about New Zealand's health response to the Samoan earthquake and tsunami, visit <http://www.moh.govt.nz/moh.nsf/indexmh/samoan-earthquake-and-tsunami>