

# SUPPORTING YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY AFTER A TRAUMATIC EVENT

## A guide on what to expect and what can help

Traumatic events are experiences that are life-threatening, perceived as life-threatening, or involve a risk of serious harm. In the aftermath of an antisemitic terrorist attack targeting our community, many of us may feel on edge, have trouble sleeping, experience intrusive thoughts or images, and experience strong emotions such as fear, sadness, grief, guilt, anger, or mistrust. These reactions are normal responses of the nervous system to threat and uncertainty, and they can vary in intensity from person to person. Coping may feel challenging, and making sense of what has happened can take time. For most people, these responses gradually ease. With the support of family, friends, and community, healing and recovery are possible. This fact sheet offers practical guidance to support you in the days and weeks following this deeply traumatic event, while drawing on the strength, connection, and enduring resilience of our Jewish community.

### What you may be noticing in yourself and others

Reactions to traumatic events vary depending on multiple factors. While everyone responds differently, there are some common emotional and physical reactions that may occur immediately, in the days and weeks following, or even months or years after a crisis. These reactions can include:

- **Emotional responses:** guilt, sadness, relief, anger, fear, anxiety, confusion, uncertainty, hopelessness, shock or disbelief, a strong sense of injustice, and intense identification with those affected or the location of the event
- **Physical reactions:** numbness, increased heartbeat, sweating, shaking, trembling, or shortness of breath
- **Cognitive effects:** difficulty making decisions, understanding complex information, or communicating clearly with others
- **Behavioural and coping responses:** increased anxiety about safety or daily activities, a desire to make sense of the event, greater exposure to news and social media, and a stronger need for emotional or professional support
- **Feelings of helplessness or being overwhelmed**

### Why your own wellbeing matters

Right now, it's important to find ways to care for ourselves, our children, our families, and our community even when our energy and resources are limited. After experiencing trauma, many parents tend to set aside their own needs to focus on their children. However, research indicates that a parent's wellbeing is one of the most influential factors in a child's recovery. Children are highly attuned to their parents' emotions. Even if feelings aren't openly expressed, they can pick up on changes in your tone of voice, facial expressions, or behaviour. Taking care of yourself helps foster a calmer and more supportive environment for your family.

### Ways to support your own mental health

Recovery after trauma isn't about trying to forget or avoid thinking about what happened or not feeling emotional pain when remembering the event. Recovery means that, with time, the distress eases and you begin to have more confidence in your ability to cope and function. Even if you are feeling immobilised and unmotivated, try to do some of the simple actions or tasks suggested below. They might help you to come to terms with the traumatic event you experienced and reduce some of the distress associated with it.

#### Acknowledge your feelings - they are normal and valid

Acknowledge that you have been through an extremely traumatic and stressful event and that your emotions will be heightened at this time. You might experience a range of intense emotions. Naming these emotions can reduce their intensity. It can also show children that intense feelings can be managed. For example: *"I'm feeling upset right now, so I'm going to take a short walk to help me feel calmer."*



*Not everything depends on us, but something does.*

### Be kind to yourself

Stress can lead to harsh self-criticism and judgement, particularly if we feel we are not able to manage our usual tasks. Try to treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer a friend. Notice unhelpful thoughts such as assuming the worst, or predicting what might happen in future, and gently replace them with thoughts like: *“This will take time,”* or *“I’m going to focus on what I can do and manage at this time.”*

### Stay connected

Connection after a traumatic event is crucial for emotional and psychological recovery. Being with family, trusted friends, members of the community or support groups helps you to feel understood, validated, and less alone in your experience. Spend time with people you care about, even if you don’t feel like discussing your experience. It’s normal too to want some alone time but try to avoid becoming isolated.

Share your feelings with people who are understanding, if you feel ready and wish to. Discussing your experience is a natural part of healing and can help you come to terms with what happened. Seek help for yourself – this is one of the most important ways you can support your family.

