



# FIRST RESPONSE TO TRAUMA



FIRST RESPONSE AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN TRAUMA AND TRAUMA RECOVERY







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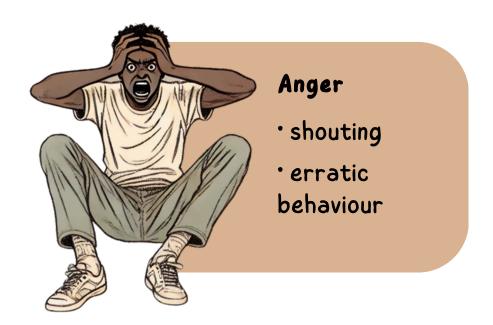
## FIRST RESPONSE & COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN TRAUMA & TRAUMA RECOVERY

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# PART ONE Providing immediate support

# The ways that people react to crises

Everybody responds to crises in a different way. For some people, a crisis can be a traumatic event, which can leave lasting harm in their lives. Starting by recognising the signs of how people react can help us respond in the most appropriate way. These emotions can express themselves in many ways, and every person experiences them differently. But here are some examples of how you may notice someone's reaction.





# Panic change in breathing trouble focussing



· avoiding talking about the crisis

Denial





## Withdrawal

- · not speaking
- body language shut off

Trauma is a response to distressing events that can significantly affect individuals and communities. Trauma impacts people differently. The effects of trauma can last for a long time, influencing how people see themselves and interact with others. However, developing coping skills and building supportive communities can help healing.

# Community responders can make an important difference in the aftermath of crisis



- ✓ Make sure you are both in a safe place to talk, or move to a place of safety
- Remain calm and reassuring and be responsive to what people need
- Provide what practical support you can, find out if people need food, shelter, or are looking for someone
- Ask people's names and use these when speaking to them
- ✓ Link people with specialist services who can provide the help that you can't
- Be honest about what you can and can't do
- Be available to listen when people are ready to talk
- Be aware of cultural and religious differences in your body language and response

# **DON'T**

- Pretend you can resolve things outside your control
- Press people to talk about what's happened or force help on people who may not want it
- Pretend you understand or say you do, as their situation and response may be very different
- Enter someone's space without asking permission, respect their privacy
- Touch or embrace people without their permission
- Use complex language when speaking or feel the need to fill silences
- Judge or question people's actions or reactions, people respond to crisis in different ways and at different speeds

# Useful responses to people in crisis



### **BODY LANGUAGE**

Mirroring someone's stance: sitting if they are sitting, leaning forwards or back to reflect their stance

Nodding to show you are listening

Remaining calm but responsive, despite the difficult things they may be telling you

Make sure your tone of voice reflects the care and respect you want to convey.



'I understand how you feel' (rather than 'I know how you feel')

'That sounds very difficult'

'I can see this is really painful for you'

'Do you want to try and tell me what's happened'

# The importance of active listening

Listening actively means listening with attention. If you can make someone feel really listened to you have already begun to provide valuable emotional support. It can make people feel valued to have someone listening to them with intent.

When they have finished speaking check you have understood them correctly



Use the same terms as the person speaking to acknowledge what they have said and show you have heard them





Be respectful at all times



Let someone talk without interrupting them



Acknowledge how difficult things must be without pretending you know what they've been through



# Be honest about what you can and can't do

### You may be able to offer:

- Support
- · Food and shelter
- · Temporary safety

· Links to security services

### You can't

- · Change what has happened
- · Know what will happen in the future
- · Be sure that everything will be alright

It's important to be honest.

Don't make promises that
you can't keep!

Look out for the different signs of trauma and try to gauge when someone cannot cope with these and will need specialist support. Untrained community responders can provide some care, but people experiencing acute shock or trauma will need to see a professional.

