



# FORGED FROM FIRE

THE MAKING OF THE BLACKSMITHS' TREE

## SCREENING GUIDE



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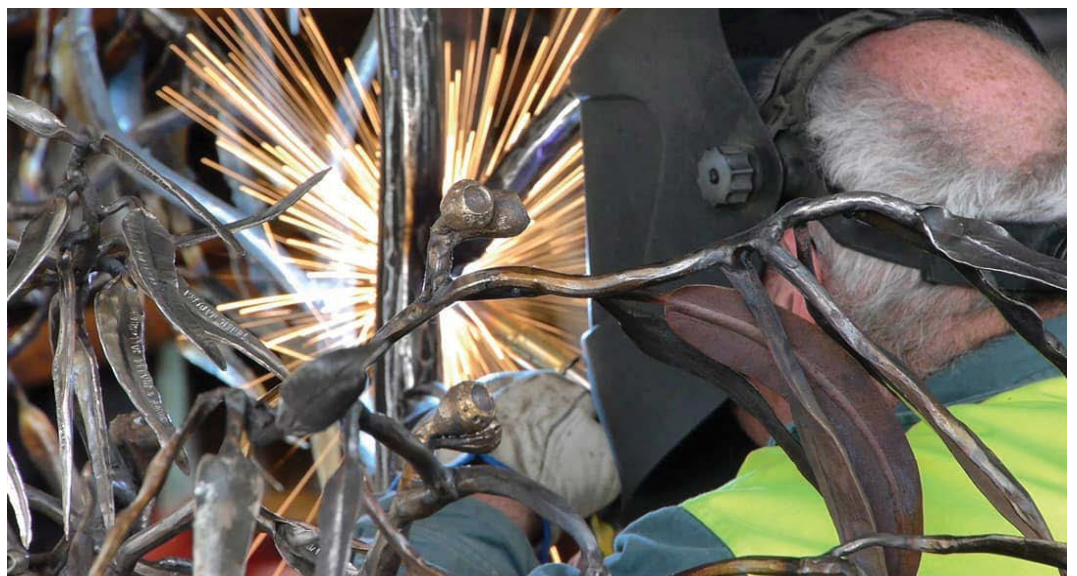


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## ABOUT THE FILM

Andrew Garton's film, *Forged from Fire: The Making of the Blacksmiths' Tree*, documents an inspiring story of recovery that grew as a response to the Black Saturday fires which devastated townships northeast of Melbourne in February 2009. The Blacksmiths' Tree began with designer and metal artist, Amanda Gibson, who gathered a local and international team of blacksmiths and volunteers to create a nine-metre steel and copper gum tree as a memorial to those people who were touched by the fires. *Forged from Fire* follows the tree's journey from inception to installation, capturing stories of resilience, connectedness and hope along the way.



## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The Black Saturday fires were the worst in Australia's recorded history and profoundly affected the people of Victoria, especially those people living in small, rural communities northeast of Melbourne. Although Forged from Fire is a story of hope and renewal, it is underpinned by an event that caused immeasurable harm, loss and trauma for many affected by the fires.

This guide is designed to provide a resource that supports the sensitive screening of Forged from Fire and facilitates conversations and connections between viewers. Whether you are a school, university, community group, or other organisation, this guide will assist you in planning your event to ensure you provide a safe space for people to view the film, share their stories, connect with others, and find support.

In this guide, you will find:

- A brief explanation of the framework used to inform this guide
- Things to consider when planning your event/screening
- Tips to support your event/screening
- Activity suggestions, including example running sheets
- Information about the signs of post-traumatic stress
- Information about post-traumatic growth
- Suggested activities to support your screening
- Resources, including sample grounding exercises and support contacts

As a facilitator, this resource is designed to guide you by providing suggestions, tips and recommendations; however, it is not intended to be prescriptive. We hope this guide enables you to carefully consider your audience and to tailor your screening to respond to their specific needs.

