

Supporting Communities After Violent or Distressing Events



Information for Faith Leaders, Community Associations and Multicultural Organisations

Violent or distressing events can affect entire communities, not only individuals who were directly involved. When events relate to identity, faith, culture, or past experiences of violence, their impact may be deeply felt across families, places of worship, and community networks.

Community leaders often carry this impact alongside responsibility for supporting others.

What leaders may notice in their communities

IN THE DAYS AND WEEKS FOLLOWING A VIOLENT EVENT, COMMUNITY LEADERS MAY OBSERVE:

- increased fear or anxiety among community members
- reduced attendance at community, cultural, or faith gatherings
- heightened concern for the safety of children and young people
- emotional distress, anger, grief, irritability or withdrawal
- resurfacing of past trauma or collective memories of violence
- increased requests for reassurance, guidance, or practical support

Some people may want to talk, while others may prefer to stay silent or continue as normal. All of these responses are common and valid.

Ways community leadership can help

Communities already have strong ways of caring for one another. The following approaches can help support safety and reduce distress:

- offering calm, consistent messages of care and reassurance
- creating opportunities for people to connect, without pressure to share
- encouraging kindness, patience and understanding within the community
- being mindful of rumours and limiting the spread of distressing images or messages
- paying particular attention to children, young people, elders, and those who may be isolated and more vulnerable
- recognising that leaders and volunteers may also need support
- seeking input or guidance from police if the community would benefit from additional reassurance about their safety

There is no single correct response. Community recovery takes time and looks different across groups.

When additional support may be helpful

EXTRA SUPPORT MAY BE NEEDED WHEN:

- fear or distress is widespread or increasing
- people stop attending community activities or places of worship
- children or young people show ongoing changes in behaviour or mood
- community leaders feel overwhelmed or unsure how to respond
- past trauma appears to be strongly reactivated

Early support can help prevent longer-term impacts.

Specialist trauma support available

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

FASSTT AGENCIES CAN SUPPORT FAITH LEADERS AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS BY:

- providing specialist trauma counselling and group support
- working alongside community leaders and organisations
- supporting children and young people
- offering guidance on trauma-informed community responses
- helping reduce isolation and maintain community connection

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

