



Prioritising First Nations Social and Emotional Wellbeing after trauma

Important: This article discusses suicide and other sensitive topics. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this article references deceased persons.

In light of the heartbreaking events that unfolded in Western Australia recently, it's completely natural to feel upset, anxious, or angry.

These emotions may persist for days or even weeks. It's crucial to understand that such responses are normal parts of coping with loss, grief, and trauma, and do not indicate any ongoing mental health issues or long-term social and emotional wellbeing concerns.

Trauma can profoundly impact our mind, body, and spirit, leading to sleep issues, difficulty in managing emotions, and a general disruption in daily activities and relationships. Often, current events can trigger memories of past traumas. These triggers can arise unexpectedly and without obvious reasons.

Although experiencing these emotions is tough, remember that it's a normal part of healing. It's vital to acknowledge our feelings and understand that while we can't control everything, we can control our actions, thoughts, and responses. In these moments, choosing how we react can significantly impact our well-being and those around us.

Healing as community

In the initial days following such events, supporting each other is key. We should respect and accommodate natural coping mechanisms, which may vary from person to person. For many, coping involves connecting with family, friends, community elders, or spending time on Country. Some may choose to share their experiences, while others might prefer to process their feelings privately.

A small number of individuals may experience prolonged distress, showing symptoms that don't ease over time. Those individuals might benefit from professional support from a Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) worker, such as a counsellor or psychologist. It's important to adopt a stepped approach to support, recognising when someone might need extra help but also respecting their preferred coping methods.

Healing and recovery

Feeling powerless in response to a traumatic event in the community is normal. However, there are tools to help you calm yourself and navigate through challenging times. Healing enables people to overcome trauma and restore well-being. Effective ways to support healing include reconnecting with culture, strengthening identity, restoring safe and enduring relationships and connecting with community.

If you find yourself struggling, don't hesitate to seek support. Consider reaching out to a trusted friend, loved one, or healthcare professional. Your local Aboriginal Medical Service or GP can also assist you in accessing appropriate support services.

Tips for self-care

- **Stay connected:** Connect with people, places, and practices that uplift you. Call a friend to tell them how you're feeling and allow them to help you. It's not a sign of weakness to ask for help.
- **Limit media exposure:** Try to avoid constant reminders of the event or reading things online.
- **Stay active:** Get outside and go for a walk. Physical activities will help keep your mind and body strong, help manage stress and enhance your overall well-being.
- **Connect to country:** Choose a place you connect with and sit for a bit. Some people find it helpful to put their feet in the water, or on the sand or grass.
- **Acknowledge your feelings:** Things will improve if you manage your thoughts and emotions by focusing on positive aspects and solutions within your control.
- **Nourish your body:** Take care of your body and spirit by eating healthy food, drinking water, and getting adequate rest. Engage in spiritual or cultural practices that bring you peace.

If you are feeling stressed, remember to Pause. Breathe. Connect.

For more tips and resources, please see the [Healing Foundation's self-care resources](#).

Watch for signs you might need more support

- Continue to have overwhelming emotions
- Low spirit over a prolonged time
- Continued sleep issues, including nightmares
- Trouble in personal relationships, at work or in community
- Excessive use of alcohol or tobacco

If you're struggling: If you find yourself struggling at any point, don't hesitate to reach out. Your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation ([find one near you](#)) or Aboriginal Medical Service provider is a good starting point and can help you engage with other appropriate services.

Helping kids cope

For parents, it's essential to address children's awareness of traumatic events honestly and supportively to aid their understanding and healing. It's crucial that kids feel loved, supported and accepted. The Healing Foundation suggests:

- Encourage our kids to tell us their concerns, listen and talk about these concerns with them. Communicate that they are loved, safe and cared for.
- Provide extra attention; especially at bedtime.
- Encourage kids to express their feelings as part of the healing process.
- Try to observe difficult emotions from a distance and not react.
- Maintain a normal routine as much as possible.
- Support them to release emotions in a safe way with activities like dancing, listening to music, drawing or going for a walk.

Remember, trauma can alter our perception of the world. It's crucial to navigate these changes with support and understanding. For immediate crisis support, consider reaching out to services like 13YARN (13 92 76) or Kids Helpline (1800 551 800). For ongoing support, talking to an SEWB worker or your GP can be beneficial in developing a recovery plan.

Take care, stay connected, and let's support each other through these times.

Feeling no good? Want to yarn?

- **13YARN** – 24/7 national crisis support line for mob. Call 13 92 76.
- **Brother to brother** – 24/7 First Nations men's crisis line. Call 1800 435 799.
- **Thirrili Postvention Suicide Service** – 24/7 After suicide support for families and communities. Call 1800 805 801.
- **Kids Helpline** – For kids and young people aged 5–25. Call 1800 551 800.
- **Qlife** – LGBTIQ+ peer support. Call 1800 184 527 (3pm–Midnight).
- **Blue Knot Foundation** – For adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse. Call 1300 657 380 (9am–5pm)
- Your local **Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO)** for culturally safe support and assistance – [find one near you](#).