



Phoenix

A U S T R A L I A

CENTRE FOR POSTTRAUMATIC
MENTAL HEALTH

Dealing with Trauma

A Guide for Young People who have Experienced Trauma



"I have massive fights with my mum because she wants me to go to bed, but I'm too scared to re-live the accident over and over again in my mind."

What is a traumatic event?

Any event that involves actual or threat of death, serious injury, or sexual violence can be traumatic. They might have seen someone die, or thought that they, or someone else, was going to die. Or they might have learnt that a friend or family member was seriously injured, or died unexpectedly.

The trauma could be something that happened once, or something that keeps on happening over and over again, for weeks, months, or even years.

Examples of traumatic events

Seeing or experiencing:

- a disaster (e.g., fire, flood, cyclone, pandemic or terrorism)
- a serious accident (e.g., car, bike, fall from a height)
- an assault or seriously violent incident (e.g., intimate partner violence, sexual or physical abuse)
- war or torture



"I feel like there's this wall around me now. Even if I'm standing right next to someone, I feel like they're a million miles away. My friends don't get it, so I've pretty much stopped talking to them."

What happens after trauma?

No two people react in the same way.

You might:

- feel angry, sad, afraid or confused
- get headaches, feel sick in the stomach or have lost your appetite
- have nightmares and trouble sleeping
- get into fights or do things that you wouldn't normally do
- be unable to concentrate, and have trouble doing school work
- not want to talk to or be around others

Many people recover in a few weeks on their own, or with the help of friends and family.

Some people might have these reactions for a long time.

It is important to get help as early as possible if you're still feeling bad after a week or two.

What is PTSD?

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a set of reactions that can develop in some people after they have been through a traumatic event.

There are 4 main types of problems that you may experience if you have PTSD:

Re-living the traumatic event

- Having upsetting memories of the event (e.g., through nightmares, or even feeling as if the event is actually happening again)
- Feeling really upset and scared when reminded of the trauma

Feeling wound up

- Being unable to concentrate
- Having problems sleeping
- Feeling always on edge
- Self-harming
- Taking risks (more than usual)

Avoiding reminders

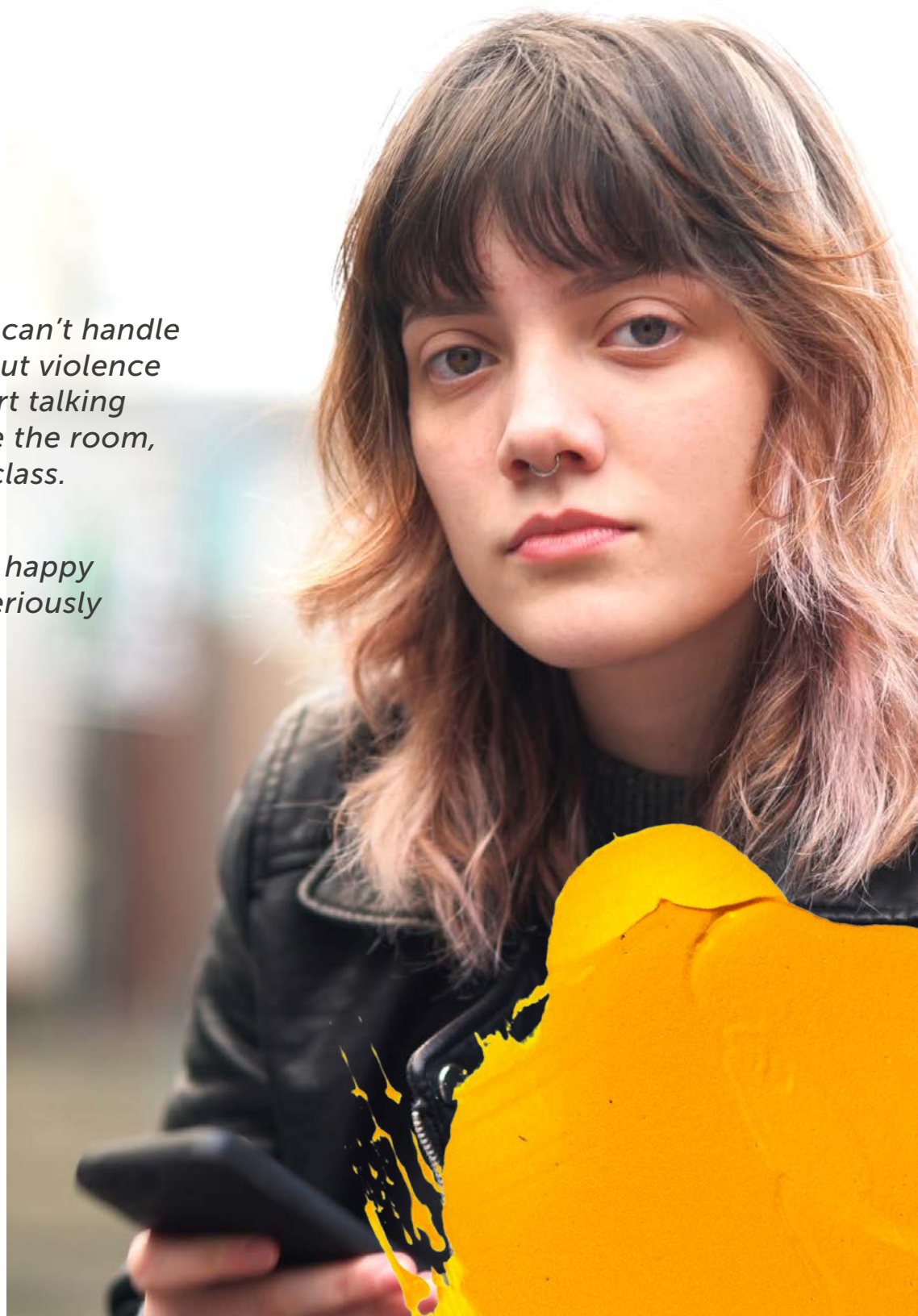
- Avoiding people, places or situations that remind you of the trauma
- Avoiding ever talking about the trauma
- Using drugs or alcohol to stop the memories

