

Working with the Stolen Generations: understanding trauma

Providing effective aged care services to Stolen Generations survivors

This fact sheet provides information for aged care staff to improve services for Stolen Generations survivors. It will help providers to comply with the Aged Care Quality Standards and meet their obligations to care for Stolen Generations survivors. There is enormous diversity among Stolen Generations survivors, and this fact sheet should be viewed as a starting point only.

Trauma

Stolen Generations survivors endured trauma and grief as a result of their forcible removal from family, community and culture, and were often subjected to harsh and degrading treatment including physical and sexual abuse, exploitation and racism.

When interacting with survivors and their families, it's helpful to recognise the trauma many people carry.

Common triggers for Stolen Generations survivors include reminders of childhood trauma, for example:

- being touched, particularly without permission
- clinical settings resembling a dormitory or institution
- situations that bring back feelings of the lack of control they experienced when they were taken from their families, including dealing with large bureaucracies like the aged care system
- a tone of voice, such as a person projecting authority
- a look on someone's face or a gesture.

Health

- 67% live with a disability or restrictive long term condition
- 39% report poor mental health



How you can help

- Ensure all staff dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents/clients receive basic education about trauma and its impacts.
- Try to make people as comfortable as possible including building trust and letting them know their privacy will be protected.
- Add a tick box to new resident/client forms asking if the person is a Stolen Generations survivor.
- Be guided by each person on whether they want to talk about their past and how much they want to reveal, and use discretion when asking people about traumatic experiences.
- If people do share their stories, consider how this information can be included in their care plan.
- Talk to Stolen Generations survivors about their individual needs which may vary significantly from person to person.
- Ask for permission before doing anything that involves touch and consider alternative arrangements if someone is uncomfortable.
- Consider informing all prospective residents/clients that the organisation employs both male and female staff.
- Where possible, ensure the environment doesn't resemble an institution.
- Explain the process and actions involved in an assessment or treatment beforehand, during and afterwards.
- Engage trauma informed professionals to assess the impact of grief and trauma and avoid misdiagnosing these as mental health issues.
- Frame directions as suggestions wherever possible.
- Use plain English and give clear explanations that are tailored to the person.
- Be mindful of the language used and be prepared to include survivors in the preparation of any written documentation, such as care plans and reviews.
- Ensure transparency of care.
- Where possible, allow additional time for delivery of services to Stolen Generations survivors.
- Consider whether someone may need support e.g. at an appointment or to complete a lengthy form. Ensure your organisational procedures allow for Stolen Generations advocates to take on this role if preferred by the survivor.
- Be flexible to reduce survivors' stress and enhance wellbeing.
- Ensure facilities and services are culturally friendly. For example, incorporate cultural awareness/safety requirements into policy and training materials.
- Consider providing additional services and healing opportunities for Stolen Generations survivors e.g. art therapy.
- Explore including cultural and kinship details in people's care plans – for example who visits a survivor regularly, key events/dates.
- Support Stolen Generations survivors in residential care to maintain contact with the community to prevent social isolation.
- Build partnerships with trusted third parties such as local Stolen Generations/Link-Up organisations and Social and Emotional Wellbeing Counsellors to better support Stolen Generations residents/clients.
- Be aware that relatives may also be dealing with the impacts of trauma and need additional support. Some survivors may benefit from having a family member stay with them as a carer.
- Check people know their rights, encourage them to speak up if these are not being respected, and support them to do so.
- Ensure policies and procedures are in place to prevent racism and discrimination, call out racist attitudes and discriminatory behaviours wherever they occur, and share your knowledge about trauma.
- Encourage all staff to undertake Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness/safety training.
- If possible, employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff with an understanding of trauma.

Things to avoid

- Making assumptions about people's needs, their level of literacy including health literacy, their healing and who they would like their information shared with.
- Using medical jargon or acronyms.
- Shouting, purposefully talking slowly or right in a person's face.
- Shining torches in people's eyes/faces.
- Requiring proof of Aboriginality.
- Making negative statements that dismiss people's trauma and grief e.g. 'move on'.

Further information

To learn more about providing effective aged care services to Stolen Generations residents/clients without retriggering trauma, view the full version of this fact sheet here <https://healingfoundation.org.au/working-stolen-generations/>