

Mental Health
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Aroha's way: A children's guide through emotions

Phillips, C. (2019). N.Z.: Wildling Books.

I'm a great believer in reviewing a book in conjunction with its intended audience and my guess is *Aroha's Way* is beautifully pitched for primary school tamariki. So, in this case, this book could be suited for my own ten-year-old, who in small ways shows us her worries, and sometimes, in quiet moments, talks about them.

On the book cover Aroha is looking out to sea, her hair and scarf blown in the wind, as is the grass at her feet and the full-bloom, yellow and green kowhai frame. My daughter, a keen artist utters her initial response, "Wow." It's a great start.

Aroha in all ways seems real and a wee bit cool. High-top sneakers, skinny jeans and chunky, knit jersey, hair dark, long and tousled – she's familiar, and we like her. She looks adventurous and happy with who she is.

It's hard to fully articulate what makes this book so special. The running poem seems to whisper faint memories of childhood nursery rhymes, the stunning images of our New Zealand shoreline – our natural playground, the visiting butterflies and native birds and the continual movement from the wind, the waves on sand, and Aroha's hair and scarf. It's like Craig Philips has captured our memories, and our emotions. Much like the waves and wind, they come and go, are prominent and fleeting.

Then we learn Aroha struggles sometimes –

*She'll sing and she'll dance
And she'll hug and she'll play*

*For that is Aroha's way.
But now and then...*

Continues over page ...



... Just like my daughter who snuggles in tight as we see Aroha worry and become fearful. I can feel my daughter recognising times when the world isn't playful and bright. We see Aroha's stillness. The wind drops, colours grey.

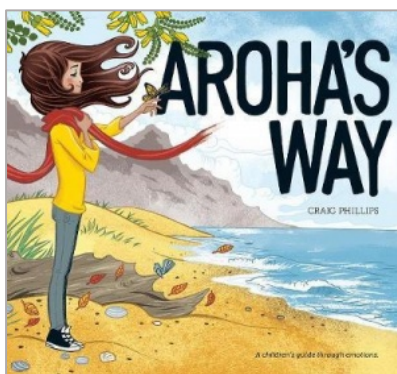
Turning the page reveals Aroha jumping and distracting herself, some pages over she is taking a deep breath, and it seems she actively recreates the floating, breezy wind-filled setting. She is figuratively blowing away her mood and negative thoughts.

These are strategies my daughter knows, but I'm thankful to Craig Phillips for gifting her the images so that she is able to adopt Aroha's Way – breathing, distracting and grounding ourselves brings back the wind and the waves and the movement and the colour and the calm.

Aroha is a bright and brave role model in our whānau. We will be buying the book and in my professional life, I'll be recommending it over and over again.

I truly believe this is a fantastic New Zealand-framed book to actively talk strategies for overcoming worries and fears with tamariki. It makes it all normal, because, it is.

Reviewed by Anna Mowat, project lead for Sparklers, a wellbeing website for schools. She also works across the All Right? wellbeing campaign and co-directs Real Parents.



The Mental Health Foundation's Information Service brings you reviews as part of the Good Reads feature for Mental Health Awareness Week. To view more go to <https://mhaw.nz/>

