

75% of Australians will experience a potentially traumatic event in their lifetime. Our responses to trauma are common, help for enduring responses is available, and we can all take an active role in lessening the impact of trauma for ourselves and those we care for.

Being aware of the impacts of trauma will help you, your loved ones, and your wider community.



Trauma Care

“Recovery from the impact of trauma is possible, that’s why identification, early help seeking and self-care are fundamentally important!”

Louise, ACT Nurse, lived experience of Trauma

What is trauma ?

Trauma is the Greek word for ‘wound’ and wounds can be both physical (physiological) and emotional (psychological). ‘Wounds’ can be formed in many different ways and from many different experiences, such as a threat or perceived threat of harm, which we call Potentially Traumatic Events (PTEs).

Examples of PTEs include bushfires, wartime or natural disasters, diagnosis of a terminal illness, or a car accident. Our individual perceptions of (and responses to) PTE’s can greatly differ, depending on a variety of factors such as our past experiences, current stress load, our level of social connection, overall health and even our genetics.

Why is it important to understand and identify the possible impacts of trauma?

75% of people will experience at least one PTE in their lifetime. Unresolved trauma can have an impact on our relationships, our capacity to work and the way we experience our larger world.

The impact of trauma can be relieved if early intervention is sought or appropriate care is taken. This means that identifying your experience of trauma, or even just this signs and symptoms of a trauma response is key in getting help early. Understanding what is going on in our bodies is also an important part of self-awareness and self-care.

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What can Trauma look like in our bodies?

Our responses to trauma can look very different from person to person, and you might experience some or many of the below symptoms following exposure to a PTE. Children, like adults can be impacted by trauma and again the body's response can vary.

Signs and symptoms of a trauma response

Adults

- Emotional – sadness, blame, anger, guilt, fear
- Thoughts – poor concentration, reoccurring negative thoughts
- Physical – trouble sleeping, eating, nausea
- Behaviours – loss of routine, avoidance, substance use, withdrawn

Children

- Emotional – sad, confused, irritable, fear
- Physical – little or too much sleep, headaches, tummy pain, needing to go to the toilet, unexplained bed wetting, changed appetite
- Thoughts – poor concentration, overly concerned or worried, separation anxiety
- Behaviours – withdrawn or clingy, lashing out, hiding or showing excessive fear

How do I know if and when help is needed?

Exposure to trauma activates the stress response (Flight, Fight, Freeze), and the above signs and symptoms are a typical and normal response to a PTE within the first 48 hours. When this response is prolonged, (continuing past 4 weeks, or beginning after 4 weeks), and is impacting on your quality of life and daily function, it is important to seek help.

Access to help, reaching out to trusted supports and accessing professional support can increase your ability to cope with your responses and ensure you are supported on your journey of recovery.

Key strategies & techniques – Self-care during a PTE

- Mindfulness Meditation. Make this your own, listen to music, run a bath, relax your mind and body.
- Positive rephrasing and self-talk. Be kind to yourself and try to think positively.
- Let go of the uncontrollable. Ask yourself if you have control to change the situation?
- Open communication & self-reflection. Be honest with your self and look inward.
- Never be afraid to ask for help. There are free supports available such as Lifeline 13 11 14.
- Remember you are not alone. There are support groups, online resources and support lines.
 - Access Mental Health Canberra, FREE, 24 hour, 7 Days a week. Call 1800 629 354 or 02 6205 1565.
 - Relationships Australia – Trauma Support Services Canberra, FREE. Call 02 6122 7100 www.racr.org.au/services/trauma-support-services/find-and-connect
 - Companion House – Assistance for people affected by trauma. Call 02 6251 4550.

Quick muscle relaxation

Hold your arms above your head, feel the tension in them, drop your arms down, feel them relax, practice tensing and then relaxing, relax muscles in your hands, face, and stomach.