

TOOLKIT:

# Conducting Healing Circles and Support Circles for Communities amidst Global Crisis in Gaza



With delivery partners



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We acknowledge and pay respects to the Traditional Custodians, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, of the lands on which we gather, work, and reside, acknowledging the wisdom, resilience, and heritage of Indigenous communities globally. As we present this toolkit, our commitment to a collaborative and inclusive approach is grounded in acknowledgment, respect, and solidarity with Indigenous peoples all across the world, including the Palestinian people.

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## Overview

### Supporting Schools & Communities During Gaza crisis and Genocide

Recognizing the unique challenges faced by communities emotionally impacted by the global situation in Gaza, this resource has been developed to guide community response in the hopes to mitigate the long term impact of witnessing the atrocities unfold. The aim is to support in the conducting of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) circles. This toolkit addresses the unique psychological and spiritual needs of communities during times of crisis.

### Overview

In the aftermath of a distressing event, our foremost objective is to swiftly assist individuals in coping and restoring them to pre-critical incident levels of functioning. This is achieved through targeted interventions, including counselling,

psycho-education, outreach, and therapeutic group programs. Our overarching aim is to prevent enduring psychological consequences such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or anxiety. Particularly in the case of children, our focus extends to minimizing disruptions to their normal growth and development. Our support reaches across a diverse spectrum, encompassing children, adolescents, families, the elderly, and entire communities.

### How to use this resource

- Self-guided Professional Learning: online video up-skill
- 7 steps when conducting support circles
- Scripts and Considerations
- Joining our Community of Practise network
- Further supports

## Introduction to Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

### Background Information - Timing and Purpose of the Model

The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) model is ideally employed within the initial 24-72 hours following a traumatic incident, with optimal effectiveness observed around one week post-incident. However, it's crucial to note that the benefits of debriefing persist even if implemented beyond this timeframe. This model serves as a powerful tool not only for immediate intervention but also for long-term impact.

CISD is strategically designed to clear emotional wounds, offering a proactive approach to prevent the later development of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The emphasis is on promoting wellness rather than focusing solely on pathology. Unlike traditional treatment approaches, victims engaging in CISD find solace through opportunities to vent, active listening, psycho-education, and emotional support. As highlighted by Weaver (2002), this model uniquely addresses the psychological aftermath of traumatic experiences, fostering a sense of resilience and well-being in individuals who have faced distressing events.

### Collective Resilience: A Communal Approach

Models of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing find greater success in cultures that embrace collectivism, wherein coping strategies like communal mastery play a pivotal role. Communal mastery reframes challenges not as personal threats but as collective challenges, emphasizing the strength of the community. This approach acknowledges that individuals need not solely rely on personal resources to navigate trauma; instead, they can access the robust support of the community. In contrast, individualistic resiliency centres on self-mastery, where individuals perceive themselves as independently capable of coping with challenges. Adopting a communal mastery approach not only promotes greater social support but also fosters a culture of reduced aggression and increased concern for others during times of crisis.

In this toolkit, we embrace the transformative power of Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) as an underpinning to the 'Healing Circles' and 'Support Circles' suggested below.

## General Considerations for facilitating Healing Circles (In-person)

- **Intention and Purpose:** Defining the intention and goals of the group is critical in guiding the structure and layout.
- **Professional Facilitation:** Utilize the expertise of a mental health professional to facilitate the group, ensuring a skilled and empathetic approach.
- **Professional Competence:** If you are not a qualified mental health professional (MHP) then its highly recommended you co- facilitate with someone who is to ensure group's safety. MHP's can provide appropriate support and intervention if participants become overwhelmed or require individualised attention.
- **Co-Facilitation:** Facilitating the group with another person offers the safest experience for group members. The load is lighter and the learning is deeper. Co-facilitating also provides a more enriching and fulfilling experience.
- **Disclaimers:** To establish group safety, communicate to participants that group debriefing session is not a personal therapy and should not be used as a substitute for therapy.
- **Group Agreements:** Participants should collectively and openly discuss what is required in order to feel safe within the group. Include things such as confidentiality, empathy, respectful of differences, what to do when feeling overwhelmed.
- **Duty of Care:** Participants should feel supported knowing facilitators will be available afterwards to debrief in need be; what signs to look out for if further support required; and be provided with a directory of where to go for further support.
- **Optimal Group Size:** Conduct debriefing sessions in small groups or class-size settings, ensuring an intimate and conducive environment for effective communication (15-18 participants maximum).
- **Appropriate Duration:** Keep the debriefing sessions to a duration of 1-2 hours, recognizing the more participants the more time required.

## General Considerations for facilitating Healing Circles (Online)

- **Nature of Online Groups:** Due to the nature of online groups, further precautions need to be taken to ensure group safety and inclusivity.
- **Group Understandings:** Clear group understandings need to be defined early in the sessions. Include things like cameras need to be switched on and microphones on mute (unless wanting to contribute) and taking turns when discussing (by raising hand emoji).
- **Utilize Breakout Rooms:** Breakout rooms offer an opportunity for smaller discussions to take place amongst participants away from the larger group. However clear instructions on the purpose of the breakout rooms are necessary.

