

INSIDE A YOUNG PERSON'S MIND

**FOOD FOR THOUGHT WHEN
CARING FOR RANGATAHI**



NŌKU TE AO



We were all rangatahi once.

We all know what it was like to navigate through new, big and sometimes scary feelings and experiences at a young age – like the fear of trying to fit in with peers, the pressure of having it all together, and the helplessness we felt when we sensed stigma and discrimination against us and our mates.

This resource was crafted from the minds of rangatahi (or young people) for you, their teachers, caregivers, authority figures and loved ones. Right now, more than ever, rangatahi need your awahi to grow.

In this resource, you'll find:

- Insights into what rangatahi are going through right now
- Tips and tricks on how you can unpack any biases you might hold, to help end discrimination towards rangatahi
- Ways you can support rangatahi through the pressures they experience.

"YOU ARE MORE
IMPORTANT TO US THAN
YOU THINK. GET TO KNOW
US, SO WE CAN GET TO
KNOW YOU TOO."

– Year 12 student



THE STORY OF RŪAUMOKO

Rūaumoko is the atua (deity) of earthquakes and volcanic activity. When his mother Papatūānuku (the Earth Mother) and father Ranginui (the Sky Father) were separated, Rūaumoko was left in the darkness beneath the earth, causing him to feel isolated and disconnected from his whānau. His turmoil reflects the pain of being excluded or marginalised.

Unlike his siblings who inhabited the skies, seas or forests, Rūaumoko was confined to the darkness of Papatūānuku's womb. **His isolation parallels the experiences of people who are excluded or marginalised within a community.**

Though unseen, Rūaumoko wields immense power, just like our rangatahi.

The turmoil caused by Rūaumoko's earthquakes and eruptions reflects the frustration, anger or sorrow of people who experience discrimination.

Just as Rūaumoko's power beneath the surface affects the entire world, so too do the contributions and challenges of marginalised people impact on our collective wellbeing.



By acknowledging people who are unseen or unheard, we create a society that values all members, preventing feelings of exclusion or resentment.

*As we uphold the immensely powerful gift of being able to help shape our rangatahi, we encourage you to think of Rūaumoko, and how we can, with the right tools, words and care, **encourage peace and equity for our rangatahi so they can grow** in a settled, inclusive environment.*

WHAT ARE 'STIGMA' AND 'DISCRIMINATION', AND HOW DO THEY IMPACT RANGATAHI?

'Stigma' is a negative way of thinking about someone, based on myths about a group or groups that person is perceived to belong to. For example, stigma may be held towards someone based on that person's mental distress experiences, disability or ethnicity. When stigmatising someone, the person doing the stigmatising mistakenly believes all people from that group are the same.

'Discrimination' is a negative action or actions taken towards a person, fed by stigma or prejudice towards them. Discrimination could look like excluding someone, or treating them unfairly, or denying them an opportunity they would willingly give to someone else.

Stigma and discrimination negatively impact everyone, including rangatahi. Being stigmatised and discriminated against can negatively affect people's willingness to learn and the pathways they take in life, as well as preventing mental distress recovery.

"When teachers treated me bad, so did the other kids."

— Year 12 student



"I WAS LABELLED THE NAUGHTY KID FROM ONE TEACHER. THEY SEPARATED ME FROM MY PEERS AND PUT ME IN A CLASS FULL OF OTHER 'NAUGHTY KIDS'. WE ALL LOOKED THE SAME."

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"THEY NEVER TREATED US THE SAME WAY AS THE OTHERS. I JUST STRUGGLED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY WERE TEACHING ME, AND NOW I'M ON MY SECOND TO LAST YEAR AND I'M SCARED OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER SCHOOL. I'M SCARED THAT I'VE ALREADY FAILED WITH THIS LABEL ON ME."

— Rangatahi, 16 years old

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HOW DO WE ADDRESS UNCONSCIOUS BIASES?

We all have unconscious biases. What's important is how we address and change these biases, so they don't impact other people's wellbeing and way of life, or feed stigma and discrimination.

Here are some steps you can take to address unconscious biases.

- **Get them out in the open.** Do you hold any unconscious biases about certain groups, and what are they? Do these negative beliefs affect how you act towards rangatahi? Admitting to any biases you might hold is the first step.
- Look at the cultures surrounding you. Do you hear negative messages about certain groups of people? Question these messages, and ask yourself, "Are these messages based on stigma and hatred, or truth?"
- **Talk to your peers.** Sharing biases we hold shines a light on them, and helps dispel their power.

Addressing mental distress stigma and discrimination is an ongoing journey. We won't address it all, or fix it all, in one day, but we can make daily commitments to acknowledge and change these negative thoughts and actions.



"Māori, Samoan and other Pacific students are far more likely to report discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity from adults than from their peers, with unfair teacher behaviour the most frequently reported issue."

