



National Centre of Excellence
for Complex Trauma



Welcome to the January edition of Breaking Free

The past few months have been challenging for Australia and for many of us. We've watched as our beautiful country has suffered devastating loss through bushfires, and we have opened our hearts to those communities that have been directly affected. We have also seen the rise of Coronavirus, and further destruction through flash floods and drought. These events can heighten our sense of danger, and for those of us who are already living on high alert from the impacts of prior trauma, we can feel overwhelmed and powerless. Our lead article this month, focuses on how these catastrophic events can impact complex trauma survivors and how we need to adapt and develop coping strategies to get through.

We also highlight our support service for people looking to engage or apply to the National Redress Scheme. The redress application process can be a daunting, arduous and confronting experience. At Blue Knot, we are there with you for the journey. Our professional and caring counsellors are specifically trained to support and guide you through the process from start to finish. If you are unsure or anxious about applying for the scheme, we really do encourage you to make the first step and call. We are here to help.

Did you know that 37% of adults who have experienced at least 1 incidence of violence after the age of 15 have a disability, and close to half (46%) who have experienced abuse before the age of 15 have a disability? These harrowing statistics help to illustrate the importance of the Disability Royal Commission (DRC). Blue Knot has established the National Counselling and Referral Service (NCRS) specifically to provide counselling support and referrals for anyone affected by the DRC. If you are affected, or know anyone that is, please speak to our specially trained counsellors.

If you have any comments about what you have read in this issue, contributions for the My Story section, or suggestions for future issues, please contact the editor at newsletter@blueknot.org.au

With warm regards,
The Blue Knot Team.



Bushfires, trauma and support

The bushfires which continue to threaten our country have already left a path of destruction behind them. Lots of people are being subjected to ongoing distress, stress and trauma as a result. This is causing substantial grief and significant loss over a long period of time. At the same time, we have seen our community pull together and support one another, with stories of incredible courage and resilience. And just as small shoots of green are sprouting of the blackened earth so too there is hope for healing and recovery, as well as good support available.

The fires and other catastrophic events including hailstorms, flash floods on a background of a protracted drought, the ongoing threat of further fires and now the Coronavirus pandemic have placed the whole country on high alert. Even if we haven't been directly impacted, we have all been affected. Our sense of safety and security has been challenged individually and collectively. The media and social media keep us updated, but in updating us, also expose us to daily, and often hourly feelings, and in some cases, the reality of ongoing danger.

Many of us are already living on high alert (and can be shut down at different times) from the impacts of prior trauma, often from childhood, although also as an adult. The current danger can leave us feeling powerless and helpless. This ongoing fear can bring back memories and feelings of our past trauma during which we had similar feelings. This can be a trigger for a range of trauma symptoms. It can be helpful to understand the broader context of what is happening in our communities and globally, and how this links with past traumatic

experiences. It helps to reflect on what is happening to us to make us feel this way, and also to know that there is information and support available.

Research (neuroscience) helps us understand how stress affects our body and brain. When we are in danger or think we are, our body switches to automatic. Our thinking brain switches off and our stress response takes over. Our stress response is a survival response. It is part of our biology. It helps us survive danger. It is innate - biologically 'built in' and happens outside of our conscious awareness.

When responses are innate, we do not intend them. They simply 'cannot be helped'. We survive in one of three main ways. We fight, we run away (flee) or we freeze (shut down). When we are in fight or flight, we become agitated (on high alert). We call this hyperarousal. When we freeze, we shut down, go numb or dissociate (i.e. we disconnect from our current experience - this is not conscious). We call this hypoarousal. When the danger passes, our thinking brain turns back on. Our body becomes calm. We return to a resting state. In the resting state we can repair. This happens with everyday stress.

Trauma is different. For people with trauma histories, or when we are in danger, (or think we are), the stress response stays turned on. Our body and brain are flooded with stress hormones e.g. adrenaline and cortisol. When this happens, we stay in survival mode. It means that we can't readily return to a calm state of repair. What's more we can be triggered into this response - by cues in the environment. These can be sensory cues i.e. stimuli which activate one of our 5 senses - smell, touch, sight, hearing, taste or something which reminds us of prior trauma. Often the trigger is not obvious. In the current situation there are lots of triggers for many of us, including a felt sense of danger, threat and powerlessness.

Sometimes when we are triggered, we experience sudden strong feelings or have a sense of disconnection, distance and difficulties being present in our lives. Strong and sometimes sudden feelings of anger, fear, sadness and frustration are common. We can find it hard to manage or 'regulate' these feelings. This is often because we didn't have an opportunity to learn how to manage them when we were a child. Usually co-regulation (a safe adult person helping a child manage their distress) occurs over time in a safe relationship with an adult caregiver and provides children with the tools to manage situations as they mature and develop. Those of us who did not have this opportunity might struggle with strong feelings. At other times we can experience flashbacks - a reliving of prior trauma with an intensity of feelings, sensations and movements from the past which can be overwhelming and disarming. If this is happening to you, it can help to understand the reasons for it and seek support.

Ongoing trauma is overwhelming. We need to adapt to survive. These adaptations are called coping strategies. Coping strategies form pathways in the brain. These become familiar. They become our 'go to' (default) responses during stress and more trauma. We develop coping strategies to help manage strong feelings and changes in arousal. People use different coping strategies to help reduce the pain and distress of their trauma response. Some survivors have learnt health promoting coping strategies as adults. These include a range of self-care activities, seeking professional support and acts of self-acceptance. Others might use coping strategies learnt earlier in life including alcohol and drug use, self-harm, anger, aggression, withdrawal and dissociation. Some of these strategies can create further challenges in our lives. They are not challenging because we are trying to be difficult. We are just trying to keep ourselves safe in a dangerous world with the coping skills that we have learnt.