## THE FRAMEWORK

This resource utilises a framework that includes the principles of safety, calming, self and collective efficacy, connectedness, and hope.<sup>1</sup> These principles are empirically supported to guide and inform effective intervention for survivors of mass trauma (e.g., natural disasters such as bushfire) and were used by the Victorian Government, Department of Health and Human Services to inform community recovery in the wake of the Black Saturday fires.<sup>2</sup>

## THE PRINCIPLES

The principles below were used to inform the development this resource and to ensure that any suggestions or recommendations herein have been considered from a trauma-sensitive perspective. In addition to these principles, this guide integrates safety, transparency, support, collaboration, empowerment and cultural considerations to support facilitators in cultivating a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach to screening the film, *Forged from Fire*.

**Sense of Safety** – When people experience mass trauma, their beliefs about the world around them often change (e.g., ‘the world is a dangerous place’), and they may begin to experience intense psychological and physical responses to otherwise harmless stimuli. This principle suggests that interrupting post-traumatic links between harmless stimuli and the traumatic event is key to recovery.

**Promotion of Calming** – Experiencing increased emotions following exposure to mass trauma is a normal and adaptive response. However, for some, the experience of heightened arousal can lead to agitation and anxiety and, ultimately, interfere with daily functioning. This principle suggests that teaching calming techniques (e.g., grounding, deep breathing, meditation) and problem-solving, combined with ‘normalisation’ of stress reactions, can be very helpful.

**Promotion of a Sense of Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy** – Self and collective efficacy is related to the belief a person has in the competency, ability to cope, and control over positive outcomes of one’s self and one’s community. Involving people in decision making, providing resources, teaching goal setting and behavioural skills, and reminding people of their efficacy can be useful strategies to increase self and collective efficacy among survivors of mass trauma.

**Promotion of Connectedness** – Social connectedness is linked to positive outcomes for survivors of mass trauma. Supporting individuals and communities to access resources that increase or maintain social support is critical for recovery.

**Instilling Hope** – Retaining a reasonable degree of optimism for the future is associated with more favourable outcomes for survivors of mass trauma. Teaching people to identify and amplify their strengths, as well as normalising their response to trauma and addressing their thoughts related to catastrophising, are associated with instilling hope in survivors of mass trauma.

## PLANNING YOUR EVENT/SCREENING

### WHO WILL BE ATTENDING YOUR EVENT/SCREENING?

Thinking about your audience will be important when planning your event and will inform where you hold the screening, what resources you might provide, and what specific needs your audience might have.

Here are some questions to consider:

- What will the age range of your viewers be?
- Will your audience include people or communities who may have been affected by fires?
- Is anyone in your audience likely to have additional needs, such as special access requirements or time limitations?
- Is your audience likely to include people who have experienced recent trauma, and is a screening appropriate at this time?

Once you have an idea of your audience, you can begin to plan what resources you might need. For example, do you need to provide age-appropriate calming resources for children (e.g., colouring books) or plan for family groups to sit near one another (i.e., social connectedness).

### WHERE ARE YOU PLANNING TO HOLD YOUR EVENT/SCREENING?

To some extent, location will be dictated by your audience: how many people, their specific needs, etc. In addition, however, you might also consider the following:

- How will the venue be set up? Sensory stimulation (e.g., lights, music, crowds) can sometimes become overwhelming.<sup>3</sup> Think of ways to provide a relatively calm, orderly and predictable environment (e.g., soft lighting and music, not overcrowded), which will be more likely to support viewers to regulate their emotions.
- What will be the location of your event/screening? If your event/screening is taking place in a rural area where most of the audience is likely to know one another, there may be different cultural expectations, social supports and ways of connecting than if it were being held in a metropolitan area where the audience is less likely to know one another.
- Do you have capacity to provide a separate area should people require a quiet space to calm down, connect with others, or utilise resources (e.g. mindful colouring books, onsite mental health first aid officers, etc.).

## HOW WILL YOUR EVENT/SCREENING BE STRUCTURED?

The film itself runs for approximately 60 minutes. Planning for other activities and having a plan for the overall structure of your event will help promote a sense of safety and facilitate a positive and manageable experience for your viewers.

Some things to consider prior to your event/screening include:

- Developing a plan and running sheet, including expected timeframes for the overall event/screening and any activities is important.
- Clearly communicating the event/screening schedule to your viewers. You might like to tell people what they can expect at the beginning of the event/screening or you could create a printed program that is distributed to viewers on arrival.

