

Support for people during times of international conflict



fasstt

The Forum of Australian Services
for Survivors of Torture and Trauma

www.fasstt.org.au

Why might a person need help during an international crisis?

When conflicts arise in their country of origin, individuals, families and communities experience heightened stress that increases their vulnerability to a variety of difficulties and symptoms associated with their past traumatic experiences. These commonly include increased anxiety and fear about the safety of loved ones who remain in circumstances of danger, as well as increased symptoms triggered by reminders of the traumatic events that they have faced in the past.

International crisis situations may trigger responses for people from refugee backgrounds who are not directly affected by the conflict but have had similar experiences or whose countries are also experiencing unrest.

Community leaders, educators and health professionals can support those affected by international conflicts and crises by providing assistance that is focused on wellbeing and connection.

Responding to people in distress – what to expect

High levels of distress are an expected and normal response to highly stressful and frightening situations. This includes intense worry and fear about loved ones in areas affected by disaster or conflict.

The following reactions are likely to be common:

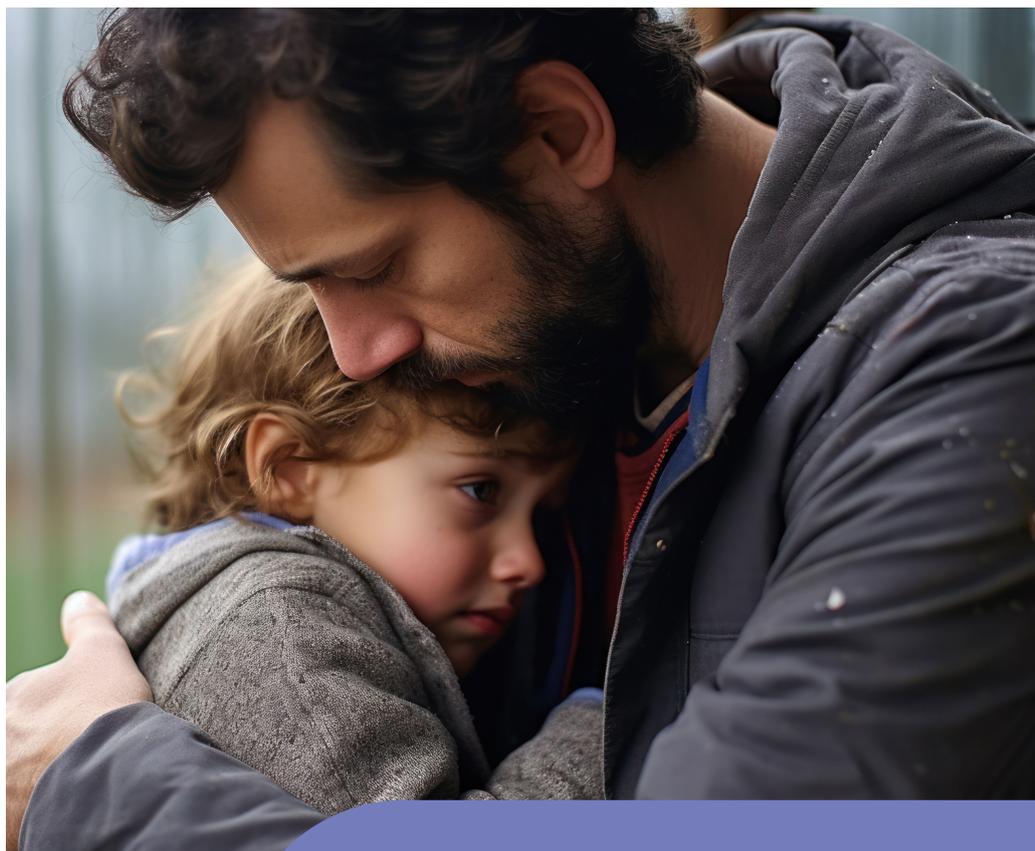
- A range of overwhelming feelings including helplessness, desperation, anger, sadness, irritability, anxiety, stress, despair, exhaustion, and frustration.
- Persistent and intrusive worries and fears.
- Persistent tearfulness, difficulty containing emotions and surges of emotions out of context (e.g. becoming tearful in the supermarket for no apparent reason).
- Memories of past traumatic experiences. Changes in sleep and appetite. Occurrence of nightmares.
- Depending on the emotional state evoked in someone (e.g. alert, alarm, fear, terror), this can affect their sense of time and concentration (e.g. an impact on someone's ability to think, plan and respond to tasks and those around them).
- Lowered mood and/or numbness.
- Difficulty in making decisions and completing daily tasks.
- Preoccupation with the war and conflict most of the time including finding it difficult to think of anything else.
- Physical sensations (e.g. body aches and pains, headaches, upset digestion, vision difficulties, dizziness, heart palpitations, sweating, shaking hands/body, breathing difficulties).