Having negative thoughts and feelings

- Being constantly irritable, anxious, afraid, angry, guilty or ashamed, numb or flat
- Having little interest in usual activities
- Feeling cut off from friends and family

"Since the assault I can't handle people talking about violence at all. If people start talking about it I just leave the room, even if it's during class.

My teachers aren't happy about that, but I seriously can't help it."





Getting help

PTSD is really just like an alarm going off in your head telling you that the trauma you experienced is too much for your brain to handle, and you need some help to make sense of it all so you don't feel so overloaded.

It's a bit like never tidying your room. As time goes by, the floor, the furniture, and eventually even your bed, get covered in junk; you can't even recognise them anymore and you don't want to spend time in your room. So you have to make time to sort through all the junk, decide what to throw away and what to keep, and find a safe place to put the things that you don't want to get rid of.

Once you have done this your room becomes a nice place to be again: somewhere where you can feel safe, hang out and sleep soundly.

If you have PTSD, going to see a counsellor is just like cleaning up your room.

A counsellor can help you sort through the 'junk' (memories, feelings and thoughts) that you have collected about the trauma, so that you can feel safe and secure again, and be free to do the things you used to like doing.

If you think that you might have PTSD, it is important to know that you are not going crazy.

"I've been seeing my counsellor for about a month now. I hated it to start with, but now I kind of look forward to going. I'd never talk to anyone else about this stuff, but getting it out of my head and saying it out loud always makes me feel better."

Who can help me?

There are lots of people who you can get help from.

However, at first you should speak to your parents, a teacher or another trusted adult about what's going on. They can then help you to find the right person to see.

This might be:

- a doctor
- a counsellor (e.g., school counsellor, psychologist, social worker)
- a psychiatrist

What works best?

If you see a counsellor, you may be offered what is known as 'talking therapy'. There are different types of talking therapies, but for PTSD the one that works best is trauma-focussed cognitive behavioural therapy (TF-CBT).

TF-CBT helps you to talk about your memories, thoughts and feelings and learn ways to manage them.

How do I get help?

Step 1:

Tell your mum, dad, teacher or a trusted adult about what is going on (take this brochure with you to help you explain it to them).

Step 2:

Make an appointment with your doctor (it is best to take your parents or a trusted adult with you).

Tell the doctor about what you're going through. They'll discuss things that you can do to feel better, and perhaps arrange for you to see a specialist counsellor.

Step 3:

Make an appointment to see the counsellor.

Things I can do to help myself



Choose a few of the things from this page that you would like to do, and try them out.