For some viewers, the event/screening may be emotionally and physically tiring. Keeping activities relatively short, avoiding running activities consecutively, and scheduling breaks can be useful and should be considered within the context of your audience (e.g., young children, older adults).

## WILL YOUR EVENT/SCREENING INCLUDE A DISCUSSION OR ACTIVITIES?

Thinking carefully about what activities and facilitators will be involved in the screening is important. If the screening is taking place in a fire-affected area, there is an increased likelihood that viewers will be emotionally impacted and may become distressed.

If you are planning activities to accompany your screening, you may wish to consider the following factors:

- Utilising a trauma-informed approach to discussion/activities associated with the screening. This may reduce the likelihood of re-traumatisation and encourage a more positive experience of the event (see tip sheet on pg 10 for more information regarding trauma-informed approach).<sup>4</sup>
- Sometimes communities already have local mental health professionals and community members who are skilled in responding to trauma and distress; sometimes outside support is required. When planning your event/screening consider existing resources and whether or not you require additional support, for example facilitators who are specialised in responding to trauma.



- If you are holding your screening in a specific setting, consider what resources are appropriate and what you already have available. For example, if you are in a school, you may have access to Student Support Services Officers who can assist with facilitation.
- Providing a 'safe space' for discussion and activities where viewers can participate in a way that validates their experience and minimises the likelihood of distress (see tip sheet on pg 10 for more information regarding creating a 'safe space').

## ARE YOU PREPARED?

Careful preparation will help your event/screening run smoothly and enable you to respond sensitively and appropriately to most eventualities.

Ways in which you might do this include:

- Ensuring facilitators are prepared to address the audience/ participants' responses to the screening in an informed way may require engaging workers who are trained in responding to trauma.
- Remaining alert to indicators of distress (see pg 12 for a list of signs and symptoms). Prior to screening, a well-formulated and articulated plan should be developed for staff to support viewers who are showing signs of distress (see pg 11 for tips on how to respond).
- Gathering resources prior to the event that can support viewers during the event/screening and also after the screening (e.g., calming activities, access to information about external support services).
- Consult with community members to gain an idea of whether or not a screening is appropriate in your location at this time.





## TIPS, CONSIDERATIONS AND INFORMATION

**Although it has been identified in previous pre-screenings of Forged from Fire that many people are spontaneously compelled to share their stories, this is not so for everyone.** The ways in which people share their stories and react to the stories and experiences of others are extremely diverse. It is important to normalise this by acknowledging that everybody has a different understanding of and response to their experience of trauma. As much as possible, involve the audience/participants in decision making. For example, you might invite attendees to tell their stories in a way of their choosing (e.g., written word, online, verbally, through art). In addition, not everyone who attends the event/screening will want to be involved in discussion/activities. Providing explicit permission for people not to share if they do not want to, is essential.

**The emphasis of Forged from Fire is resilience and recovery and how you will remain sensitive to your viewers experiences, while conveying this sense of community renewal, is important to consider.** In itself, this film is a message of hope – hope in connection, hope in creation, hope in growth, hope in community, hope in the future, and hope in the human spirit. At the close of your event, consider emphasising the overarching message of this film, but also acknowledge that people experience loss, coping and growth in very different, individual and equally valid ways. It can also be helpful to highlight that both growth and overwhelm after trauma can co-occur and are not mutually exclusive.

**Remain mindful of connectedness; social isolation is a risk factor for negative outcomes for people who have experienced significant trauma.<sup>5</sup>**

Some ways you can promote connectedness are to acknowledge the shared experience of watching the film, while normalising and validating the diversity of responses. Provide resources for further connection (e.g., information about social media and community-based support groups) and remain alert for people who may be socially isolated and offer support.

**To promote a sense of safety, providing an organised and predictable environment is important.** Providing viewers with a program of the event/screening schedule, including any activities, timeline and venue orientation (e.g., screening time, exits, available support resources). Outlining what viewers can expect can also be helpful, as can ensuring that everyone is aware of what to do and/or where to go if they become distressed during the screening.

