

# Factsheet 2: What is trauma?

Trauma is a word used to describe life-threatening or extremely dangerous and frightening situations and experiences that can affect a person's ability to cope or function normally. Traumatic events challenge our understanding of the world and our sense of safety within it.

**The term trauma covers events common to the refugee experience, including:**

Experiencing or witnessing extreme acts of violence and cruelty

Exposure to war and conflict

Sexual violence

Separation from family and community

Perilous flight or escape



Threats of harm

Violent destruction of culturally important places



Persecution and human rights violations

Lengthy periods of uncertainty and lack of safety

Extreme poverty and deprivation including lack of access to health care and education



Trauma can also refer to other frightening life events that many people may have gone through including natural disasters, fire, vehicle accidents and serious injury.

*These experiences might cause wounds that we can see on the outside, but they can also cause wounds that we cannot see on the inside which also need to be cared for and healed.*



SCAN TO VIEW  
**Counsellor  
explaining  
trauma**



# Who does trauma affect?

Traumatic experiences can affect anyone, regardless of your gender, your age, your income, your job or education, whether you were born in Australia or arrived as a migrant or refugee.

Almost everyone who experiences trauma will be affected in some way. People often report feeling unsafe and experiencing strong emotions like fear,

sadness, anger, shame and guilt. Some people may feel numb (a sense of having no feelings). Some people may hide or ignore their distress from others to appear strong.

The impact of these events can appear soon after or even years later, impacting health, wellbeing, families, relationships and communities.

## Understanding your experience of trauma

***It is important to remember that:***

- ➊ Reactions to traumatic events are normal human responses to overwhelming stress and fear.
- ➋ Trauma may affect us at different times and in different ways.
- ➌ Healing from trauma whilst settling into a new country is challenging. Your experiences in Australia may also affect recovery. Learning about and accessing support services as early as possible can make a positive impact on your settlement and recovery journey.
- ➍ With time and support, most people heal and find safety, hope and meaning to their lives. Thriving in Australia is possible.

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*Counselling helped me to unpack my refugee experience in a way I never thought I could. It was a tough journey, but I needed to do it. My counsellor has helped me a lot.*

QPASTT client



## How does QPASTT support trauma recovery?

QPASTT provides free and confidential support to people affected by issues related to their experiences of refugee-related trauma or of being tortured.

QPASTT has a range of different services and programs for adults, families, children and young people and communities.

People can call QPASTT for advice about accessing our services, or they can make a referral through our website at [qpastt.org.au](http://qpastt.org.au).

**To speak with QPASTT or find out more about our services, please call 07 3391 6677 or visit [qpastt.org.au](http://qpastt.org.au).**

QPASTT is the Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma. It is a community organisation which provides a variety of flexible and culturally sensitive support services to people who have been tortured or who have suffered refugee-related trauma. QPASTT has offices across Queensland.