Emotional wellbeing and coping

Family and domestic violence can affect how you feel about yourself, other people and everyday life. Looking after your emotional wellbeing can be an important part of recovery and healing.

Emotional wellbeing does not mean feeling happy or positive all the time. It is about recognising your feelings, understanding what you may need and finding ways to support yourself through difficult times.

As you recover and rebuild different parts of your life, your emotional needs may also change. There is no single way to recover emotionally.

What is emotional wellbeing?

Emotional wellbeing is about how you experience, understand and respond to your feelings. It can influence your relationships, confidence, decision-making and ability to manage everyday challenges.

During recovery and healing after family and domestic violence, you may experience different emotions and notice changes in your emotional wellbeing. You might:

- Experience sadness, anger, fear, guilt, confusion or relief.
- Feel overwhelmed by everyday demands or responsibilities.
- Find it difficult to enjoy things you once enjoyed.
- Question yourself or feel less confident in your decisions.
- Feel emotionally exhausted or find it difficult to relax.
- Experience moments of hope or happiness alongside difficult feelings.



Your emotions may change from day to day, or even throughout the same day.

There is no right or wrong way to feel. Different emotions can exist alongside each other.

Understanding your emotions

Emotions can help you recognise what matters to you, how situations are affecting you and what you may need. Different emotions may be connected to your experiences and what is happening in your life.

For example:

- **Sadness** may be connected to loss, disappointment or changes in your life.
- **Anger** may arise when you have been treated unfairly or your boundaries have been disregarded.
- **Fear or worry** may be connected to uncertainty about what is happening now or what may happen next.
- **Guilt or self-doubt** may involve questioning decisions or blaming yourself for the violence you experienced.
- **Relief or hope** may come with greater freedom, support or opportunities to make your own choices.



You may experience several of these feelings at once. You might also find it difficult to identify exactly what you are feeling.

You don't have to understand or explain every emotion to start looking after your wellbeing.

INFORMATION SHEET

Emotional wellbeing and coping

Emotional wellbeing can change over time

Some days you may feel more settled, hopeful or confident. On other days, emotions may feel harder to manage.



Everyday pressures, ongoing violence or controlling behaviours, financial concerns, parenting responsibilities or uncertainty about the future may affect how you feel.

Having difficult emotions does not mean you are going backwards in your recovery.

Your emotional needs may change as your circumstances change, and what helps you at one time may be different from what helps you later.

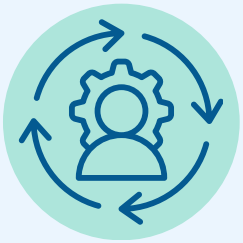
What is emotional regulation?

Emotional regulation means recognising, understanding and finding ways to respond to your emotions.

It does not mean ignoring your feelings, pushing them away or forcing yourself to remain calm.

Emotional regulation can involve:

- **Noticing** what you are feeling, without judging yourself.
- **Understanding** what may be contributing to those feelings.
- **Recognising** what you might need in that moment.
- **Responding** in ways that support your wellbeing, where possible.



Sometimes this may mean taking a break, finding a quiet space, connecting with someone you trust or allowing yourself time to experience an emotion.

You may not always be able to change how you feel or what is happening around you. Emotional regulation is not about controlling every feeling or response.

It is about developing ways to care for yourself while recognising that your feelings are valid.



INFORMATION SHEET

Emotional wellbeing and coping

Coping with difficult emotions

Coping refers to the different ways people manage emotional challenges, everyday pressures and difficult situations.

There is no single coping strategy that works for everyone. Some approaches may help you manage difficult emotions when they arise, while others may support your wellbeing over time.



Coping might involve:

- Finding moments of rest or comfort.
- Doing something familiar or enjoyable.
- Spending time outdoors or moving your body.
- Expressing feelings through talking, writing or creative activities.
- Connecting with supportive people.
- Seeking practical or professional support when needed.

You may already have ways of coping that have helped you through difficult times, including during your experiences of family and domestic violence. As your circumstances change, you may find that different strategies are helpful at different times. Exploring different approaches can help you discover what works for you now.

The ***Practical Information – Coping and Wellbeing Strategies*** resource in this content area offers some simple approaches you may wish to explore.

Being kind to yourself

Experiencing family and domestic violence can leave people questioning their decisions, blaming themselves or feeling frustrated about how they are coping.



You may find yourself thinking about what you could have done differently or expecting yourself to be further along in your recovery.

Self-compassion means responding to yourself with understanding and kindness, particularly when things feel difficult. This does not mean ignoring your experiences or pretending everything is okay. It means recognising that you deserve care and understanding.

You are not responsible for another person's choice to use violence.

Finding support for your emotional wellbeing

You do not have to manage difficult emotions or challenges on your own.

Support may come from people you trust, community connections, specialist family and domestic violence services, counselling or health professionals. Practical assistance with everyday challenges may also help reduce some of the pressures affecting your emotional wellbeing.