If any of this is happening to you and you would like to speak with a trauma specialist counsellor, please call Blue Knot Helpline 1300 657 380 between 9-5 Mon-Sun ADST. Speaking to a counsellor can help you feel safe and supported and find ways of understanding what is happening as well as creating pathways to ongoing support. Blue Knot is not a crisis service. If you need crisis support please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

The Life in Mind website has a comprehensive list of resources to support bushfire affected communities and the general public. It lists a range of crisis and support numbers as well as practical and emotional resources available for people who wish to seek support due to the impact of bushfires. This includes people who are in areas impacted by current bushfire activities and who need crisis support, as well as those who are seeking ongoing emotional support for themselves and their families. Go to the website to find out more.



Reader Contribution

Tears of Eve - Bruce Docker

I am Queensland's Daniel Morcombe
And Melbourne's Jill Meagher
I am NSW's murdered backpackers
And Brisbane's Sophie Collombett & Eunji Ban
I am NSW's mid north coast's William Tyrrell
And South Australia's Beaumont children
I am Tasmania's Ricky John Smith
And West Australia's James Patrick Taylor
I am Canberra's Megan Mulquiney & Tara Costigan
And Canada's highway of tears
I am India's Jyoti Singh Pandey
And Nigeria's 200
I am Mexico's missing student teachers
And the millions swept into slavery
I am sexual servitude in a war zone
And
I am stolen



Survivor Workshops

This full-day educational workshop, informed by current research, provides a safe space for people who have experienced abuse or trauma in childhood, to learn more about abuse and other traumas and how trauma experiences can affect people, at the time of the trauma, and afterwards.

It will raise awareness about survivors' strengths and resilience, the role of coping strategies, how the brain responds to stress, and, most importantly, research which shows that recovery is possible.

There are still places available for Survivor Workshops in the following cities:

Launceston	14 March 2020
Darwin	20 June 2020

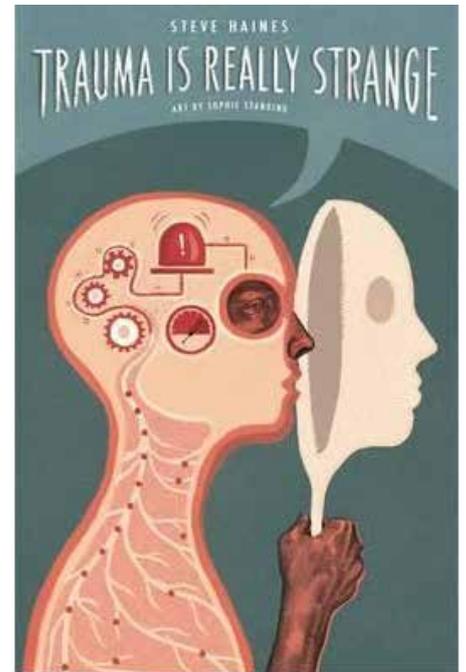
Go to <https://www.blueknot.org.au/Survivors/Support-through-connection/survivor-workshops> to book or call (02) 8920 3611

Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide sessions are now full. Please email training@blueknot.org.au if you would like to be added to the waitlist.

Book Recommendation

Trauma is Really Strange - by Steve Haines

“Trauma Is Really Strange” by Steve Haines is a unique comic that explains how trauma changes the way our brains work. It is a clear and accessible explanation of how trauma confuses the brain and the impacts this has on our body. It utilises latest neuroscience and trauma research, and draws on work from leaders in the area of complex trauma. This is a complex topic area, but this small book goes a long way to describe this complexity in a clear accessible way using humour, comics and plain English. It is easy to read, easy to understand, and also provides readers with some very helpful exercises that release tension and stress deeply embedded in our body’s post traumatic experiences. The book is a great resource for people who want to make sense of how their trauma impacts their body. It can also be used by trauma practitioners as a great tool for helping survivors understand the mental and physical impact of trauma.



Do You Need Support for the Disability Royal Commission?

In April 2019 the Australian Prime Minister, Hon. Scott Morrison MP announced that a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability would be set up. The Commission was needed to help Australian governments, institutions and the community to know how to prevent, and better protect, people with disability from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The inquiry covers all forms of violence against, and abuse, neglect and exploitation of, people with disability, in all settings and contexts.

The Royal Commission’s Terms of Reference cover what should be done to:

- prevent, and better protect, people with disability from experiencing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- achieve best practice in reporting and investigating of, and responding to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- promote a more inclusive society that supports the independence of people with disability and their right to live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

An Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Report estimated that:

- more than one-third (37%) of adults who have experienced at least 1 incident of violence after the age of 15 have disability
- close to half (46%) who have experienced abuse before the age of 15 have disability.

The Disability Royal Commission will resume public hearings in February. It will release its first major report in October this year. The final report is expected to be released in April 2022. The next public hearings will be in western Sydney, looking at allegations people with cognitive disabilities are dying because of poor health care.

Visit <https://www.abc.net.au/radnational/programs/breakfast/disability-royal-commission-to-focus-on-cognitive-disability/11905190> to hear an interview on RN breakfast with Ronald Sackville QC, chair, Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability ahead of this public hearing.



National Counselling and Referral Service (NCRS)

Blue Knot Foundation has established a specialist service to provide counselling support and referrals for people with disability, their families and carers, and anyone affected by the Disability Royal Commission.

