



Australian Government
Department of Defence

Traumatic stress

Defence Mental Health & Wellbeing





*'Mental health and wellbeing is the state in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with normal stress of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'**

Defence's vision is that our people – military and public servants – experience positive mental health and wellbeing. *They are Fit to Fight – Fit to Work – Fit for Life.*

*World Health Organization

What is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a condition that can sometimes occur after exposure to a traumatic event. It is normal for most individuals to experience some form of distress after highly traumatic events and the majority will return to normal functioning in a short period of time without intervention. However, for some people, long term and incapacitating problems develop.

What is a traumatic event?

Traumatic events involve situations that are either life-threatening or have the potential for serious injury.

These include but are not limited to:

- feeling under threat of death or serious injury
- serious injury to self
- viewing or handling of dead bodies
- sudden death or serious injury of a family member, close friend, or colleague
- exposure to a potentially contagious disease or toxic agent
- sexual assault or childhood sexual abuse
- witnessing human degradation on a large scale
- an action or inaction resulting in the serious injury or death of others.

What are common reactions?

Most people experience strong reactions after traumatic events. These may include:

- re-living the event through unwanted and recurring memories or vivid nightmares
- a desire to avoid anything attached to the event, or avoiding thinking and talking about the event
- feelings of panic or being highly anxious, especially in situations that are associated with or remind you of the event
- feeling sad, tearful, hopeless or depressed and wanting to be on your own more than usual
- feelings of guilt or anger
- feeling unable to control your moods, especially your anger
- feeling your personality has changed
- drinking more alcohol or misusing other substances
- trouble concentrating, disorientation or memory problems
- sleep disturbance, excessive alertness or being easily startled
- having difficulties with relationships.

How do I know if I should seek help?

If the symptoms mentioned above persist for more than 2 weeks and are causing you considerable distress or are impacting on your ability to function at work, at home and/or socially, you need to seek help. You do not have to go through this alone and there is help available.

Seeking assistance early is important, however, treatments for post traumatic stress disorder can work even if your traumatic experience was some time ago, or if you have been through several different traumatic events.



Where to seek help

If you or someone in your workplace is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call **Emergency Services 000**, contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

Emergency contact information – 24 hours

If you or someone you know needs help, call:

- Emergency on **000**
- Lifeline on **13 11 14**
- Suicide Call Back Service on **1300 659 467**.

ADF

Contact your local on base Health Centre, Mental Health Professional or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Health and Wellbeing Portal is an online health information resource tool for ADF members and their families www.defence.gov.au/health/healthportal/

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support.

Military Chaplains are connected to all ships/units/bases around Australia and on Operations. They can provide all-hours support and appropriate referral. To access Defence Chaplaincy support, call **1300 333 362** and ask to speak to the Duty Chaplain from your area and service.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on **1800 628 036** or if calling from overseas **+61 2 9425 3878**.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call **1800 IMSICK (1800 467 425)** to locate the nearest support.

Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608) The Defence Family Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists. Defence Community Organisation website is: www.defence.gov.au/dco

The National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC)

Serving Families of Deployed Australian Defence Personnel.

As part of the Headquarters Joint Operations Command, the National Welfare Coordination Centre (NWCC) provides a 24 hour support, referral and information service for families of Defence personnel deployed on operations and exercises.

1800 801 026 or **+ 61 2 6127 1812**.

Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office (SeMPRO)

SeMPRO offers advice, guidance and support to current and former Defence personnel who have been affected by sexual misconduct, whether the incident is current or historical.

This includes support to ADF cadets, officers and instructors of cadets, APS personnel, commanders, managers, supervisors, support people and families affected by sexual misconduct. **1800 736 776 (1800SeMPRO)**.

Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling (formerly WCS): is a national mental health service that provides 24-hour free and confidential counselling, group programs and suicide prevention training for current and ex-serving ADF members, and their family. To get support or to find out more, call **1800 011 046** or visit **www.OpenArms.gov.au**

APS (and Reservists)

Defence Employee Assistance Program (EAP) (including the Reserve Assistance Program – RAP). The EAP provides short term confidential counselling and support for employees and immediate family members (if eligible). It is easily accessible, voluntary and can provide support on a range of personal and work related issues. The Defence EAP can be accessed by calling **1300 687 327**.