

What is trauma?



Trauma is your mind and body's natural response to deeply distressing experiences that feel overwhelming or threaten your sense of safety. It might come from a sudden event, like an accident or assault, or from ongoing situations, such as growing up in an unsafe environment.

Everyone experiences trauma in their own way. Two people might go through the same event but feel and respond completely differently, and that's okay. However trauma shows up for you, it's important to know your feelings are valid.

Types of trauma

Acute trauma: A single overwhelming event, like an accident or natural disaster.

Chronic trauma: Ongoing distress, such as living with abuse or facing repeated violence.

Complex trauma: Experiencing multiple traumatic events, often involving people you know or trust.

Vicarious trauma: Being deeply affected by hearing about or witnessing someone else's trauma.

Intergenerational trauma: The lasting impacts of trauma passed through families or communities over time.

Signs & effects

Trauma can show up in differently for everyone. Some common experiences include:



Feeling overwhelmed or on edge

Emotions like fear, sadness, or worry can feel constant or hard to manage.



Reliving what happened

Flashbacks, upsetting memories, or struggling to concentrate.



Feeling disconnected

Mood swings, irritability, or feeling numb or cut off from your emotions.



Noticing changes in your body

Trouble sleeping, feeling tired all the time, headaches, or a racing heart.



Finding it hard to trust:

Feeling unsafe or uncertain in relationships or familiar places.



Avoiding reminders

Staying away from people, places, or situations and/or using substances to cope.

Causes

Trauma can come from many different experiences, such as:

Experiencing violence or abuse

Physical, emotional, or sexual harm, including domestic and family violence.

Being in a serious accident or injury

Car crashes, falls, or other life-threatening events.

Going through loss or grief

The death of a loved one, sudden separation, or the end of an important relationship.

Facing natural disasters

Experiencing bushfires, floods, or other extreme weather events.

Living with medical trauma

Major surgery, ongoing illness, or difficult medical treatments.

Experiencing or witnessing war or displacement

Fleeing conflict, seeking asylum, or living in unstable conditions.

Experiencing trauma is never your fault. Whatever the cause, there are ways to navigate what you're feeling. And remember, support is available every step of the way.

Recognising when and how trauma shows up


Having a plan like below can help you prepare for situations that might trigger a trauma response. This can make it easier to spot what's happening and respond in ways that support your wellbeing.


Trauma management plan


Anticipate	What situations or reminders might bring up distressing emotions? e.g., anniversaries, certain sounds, places, or interactions
Identify	How might I feel or respond? e.g., racing thoughts, physical tension, feeling suddenly unsafe or overwhelmed
Manage	What can I do to care for myself? e.g., grounding techniques, deep breathing, reaching out to a trusted person





Practical strategies


 **Use grounding techniques**
Things like deep breathing, the five senses exercise, or a short walk can help you feel more present and ease distressing thoughts or sensations.

 **Focus on your breathing**
Slow, steady breaths can help calm your body and mind. Try breathing in for four counts, holding for four, and breathing out for four.

 **Create a steady routine**
Regular sleep, meals, and daily activities can help rebuild a sense of stability, even when things feel unpredictable.

 **Show yourself kindness**
Healing takes time, and it's okay to have good days and tough ones. What matters most is giving yourself patience and care.

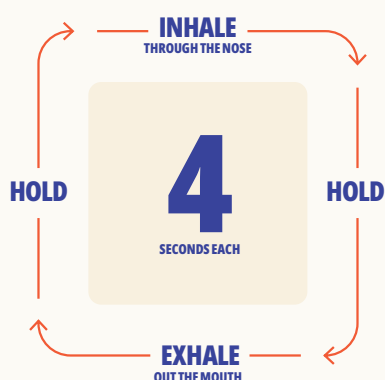
 **Move in ways that feel good**
Gentle activities like walking, stretching, or yoga can help release tension and lift your mood.

 **Find ways to express what you're feeling**
Talking to someone you trust, writing things down, or creating art can help you process emotions in a way that feels safe.

Want to try something now?

If you're feeling distressed or unsure where to start, a grounding technique like **box breathing**, **reciting something in order**, or **using your five senses** can help ease physical sensations and take your focus off what's causing you to feel overwhelmed.

BOX BREATHING



RECITING TECHNIQUE

You can try reciting:

- the alphabet
- the months, backwards
- what you did yesterday



5 SENSES TECHNIQUE

Look for...

-  5 things you can **see**
-  4 things you can **feel**
-  3 things you can **hear**
-  2 things you can **smell**
-  1 things you can **taste**



Everyone is different, so what works for someone else might not work for you, and that's okay.

The key is to keep experimenting until you find what helps you most.

When to seek help

You may want to speak to a health professional if:

- ✓ Unwanted memories or flashbacks about what happened feel overwhelming or upsetting.
- ✓ It feels like you're reliving the trauma, with vivid images or physical sensations from the past.
- ✓ You feel detached from yourself or your surroundings, like life is happening at a distance.
- ✓ Feelings of fear, sadness, or anger stick around and don't ease over time.
- ✓ You've started withdrawing from loved ones or avoiding things you usually enjoy.
- ✓ Everyday life feels harder to manage, and it's difficult to cope with work, study, or responsibilities.

Reaching out can feel difficult, but it's a sign of strength.

Support is always available to help you feel more in control and hopeful for the future.

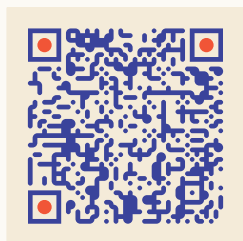
Support is available

Understanding and managing trauma isn't something you have to do on your own.

Head to our **Support Toolkit** to find more practical strategies and discover national and local support services that can help.

The Support Toolkit also offers information on a wide range of mental health and wellbeing topics you can explore at your own pace, whenever you need.

Visit lifeline.org.au/trauma/services or scan the QR code to get started.



If you're feeling overwhelmed right now, Lifeline is here to support you.

You can reach us 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ Call 13 11 14

✉ Text 0477 131 114

💬 Chat online at lifeline.org.au/crisis-chat

If your life is in danger, please call 000.

Wherever you are, help is at your fingertips with the **Support Toolkit**

➔ lifeline.org.au/toolkit