Who the service is for:

- people with disabilities who have experienced violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation anywhere
- parents, guardians, other family members of a person with disability
- carers of a person with a disability
- advocates for people with a disability
- service providers or agencies working with people with a disability
- employers or colleagues of a person with disability

What the service provides:

- professional short-term counselling and support
- a gateway to frontline counselling services
- warm transfers to and from the Royal Commission, advocacy and legal support services
- information and referrals about other useful services
- psychoeducation

What you can expect when you call the National Counselling and Referral Service:

- Our counsellors are here to listen and support you
- Everyone's experience of trauma is different, and everyone has different needs
- Our counsellors focus on your needs when you call
- We try to answer each call when it rings and usually do. Sometimes we won't be able to answer straight away and will need to put you on hold. When you are on hold, we will tell you where you are up to in the queue. If you have been in the queue for a

while, you can ask us to call you back without losing your position in the queue. We won't call you back unless you give us permission to do so

There are a number of different ways you can contact NCRS depending on your accessibility requirements, and the type of service you require.

This service operates from:

- 9am-6pm AEDT Mon-Fri and
- 9am-5pm AEDT Sat, Sun and public holidays.

Telephone:

Contact 1800 421 468 or 02 6146 1468 to speak with one of our counsellors for short term counselling support and referrals.

Video Conference (VC):

VC is available to clients who have specific restrictions around their ability to contact our counsellors via telephone. Please connect with us first via email at ncrscounsellors@blueknot.org.au or by calling us yourself or with a support person on 1800 421 468 AEDT to discuss accessing this service. This service is only available for a single session with a focus on linking you with local and ongoing supports.

Webchat (WC):

Webchat is available for clients who require support, information or referrals. Webchat is found at the bottom right of the screen on this webpage. It is not available for counselling support. Please refer to the Webchat Terms and Conditions for further information should you choose to use this service.

SMS:

SMS is available to clients who require support, information or referrals. SMS contact 0451 266 601. It is not available for counselling support.

This is a separate service from the Blue Knot Helpline which provides counselling, support, information and for support around the National Redress Scheme

Accessibility

If you find it difficult to hear or speak you can contact us through the National Relay Service (NRS). Please phone 133 677.

If you find it challenging to use the telephone, you can contact the National Counselling and Referral Service supporting the Disability Royal Commission using video conferencing. To do so please connect with us first via email at ncrscounsellors@blueknot.org.au or by calling us yourself or with a support person on 1800 421 468 AEDT to discuss accessing this service.

If you require support in another language you can use the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National) free of charge by:

- Calling the National Counselling and Referral Service and asking for an interpreter. The counsellor will make the arrangements, or
- Calling TIS on 131 450 and asking to be connected to National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 468

Introducing Blue Knot Foundation's Support Service for people engaging with or applying to National Redress Scheme.

The National Redress Scheme ("the scheme") was created as a response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The Commission estimated that around 60,000 people who experienced child sexual abuse in Australian institutions would apply to the scheme. The Scheme started on the 1st of July 2018 and will run for 10 years.

Who is Blue Knot's service for?

This service is open to any person who has experienced sexual abuse as a child (up to the age of 18) in any institution (eg. sporting clubs, orphanages, foster care, schools, religious organisations, group homes, clubs etc).

We provide services via telephone or video conferencing to anyone living in any region in Australia. Video conferencing is also available to Australian citizens living abroad.

The Scheme provides an alternative to seeing compensation through the courts and if an application is successful is able to provide three things:

- Access to counselling
- A monetary payment, and
- Direct personal response from the institution (eg. an apology) for people who want one.

People can choose to apply to receive one, two or three of these things.

Recent data from the scheme has noted that people who apply with the support of a funded support service, are more likely to have a better result than people who complete the application independently. This is because support services have trained personnel who receive additional training from the Scheme and legal services about the best ways to apply and support people during the process.

Blue Knot's National Redress Scheme Support Service can provide information about the scheme, free and confidential support to anyone considering applying to the Scheme and support in filling out the application form, throughout the application process and support required after the receipt of an outcome.

At Blue Knot we know that many people applying to the Scheme have found the process challenging. For this reason, we support people through the whole process. This spans from the first enquiry right through to receiving an outcome. We are also able to link people in with long

terms supports if they want this. Our trauma specialist approach focusses on the person and their needs. It is empowering and prioritises choice. Our response and support of each person is unique as each person is unique. This is a journey which we take together.

If you are thinking of making an application or are already involved in the Redress process, there are seven main stages that you will transition through:

1. Checking your eligibility for the scheme
2. Referring you to other support, legal or financial planning services as needed and wanted
3. Assisting with your application
4. Supporting you through the application process.
5. Supporting you when you receive a decision from the Independent Decision Maker
6. Supporting you when accepting/declining the offer
7. Assisting you to link linking in with long term supports (if needed and wanted)

At Blue Knot we know that these stages can be retraumatising. We have a team of trauma specialist counsellors who are trained and experienced in providing you with the support you need.

For some people this includes assistance with writing their application. This also often includes support during the process. For others it is having the support you need while waiting for the decision and following up with and organising an apology, if that was part of your application.

The Blue Knot team is available to provide the support you need, every step of the way.