— *He Whakaaro*, Ministry of Education (2022)

HELPFUL DAILY QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

- What core beliefs do I hold? How might these beliefs limit or enable me and the rangatahi in my classroom?
- How do I react to rangatahi from different backgrounds? Do I hold any stereotypes or assumptions about particular social groups?
- As a teacher, do I acknowledge and leverage differences in the classroom?
- How would rangatahi describe my leadership style, if they were sharing their experiences with me to others?
- **Do my words and actions reflect my intentions?**
- Do I empathise with the rangatahi I teach and try to put myself in their shoes, even if I don't fully understand their situation?

CLASSROOM CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider **structuring course content in a variety of ways**, to help a wider range of rangatahi absorb it.
- Provide research and information from gender-diverse, Māori, Pacific and Asian sources.
- Consider how Māori and Pacific issues are presented. Are these issues portrayed in a deficit-based way, and if so how could you help change this?
- Use **inclusive teaching and learning practices**, designed to support different thinking and learning styles and cultural needs.
- Use universal design principles in the teaching resources you choose, e.g. use captioned videos, or provide information in a variety of formats.
- Showcase diverse role models and **diverse opportunities** for student interaction.
- Consider marginalised students, ensuring they can speak and ask questions in a safe environment.



"When you start to label kids as having behavioural issues, that becomes a mental health problem. Kids aren't often deliberately being naughty but are just struggling to understand and/or learn using your teaching mechanisms."

– Dr. Erena Wikaire, *Kaupapa Māori health researcher*



"I'm chasing perfection, and failing feels like a punch to the heart."

– Year 12 student

DEALING WITH PRESSURE AND CHANGE

Rangatahi are navigating a world of change. They might be navigating this change in environments that aren't safe or inclusive, along with facing other peer, financial and academic pressures.

Our adolescent years are often our defining years. How safe and supported rangatahi feel can shape the choices they make, including what life pathways they choose after their schooling ends.

Rangatahi wellbeing levels can also influence their future mental health and wellbeing.

Nearly 60% of mental health challenges begin by adolescence, with many continuing into adulthood (Caspi et al., 2020), so getting the support rangatahi need, when they need it can be crucial to maintaining good wellbeing throughout their lives.

"I'M BALANCING A LOT
WITH SPORTS, EXAMS AND
LEADERSHIP. YOU EXPECT
ME TO BE THE BEST AT
EVERYTHING."

"I don't know how to
do everything."

"I'm trying my best at a lot."



"I want to make you proud, and
I know I do make you proud –
but it's really hard."

"I'M SCARED TO FAIL."

"IT'S SCARY GROWING
UP AND THINKING ABOUT
WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN
AFTER SCHOOL."

HOW CAREGIVERS CAN SUPPORT RANGATAHI

We can support rangatahi through stressful times by:

- Ensuring their stress levels aren't affecting their health, behaviour, thoughts or feelings, and learning and modelling stress management skills they can follow.
- Listening carefully to them, and how they talk about their concerns.
- Supporting their involvement in sports and other social activities, while ensuring they don't take on too much.
- Encouraging (rather than judging) them in all aspects of life.
- Practising using 'I' rather than 'you'-style language when working through problems together, e.g. instead of saying "Please stop yelling", you could say "I feel hurt when you yell at me".
- Challenging negative thoughts and feelings they may share, by first validating those thoughts and feelings but also offering hope for change.
- Role modelling completing jobs, rather than completing them perfectly (to advocate against perfectionism).
- Encouraging rangatahi to take regular breaks.

"I struggled this year and I wanted to quit, but my friends encouraged me to keep going."

– Year 11 student



HAVING A KŌRERO ABOUT THE HARD STUFF

If you're experiencing distressing thoughts and feelings, opening up the kōrero can seem like the hardest part. It's normal to feel awkward, whether you're experiencing these feelings yourself or asking rangatahi about how they're feeling.

You can open up the kōrero with rangatahi by:

- Asking rangatahi about how they're feeling, and sharing how you're feeling too.
- Asking open-ended questions. You can also try talking when you're already doing something together, such as going for a walk or eating.
- Validating their feelings, and accepting their experiences as real and true for them.
- Echoing back what you are hearing. By repeating the key points they say when they kōrero about their mental distress experiences, you can ensure rangatahi feel heard and understood.

When our rangatahi are experiencing distressing thoughts and emotions, it's tempting to want to get stuck in to help them. However, big gestures or responses are not always helpful.

Instead, you can support them by:

- Asking them if you can help, and how.
- Being realistic about what you can offer.
- Owning your own fears around their wellbeing.



You can provide ongoing support for rangatahi by:

- Sharing their care with friends and whānau.
- Reaching out to mental health services for advice.
- Finding your own outlets for self-care.
- Demonstrating good wellbeing practices which can inspire rangatahi to follow your example.