Flashbacks or frequent nightmares

Sensitivity to noise or to being touched

Always expecting something bad to happen

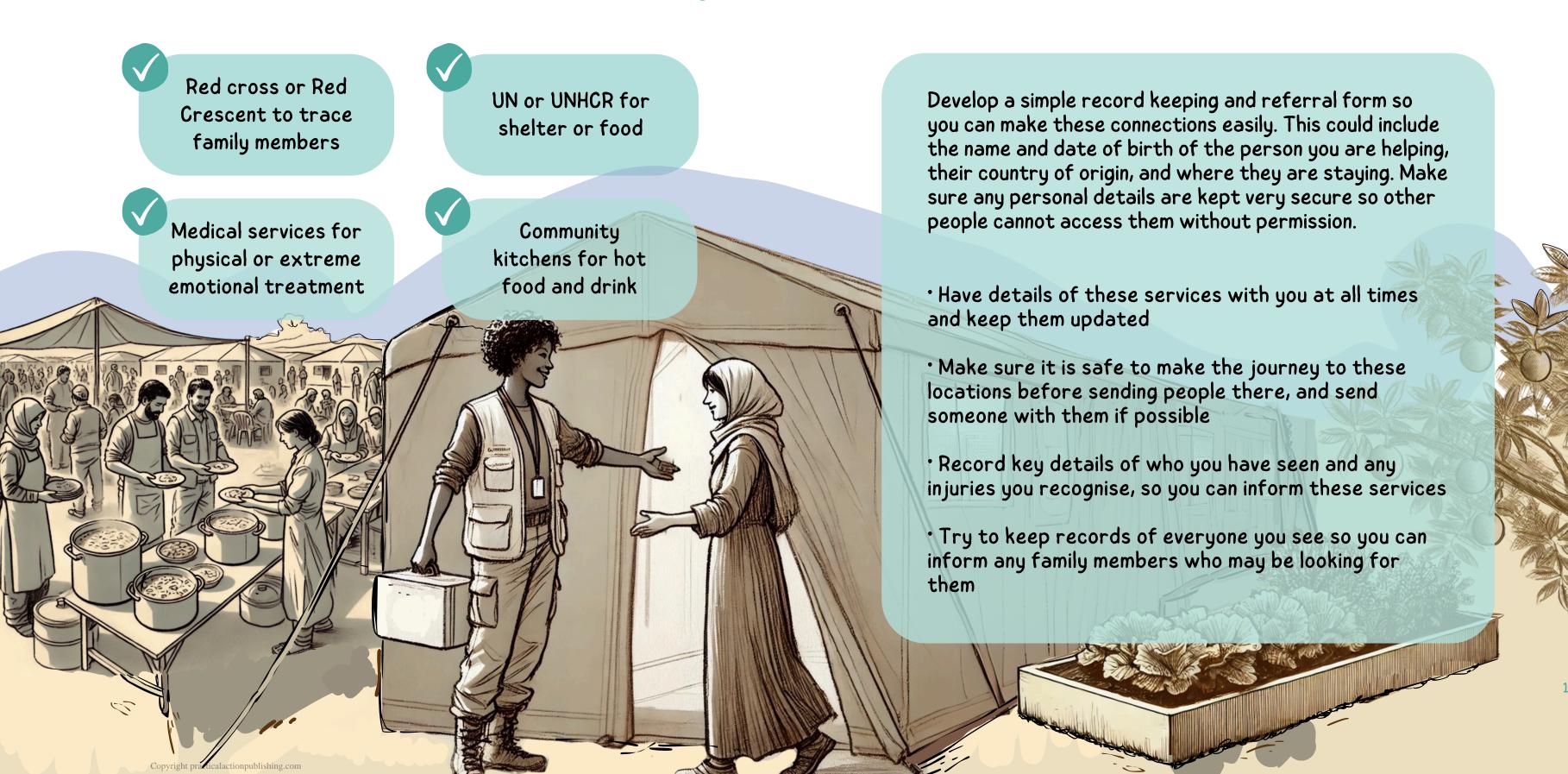
Not remembering periods of life

Feeling emotionally numb

Lack of concentration or irritability

Excessive alertness, anxiety, anger or sadness

# Connect people with other services if they are available



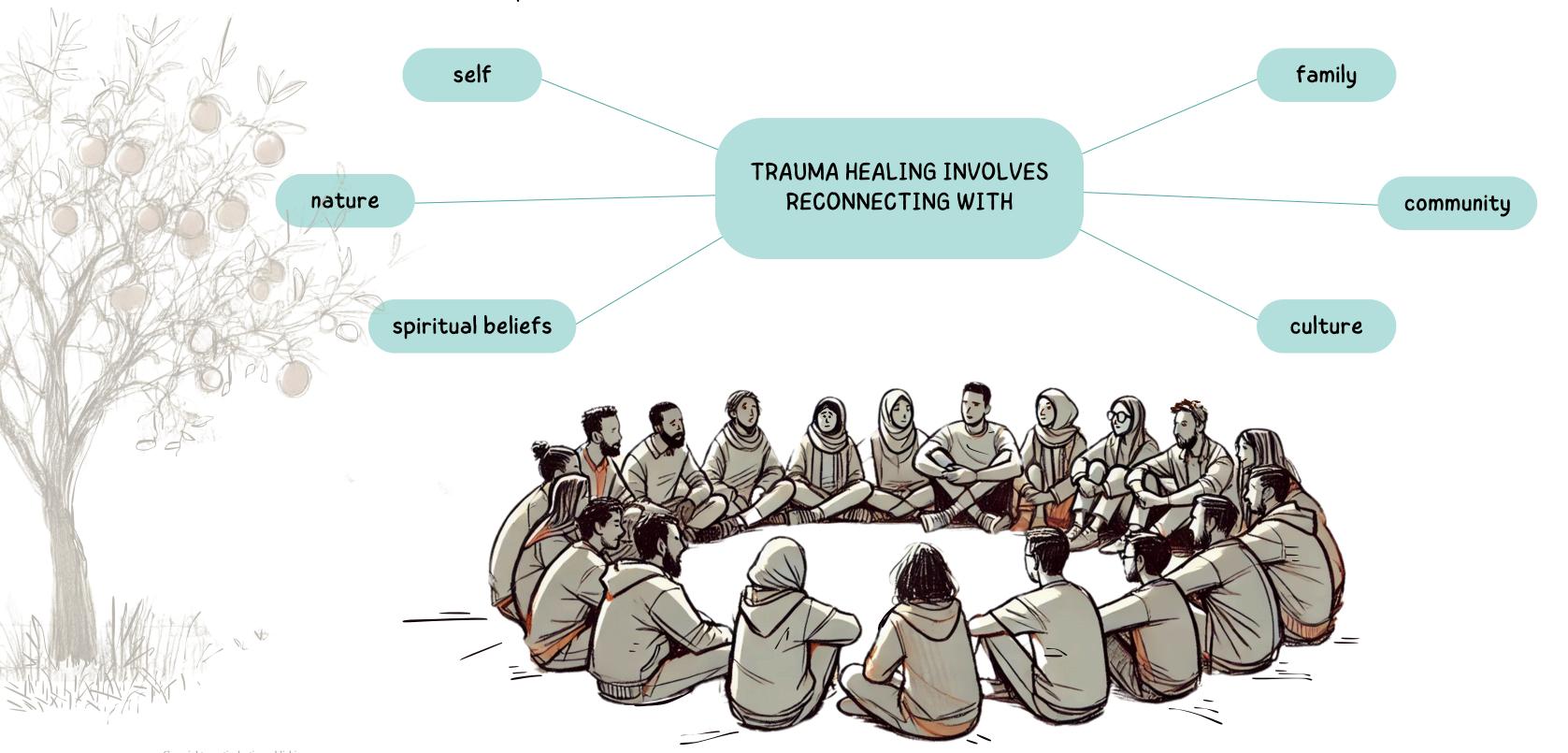


# Regenerating hope and community connection

# Creating conditions for reconnection and healing

After trauma people often feel fearful, isolated and alone, losing trust in themselves and others. Once a situation has stabilised it is important to start rebuilding personal, family and community connections. After shared trauma, shared healing is important. Finding ways to connect and share experiences with others can be an essential first step.