How to access this service:

If you want to discuss the different ways we can support you please call us on 1300 657 380 between 9-5 Mon-Sun AEDT for a confidential conversation. You can also connect with us via email at redress@blueknot.org.au

Professional Trauma Training Calendar

Book your professional training for next year and lock-in early bird discounts



Gold Coast	12 Mar	Working Therapeutically with Complex Trauma Clients (L2)
Launceston	13 Mar	Intro to Working Therapeutically with Complex Trauma Clients (L1)
Melbourne	16 Mar	Foundation for Trauma Informed Care and Practice (L1)
Adelaide	19 Mar	Working Therapeutically with Complex Trauma Clients (L2)
Sydney	20 Mar	Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
Melbourne	24 Mar	Trauma-Informed Transgender and Gender Diverse Affirmative Care - Masterclass
Canberra	27 Mar	Embedding Trauma-Informed Care and Practice for Managers
Perth	30 Mar	Trauma-Informed Care and Practice (L2)
Townsville	1 Apr	Trauma-Informed Care and Practice (L2)
Sydney	2-3 Apr	Working Therapeutically with Complex Trauma Clients (L2)
Melbourne	17 Apr	Trauma-Informed Care and Practice: Working with People with a Disability
Melbourne	22 Apr	Introduction to Working Therapeutically with Complex Trauma Clients (L1)
Melbourne	23-24 Apr	Working Therapeutically with Complex Trauma Clients (L2)
Parramatta	29 Apr	Trauma-Informed Care and Practice (L2)
Melbourne	30 Apr	Embedding Trauma-Informed Care and Practice for Managers

Blue Knot's trauma training is informative, interactive and engaging, and is facilitated by experienced clinicians and trauma trainers around Australia. Professionals may claim CPD hours/credits/points as a pre-approved or self directed learning activity. Go to www.blueknot.org.au/Training-Services/Training-for-you to learn more and book



NEW - Fact Sheet

Trauma Resolution and Healing

This newly released fact sheet explores how childhood trauma survivors are often very good at caring for others but can struggle in caring for themselves. Many don't recognise their own strengths.

Considering these strengths, the best person to drive restoration is each survivor. Our service systems however make strong assumptions about what is best for survivors. Our role, in the system in which we work, may be better oriented to supporting survivors to work out what they really need, and then supporting their planning to achieve this. This is empowering, respectful and trauma-informed.

Download the Fact Sheet at [Www.https://www.blueknot.org.au/Resources/Fact-Sheets/fact-trauma-resolution-healing](https://www.blueknot.org.au/Resources/Fact-Sheets/fact-trauma-resolution-healing) to learn more.



Self-care for survivors



“Self-care” means looking after yourself. It means treating yourself as person who deserves care.

Caring for yourself is often challenging for people who experienced child abuse or childhood trauma. That’s because you were harmed by another person. Sometimes it was done on purpose. Other times it happened because that person had their own issues which stopped them caring for you.

When an adult neglects, hits, insults, abuses or ignores a child, the child comes to understanding that they aren’t worth much. Often this happens time and again. This often means that the child grows up believing that they don’t deserve to be loved or cared for – that they are unlovable or worthless. So does the adult, who that child, becomes.

Learning to care for yourself if you are survivor, means seeing yourself in a new way. It means seeing yourself as a person who deserves to feel comfortable, safe and worthwhile.

You don’t have to do anything complicated to care for yourself. It can be very simple things, every day, if you can. It’s good to try to do one or two caring things for yourself each day.

It can be a good idea to have some things for you to do in the moment (e.g. when you are faced with challenges), each day as an ongoing practise and things that will improve your wellbeing in the long term. This can become a toolkit that helps you become stronger and more able to manage life’s challenges. For example you might have a range of different in the moment strategies that help you feel settled when faced with difficult situations. On top of this you might do some things each day that help to nurture you (e.g. spending time with your pet, making time for friends whose company you enjoy, listening to some of your favourite music. Then the long term goal might be to develop a skill that is interesting to you (maybe woodwork, an art class, learning to surf etc.) or focussing on your health (e.g. learning to cook meals that nurture you, doing an activity that keeps you fit) or working on a project that builds on your future.

Strategies which help you care for yourself can stop you being overwhelmed by strong emotions. They can help ground you and help you regain control over difficult emotions, such as anger, shame or distress. They can help stop you reacting and spiralling out of control.

Trauma in Childhood: What You Need to Know

How trauma in our childhood affects adult life, and how to heal.

Joel is 24 and can't finish college; he often prefers smoking weed to writing papers.

But Joel's laziness is a learned behavior. Joel grew up with his grandparents, with a narcissistic grandfather who constantly told him that he won't amount to anything. Now as a young adult, Joel has internalized this sentiment. Why try when you are destined to fail?

Jessica was raised by an unpredictable mother and now, at 37 has had a string of bad relationships. Mom's mood swings and aggressive blowups gave Jessica a less-than-secure childhood.

Now Jessica goes through life like a gazelle, trusting no one, perpetually ready to bolt at the slightest provocation.

Both Joel and Jessica suffer from a version of Childhood Trauma. Let's explore what happens to young people, and what can be done.

Types of Trauma

Acute trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are well known to the public, from television and movies as well as direct experience. A soldier who sees his friend die before his eyes experiences trauma; when the same memories come back months later to haunt him through nightmares

and flashbacks, they transform into PTSD.

Complex trauma is different.

It is the result of consistent, inescapable, sometime subtle aggression. It's the trauma of youth.

This is what a young child experiences when they are attacked, whether verbally, physically or psychologically by care-givers. Ridicule instead of adoration, violence instead of love, rejection instead of embrace. It's a form of trauma, and unlike adults, a child cannot escape.

Years later, childhood trauma usually reappears with unfortunate consequences.

Joel might do better at school, but his grandfather's narcissistic contempt still holds him spellbound, unable to realize his full intellectual potential. (The weed he uses to dampen self-loathing also doesn't help.) Though the man himself has long passed away, his unkind words still traumatize.

Meanwhile, Jessica is hyper-attuned to other people's disappointment. At the first hint of displeasure from her boss, her colleague, or her date, she flees. Her jobs, however promising, never turn into careers; her colleagues, however friendly, never become actual friends; her dates, however pleasant, never become long-term boyfriends. She is simply

too afraid of falling short of their expectations. This is the legacy of her mother's instability.