If you're not sure who to reach out to, you can **free-call 1737** to speak to a trained counsellor at any time of the day or night, or visit **www.mentalhealth.org.nz/helplines**. There are also a range of different resources which can help you to support rangatahi, or learn more about mental distress discrimination. For access to these resources, visit:

- **www.nokuteao.org.nz**
- **www.mentalhealth.org.nz**

If you or someone you know has immediate safety concerns, please dial 111 or visit **www.mentalhealth.org.nz/help**

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Supporting rangatahi in distress can be hard on our wellbeing and contribute to our own anxious thoughts. It's important to put some wellbeing tools in place, both for yourself and the rangatahi you care for.

Ngā mihi

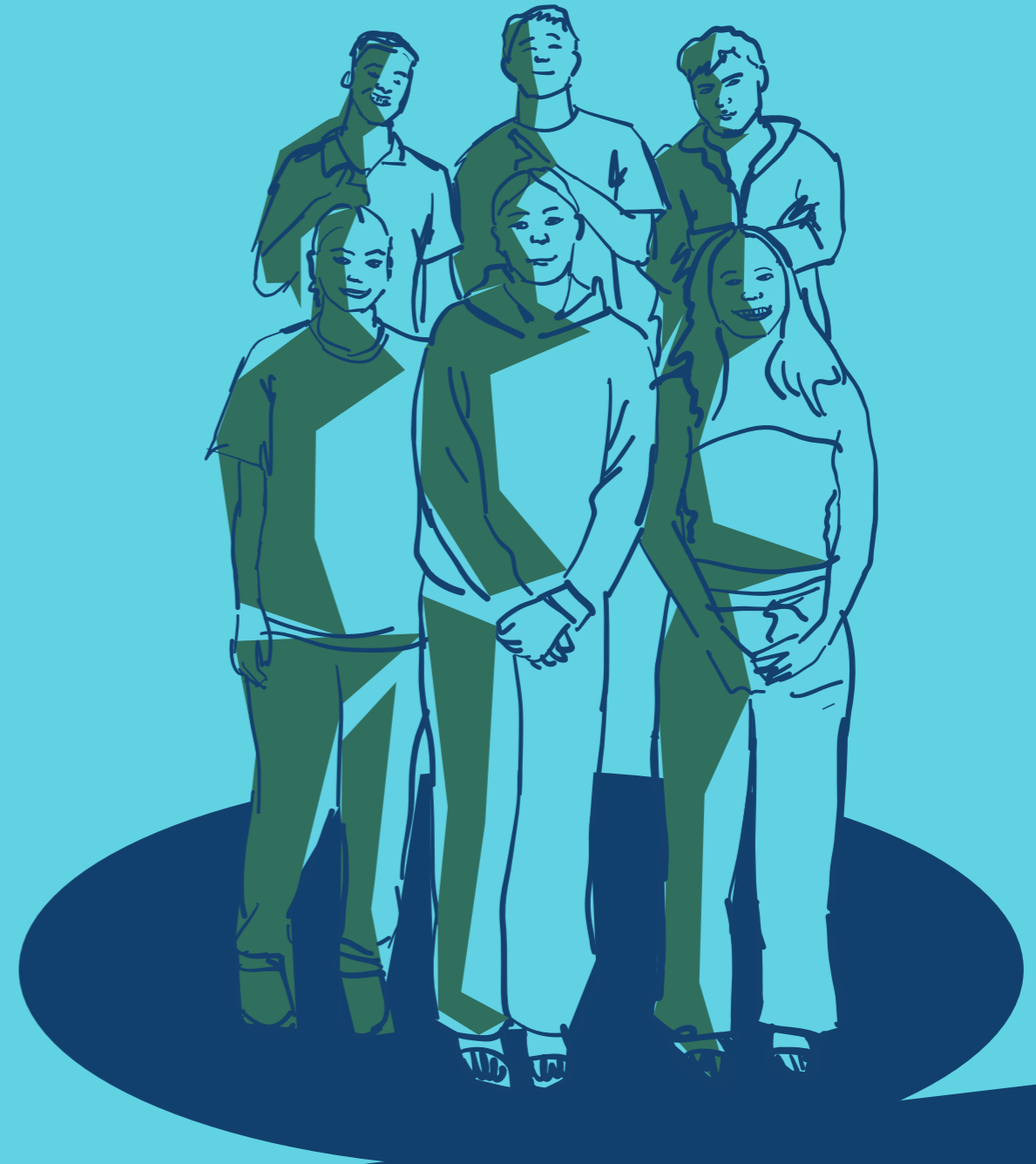
E rere ana ngā mihi aroha ki ngā whānau, ki ngā hapori, ki ngā tāngata katoa i kaha tautoko mai i tēnei kaupapa whakahirahira. Mei kore ake ko koutou! Nā koutou tēnei taonga e aku Rangatira!

We mihi the many people across the motu who shared their time, knowledge and space with us to help bring this taonga to life.

References

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