Children and young people may also exhibit the following reactions:

- Increased clinginess.
- Tantrums/emotional outbursts.
- Act younger than their age (e.g. return to bed wetting, need more help with tasks).
- Express worry about seeing their parents and family members upset.
- Be less engaged in school/ learning and other activities.
- Want to spend more time on technology devices; withdraw from friends, family and peers and/or appear hyperactive and hyper-alert.

It is also very common for people to seek information and advice about the current situation in affected areas, possible migration channels, and options for contacting, finding and/or finding support for, family and friends in areas experiencing war and conflict. Sometimes they can become so preoccupied by their search for information that this can interfere substantially with other areas of their lives.

Community leaders will also be experiencing significant pressure due to the direct impacts of this situation on their own family and friends, as well as in connection to the increased demand for support stemming from their communities.



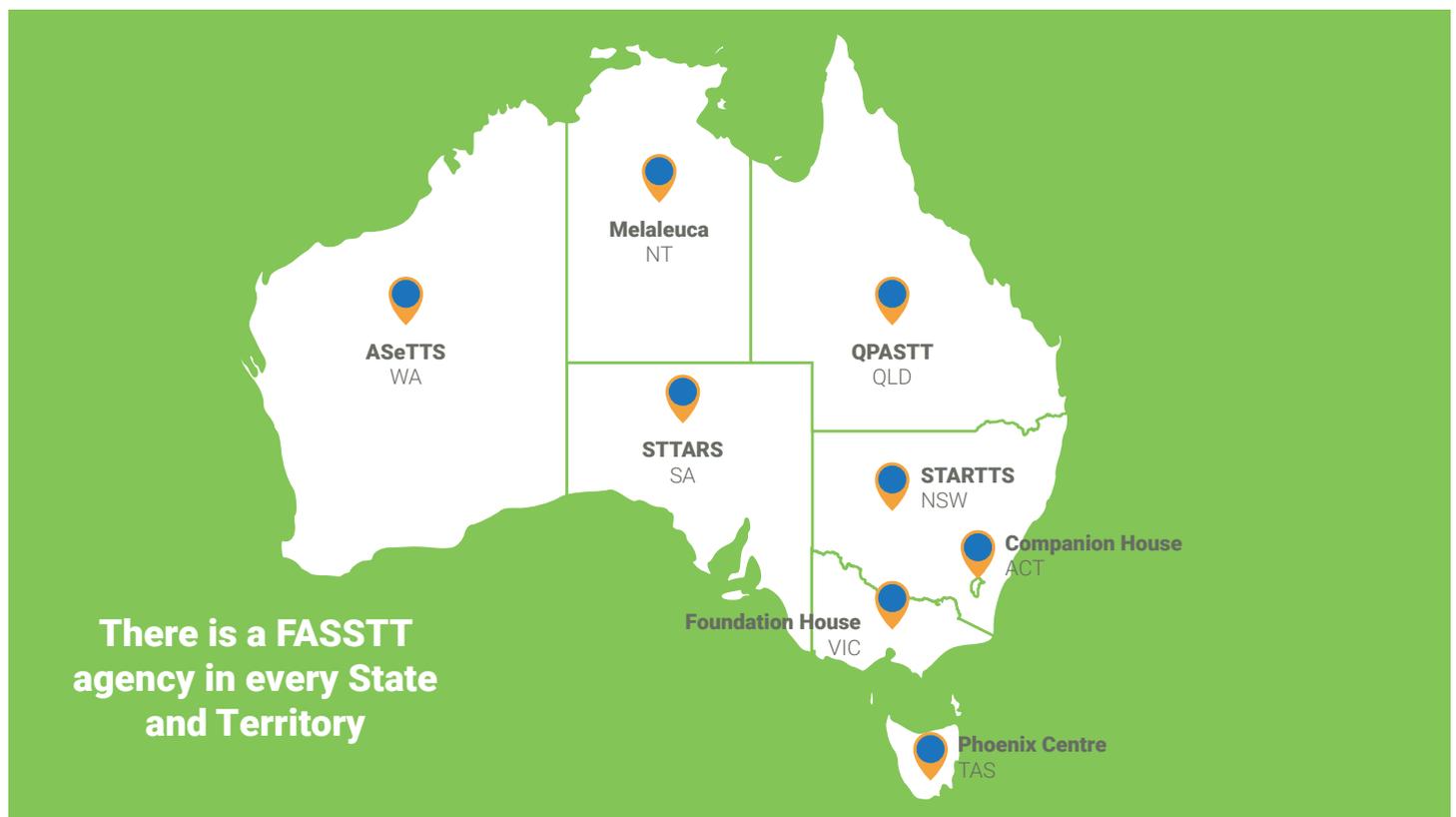
While the above responses are the most common, it is also not unusual for people from affected communities to not present as distressed and just want to get on with things.