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# Reconnecting with self

People first need to be able to forgive themselves for surviving when others might not have. They need to reconnect to their sense of self worth. Traumatic events are powerful and can leave people feeling helpless. So where possible, enable people to do things for themselves so they can rediscover their inner agency and power.



Be available to listen to people individually if they need it

Create conditions for people to take actions for their own wellbeing

Encourage people to rest and be gentle with themselves

Teach simple exercises like breath-work that people can do themselves

### Breath and meditation

Simple meditation or breathing exercises may help in times of stress. You can guide people through a simple breathing exercise, or teach people how to do it themselves.

- Take a deep breath in. You may like to close your eyes but some people may not feel comfortable or safe to do this. That's okay!
- Hold your breath while you count slowly to four. One... two... three... four.
- 3 Slowly breathe out to the count of four.
- Hold your breath out for four seconds, then breathe in again for four seconds. Repeat!

# Art and image making can be used by individuals or groups to explore deep feelings

Organise spaces where people can paint or draw to express their feelings in a creative way. Invite individuals to talk about the images they have created. Some people may not be ready to talk, and that's okay.

Give people the opportunity to create images in groups if they would like to. Creating wall art together can also be a means to share messages of hope to the wider community as well a witness to people's strength and resilience.



# Reconnecting with family

People may need help in reconnecting with their family, especially if they have had a shared traumatic experience. Families look different, and this may be a chosen family or a traditional family. Helping a family talk together in a healthy way can be an important step in a healing process.

Being with a family in talking through difficult things that have happened can help them to raise issues they would not otherwise feel able to speak about.

When feelings are raw and difficult, providing a supportive presence and making sure everyone has the opportunity to be heard can make a significant difference.

People may need support to reconnect with their families, physically or emotionally, and to forgive and accept each other.



# Working with family members to challenge difficult beliefs

Individuals can become isolated in families by the beliefs of other members, such as attitudes to women or menstruation, attitudes toward protected groups such as LGBTQ+ people, or the reactions of spouses whose partners have been abused.



Isolation is always painful, especially after trauma. Working with all family members individually can also help them to see through their own pain and avoid blaming other family members for things that weren't their fault.

# Reconnecting with culture

Sports or cultural practices can bring communities together, taking them out of their individual pain and immersing them in a shared experience.

dance

sport

music

ceremony



# Some significant ceremonial practices have included:

- · Sharing the calabash
- Telling stories around a fire or writing down painful thoughts and burning them in a fire ritual
- · Using the gong or drum to raise positive emotions and to cast out negative ones
- · Using soap and ritual washing to wash away painful memories
- · Exchanging peace plants or sharing a pipe





# Reconnecting with spiritual beliefs

Reserve a space where people can meditate or pray

Help people to remember beliefs that have sustained them in the past

Try to ensure spiritual leaders are on hand to listen to individuals

Host a religious ceremony for the whole community that includes different beliefs and practices