Death does not erase a person's influence over others; if anything, it solidifies their legacy. Once a person is gone, you can no longer respond to them. And so even dead, Joel's grandfather still controls his life, and Jessica's mother holds her back from becoming a self-sufficient and fulfilled adult. The abusive adult may be no more, but their hurt continues.

The American playwright Eugene O'Neill once wrote:

"There is no present or future, only the past, happening over and over again, now."

You might recognize yourself in Joel or Jessica.

Perhaps you had an alcoholic parent or went through a nasty divorce. You might have even suffered physical abuse at the hands of a loved one. Any of this can lead to complex trauma. A sufferer can become aggressive - or be so averse to confrontation that they cut off budding relationships at the first hint of disharmony. They can become incapable of tackling complex tasks, paralyzed by self-doubt - or they can turn them into an asocial workaholic, subconsciously determined to succeed even at the cost of their happiness and family life.

Childhood Abuse - 10 Ways to Heal:

Acknowledge What Happened: This is a parent or a loved adult that we are talking about. Even if you loved him or her, and were loved in return, that adult still hurt you deeply.

Psychotherapy: Talking it out might help Joel put his grandfather's unkind words to rest and allow Jessica to set aside her fear of rejection and let other people into her life. Therapy helps you to objectify your experience, so you have a better chance of grasping it; and overcoming.

Grief: The death of a parent or care-giver is always traumatic, even if they had been unkind. Acknowledging both the good and the bad about a deceased parent can allow you to finally let go of them. You may even be able to forgive.

Identify your Triggers: Joel receives a difficult assignment and feels like a little kid staring helplessly at an arithmetic worksheet. Jessica hears a raised voice and runs away from it, feeling small and helpless. What sets off your trauma-induced behavior?

Break the Cycle: Every time you respond to your trigger, you re-enforce the reaction. When Joel fails a test, he re-enforces both his inability to concentrate and his feelings of worthlessness. When Jessica ends yet another relationship after the first argument, she re-enforces her own fearfulness.

Alternative Treatments: In addition to psychotherapy, EMDR, Somatic Experiencing or DBT can help. These treatments work to mute the triggers that are neurologically embedded in your brain. Remember, the fight/flight/freeze response

evolved to protect the organism from dangerous situations. Overcoming this biological programming might require expert help.

Depression and Anxiety: Trauma often manifests with other psychiatric disorders. In some cases, medication might be in order to mute trigger responses effectively.

Spirituality: Expressions of faith can, for some people, prove invaluable both in affirming their own self-worth and in letting go of past grievances. Many faiths offer insights into renewal and rebirth that can be useful in working to shed the old skin binding one's psyche.

Helping the Next Generation: One day, it could be raising your own children, with a commitment never to hurt them like you had been hurt. Or, you may want to volunteer and help less fortunate kids mature, perhaps in the role of pastor, therapist, teacher or coach. Mind you, there is risk involved. You can be triggered to repeat the mistakes of the past; do it wrong and you continue the trauma to the next generation. Yet, with help and determination, you can do it right. Help raise a healthy child; it's a healing for you and the world.

Let Go If You Can:

Above all, allow yourself to let go. And, if you can't let it go, try to accept. There is so much that is unfair and wrong in this life. But, holding onto hurt perpetuates the injury. Accept and release, if you can.

"Rest in peace," we say of our dead relatives. But, with trauma an abusive parent or guardian somehow lives on. It's not right.

Work the program; one of the above methods may bring you to the other side. And, let go of the person who hurt you. They may be alive or dead, but their criticism or slander remains.

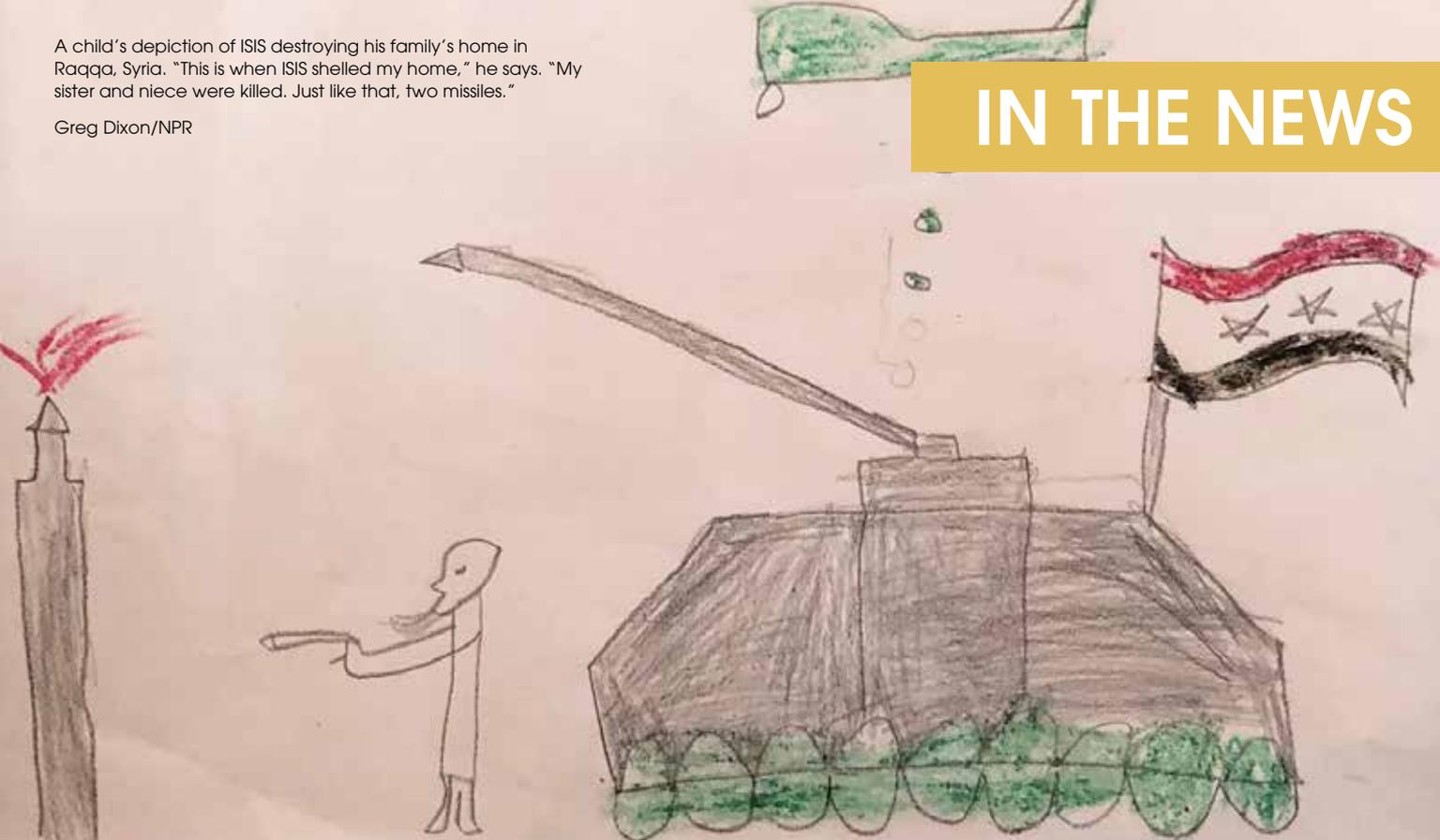
Let it go. And let them rest in peace.