This is completely appropriate, and a normal reaction associated with a different coping style. We should not expect only an overt distress response.

What is FASSTT?

The Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (FASSTT) is a network of 8 specialist agencies who work with survivors of torture and trauma, their families, and communities to help them recover from the impact of their traumatic experiences.

FASSTT agencies provide specialist counselling, group work, community capacity building as well as sector development including training for workers and agencies supporting people who have experienced torture and trauma.



Who can access FASSTT services?

FASSTT agencies support people who have experienced torture, persecution, war, violence, or other human rights violations before coming to Australia and are having difficulties because of these traumatic experiences. Most of our clients are from refugee or refugee-like backgrounds and people seeking asylum.

Support is available to survivors, their families, and communities. It does not matter how old someone is or how many years they have been living in Australia. Services are free and confidential and without a time limit.

Who can refer to a FASSTT agency?

An individual, their parent/guardian, support person or community leader can contact their local FASSTT agency – preferably by phone or email. Referral forms are available through each agency website.

A Counsellor or Intake Worker will be in contact as soon as possible. Sometimes, in periods of high demand, it might be necessary for the agency to triage and prioritise need and therefore it might take a little longer to return contact.

Support is completely voluntary; therefore, consent must be willing.

How can I refer to a FASSTT agency?

If you think that the person you are supporting would benefit from specialist counselling support, please contact your local state or territory based FASSTT agency. Their contact details are provided at the end of this information sheet.

When do people need more urgent support?

The following reactions indicate the need for more urgent support.

- Self-harm and/or suicidal thoughts, behaviours or plans **(if someone is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others contact 000)**.
- Inability to attend to any self-care needs or accept help from others.
- Should someone experience the following for a period of time, beyond 4 weeks, it is important to discuss referral options for more ongoing support including counselling:
 - o Prolonged distress and physical symptoms without some return to routine or previously enjoyable activities.
 - o Prolonged self-isolation from family, friends or regular supports and important activities, such as school.

