



Trauma & mental health

Our response to trauma

Trauma is the response to something – usually an event/s – that overwhelms a person's ability to cope.

Everyone experiences and responds to it in different ways and it can cause feelings of distress, fear, helplessness and loss of control. Traumatic events are situations that threaten your life, sense of safety, or that of someone around you.

Due to the difficult nature of these events, it is often hidden, not reported or denied.

There are many reasons for this including being afraid of getting into trouble, feeling shame, guilt or self-blame about the event, or being scared of the offender.

The different types of trauma

- **Complex trauma**
- **Intergenerational trauma**
- **Single incident trauma**
- **Vicarious trauma**

The effects of trauma

Everyone responds to trauma differently and there is no 'right' way to respond. This depends on the individual, their past experiences, levels of support and the nature of the events.

What happens after traumatic events are normal responses to 'not normal' events. Being exposed to trauma can have a wide range of effects on mental and physical health.

Getting help

People can recover from the impact of trauma. Some people choose to try to manage on their own, but sometimes additional support may be needed. You might have been feeling better for some time but the challenges might unexpectedly resurface.

This can occur during unsettled times when lots of change is happening, or if you are reminded of the circumstances of the trauma. At these times it can be helpful to seek support, even if you have had assistance in the past. Reaching out for support whenever needed can help make things easier to manage.

Though it can be really challenging reaching out to others to let them what you're going through, it can help you feel supported, less isolated and it can be the beginning of a valuable support network.





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Early reactions

Common responses include:

- *confusion*
- *sadness*
- *anxiety or fear*
- *agitation*
- *anger*
- *numbness and detachment*
- *denial*
- *embarrassment*
- *fear*
- *guilt*
- *shame*
- *helplessness*
- *feeling out of control*
- *nightmares*
- *flashbacks*

Common physical symptoms include:

- *nausea*
- *dizziness*
- *altered sleep patterns*
- *changes in appetite*
- *headaches*
- *gastrointestinal problems*
- *being easily startled*



Delayed reactions

Many people may find that with time and support it can get easier to cope with traumatic experiences. However, some people may find that their distress continues or increases.

This may result in:

- *mood swings, including irritability*
- *feeling more fragile or vulnerable*
- *fatigue*
- *grief*
- *fears of recurrence*
- *emotional detachment*
- *increased arousal and vigilance*
- *self-blame or guilt*
- *preoccupation with the events*
- *difficulties making decisions*
- *problems with school, work and relationships*
- *post-traumatic stress disorder*
- *depression*
- *anxiety*
- *dissociation (or feeling numb, cut off or disconnected to your feelings)*
- *substance use.*

Getting Support

Taking that first step can be tough, but if you are experiencing mental health difficulties, it's important that you reach out. You can also get in touch with your GP or use our online or phone-based service by calling **1300 327 624** or emailing mhwb@ruralaid.org.au

If you ever feel unable to cope because of overwhelming or intense emotions, or if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, then ask for help immediately or call **000** or speak to someone at **Lifeline (13 11 14)**