



Trauma: Suggestions and resources for families. How you can help

Help children to feel safe

Children who have experienced trauma can feel scared and worried about a lot of things. Help them to feel safe by reassuring them, helping them learn to calm and soothe themselves, and identifying safe places they can go.

“Being strong in their culture and have a sense of belonging, connectedness and self-worth can help to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children against the impact of racism” (Kickett-Tucker, 2009).¹

Support children to make sense of what's going on

Making sense of what has happened is an important part of moving forward. By letting children know that it's not shameful to feel sad or angry, adults can help children to share and process their experience. For older children, explaining what's a normal response can be helpful. For example, adults might reassure children by saying that lots of people experience strong and confusing feelings and other problems, such as nightmares.

¹ Kickett-Tucker, C. S. (2009). Moorn (Black)? Djardak (White)? How come I don't fit in Mum? Exploring the racial identity of Australian Aboriginal children and youth. *Health Sociology Review*, 18, 119-136.

Taking care of yourself

When reading this resource, remember it is important to take care of yourself. Tune into how you're feeling and reacting to the content, and identify a place you can get support if you need to.

Provide space for children to talk, if they want to

“Help to create spaces where children feel physically, emotionally (Atkinson, 2013)² and culturally safe”. If they want and are ready to do so, children should feel comfortable about sharing their stories in age-appropriate ways. They might express their feelings in different ways, such as through painting, drawing, storytelling, song or drama. Some children, especially young children, will have thoughts about what has happened to them that are incorrect and that make their experience more frightening or painful, such as a belief that what happened was a punishment for doing something bad. Taking time to clarify misunderstandings allows children to develop a realistic picture of what’s happened.

Have a chat to the child’s school or teacher

It’s good for school staff to know about any major events in children’s lives outside the classroom, as well as changes families have noticed in their children’s behaviour. This can help school staff to look out for changes in the child’s school work or relationships. Letting others know that the child is having a difficult time can help everyone work together to offer support. If your school has an Aboriginal Liaison Officer, organise to meet occasionally to tackle any issues to do with the child together. Ask for help from the Liaison Officer if you need to be connected with outside agencies.

Take care of yourself

Children benefit when adults caring for them also take care of themselves by finding ways that support them culturally. This is especially true if the family or community as a whole has experienced trauma and others in the group are dealing with strong emotions. Most importantly though, families benefit from staying connected to community in order to support children. Spend time with people who make you feel happy, attend community events, and talk to others about how things are going.

² Atkinson, J. (2013). Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children [Resource Sheet No. 21]. Canberra, ACT: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

Resources for families

The Trauma and Grief Network has developed a fact sheet called *Indigenous Parents and Carers: How might trauma, loss and grief affect your bub?* It’s available from: www.tgn.anu.edu.au

The Indigenous Substance Misuse Health Promotion Unit has a fact sheet all about grief and how to talk to children when someone passes away. It’s available through: www.adac.org.au

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care has a website with lots of information and resources about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s social and emotional wellbeing: www.snaicc.org.au/index.cfm

The KidsMatter website has a series of videos which aim to promote the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Each animation provides a story that highlights key messages about the day-to-day caring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s wellbeing by parents, families and communities.

View these videos on: <https://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/aboriginal-video-animations>



Australian Government
Department of Health



Australian
Psychological
Society

Principals
Australia
Institute
Learning. Leading.