

Information for home care workers

Working with older people affected by trauma: How can I stay safe and look after myself?

Supporting older people who have experienced trauma and adversity can affect your mental health and wellbeing. It can be hard to witness someone's distress and vulnerability. Distress can also lead to behaviours like refusing care, agitation or aggression, which can be difficult to deal with if you don't have the right supports or training.

If work is busy and you are feeling overloaded or unsupported, it can be even harder to cope with the impacts of working with someone who has experienced trauma. Workers who provide services to people in their homes can also feel isolated.

These kinds of experiences at work can build up over time until you feel you've reached your limit.

Your wellbeing, safety and health matter. Staying safe and feeling connected to your co-workers also improves the quality of care you can provide.

Tips on how you and your organisation can keep you safe and well at work

- Report any safety concerns to your manager as soon as you can. Your manager should provide you with support following the event.
- Make sure you have the right training. Doing a job you feel you have the skills for protects your wellbeing.
- Reach out to a colleague you trust if you feel upset or confused about something that has happened at work.
- Take regular breaks – take leave regularly, go for a short walk or chat to workmates, try not to take back-to-back shifts.
- Provide time for you to meet with your co-workers to connect with them and reflect on your work.
- Support your work-life balance by not asking you to work unreasonable hours or complete tasks outside of work.

Other tips to maintain your wellbeing

- Have some 'me time'.
- Make time to relax.
- Spend time doing things you enjoy with people you care about.

Look after your health

- Exercise regularly and eat a balanced diet.
- Don't consume too much alcohol or caffeine.

"It's hard being out on the road all the time. I don't see many of my colleagues so I don't get to share my concerns with them. Sometimes I don't feel safe with a new client. I feel like I'm all on my own."

Getting help and support

Sometimes, it can take a while before you realise you are not coping. Ask for help as soon as you can. You don't need to feel embarrassed or ashamed. Anyone can be affected by the things they see or hear when caring for older people.

- Talk to your manager about how you are feeling and how this is affecting you and your work.
- Talk to your doctor. They may arrange for you to see a counsellor who can help you with what is happening and how to manage it.
- Talk to family and friends. They can help you feel better.



“One of the older ladies I cared for passed away from cancer. She was a beautiful lady – always kind and polite. I was there with her towards the end – she had to fight for every breath. I can still remember the sound. Some nights I wake suddenly. I see her face and it takes me ages to go back to sleep again.”

Useful resources

- Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Nurse & Midwife Helpline 1800 667 877
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (aged care peer support program) 1800 22 22 00; aged.grief.org.au/AgedCare/Resources/Webinars/Peer_Support_Program.aspx
- Head to Health www.headtohealth.gov.au