After all, it's your life.

A child's depiction of ISIS destroying his family's home in Raqqa, Syria. "This is when ISIS shelled my home," he says. "My sister and niece were killed. Just like that, two missiles."

Greg Dixon/NPR

IN THE NEWS



In Syria, A School Helps Children Traumatized By War

by Kate Walton 13 Nov 2019

The skinny boy says he's 12, though he looks years younger. He points to a crayon drawing he created this summer, when he arrived at a U.S. government-supported childcare center in Raqqa, Syria.

It's mostly colored in black. There's a tank. An aircraft. A crude figure of a man with a wispy beard holding an oversized gun.

"This is when ISIS shelled my home," he says. "My sister and niece were killed. Just like that, two missiles."

In the picture, there's a red tongue of flame rising from the roof of his home.

"When the house was hit, the smoke was red like this," he says.

Therapists have known for decades that a primary way young children communicate and comprehend trauma is by drawing pictures. If that's true, these drawings on the wall are one collective scream.

There are childish scrawls of beheadings. Corpses. Planes dropping bombs. One small boy gestures to the picture he made. His eyes are pinched by burn scars.

This school, along with 10 others like it, is designed to ease the kids back into something like a normal life.

"It's everything from art to music to sports," says Deanie Holder, a State Department official who helps oversee the childcare centers in northeast Syria, an area controlled by U.S. forces and its Kurdish and Arab allies.

"What we found is the children had been so traumatized, they couldn't even recognize numbers or letters," Holder continues. "So we had to work through that before we could start educating them again."

The school's outer walls are painted with colorful bears and balloons. It sits just a block or two from piles of rubble and the skeletons of buildings, destroyed by Islamic State booby traps and American airstrikes. There are about 500 kids here, some of them orphans, with space for hundreds more.

A Syrian teacher instructs a small class, just seven boys and girls who never went to school during the years of war. NPR is not identifying any of the Syrians for security reasons.

Through an interpreter, the teacher says the children were afraid to be inside any building or even on the roads.

They just didn't feel safe because of the bombings and destruction they witnessed.

"First, they were still carrying memories of the war," says the teacher. "And they had lost people close to them. Some had lost their fathers; some had lost both their parents."

She points to two girls in the back of the room. One stares blankly at the floor, thumbing the pages in her book. The other covers her face with her hands, peering through a web of fingers at the visitors in the room.

"They had an obvious case of social isolation," the teacher says.

In the beginning, they didn't talk to anyone.

"Thankfully, they've recovered," she says. "And adapted to the new place, adapted to their new friends."

One boy in the class lost both his legs and sits in a wheelchair. Another is 13 and lost his left hand. He smiles from the front row of the class and waves at the strangers, showing off his notebook.

He and two other children were playing with a bomb, he says. When it exploded, it killed both his friends.

Holder says the schools like this are part of a program that costs about \$13 million. But U.S. funds will run out in just four months and it's unclear whether more money is coming.

President Trump cut \$200 million in aid a few months back — about half the U.S. stabilization money for all of northeast Syria — saying he wanted other countries to contribute. State Department officials pleaded with the White House to restore at least part of the aid, saying they wanted \$70 million for critical projects. In the end, they got less than \$7 million to support the White Helmets, the Syrian civil defense force that helps civilians.

So how did those cuts affect the education efforts?

"Basically, part of the education programming money was tied up in the money that was stopped," says Holder. "So instead of having a full year coming up, I will basically end funding at the end of January."

Holder says there's hope from other countries who are contributing aid money.

"We're working very hard with the international community to explain the many different ways they could be involved in the education sector," she says.

The United Arab Emirates gave \$50 million, but prefers the money to be spent on projects like restoring water service and electricity. Back in August, Saudi Arabia promised to provide \$100 million for stabilization in Syria. Those funds came just this week, officials said, when Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Riyadh.