**Creating a 'Safe Space' for discussion activities, whether online, in writing or in person facilitates open and respectful discussion and sharing of stories.** Below is a list of suggested guidelines to support your viewers to remain safe when telling their stories:

- Invite people to tell their stories but also acknowledge that this is not something that everyone will want to do.
- Gently suggest ground rules for sharing:
  - Allow others to speak without interruption
  - Refrain from giving unsolicited feedback
  - Remember to use respectful language
  - Remain mindful of others in the room
- Encourage people to use "I" statements and to speak about their own experience, rather than speaking for a whole group.
- Remind attendees that everyone has their own story, interpretation and experience and that others' perspectives may be very different.
- Indicate the amount of time available for sharing stories, or asking questions, so attendees know when the activity will finish and will not feel cut-off when this time comes to a close.
- Invite any attendees who do not wish to remain for story sharing or Q&A to leave after the film has finished. This demonstrates that some attendees will wish to stay and others will prefer to depart and will prevent attendees from feeling they pressured to remain, if they do not wish to do so.

**A trauma-informed approach uses a strengths-based framework that acknowledges the impact of trauma, recognises the signs and symptoms of trauma, responds to trauma in an informed way, and actively works to resist re-traumatisation.** Six key principles underpin the trauma-informed approach, these are: safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and respect for diversity. Trauma-informed interventions generally consider the need for respect (e.g., trauma survivors have managed the best they could), hope and optimism for recovery, the need to work with people who have experienced trauma in a collaborative way, and the importance of empowering survivors of trauma. This guide has been designed to incorporate the principles and philosophy of a trauma-informed approach.

## MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID

### WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE BECOMES DISTRESSED DURING YOUR EVENT/SCREENING - TIPS FOR SUPPORT WORKERS.

Mental Health First Aid provides a guide to responding to someone in distress and includes the following:<sup>6</sup>

- **Approach, Assess and Assist** – Find a suitable time and space where you are likely to feel comfortable to approach the distressed person; assess their level of distress, which will inform the assistance you offer (e.g., a cup of tea, grounding exercise [see below], engaging external support).
- **Listen Non-judgementally** – Use verbal and non-verbal listening skills that convey empathy and understanding, and validate the person's experience (e.g., providing space for the person to talk without interrupting, reflecting the person's words, nodding your head, attending to the person without becoming distracted or distressed yourself).
- **Give Support and Information** – Offering emotional support, reassurance and information can be very helpful to the distressed person.
- **Encourage the Person to Seek Appropriate Professional Help** – People who are experiencing difficulties with their mental health may benefit from a variety of supports (e.g., counselling, support for family members) but may not be aware of what is available to them. Be aware of resources in your community and be prepared to offer these to distressed attendees.
- **Encourage Other Supports** – Encourage the distressed person to use self-help strategies (e.g., grounding) and to seek support from family, friends and others.

When engaging with someone who is distressed, it is helpful to remain mindful of your pace and tone of voice. Try to slow things down, use a calm tone and closed questions (e.g., Who is available to support you? How do I contact them?).

If you, as a facilitator, feel distressed, remember to seek support for yourself to coping with your own emotions.



## POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a set of reactions that people can develop following a traumatic event in which their safety or life, or that of those around them, was threatened. Examples of situations that can lead to PTSD include serious accidents; physical or sexual assault; war; or disasters, such as bushfires. Feelings of intense fear, helplessness or horror experienced during a traumatic event lead some, but not all, people to develop PTSD which may include some combination of the following indicators:<sup>7</sup>

- Person may seem agitated, irritable or even angry
- Person may be visibly distressed (e.g., crying, shaking)
- Person may appear unusually still or disconnected from what is going on around them (i.e., dissociated)
- Person may report or be observed to have very low mood and appear very 'flat'
- Person may experience a 'reliving' or 'flashback' of the traumatic event which may be very distressing
- Person may report feeling unsafe or display behaviour that indicates they are feeling unsafe (e.g., being hypervigilant)
- Person may report sleep difficulties (e.g., insomnia, nightmares)
- Person may disclose suicidal thoughts or intention to harm themselves

## POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH

Post-traumatic growth is related to the positive changes that someone may experience following a traumatic event. Research suggests that post-traumatic growth can be experienced in three different life domains: people's relationship with others, their sense of self, and their life philosophy.

