



LeVa

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Talanoa to Protect

How to have open, trusting conversations that nurture the va (sacred relationship), strengthen bonds and create a safe space where children feel empowered to share any concerns, including worries about inappropriate or harmful behaviour.

Attention: This resource talks about the serious topic of child sexual abuse. Some descriptions may be upsetting, and we encourage you to read with care. If you suspect harm or abuse, or if you need support, the resources listed at the end of this factsheet can help.

E pala le ma'a ae le pala le tala

Stones decay however, words do not

Samoan proverb

Key messages

- * Talanoa creates a safe space where children feel comfortable sharing openly.
- * It involves more than words; body language, tone, and gestures matter too.
- * Listening carefully shows children they are valued and encourages them to open up.
- * Thinking before speaking is essential, as words can have a lasting impact.
- * Staying calm during tough conversations helps children share any worries they may have.

Nurturing is a sacred duty

Children are at the heart of Pasifika families and society. As parents and caregivers, the sacred duty of nurturing children involves not only care and guidance but also building trust and openness. When children feel safe in their family environment, they are more likely to share any experiences that may feel uncomfortable or unsafe such as grooming and child sexual abuse.

History of Talanoa

Before the written word came to Pacific shores, Pasifika people passed on valuable oral traditions, knowledge and cultural treasures using talanoa. Talanoa is made up of two words: 'tala' meaning 'to talk' and 'noa' meaning 'nothing'. When these two words are combined, 'talanoa' represents open and free-flowing conversation. Talanoa is highly valued in traditional Pasifika cultures, as it encourages open conversation and fosters respectful and meaningful connections.

'E pala le ma'a ae le pala le tala' is a Samoan proverb that means 'stones decay, however words do not.' This Samoan proverb speaks to the lasting impacts of words and reminds us that words can either build children up or tear them down.

Talanoa to build trust with our children

Talanoa with children creates a safe space where they feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, feelings and experiences. By building trust through open conversations, we help children feel secure in talking about both the good things in their lives and difficult issues. Regular talanoa encourages open communication, making it easier for them to share without fear of judgement, ensuring they feel supported and heard in all areas of their lives.



Talanoa is more than words

When we talk with children our body language must match our words. This shows children that we care and are paying attention. By matching our body language with words, parents show children that they are genuinely listening, which helps children feel safe to bring up any topic, even if it's a difficult one. These simple actions support meaningful talanoa and they can help create a safe space where children feel valued and heard.

Here are some tips on how to use body language and tone when talking with our children:

Get down to their level: When you sit with children instead of standing over them, it helps them feel valued and open to sharing anything, even worries they may have kept inside.

Speak in a calm voice: Using a calm and gentle tone can help reduce anxiety and show that it's safe to discuss all feelings, including ones they may be hesitant to share.

Use open body posture: Lean forward slightly and keep your arms open, which signals that you're truly interested in their thoughts, encouraging them to feel that nothing is too "big" or "small" to talk about.

Mirror positive emotions: When appropriate, mirroring a child's emotions (like joy or curiosity) through your expressions can build connection and empathy, showing that you understand how they feel.

Smile warmly and nod: A gentle smile and occasional nods let your child know you're listening and supportive, which is especially comforting if they're sharing something difficult.

Soften your gaze: Avoid intense eye contact, as it may feel intimidating; a soft, warm gaze shows that you're approachable and emotionally present.



Talanoa to connect

Many things influence how we talk and understand each other. Sometimes, when children share something, it can be misunderstood. It's important to listen closely during talanoa to understand what the child is really saying and take a moment to think before you reply to connect with your child.



Listen to understand

Here are some active listening tips to help with understanding and connection.

Show interest: Face your child, nod, and use small verbal cues like “*mmhmm*” to show you’re actively listening.

Give full attention: Put away distractions like phones to be fully present.

Hold back judgement: Accept what they say without criticism, creating a safe space for sharing.

Ask open questions: Encourage details with gentle prompts like, “*Can you tell me more?*”

Be patient: Give them time to gather their thoughts without interruptions.

Reflect back: Repeat or rephrase what they say to show you understand.