While officials say the Saudi money will go toward a number of programs, including education support, it's uncertain at this point whether any of that funding will be able to keep this and other schools open.

Private donations, officials say, can also help fill the gap.

For \$1.5 million, Holder says, she could renovate 100 Iraqi schools. For about \$5 million, the care centers could continue for another year.

Whatever the fate of these schools, there are signs of hope. Girls in red and white uniforms perform a dance routine on a stage. The boy who lost his hand in an explosion shows a picture he just drew in his notebook. It's a bouquet of flowers.

And that boy whose black crayons pictured an ISIS fighter and the burning home the family left to flee to Lebanon? He's made a picture of his new home.

"I was so happy I drew this," he says. "This is when we returned. We rebuilt our house and now we are very happy."



A drawing by the same child whose home in Raqqa was destroyed by ISIS depicts the family's rebuilt house.

Greg Dixon/NPR



Schoolchildren are led through a dance routine at a U.S. government-supported childcare center in Raqqa.

Greg Dixon/NPR



THE FOURTH TRAUMA RESPONSE WE DON'T TALK ABOUT

Fawning: The Fourth Trauma Response We Don't Talk About

Juliette Virzi

Whether we realize it or not, most of us are familiar with three classic responses to fear — fight, flight and freeze.

When our brains perceive a threat in our environment, we automatically go into one of these stress response modes. From an evolutionary standpoint, these responses have served us well by allowing us to respond quickly to threats and get to safety. But for folks who have lived through prolonged exposure to abuse or trauma (often referred to as complex trauma), the threat never feels like it went away, leaving many individuals “stuck” in different stress response modes.

Think of the person who seems to lash out in anger at the slightest provocation (fight). Or the perpetually anxious person who avoids interpersonal conflict by immersing herself in work or school (flight). Or the individual who constantly feels defeated by their inability to make decisions (freeze).

These are classic examples of fight, flight and freeze due to trauma, but did you know there's actually a fourth response? It's called “fawn” and is a term coined by Pete Walker, a C-PTSD survivor and licensed marriage and family therapist who specializes in helping adults who were traumatized in childhood.

Before we get too deep into the fawn trauma response, let's make sure we have a good grasp on the other three commonly-recognized trauma responses: fight, flight and freeze. With the help of trauma-informed treatment specialist, Patrick Walden, LICSW, we've defined each below.

As a note, most trauma survivors tend to lean toward one stress response. It's important to remember no one response is “better” or “worse” than the others. If you find yourself “stuck” in one of the stress responses, and it's affecting your quality of life, we encourage you to seek the help of a trauma-informed specialist.

Fight

Survivors who tend toward the fight response innately believe power will guarantee the security and control they lacked in childhood.

“Fight looks like self-preservation at all costs,” Walden told *The Mighty*, adding that this trauma response can manifest in explosive outbursts of temper, aggressive behavior, demanding perfection from others or being “unfair” in interpersonal confrontations.

He also noted that while we typically associate the fight response with men, women can also struggle with anger, though in many cases they direct their anger inward at themselves instead of toward others.

Flight

Survivors who tend toward the flight response are usually chronically busy and perfectionistic. They may believe “being perfect” is a surefire way to receive love and prevent abandonment by important people in their lives.

"Flight can look like obsessive thinking or compulsive behavior, feelings of panic or anxiety, rushing around, being a workaholic or over-worrying, (and being) unable to sit still or feel relaxed," Walden said.

Freeze

Survivors who tend toward the freeze response are often mistrustful of others and generally find comfort in solitude. The freeze response may also refer to feeling physically or mentally "frozen" as a result of trauma, which people may experience as dissociation.

"Freeze looks like spacing out or feeling unreal, isolating (yourself) from the outside world, being a couch potato ... (and having) difficulty making and acting on decisions," Walden said.

What Is the Fawn Response?

Fawning is perhaps best understood as "people-pleasing." According to Walker, who coined the term "fawn" as it relates to trauma, people with the fawn response are so accommodating of others' needs that they often find themselves in codependent relationships. On his website he wrote:

Fawn types seek safety by merging with the wishes, needs and demands of others. They act as if they unconsciously believe that the price of admission to any relationship is the forfeiture of all their needs, rights, preferences and boundaries.

Below we've listed some classic signs of fawning. These behaviors may be especially prevalent when a survivor feels triggered or fearful:

People-pleasing

- Being unable to say how you really think or feel
- Caring for others to your own detriment
- Always saying "yes" to requests
- Flattering others
- Struggling with low self-esteem
- Avoiding conflict
- Feeling taken advantage of
- Being very concerned about fitting in with others

Because fawn types struggle to take up space and express their needs, they are more vulnerable to emotional abuse and exploitation. In abusive circumstances (for example childhood abuse or intimate partner violence), abusers may suppress a survivor's fight or flight responses

by threatening punishment, leading to the the survivor's reliance on the fawn or freeze response.

"When we lack the power or ability to fight or flee, which occurs commonly with complex trauma, we will freeze, 'appease' or dissociate," Dr. Cathy Kezelman, AM, president of Blue Knot Foundation: National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma, told *The Mighty*. "The appease response, which is also known as 'please' or 'fawn' is another survival response which occurs (when) survivors read danger signals and aim to comply and minimize the confrontation in an attempt to protect themselves."

What It's Like to Experience Fawning

As humans, we tend to seek out relationships that feel comfortable and familiar. For fawn-type trauma survivors who are used to working hard to please in relationships, this can unfortunately mean attracting abusive relationships that feel familiar or "deserved."