### Prioritise time for positive moments each day

Make time for relaxation – whether it’s listening to music, taking a bath, being in nature – whatever works for you. It might be helpful to use or learn a relaxation technique like mindfulness meditation, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, or breathing exercises (see below).

### Keep a simple daily routine

Keeping regular daily routines, such as consistent mealtimes and bedtimes, can help create a sense of stability and reassurance for both adults and children. Structure your days and try to schedule at least one enjoyable or relaxing activity. Break tasks into small, manageable steps and acknowledge each accomplishment. Tefillot, tefillin, lighting shabbat candles, will all be grounding.

### Use coping strategies

Use calming techniques and model these for your children such as

- Slow, deep controlled breathing, for example: - *Box Breathing*: (4-count inhale, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4), - *4-7-8 Breathing*: inhale 4, hold 7, exhale 8.
- Grounding exercises, for example: - 5-4-3-2-1 technique: name 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste

### Seek support

Reach out to a family member, trusted friend, community member, GP, or health professional. Consider professional support if reactions are severe, getting worse, or persistent, such as

- Ongoing or intense panic or fear
- Inability to sleep
- Withdrawal or emotional shutdown
- Regressive behaviours (e.g. bedwetting or loss of speech)
- Expressions of hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm

## Supporting your family: Psychological First Aid principles

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a supportive, evidence-informed approach used in the hours, days, weeks, and sometimes longer following a traumatic event. Its purpose is to strengthen people’s natural capacity to recover. PFA normalises common reactions to trauma, helps individuals address immediate needs, recognise their existing strengths, and develop practical coping strategies. It aims to reduce distress and overwhelm while supporting connection to trusted people and appropriate support services. Core elements of PFA include:.

### 1. Ensuring safety

- Remove people from or reduce exposure to the threat of harm
- Meet basic needs (food, water, shelter, finances, medical care)
- Offer physical and emotional comfort. For children: *“You are safe now. There are grown-ups here to help you.”*
- Validate all emotions – there’s no right or wrong way to feel
- Provide clear information about resources to draw on to get basic needs met – see our community support resources below.

### 2. Promoting Calm

- Help stabilise people who seem overwhelmed or disoriented
- Provide environments where people can feel safe and comforted
- Listen with compassion without forcing people to share
- Validate all emotions – there’s no right or wrong way to feel
- Offer guidance on stress reduction – such as taking slow breaths together
- Reassure people that additional help and services are available

### 3. Promoting Connection

- Facilitate contact with family, friends, support networks
- Keep children with parents or carers
- Link people with available support and community services
- Connection with culture and rituals - go to synagogue, speak to a rabbi, volunteer, find meaning
- Offer practical help to others to address immediate needs
- Let people talk if they want to — silence is okay too
- Listen more than you speak For children: drawing or play can help them express feelings

### 4. Promoting self-efficacy

- Encourage people to address their own needs where they can
- Offer presence and reassurance
- Support decision-making- even with minor choices
- Help to prioritise and solve problems – focusing their time *and energy* on what they can control or influence
- Support them to take on small, manageable actions / tasks

### 5. Instilling Hope

- Maintaining some optimism can improve recovery, as it helps people retain hope for the future. Instilling hope may include
- Express confidence in people’s strengths and ability to recover
- Being present and willing to help
- Reassure them that their feelings are normal
- Emphasise that the event is over and there is support For children: *“Something scary happened, but it is over now.”*

## Community and local support services and helplines

Community 24/7 Support Hotline 1800 979 676

### Emergency (24/7 Support)

**000** - if someone is in immediate danger  
**Lifeline** - 13 11 14  
**Beyond Blue** - 1300 22 4636  
**Kids Helpline** - 1800 55 1800 (ages 5–25)

### Other Support Services

**Jewish Care** – 1300 133 660  
**Jewish House** - 1300 544 357  
**Hatzolah Counselling** – (03) 85340100  
**HeadSpace** – 1800 650 890 (ages 12–25)

### NSW Mental Health Service

**Mental Health Access Line** – 1800 011 511  
**Visit Your GP** – for assessment and referrals