Acknowledge feelings: Recognise their emotions, like, “*I can see that upset you.*”

Stay calm: Respond calmly, even if the topic is difficult, to keep the space safe.

Use gentle touch: Offer a hand or hug to reassure them when needed.

Be okay with silence: Allow pauses for them to process and share at their own pace.

Be consistent: Practice active listening regularly to build trust over time.

Think before speaking

Here are some tips to improve talanoa.

Think first: Choose words carefully; they leave a lasting impact and build trust.

Pick the right time & place: Talk in a calm, comfortable, and distraction-free setting.

Be open & honest: Stay genuine, and respect their views, even if they differ from yours.

Use clear language: Speak simply to keep them engaged and help them understand.

Check for understanding: Pause to ask if they have questions or need clarity.

Acknowledge feelings: Validate their emotions to show empathy and understanding.

Stay calm: Use a gentle tone and be patient, especially on tough topics.



Challenging conversations

Handling challenging topics with sensitivity helps children feel safe and understood, which builds trust and encourages them to share openly in the future. Building these skills can make children more likely to come forward with any troubling experiences. It may take practice, but it is possible.

Check out some helpful pointers below.

Don't let emotions be in control

- ✿ Stop, breathe and think before reacting.
- ✿ Allow time to sit with an emotion and choose words carefully before giving a response.
- ✿ Decide whether it is the right time to have a talanoa, or whether it is better to reschedule.

Own your feelings by using 'I' statements

Try these steps to get any messages across without attacking the child:

- ✿ *I feel...* so sad
- ✿ *when...* you do not tell me what is really happening with you
- ✿ *because...* I care about you and want to know how I can help you.
- ✿ *What I need is...* for you to please trust me so we can work through this together.

Avoid the following phrases, as they can make the situation worse

- ✿ *You make me...* embarrassed.
- ✿ *You never...* listen.
- ✿ *You did this...* to yourself.

Dislike the behaviour, never the child

- ✿ Do not make any personal judgement statements.
- ✿ Approach the situation with compassion and empathy.
- ✿ Do not blame the child for what has happened.
- ✿ Resolving the issue immediately may not be possible, you may need to take some time out to manage your emotions. It may also be helpful to involve a support person who can help process what the next step could be to keep everyone safe, e.g., a trusted relative, a good friend or someone you both trust.

Reflective questions

This guide is designed to support open and respectful communication, strengthen relationships, and build trust with children. Below are some reflective questions to help you explore ways to deepen your connection with children through talanoa.

Questions for parents to consider

How can I use non-verbal communication better during talanoa?

How do I handle challenging conversations with my child?

What are some topics or interests my child enjoys discussing?

How can I create a safe space for talanoa with my child where my child feels that they can share anything including worries?

In what ways can I create a non-judgemental atmosphere for my child to express themselves?



Why is talanoa important in my relationship with my child?

How can I be a more active listener when my child talks to me?

How can I encourage my child to participate in talanoa more willingly?

How can I make talanoa a regular part of my time with my child?

What steps can I take to strengthen the trust and bond with my child through talanoa?

Talanoa Starters

Questions for parents to ask children

Younger Children

Everyday Joy and Connection

- What's the funniest thing that happened to you today?
- Who do you like spending time with most at school, and what do you enjoy doing together?
- What's your favourite story or song to share with our family?
- Who in our family makes you laugh the most?
- If you could choose one place for us to visit together, where would it be?

Growth, Strengths and Aspirations

- What's something you're really curious to learn about?
- If you had a superpower, what would it be?
- What's one thing you're proud of that you did recently?
- What's one dream you have for the future?

Trust and the Va (Sacred Relationship)

- What's one thing I do that shows you I'm really listening to you?
- What do you love about our time together when we talanoa?
- What's something you wish I understood more about you?
- Who do you feel close to in our family?

Culture and Identity

- If you could eat one special Pasifika food every day, what would it be?
- What's one thing you love about our family gatherings?
- What's something about our culture that makes you feel proud?

