

Glossary of healing terms



A guide to key terms related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing

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.

COLLECTIVE HEALING

Collective healing moves away from treating people individually to a model where individuals develop their own skills and capacities to empower healing in themselves and their families and communities.

Whatever form it takes, collective healing is supported by bringing people with similar experiences together, often with their children and grandchildren, in a safe space where they can share, get to know their own story, build understanding and skills, and take positive steps towards a better future.

STOLEN GENERATIONS

The Stolen Generations refers to the 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 institutions or adopted by non-Indigenous families. They were separated from their culture, family, land and identity and many of them suffered abuse and neglect.

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. If people have not had the opportunity to heal, they may act out their pain in negative ways including physical or emotional violence, abuse or addiction.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

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.

Stolen Generations survivors might also pass on the impacts of institutionalisation, finding it difficult to know how to nurture their children because they were denied the opportunity to be nurtured themselves.

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

This refers to a feeling of being healthy on a physical, spiritual, emotional and social level. It is a state where individuals and communities are strong, proud, happy and healthy. It includes being able to adapt to daily challenges while leading a fulfilling life. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people land, family and spirituality can also be considered central to wellbeing.

RESILIENCE

Resilience is an individual or collective inner strength, developed over time, as a result or reaction to stress, sadness, dysfunction or trauma. Resilience is about experiencing and identifying adversity and learning how to cope. Coping may include developing supportive relationships, maintaining links to culture and community or visiting a support program.

TRAUMA AWARE HEALING INFORMED PRACTICE

Trauma aware healing informed practice is a strengths-based approach to healing that is based on an understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impacts of trauma.

It emphasises physical, psychological, and emotional safety for people seeking help and for the helpers.

It also creates opportunities for people affected by trauma to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

It recognises the prevalence of trauma and is sensitive to and informed by the impacts of trauma on the wellbeing of individuals and communities.

CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Cultural knowledge is an accumulation of knowledge that has been handed down from generation to generation, which might be held by particular individuals or family groups. It includes knowledge about spiritual relationships, relationships with the environment and the use of natural resources, and relationships between people, which are reflected in language, stories, social organisation, values, beliefs, and cultural laws and customs.

IDENTITY

Identity is the distinctive characteristic, which belongs to an individual, or is shared by all members of a group. It can be a sense of who you are and the community or communities you are a part of. Identity recognises that we are all unique.

KINSHIP

Kinship refers to the patterns of social relationships, the way people are organised into groups and how they are related to one another. It defines how people behave within a community and how they understand their roles and responsibilities.

SPIRITUAL HEALTH

Spiritual health is a focus on the strong spirits of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is an important part of culture. It emphasises people's relationships with each other, with land and place, and the connection between past, present and future. Over time, spiritual health has been weakened as a result of colonisation, assimilation and Stolen Generations policies.

SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-determination refers to independence—the freedom of a group of people to determine their own future. This may include defining their political status and governing themselves without influence from outside groups. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it means taking control over their own affairs.

LATERAL VIOLENCE

Lateral violence refers to harmful behaviours such as ridiculing, defaming, backstabbing, bullying or, at its extreme, physical violence between members of an oppressed group or community. It is often called internalised colonialism for this reason. It is identifiable in minority communities worldwide where the control over resources and decision-making power is almost exclusively with the dominant culture.

Please note: This is a summary of key healing terms produced by The Healing Foundation. It is intended for use by anyone interested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing, but it does not intend to be a definitive or exhaustive list. You are invited to use this glossary as a tool for your own discussions on healing.

www.healingfoundation.org.au

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that partners with communities to address the ongoing trauma caused by actions like the forced removal of children from their families. Our work helps people create a different future.