Things I can do to feel better:

1. Talk about my problem with a friend or trusted adult
2. Hang out with my friends
3. Listen to my favourite music
4. Ask a trusted adult or a friend for a hug
5. Do some exercise with a friend or family member (running, dancing to music, riding my bike, going for a walk)
6. Make something by drawing, painting, sewing, knitting or cooking
7. Have a warm bath
8. Do a quick relaxation exercise
9. Write in my diary
10. Use positive self-talk

Positive self-talk

Sometimes the thoughts in our heads make us feel happy, but sometimes they can make us feel sad, angry, worried or stressed.

Positive self-talk helps to chase these unhelpful thoughts away so we can feel less stressed. If you are thinking about something horrible that happened, or are worried that something awful might happen, try using positive self-talk to make you feel better.

"I am safe now.

I was strong to survive that.

I have people who can help me.

I have done a lot of things well before – I'm sure I can again!"

"I've learnt a lot about how the way I think and the way I feel are connected. Like, I'd been thinking a lot since the fires about how I'd never be safe again, and I felt really anxious. But now I'm getting better at telling myself that the fires are over, and even if something like that does happen again, we'll be ready for it this time. It makes me feel much stronger."

Quick relaxation exercises

Calm breathing

1. Sit in a chair or lie on the floor
2. Take a breath in through your nose and count to 3 and imagine a soothing colour
3. Breathe out through your mouth and say the word 'calm' to yourself
4. Repeat this 10 times

Imagine a happy place

1. Imagine a calm and happy place
2. Tell yourself what you can see, hear, smell and feel in this happy place
3. Practise your calm breathing whilst you are picturing your happy place

Quick muscle relaxation

1. Hold your arms above your head – feel the tension in them – now drop your arms down by your side and feel them relax
2. Practise tensing and then relaxing muscles in your hands, legs, face, and stomach, and wherever else you feel stress

Where can I find more information?

Where can I find more information and start getting help?

Your doctor can be a good starting point when seeking help.

They can help confirm what is going wrong and refer you to the right organisations and practitioners.

For immediate assistance call Lifeline on 13 11 14 for confidential 24-hour counselling and referrals.

Useful information and resources are also available through the following organisations.

Trauma and posttraumatic mental health

Phoenix Australia - Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health provides information and useful resources about posttraumatic mental health, for practitioners and people directly affected, at www.phoenixaustralia.org.

Alcohol and other drugs

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation gives comprehensive information and a list of resources available across Australia at www.adf.org.au www.adf.org.au

Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants who have experienced torture and trauma

The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) has a list of agencies that provide support, advocacy and treatment at www.fasstt.org.au

Carers

Carers Australia offers information, resources and access to support groups at www.carersaustralia.com.au or call **1800 242 636**

Children and young people

Kids Helpline offers web-based, email, or telephone counselling for children and young people aged 5 to 25 years. Call **1800 55 1800** or visit www.kidshelp.com.au

Information on a range of mental health and related issues that affect teenagers and young adults is available from ReachOut at au.reachout.com.

Information on trauma and mental health, where to get help, and online support is available from headspace, the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. Visit www.headspace.org.au

Children of parents with a mental illness

The COPMI resource centre provides information, resources and access to services at www.copmi.net.au

Depression and anxiety

Several organisations offer access to information, resources and services, including Beyond Blue at www.beyondblue.org and the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression at www.crufad.org

Disasters

The Red Cross has information, advice, and resources for kids, teenagers, teachers, and parents. Visit www.redcross.org.au

Domestic violence and sexual abuse

1800 RESPECT provides a national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling and information referral service, available 24/7 at **1800 737 732**

Immigrant women's domestic violence services

There are several services in each state and territory. See www.iwss.org.au or www.speakout.org.au for a list of services throughout Australia.

Parents

Parentline provides telephone counselling to parents and carers of children aged 0 to 18 years. Visit www.parentline.com.au or call **13 22 89**.

Information on how to talk to children and teenagers about their problems and where to find help, as well as online and telephone support, is available through headspace at www.headspace.org.au/parents-and-carers.

Psychologists

The Australian Psychological Society has a register of psychologists and lists their speciality at www.psychology.org.au or call **1800 333 497**.

Australian Clinical Psychology Association

The national professional body has a clinical psychologist directory at www.acpa.org.au

Sexual assault

Sexual assault services are listed at www.au.reachout.com/articles/sexual-assault-support

Veterans and their families

The Department of Veterans' Affairs can provide information and referral advice at www.dva.gov.au or on **1800 555 254**. The Department can provide the phone number of the Open Arms - Veterans & Families Counselling in your state and territory.



This guide is a companion document to the *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Acute Stress Disorder, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. The Guideline recommendations were approved by the Chief Executive Officer of the National Health and Medical Research Council on 23 June 2020 under section 14A of the National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992.