Indicators of positive changes in a person's world view following a traumatic event may include:<sup>8</sup>

- Stronger relationships with others (e.g., family, others who have also experienced trauma).
- Increased ease of self-disclosure or desire to share their story; many people who experience trauma feel the need to talk about their experience.
- Increased desire to express thoughts and emotions, and ease in doing so (e.g., engaging in honest rather than superficial social responses)

- Increased empathy, compassion, and willingness to help others who have experienced trauma
- Increased sense of vulnerability and strength (i.e., having survived a life threatening or dangerous situation)
- Increased sense of self-competence, self-reliance and ability to cope
- A greater appreciation of everyday things (e.g., friends, family, music, nature)
- A shift in priorities (e.g., from work to family, from body image to healthy living)



## EXAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Below you will find some examples of activities you might like to offer at your event. These are only suggestions and you should consider the needs of your audience when planning activities for your screening. Please keep in mind that you want to be careful not to overwhelm your audience. Thus, it is not advised that you use all of the activities below in any screening.

### STORYTELLING (150 MINUTES)

Anecdotally, audience members have been observed to spontaneously tell their stories following pre-screenings of the film. This type of engagement is consistent with research related to post-traumatic growth and is something that you can facilitate at your screening. Below is an example of how to go about this, with suggestions and a timeline of what this might look like at your event.

#### **6pm - Introduction**

- Start with a brief description of the synopsis of the film. You may develop your own introduction to the film or use the blurb at the beginning of this guide.
- Provide an overview of what the viewers can expect throughout the screening: schedule, timeline, storytelling activity, etc.
- Provide viewers with information about what to do if they are feeling distressed during the screening/event, including the location of exits, identity and whereabouts of support staff, etc.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will want to participate in discussion following the screening and that this is entirely optional. No one need participate, if they don't want to. Let viewers know that there will be a brief break after the film, during which they can depart before the storytelling discussion, if they prefer.

#### **6.10pm – Screening of Forged from Fire**

#### **7.10pm – Break**

- Invite your viewers to take a short break and to return for the storytelling activity, should they so choose.

#### **7.15pm - Introduce the storytelling activity**

- Introduce facilitators, including names, roles, and other relevant details. These may be local community members, mental health professionals, support workers or other people who are relevant to your audience.



- Prior to the event, decide how much time will be spent on the storytelling activity after the film and make the audience aware of this (e.g., not everyone may get to tell their story).
- Gently set boundaries for group discussion; see 'Safe Space' info pg 10
- Acknowledge that while some people may wish to speak to the group, others may prefer to participate by listening only.

### **7.20pm - Facilitators invite the audience to share their stories**

- This may include the entire audience as a group or may be facilitated in smaller groups.
- If possible, some people may prefer to speak one-on-one with a facilitator in a break-away format.
- Should discussion veer off topic, facilitators can gently redirect the conversation with open ended questions (e.g., 'Can you tell us what that was like for you?') and prompts (e.g., 'When that happened...').

### **7.55pm - Facilitators gently signal that the activity is coming to a close**

- Direct people to additional options for sharing their story. For example:  

Some people may prefer to write their story or reflection (this may be anonymous), perhaps in a book that may be made publicly available after the screening

Others may prefer the opportunity to respond at a later date, perhaps in an online storybook via a social media platform.

Children may prefer to draw pictures depicting their stories.

### **8pm – Informal social opportunity**

- Invite the audience to share a cup of tea or a light meal and continue to conversation.
- Facilitators and staff can circulate through the group to provide additional opportunities for storytelling and to offer support to viewers, if needed.

### **8.30pm - Close your event**

- Thank your audience and ensure that they have been provided any resources for additional support following the event/screening.

## **Q & A (120 MINUTES)**

Post-traumatic growth suggests an association between self-efficacy, connectedness and sense of agency with positive outcomes. Inviting the audience to deepen their understanding of the project provides them with the opportunity to connect with the project on their own terms.

**6pm - Introduction**

- Start with a brief description of the synopsis of the film. You may develop your own introduction to the film or use the blurb at the beginning of this guide.
- Provide an overview of what the viewers can expect throughout the screening: schedule, timeline, Q&A activity, etc.
- Provide viewers with information about what to do if they are feeling distressed during the screening/event, including the location of exits, identity and whereabouts of support staff, etc.
- Acknowledge that not everyone will want to participate in the Q&A discussion following the screening and that this is entirely optional. No one need participate, if they don't want to. Let viewers know that there will be a brief break after the film, during which they can depart before the Q&A discussion, if they prefer.