If emotions are becoming increasingly difficult to manage, affecting everyday life, or leaving you feeling overwhelmed, additional support may help.

You can explore the ***Support & Service Pathways*** resource in this content area for information about the types of support available.

Looking after your emotional wellbeing is not about feeling better all the time. It is about recognising what you need and finding support and strategies that work for you.

Sources: Informed by Carman et al. (2023), Williams et al. (2024), Satyen et al. (2025) and 1800RESPECT (Mental health and domestic, family and sexual violence).

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Coping and Wellbeing Strategies



1 Finding ways to support your emotional wellbeing

There are different ways to support your emotional wellbeing during recovery and healing after family and domestic violence.

Some strategies may help when emotions feel difficult or overwhelming. Others may provide comfort, support your everyday wellbeing or help you feel more connected to yourself and others.

The following approaches are options you can explore at your own pace, depending on what feels comfortable, helpful and appropriate for your circumstances.

2 When emotions feel difficult

During recovery and healing, emotions may feel particularly difficult to manage. Having a few different ways to respond may help you feel more supported during these moments.

Taking a moment

When emotions feel overwhelming, taking a short break from what you are doing may help you feel less pressured. This might mean sitting somewhere quiet, stepping outside, having a drink of water or giving yourself time before responding to a situation.

Not every situation allows you to take a break, particularly when there are ongoing safety concerns or responsibilities. Even a small moment of rest may be helpful when it is possible.

Finding comfort through your senses

Familiar sights, sounds, smells or physical sensations can sometimes provide comfort when emotions feel difficult.

You might try listening to music you enjoy, holding a warm drink, wrapping yourself in a comfortable blanket or noticing something pleasant in your surroundings.

Different sensory experiences affect people differently. Choose what feels comfortable for you, and leave aside anything that increases distress.

Connecting with someone supportive

Talking with someone you trust may help when you are experiencing difficult emotions. You may want to share how you are feeling, ask for practical help or simply spend time with someone without needing to explain anything.

Support might come from a friend, family member, community connection or professional.

If contacting someone could affect your safety or privacy, consider what feels safest in your circumstances.

3 Supporting your emotional wellbeing day to day

Looking after your emotional wellbeing can also involve small things that bring comfort, enjoyment or a sense of stability to everyday life.

You may not always have the time, energy or opportunity to focus on your own needs. Supporting your wellbeing does not have to involve making big changes or adding more responsibilities to your day.

Some approaches you might explore include:

Making time for rest

Rest can take different forms. It might mean getting some sleep, having a quieter day where possible or allowing yourself time without feeling that you need to be productive.

Moving your body in ways you enjoy

Gentle movement, walking, stretching, gardening or spending time outdoors may support your emotional wellbeing. Choose activities that feel comfortable and suit your circumstances.

Doing something you enjoy

Reading, being creative, spending time on a hobby or returning to a familiar interest may provide moments of enjoyment or connection with things that matter to you.

Creating familiar routines

Simple routines, such as having a regular morning activity, preparing a meal or setting aside time for something you enjoy, may provide a sense of familiarity and stability. Routines can be flexible and change depending on your needs.

Staying connected to what matters to you

Connections with family, friends, culture, community, spirituality or personal interests can contribute to emotional wellbeing. You may choose to reconnect with people or activities that are meaningful to you when it feels right.

4 Finding what works for you

You may already have ways of coping that have helped you through difficult experiences, including during family and domestic violence. Recognising what has helped you in the past can be a useful starting point.

As your circumstances change, you may find that different approaches are helpful at different times. You can continue with strategies that work for you and leave aside those that do not.

There may also be times when coping strategies are not enough, particularly if you are experiencing ongoing violence, uncertainty or significant pressures in everyday life. This does not mean you are doing anything wrong.

Support from trusted people, specialist family and domestic violence services, counselling or other professionals may help you manage some of these challenges.

You can explore the **What Helps Me?** reflection activity in this content area to consider the strategies and supports that are useful to you.

REFLECTION

What Helps Me?

During recovery and healing after family and domestic violence, you may notice that different things affect your emotional wellbeing.

You may already have ways of coping that have helped you through difficult times. This reflection offers an opportunity to think about what helps you, what you might need and what you may want to explore.

You can consider whichever questions feel useful. There are no right or wrong answers, and you do not need to complete every question.

1 Noticing how I feel



What do I notice about myself when emotions become difficult or overwhelming?

For example, changes in my thoughts, feelings, energy or ability to concentrate.

2 What has helped me?



What have I found helpful when I've experienced difficult emotions in the past?

This might include something I do, somewhere I go or someone I connect with.

3 What supports my everyday wellbeing?



What activities, people, places or connections help me feel comfortable, supported or more like myself?

4 What might I need right now?



Is there something that could make things a little easier for me at the moment?

This might be rest, practical help, connection, time for myself or additional support.

5 Something I might like to explore



Is there a strategy or activity I would like to try, or something that has helped before that I would like to return to?



A reminder

What helps you may change over time. You can return to this reflection whenever it feels useful, and you do not need to have all the answers.