Emotional Awareness and Resilience

- What makes you feel brave when you're scared?
- What helps you feel better when you're sad or upset?
- How do you feel when we talk about things that are important to you?
- Is there anything that feels hard to talk about?
- What's one dream you have for the future?
- How can I be here for you when things are hard?

Openness and Communication

- What helps you feel safe sharing what's on your mind?
- If there's something you don't feel ready to talk about, what would help make it easier?

Older Children

Everyday Moments and Joy

- ▶ What's something that made you laugh today?
- ▶ What's a memory you have that makes you feel happy?
- ▶ What's something you'd love for us to do together soon?

Culture, Identity and Pride

- ▶ What's one Pasifika tradition that you feel proud to carry on?
- ▶ How do you feel connected to our culture?
- ▶ If you could choose one part of our culture to share with others, what would it be?

Trust, Talanoa and Safe Communication

- ▶ How do you feel when we have our talanoa talks?
- ▶ What helps you feel safe sharing what's on your mind?
- ▶ If you could change one thing to make talanoa easier, what would it be?
- ▶ What's something you want me to know that's hard for you to say?

Growth, Aspirations and Strengths

- ▶ What's something you're proud of that you'd like to share with me?
- ▶ What's one big dream or goal you have for the future?
- ▶ If you could teach me about something you're interested in, what would it be?

Support and Emotional Understanding

- ▶ What's one thing that brings you comfort when you're feeling down?
- ▶ What's something you wish I knew more about to support you as you grow up?
- ▶ What's something I do that makes you feel understood?

Values and Relationships

- ▶ Who's someone you look up to, and what do you admire about them?
- ▶ What's your favourite way to show kindness to others?
- ▶ What's something you appreciate about our family?

Emotional Intelligence

- ▶ Is there a time when you felt really listened to — what made it feel that way?
- ▶ If you had a message for other parents about how to support young people, what would it be?
- ▶ What helps you when you're having a rough day?

Reporting abuse and knowing where to get help

If you need to talk to someone now, help is available. Confidential support is available for those feeling unsure and needing to talk to someone about child sexual abuse.

If someone is in danger:

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call the Police on 111.

If you or a young person needs someone to talk to:

Safe to talk

Support for those impacted by sexual harm.

Call: 0800 044 334

Text: 4334

Email: support@safetotalk.nz

Live webchat: www.safetotalk.nz

Youthline

Youth helpline service & face-to-face counselling.

Call: 0800 376 633

Text: 234

Email: talk@youthline.co.nz

1737

Support from trained counsellors

Call or text: 1737

If the young person is in an unsafe environment:

Oranga Tamariki

Free call: 0508 326 459

Email: enquiry@ot.govt.nz

Support for those who have experienced sexual abuse:

Victim Support: 0800 842 846

Rape Crisis: 0800 88 33 00

HELP: Call: 24/7, 0800 623 1700 (24-hour HELpline)

Email: gethelp@helpauckland.org.nz

Text: 8236

Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP): 022 344 0496

More information and resources from Le Va:



Growing the Pasifika mental health and addiction workforce

www.leva.co.nz/our-work/mental-health



Equipping young people to look after their mental health

www.mentalwealth.nz



Shaping resilience in young people with digital mental health tools

www.auntydee.co.nz



Preventing violence by supporting families to have respectful relationships

www.atumai.nz

Learn how to help prevent suicide:

FLO Pasifika for Life Supporting community-based suicide prevention for Pasifika families
www.leva.co.nz/our-work/suicide-prevention

LifeKeepers Equipping all New Zealanders with skills to prevent suicide
www.lifekeepers.nz

Mana Akiaki Fostering te ao Māori approaches to suicide prevention training
www.lifekeepers.nz

Other learning opportunities through Le Va:

Mana Restore Enhancing mental health literacy in online gaming
www.manarestore.nz

Global Pacific Solutions Igniting community collaboration for wellbeing solutions
www.leva.co.nz/our-work/mental-health-addiction/global-pacific-solutions/

Faiva Ora Championing equity for Pasifika people with disabilities
www.leva.co.nz/our-work/disability-support/faiva-ora-leadership

Engaging Pasifika Improving the quality of health services through cultural competency
www.leva.co.nz/trainingeducation/engaging-pasifika