**6.10pm – Screening of Forged from Fire****7.10pm – Break**

- Invite your viewers to take a short break and to return for the Q&A activity, should they so choose.

**7.15pm - Introduce the Q&A activity**

- Introduce facilitators including names, roles, etc. Facilitators could include a panel comprised of community members involved in the project, such as filmmaker(s), people who worked on the project (e.g., blacksmiths); mental health professionals; community support workers; etc.
- Provide boundaries for Q&A discussion (e.g., time limitations, respectful language, topic limitations based on range of panel expertise/knowledge).
- Invite the audience to ask questions relating to the film.

**7.45pm - Q&A finishes**

- Facilitators gently signal that the activity is coming to a close.
- Some people may have further questions, and you may like to provide contact information so that your viewers can follow up at a later date.
- Invite your audience to share a cup of tea or a light meal and continue the conversation.

**8pm - Close your event**

- Thank your audience and ensure that your audience have been provided any resources for additional support following the event/screening.

## STORYBOOK OR GUESTBOOK

If you choose not to hold any formal activities to complement your screening but you would still like your viewers to have the opportunity to share their reflections or stories, you may wish to provide viewers an opportunity to create an entry for a storybook. The idea is to invite your viewers to write or draw their experience of the film, the fires, or stories of recovery and renewal in a format that can be collated into a community book or document.

You may also choose to invite your viewers to contribute to a guestbook that is passed around or positioned somewhere in your venue. If you have a large crowd, you might think about providing individual pages that can be completed by many people at the same time and then gathered at the end of the event and collated into one document. You may wish to appoint a custodian who will be charged with overseeing the document and can guide viewers through the process and collate the pages at the conclusion of the screening.

In addition, you may wish to provide an online storybook or guestbook wherein viewers can contribute their stories after the screening. This could be accessed via a social media platform, such as Facebook. Alternatively, entries could be submitted to a custodian who then uploads them to a website that is accessible to the community (e.g., local council website, purpose-built website).





## SIMPLE GROUNDING INTERVENTIONS

When people are distressed, engaging in activities that soothe, bring body awareness, and/or focus the mind on the present moment can be helpful. Remember to always seek permission to use grounding exercises before initiating them with anyone who is in distress. The following are some simple activities that can be useful.

### 5-4-3-2-1

Start by sitting comfortably, closing your eyes and taking a couple of deep breaths. Breath in through your nose (count to 3) and out through your mouth (count of 3).

Now open your eyes and look around you. As you continue to take long, slow breaths, name aloud (or to yourself if you are not in a position to speak) sensory stimuli from the present moment:

5 – things you can see (you can look within the room or out of the window)

4 – things you can feel (e.g., the solid chair beneath you, the fluffy carpet under your toes)

3 – things you can hear (e.g., traffic noise or birds outside, the hum of the air conditioner)

2 – things you can smell (e.g., hopefully something pleasant and nothing too bad!)

1 – thing you can taste (e.g., toothpaste, popcorn)

Take a final deep breath to end.

### DISTRACT YOURSELF

Pick a colour - How many things in different shades of that colour can you see around the room or out of the window? Still feeling stressed? Pick another colour and repeat.

Count backwards by 7, starting at 100. This isn't that easy and requires you to concentrate. This activity can also be helpful when you find it hard to sleep.

How many items in your immediate environment can you name starting with the letter A...B...C...etc?

## BREATHING FOR RELAXATION

Sit in a comfortable position with your eyes either open or closed, whichever you prefer.

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your belly.

Inhale and exhale normally and observe your hands rising and falling.

Now, on the next in-breath, concentrate on it filling your whole body, notice your belly extending to make room for your breath.

Inhale long and slow through your nose, hold for a few seconds and then exhale long and slow through your mouth feeling your belly move in as your breath moves out.

Repeat as needed.



## RESOURCES

**Emergency Services:** 000

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14

**Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800

**Better Health Channel:** [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/trauma](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/trauma)

**Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health:**  
[www.phoenixaustralia.org/recovery](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org/recovery)

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