This is something mental health advocate Sam Dylan Finch wrote about on his blog, "Let's Queer Things Up":

The more invested I was in an emotional connection, the less likely I was to criticize that person, vocalize when my boundaries were crossed, express unhappiness with their behavior, or share anything that I felt might damage that relationship...

It took stepping away from a friendship that had so thoroughly gaslit and demolished me — while plummeting into the deep depths of anorexia — before I realized that chasing controlling, emotionally unavailable, even abusive people was crushing my spirit.

I sought out the most emotionally inaccessible people, and I threw myself into the pursuit, somehow believing that if I could secure the love and affection of the most unattainable person, it would indisputably prove my worthiness.

If you are a trauma survivor and can relate to his words, you're not alone. There is no shame in struggling with fawning. Fawning, like the other stress responses, is like self-protective armor. It has helped many trauma survivors live through abusive and sometimes dangerous circumstances.

As we mentioned above, there is no stress response that is "better" or "worse" than the others, but getting stuck in one of them can be harmful. Though fawning tends to assuage anxiety and make you feel "safer" in the moment, it can actually silence your voice and prevent you from healing or surrounding yourself with people that truly care about your well-being.

How to Find Help

The good news is it's never too late to heal from trauma. With the help of a trauma-informed therapist (check out this helpful tool to find one), you can work to change your deeply ingrained responses to fear.

"People who have experienced complex trauma often struggle to feel safe and regulate their often strong emotions," Kezelman told The Mighty. "Learning to find a sense of safety can be a slow and gradual process, but one which is absolutely achievable."

One of the most important parts of your healing journey will be learning to develop and assert healthy boundaries with people in your life. (For a crash course on boundary-setting, check out our guide here). In times of stress and fear, instead of compromising your needs, a therapist can teach you self-soothing and self-care strategies, as well as grounding techniques if you struggle with dissociation.

As you begin (or continue) your healing journey, there are a few things we need you to know:

You deserve to take up space.

You are enough just as you are.

Your thoughts, feelings, opinions and boundaries matter.

To connect with The Mighty's trauma survivor community, we encourage you to post a Thought or Question on the site with the hashtag #TraumaSurvivors. Whatever you're facing today, you don't have to do it alone.





Royal Commission

**Into Violence, Abuse, Neglect
and Exploitation of People
with Disability**

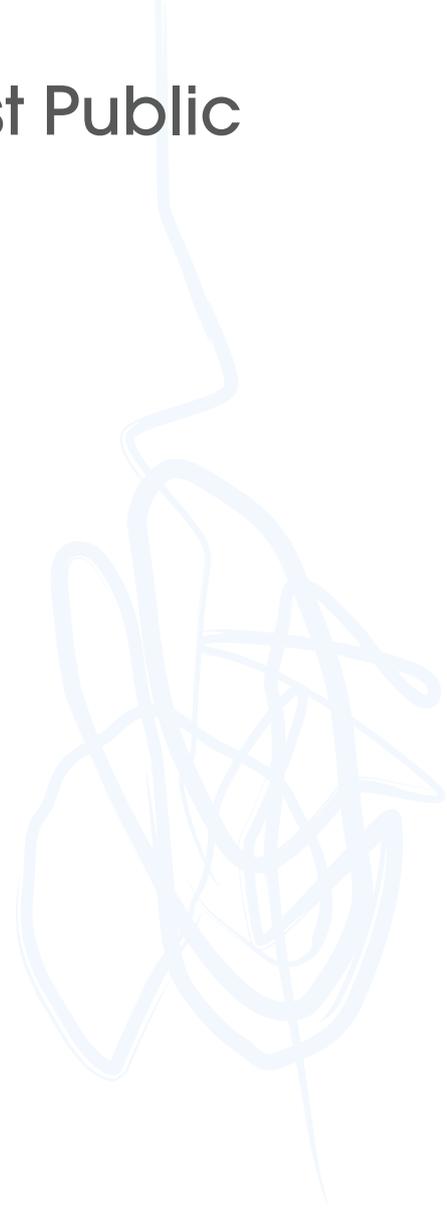
The sitting will commence at 10:15am

Disability Royal Commission: First Public Sitting, Brisbane

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability held its First Public Sitting on Monday 16 September in Brisbane, Queensland.

Watch more here:

https://www.blueknot.org.au/LinkClick.aspx?link=https%3a%2f%2fwww.youtube.com%2fwatch%3fv%3dlsSW8ieytmk%26feature%3dyoutu.be%26fbclid%3dlwAR0lw57w_AKbMloUNolGQhD76MahiPjhGXqC5T0VGwLXIEOCnwg-omgLr5c&tabid=909&portalid=2&mid=5029



SUPPORTING A TRAUMA SURVIVOR CAN BE REWARDING AND CHALLENGING.

being trauma informed can help

This means supporting the person to feel safe, and learn to trust you

Offering them real choices, and working with them to empower recovery

While always keeping their culture and background in mind





Talking About Trauma with colleagues

Tips for talking about trauma with a colleague
who may have experienced trauma

Ensure safety

If the workplace is the source of trauma, carefully consider the best way to engage with the person.

Are you okay?

Start from an extension of the question: are you okay?

Tell the person about support

Let the person know that support is available. Provide contact details or where to find them



Breaking Free is Blue Knot Foundation's monthly eNewsletter for survivors of childhood trauma, their supporters and community members. For feedback or to contribute, please email newsletter@blueknot.org.au or call (02) 8920 3611.



In-house Training for the second half of 2019

You can browse through our In-House training options for the second half of 2019 [here](#). Please email trainingandservices@blueknot.org.au or call (02) 8920 3611 to find out more.