

Ki Te Ao Mārama: Understanding trauma-informed approaches & pathways to healing | Workshop 2 | 22 April 2026

Session one: Honouring story, restoring spirit | Understanding Pacific approaches to trauma-informed practice | Questions and answers

[Click here to view the presentation slides](#)

Question / discussion topic / theme	Response
How can we apply healing-centred, culturally grounded approaches in everyday practice (e.g. schools, hospitals, online settings), while maintaining safety, engagement, and trust?	Healing-centred approaches start with building trust and understanding what matters to the person and their family. Support people to nurture their holistic wellbeing by understanding the important relationships in their life and exploring connections to culture, spirituality, family, community, and other sources of strength. Small actions such as using simple greetings, showing genuine curiosity, listening well, and following through on commitments can help people feel safe, respected, and engaged. Creating space for people to bring their culture, values, and lived experiences into the conversation can strengthen connection, trust, and wellbeing.
How do we work respectfully with Pasifika families when there are differences in perspectives – for example across generations, or around parenting practices – while still prioritising safety and wellbeing?	Working with Pasifika families often involves balancing respect for cultural values, roles, and ways of caring with ensuring safety and wellbeing. At times, family approaches may look different to what we expect and can trigger personal feelings. Pacific families often deal with multiple stressors, which may sometimes show up in interpersonal behaviours that would seem harsh or unloving. The key for us is to stay curious, avoid judgement, and work in partnership with families, creating space to understand their perspective while also supporting approaches that protect the wellbeing of the individual. Talanoa, active listening, and building trust can help create opportunities to explore differences respectfully while maintaining a focus on safety and positive outcomes. It is also important to remember that violence, abuse, and harm are not Pasifika values. Across Pacific cultures, values such as alofa love, respect, service, reciprocity, spirituality, and the nurturing of the vā space between are intended to protect, strengthen, and uphold the wellbeing of children and families. While these values can sometimes be misunderstood, misapplied, or used to justify harmful behaviour, this does not reflect their true meaning or purpose. Harm and violence have never been part of the essence of Pasifika values, which are grounded in care, protection, dignity, and collective wellbeing. Therefore, while we respect cultural differences and family perspectives, we must also be clear that any form of harm, violence, or abuse is unacceptable, and that safety and wellbeing must always remain a priority.

Question / discussion topic / theme	Response
How can we better understand and respond to behaviours (including for children and adults with disabilities or neurodiversity) in ways that consider trauma, culture, and family context?	Behaviour is often a form of communication. When working with children and adults with disabilities or neurodiversity, it can be helpful to be guided by families and ask what certain behaviours mean, what might trigger distress, and what helps the person feel safe and settled. What looks like challenging behaviour may be linked to sensory overload, changes in routine, communication difficulties, trauma, or unmet needs. Staying curious and understanding the person's family, cultural, and environmental context can help us respond in ways that are supportive rather than reactive. Rather than asking, "What's wrong with this person?", consider asking, "What might this person be trying to communicate?" or "What do they need right now?". Families do not need to navigate this journey alone. Talk to your local Pasifika provider first. They can help connect you with disability, autism, education, and family support services that understand your family's cultural context.
How do we navigate spirituality and religion in our work — including when they are sources of strength, and when they may also be linked to experiences of harm?	Start by asking the person what role spirituality, faith, or religion plays in their life, rather than making assumptions. For many Pasifika people, faith and church communities can be important sources of strength, connection, identity, and support. For others, they may be connected to difficult or harmful experiences. If someone shares experiences of harm linked to religion, faith communities, or people in positions of spiritual authority, it is important to listen without judgement, believe their experience, and allow them to share at their own pace. Avoid defending, criticising, or making assumptions about their faith or church. Our role is not to tell people what they should believe. Our role is to support their safety and wellbeing. Be clear that harm is never acceptable, regardless of who caused it or the position they hold. Where appropriate, support people to identify safe and trusted sources of support, whether that is within their faith community, their family, or elsewhere in the community.
How do historical and collective experiences (e.g. colonisation, migration, pandemics) continue to shape trauma and wellbeing for Pasifika communities today?	Families may be cautious, guarded, or hesitant to engage with services for many reasons. Rather than viewing this as resistance or lack of interest, it can be helpful to ask, "What experiences might be shaping this response?" In our work, this means taking time to build trust, listening to families' stories, following through on commitments, and involving families in decisions that affect them. Small actions that demonstrate respect, consistency, and genuine care can go a long way in helping families feel safe to engage and seek support when needed.

Question / discussion topic / theme	Response
How do connections to land, moana, and environment influence wellbeing, and what role do they play in healing?	When supporting Pasifika, consider asking what places, environments, or cultural connections help them feel grounded, calm, and connected. For some, wellbeing and healing may be supported through spending time by the ocean, being in nature, participating in cultural activities, caring for the environment, or reconnecting with their island home, family, and community.