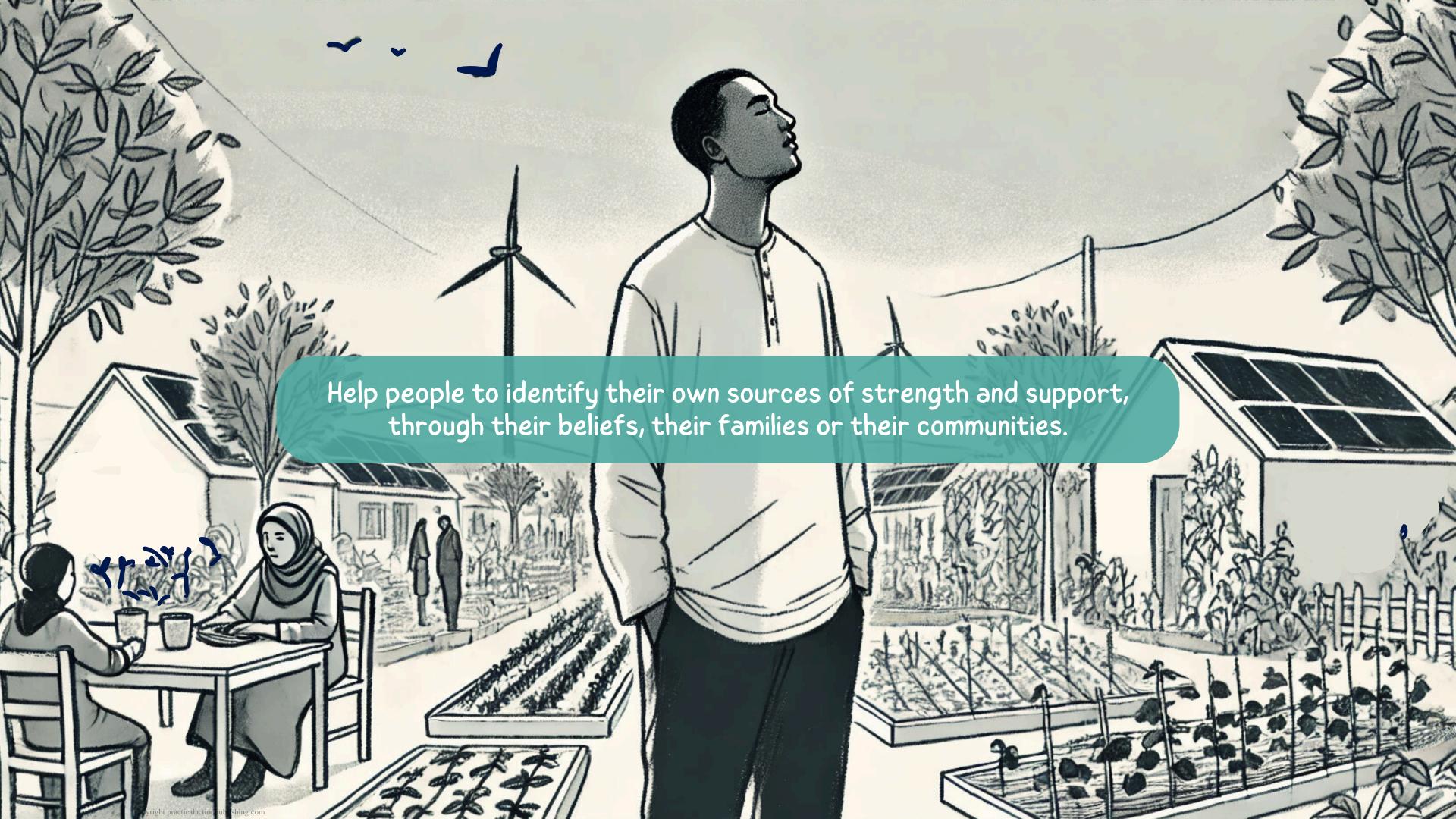
Using texts, songs and rituals to evoke an awareness of spiritual or ancestral protection

Rituals can be used to cleanse the environment or the person.

Be sensitive to different spiritual beliefs and practices within the same community, don't assume everyone will be ready to join in.

Memorials for those lost are important to recognise and accept their passing.







Re-Alliance is a global network of regenerative practitioners, aiming to advance and showcase regenerative practice across the sectors of humanitarianism and development.

This booklet is part of a series of guidelines which showcase regenerative technologies that can be used in contexts of crisis response or displacement, in order to create better community and ecological health. Find out more on the Re-Alliance website.

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TRAUMA HEALING

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