The complete Guidelines and resources for people affected by acute stress disorder or posttraumatic stress disorder, are available online:

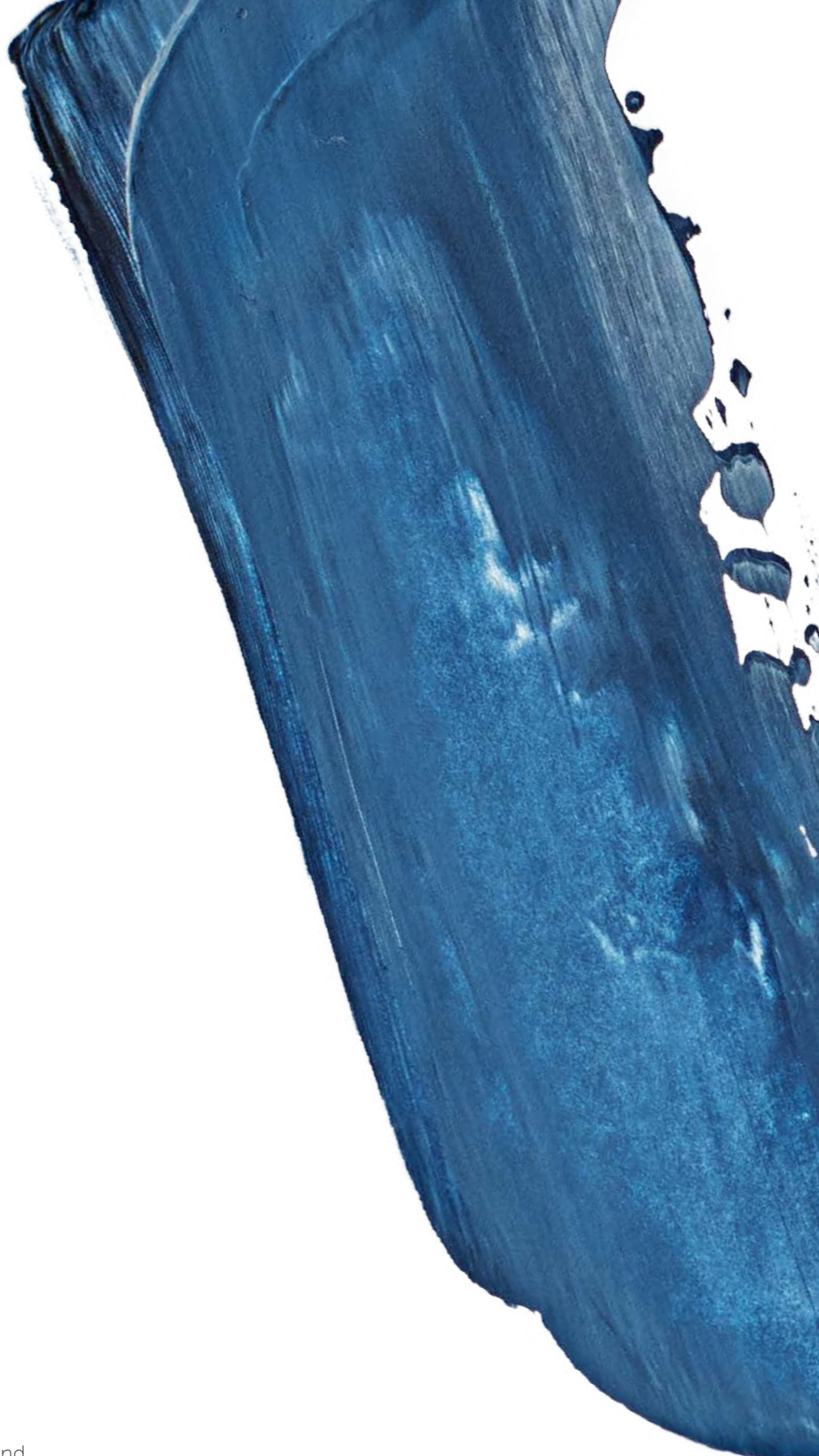
www.phoenixaustralia.org

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Phoenix Australia




Australia's National Centre of Excellence in Posttraumatic Mental Health. We build evidence and translate knowledge into action, such as improved treatment options and greater support for trauma-affected individuals, families and communities.

Understanding trauma. Renewing lives.

For more information about trauma, its effects and best practice treatments, visit phoenixaustralia.org

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