If you are concerned that someone's response is beyond a common reaction, seek support.

Other supports can include:

- Your local FASSTT agency during normal office hours. You can contact them by phone or email and ask to speak with an Intake Worker. Contact details are on the following pages.
- General Practitioners (GPs) and other trusted professionals.
- Lifeline 24/7 Crisis Support Telephone Line (13 11 14).
- Lifeline Text 24/7 Crisis Support (0477 13 11 44).
- Kids Helpline 24/7 Crisis Support Telephone Line (1800 551 800).
- Suicide Callback Service 24/7 telephone and video counselling service (1300 659 467).

Can FASSTT agencies assist people affected by the current conflict who are not themselves survivors of torture or refugee trauma?

FASSTT agencies recognise that wide scale traumatic events associated with overseas conflict can impact people who may not have been directly exposed themselves to traumatic events in the context of conflict and the refugee experience.

FASSTT agencies respond to the widespread impact of conflict, humanitarian crises, and natural disasters by supporting organisations and key influencers in the affected communities and helping them increase their capacity to support their own communities.

In an emergency where someone is at risk, it is important that you contact 000

Additional Resources

Hints for Healing

hintsforhealing.startts.org.au/

Schools in for Refugees

sifr.foundationhouse.org.au/

STARTTS in Schools

startts.org.au/services/schools-program/

Hints for Teachers

companionhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/tips-for-teachers-feb2013.pdf

Australian Refugee Health Practice Guide

refugeehealthguide.org.au/

Service directories for refugees and people seeking asylum

refugeecouncil.org.au/services/

Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA)

www.refugeecouncil.org.au/

Settlement Council of Australia (SCOA)

scoa.org.au/

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN)

myan.org.au/

Red Cross International Tracing Service

redcross.org.au/migration/find-my-family-restoring-family-links/

Embrace Multicultural Mental Health

embracementalhealth.org.au/

Mental Health Australia

mhaustralia.org/

Suicide Prevention Australia

suicidepreventionaust.org/

Phoenix Australia

phoenixaustralia.org/

Working with people from refugee backgrounds. A guide for Social Workers (2nd Edn)

startts.org.au/media/Working-with-people-from-refugee-backgrounds-A-guide-for-social-workers-2nd-Edition_2022.pdf

Information for Community Leaders about Mental Health

qpastt.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/OPASTT-A5-Brochure-8pp-Mental-health_Final.pdf

FASST Agency Contact Details

ACT



Head Office

41 Templeton St, Cook, ACT 2614
(02) 6251 4550
info@companionhouse.org.au
companionhouse.org.au

NORTHERN TERRITORY



Head Office

24 McLachlan Street, Darwin City, NT 0800
(08) 8985 3311
admin@companionhouse.org.au
melaleuca.org.au

SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Head Office

81 Angas Street, Adelaide South, SA 5000
(08) 8206 8945
enquiries@sttars.org.au
sttars.org.au

VICTORIA



Foundation House
The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture Inc.

Head Office

4 Gardiner Street, Brunswick, VIC 3056
(03) 9389 8900
info@foundationhouse.org.au
foundationhouse.org.au

NSW



NSW Service for the Treatment
and Rehabilitation of Torture
and Trauma Survivors

Head Office

152-168 The Horsley Drive, Carramar, NSW 2163
(02) 9646 6700
stts-startts@health.nsw.gov.au
startts.org.au

QUEENSLAND



Head Office

28 Dibley Street, Woolloongabba, QLD 4102
(07) 3391 6677
connect@qpastt.org.au
qpastt.org.au

TASMANIA



Head Office

Level 2, 1A Anfield Street, Glenorchy, TAS 7010
(03) 6234 9138
reception@mrctas.org.au
mrctas.org.au/phoenixcentre

WESTERN AUSTRALIA



Head Office

286 Beaufort Street, Perth, WA 6000
(08) 9227 2700
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