

## TEACHER NOTES:

# Preparing your classroom

### Overview

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This fact sheet, aims to provide teachers with some general information to help you prepare for lessons about Stolen Generations and includes an overview about:

- the Stolen Generations
- trauma in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context
- cultural safety in the classroom.

The Stolen Generations resource kit for teachers and students has been developed in close consultation with Stolen Generations members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous teachers and parents, and includes safe, age-appropriate activities. However, some content may cause sadness and distress to students, particularly if they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Please take this into account when preparing your lessons and consider additional classroom support for certain activities.

Knowing the backgrounds of the children in your group and identifying those who may be at risk of triggering (e.g. children currently in or with a history of being in out of home care, descendants of Stolen Generations members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, children with significant grief and loss histories) is very important. It is also important to give children the choice to opt in or out of the session. If they opt out, don't ask them to provide a reason. Just allow them to participate in another structured and meaningful activity (e.g. join another class, library time etc).

When preparing for these lessons, let parents and carers know in advance that you will be working on issues related to the Stolen Generations as part of the school curriculum and that their children may want to talk with them about what they are learning. When you start the lessons, introduce the topic sensitively and let the children know that this can be a difficult topic to discuss for many reasons. Let them know that they may have strong feelings emerge. Make sure you feel as comfortable and confident as possible leading conversations about the topic. Children will respond and resonate with your calmness and containment.

The voices of Stolen Generations survivors and their descendants are important when teaching about this history. Additional resources, including professional learning and support tools, can be found on The Healing Foundation and [Narragunnawali Reconciliation in Schools websites](#).

The Healing Foundation factsheet about [working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people](#) is a useful resource. This was developed in partnership with Professor Helen Milroy, a leading child and adolescent psychiatrist and descendant of the Paluku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia.



## Terms to know

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### The Stolen Generations

Tens of thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were forcibly removed from their families and communities between the early 1900s and the 1970s.

Stolen Generations children were removed as part of deliberate assimilation policies adopted by all Australian governments. The children were sent to live in one of more than 480 institutions across Australia or adopted by non-Indigenous families.

The children were separated from their culture, family, land and identity and many of them suffered abuse and neglect. This happened to thousands of children across many decades and the impact is still being felt across the generations today.

### Trauma

Trauma affects the way people think and act and overwhelms their ability to cope and engage. It can affect a person for many decades and in many different ways. Common symptoms include fear and anxiety, difficulty with relationships, impulsive behaviour, feeling sad and hopeless, tired and confused. Research has shown that people are not only affected by traumatic events they directly experience. Witnessing or hearing about trauma from a family or community member can also have an impact. Unresolved trauma contributes to many of the social and health problems affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Trauma in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is not just experienced individually but collectively. It is experienced between generations and across communities and has multiple impacts on relationships.

If people don't have the opportunity to heal from trauma, they may unknowingly pass it on to others through their behaviour. Their children may experience difficulties with attachment, disconnection from their extended families and culture and high levels of stress from family and community members who are dealing with the impacts of trauma. This can create developmental issues for children, who are particularly susceptible to distress at a young age. This creates a cycle of trauma, where the impact is passed from one generation to the next. In Australia, Intergenerational Trauma predominantly affects the children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations.

The first steps to better understanding the full impact of trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and supporting their aspirations for healing is really only just beginning to be understood.

### Healing

Healing enables people to address distress, overcome trauma and restore wellbeing. Ways to support healing include reconnecting with culture, strengthening identity, restoring safe and enduring relationships and supporting communities to understand the impact that their experiences have had on their behaviour and create change.

Healing occurs at a community, family and individual level. Healing continues throughout a person's lifetime and across generations.

International best practice in healing involves combining traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural healing practices with western methodologies.

For more information download [The Healing Foundation's Glossary of healing terms](#).