ACTIVITY SHEET

Finding a Kinder Way to Speak to Myself

Recognising self-criticism and what I need

After experiencing family and domestic violence, you may find yourself questioning your decisions, blaming yourself or feeling frustrated with how you have been coping.

Sometimes, we speak to ourselves more critically than we would to someone else.

This activity offers an opportunity to notice self-critical thoughts and explore how you might respond to yourself with greater kindness and understanding.

You can choose which questions to explore, leave parts blank or stop at any time. There are no right or wrong answers.

1 Recognising when I am critical of myself

Is there something I sometimes criticise myself about?

This might relate to a decision, how I am feeling or how I have been coping.

How do I feel when I speak to myself this way?

2 Understanding what I might need

When you notice self-critical thoughts, it may help to consider what you need in that moment rather than focusing on what you believe you have done wrong.

What might I need when I am feeling critical of myself?

For example, reassurance, understanding, rest, support or time to work through my feelings.

ACTIVITY SHEET

Responding to myself with kindness

3 What would I say to a friend?

Imagine someone you care about was experiencing something difficult and being critical of themselves.

Think about how you might respond if you wanted them to feel understood, supported and cared for.

What might I say to someone I care about who was feeling this way?

4 Finding a kinder way to speak to myself

Sometimes it's easier to offer understanding and compassion to others than to ourselves.

Being kind to yourself does not mean ignoring difficult experiences or pretending everything is okay. It means recognising that you deserve care and understanding, including when things feel difficult.

Is there something I could say to myself with the same kindness I would offer someone I care about?

Some examples might include:

- I am doing the best I can with what I am managing right now.
- I can take things one step at a time.
- I deserve kindness and understanding.
- I do not have to have everything worked out.

A reminder

You are not responsible for another person's choice to use violence.

You may find it difficult to speak kindly to yourself at times, particularly if you have experienced blame, criticism or controlling behaviours.

You do not need to change how you feel or think straight away. This activity is simply an opportunity to explore a different way of responding to yourself.

Feelings Wheel

During recovery and healing after family and domestic violence, emotions can sometimes feel difficult to recognise or put into words.

The Feelings Wheel can help you identify and name what you are feeling. It includes six broad emotional categories, with more specific words to help you explore your feelings.

You may experience several emotions at once, and your feelings may change over time.



1. Start with the centre

Look at the six main feelings. Is there one that feels close to what you are experiencing?

2. Explore the outer sections

Follow that section outwards to find words that might describe your feelings more specifically.

3. Notice what fits for you

You might identify more than one feeling, or none of the words may feel quite right. That's okay.

4. Consider what might help

Recognising how you feel may help you understand what you need, such as rest, connection, reassurance, practical support or something else.

A reminder

There are no right or wrong feelings. You do not need to change or act on an emotion simply because you have noticed it. The Feelings Wheel is a tool for understanding your emotions, not judging them.

Finding Support for Your Emotional Wellbeing

Recovery and healing after family and domestic violence can affect your emotional wellbeing in different ways. At times, you may find that additional support could be helpful.

There are different types of support available, and what feels right for you may change over time. You can choose whether, when and how you seek support.

1 When might additional support be helpful?

You may want to consider additional support if you are:



- Finding emotions increasingly difficult to manage or feeling overwhelmed.
- Experiencing ongoing worry, sadness, fear or other emotions that are affecting your wellbeing.
- Finding it difficult to sleep, concentrate or manage everyday activities.
- Feeling isolated or finding it difficult to connect with others.
- Finding that your usual ways of coping are not providing the support you need.

You can also seek support simply because you want someone to talk to or to explore ways to support your emotional wellbeing.

2 Types of support that may help

Specialist family and domestic violence support

Specialist services understand how experiences of violence, coercive control and abuse can affect emotional wellbeing. They may offer counselling, recovery-focused support and assistance connecting with other services.

Practical support

Housing, financial pressures, parenting responsibilities, legal matters and other everyday challenges can affect emotional wellbeing. Getting assistance with these concerns may help reduce some of the pressures you are experiencing.

Health and mental health support

A general practitioner, counsellor, psychologist or other qualified health professional may be able to help you explore emotional or mental health concerns and discuss options for additional support.

When seeking counselling or psychological support, it can be helpful to find someone who understands family and domestic violence and its impacts.

Connection and community

Support may also come from trusted family or friends, community groups, cultural connections, peer support or activities that help you feel connected and supported.

3 Finding support that feels right for you



You can ask questions about a service before deciding whether to use it.

For example:

- What type of support do you provide?
- Do you have experience supporting people affected by family and domestic violence?
- Can I choose what I feel comfortable discussing?
- Is support available by telephone or online if I live in a regional or remote area?

Finding the right support may take time, and your needs may change during recovery.



Looking for support or need help now?

For DVassist contact details, specialist family and domestic violence services, crisis and immediate safety options, and other key services, visit the Support and Safety section on the Recovery and Healing Toolkit home page.