

The impacts of trauma

Information for older people, their families and loved ones

Many older Australians have experienced trauma at some point in their life, either a long time ago or more recently. Trauma in older age can include:

- the sudden death/serious illness of a partner, family member or friend
- being abused or neglected – as a person becomes more dependent on others, they can be more vulnerable to aggression, abuse, or not having enough food or care
- being injured or getting very sick, or having a frightening medical procedure.

Traumatic experiences from earlier in life can include child abuse, war, a serious accident or being assaulted.

What to expect after a trauma

In the first weeks after a trauma, most people will feel fear, sadness, guilt, anger or grief. These feelings usually go away within a few weeks, but for some people, they can last for months or even years.

Signs that someone needs help

-  Constant headaches or stomach upsets
-  Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
-  Feeling irritable or angry
-  Feeling down or emotionally cut off
-  Feeling on edge or anxious all the time
-  Having bad dreams or memories of the trauma
-  Fast-beating heart, shaking or sweating when reminded of the trauma
-  Avoiding reminders of the trauma and not wanting to talk about it

When to seek help: If these problems don't go away after a week or two and are having an impact on your, or your loved one's daily life, talk to your doctor or aged care provider. They can help you access counselling or give you a referral to an aged care psychiatrist.

Useful resources

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement
1800 22 22 00

Dementia Support Australia
1800 699 799

Healing Foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
www.healingfoundation.org.au

LGBTIQ+ Health Australia
www.lgbtiqhealth.org.au/services_and_supports