

Support for People Affected by Violent or Distressing Events



Violent or distressing events can affect many people - not only those who were directly involved. It is common for individuals, families and communities to feel unsettled, distressed or unsafe after such events, especially when they relate to identity, culture, faith, community, or trigger memories of past experiences of violence.

Common reactions

IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS FOLLOWING A VIOLENT EVENT, PEOPLE MAY EXPERIENCE:

- fear, anxiety, sadness, anger, panic and/or shock
- feeling unsafe in public places, and avoiding public events and places
- difficulty sleeping and/or concentrating
- physical symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, stomach discomfort
- memories or feelings linked to past traumatic experiences.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE MAY:

- become more clingy or withdrawn
- have emotional outbursts
- struggle with school or daily routines
- spend more time online or appear constantly alert
- have difficulty sleeping and/or nightmares
- avoid eating or want to excessively eat
- feel confused and not understand what has occurred
- feel irritable or regress with behaviours (e.g., bed wetting)

These reactions are normal trauma responses to abnormal events.

What can help

MANY PEOPLE FIND IT HELPFUL TO:

- talk with trusted family members, friends, or community supports
- keep daily routines where possible
- limit repeated exposure to distressing news or images
- spend time doing calming or grounding activities
- seek support if feelings become overwhelming or persist

WHEN SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, IF CAN BE HELPFUL TO:

- limit access to television and social media, to reduce them seeing distressing footage
- provide honest but age-appropriate information about the distressing or violent event. Encourage them to come to a trusted adult if they want more information
- reading together, staying nearby, keeping routines predictable can help ease anxiety
- remind them distressing and violent events are rare, and Australia is a safe country

There is no right way to respond. People cope in different ways, and some may not feel distressed at all. This is also normal.

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When to seek additional support

EXTRA SUPPORT MAY BE HELPFUL IF SOMEONE:

- feels unsafe most of the time
- is unable to manage daily activities
- experiences strong distress that does not ease over time
- notices old trauma symptoms returning
- is worried about a child or young person's wellbeing
- continues avoiding public areas or not leaving their home, even after a prolonged period of time

Specialist trauma support

FASSTT (Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma) is a national network of specialist trauma recovery services. FASSTT agencies work with individuals, families, and communities affected by violence, persecution and traumatic events.

FASSTT SUPPORT IS:

- Free and confidential
- Available in every Australian state and territory, regardless of how long someone has been in Australia
- Provided by specialist trauma services
- Available in your preferred language, through the use of interpreters

How to access support

You can contact the FASSTT agency in your state or territory by phone or email. Agency contact details are available on the FASSTT website: www.fasstt.org.au

You can also access support by calling the **Witness to War Telephone Line on 1800 845 198 (free call)**.

If someone is in immediate danger or at risk of harming themselves or others, call **000**.

ASETTS (WA)

P: 08 9227 2700
asetts.org.au

COMPANION HOUSE (ACT)

P: 02 6251 4550
companionhouse.org.au

FOUNDATION HOUSE (VIC)

P: 03 9389 8900
foundationhouse.org.au

MELALEUCA AUSTRALIA (NT)

P: 08 8985 3311
melaleuca.org.au

QPASTT (QLD)

P: 07 3391 6677
qpastt.org.au

PHOENIX CENTRE (TAS)

P: 03 6234 9138
mrctas.org.au/phoenix-centre

STARTTS (NSW)

P: 02 9794 1900
startts.org

STTARS (SA)

P: 08 8206 8900
sttars.org.au