## Considerations for Healing Circles with Children and Young People

- **Inform Parents:** Initiate the process by sending a letter of information home to parents, ensuring transparency about the debriefing process.
- **Gain Parental Consent:** Obtain consent from parents before conducting the debriefing, respecting their involvement in decisions related to their child's well-being.

- **Inform Teachers:** Clearly explain the debriefing process to teachers, establishing a collaborative and informed approach to support the students.
- **Optimal Group Size:** Conduct debriefing sessions in small groups or class-size settings, ensuring an intimate and conducive environment for effective communication (15-20 participants maximum).
- **Appropriate Duration:** Keep the debriefing sessions to a duration of 1-2 hours, recognizing the attention span and emotional capacity of children and young people.
- **Professional Facilitation:** Utilize the expertise of a community or school counsellor to facilitate the debriefing, ensuring a skilled and empathetic approach.
- **Limited Presence of Family Members:** While school staff can be present to provide additional support, limit the presence of family members during the debriefing to maintain a focused and secure environment for the children and young people involved.

## Practical Guide: Conducting Healing and Support Circles

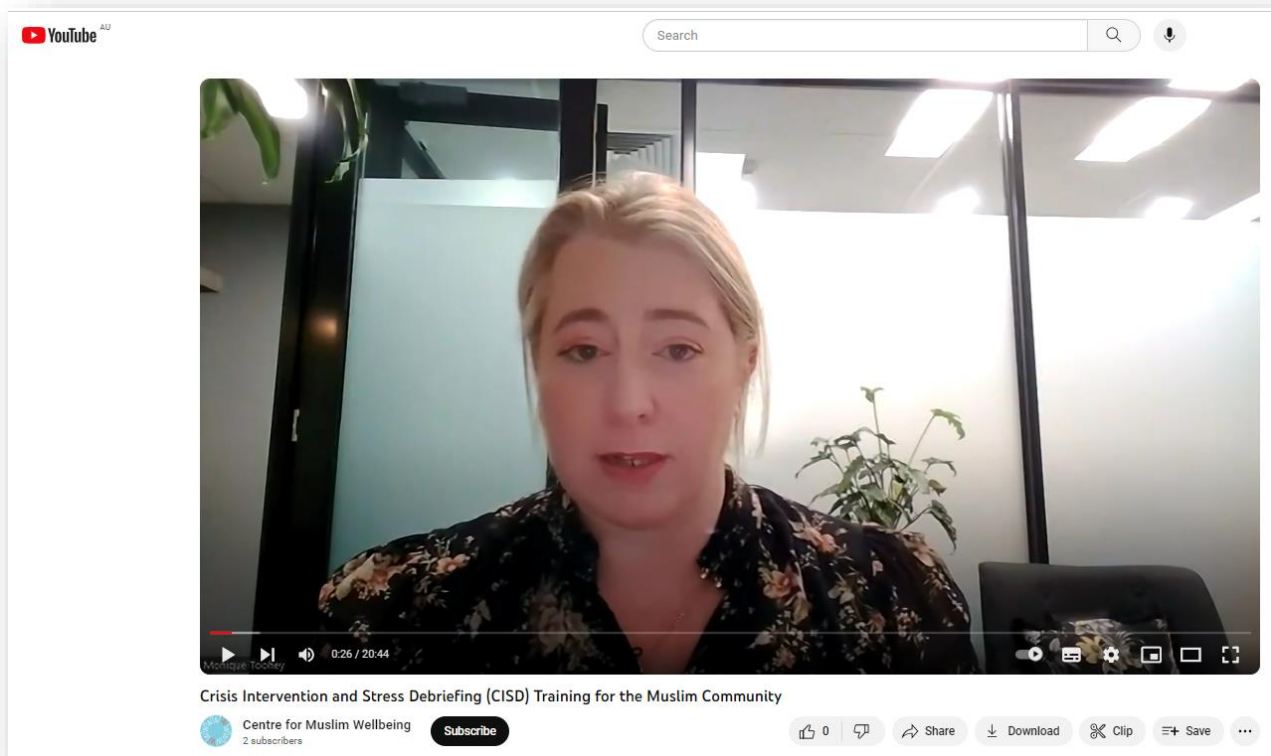


### i. Video upskill + Launch

**Upskill:** Self-guided Professional Learning: online video upskill (22 min)

Equip yourself with the theory and skills of Crisis Intervention and Stress Debriefing (CISD) Training by watching this online professional learning designed specifically

for the Muslim community. The content provides individuals with crucial skills to offer effective support and guidance to community members during challenging times, nurturing resilience and overall well-being. The [video](#) is facilitated by Consultant Psychologist Monique Toohey of Nasihah Consulting Group.





**Launch: Online Toolkit Launch (72 min)**

This updated toolkit and guide will serve to equip professionals and workers to hold safe emotional spaces by utilising critical incident stress debriefing when supporting their school student, staff and parent community. An online toolkit launch on "Conducting Healing Circles & Support Circles for Gaza" tailored specifically for individuals working in mental health settings across communities, schools and workplaces. The [webinar](#) was facilitated by Ola El-Hassan (Social Worker), Basmah Kahil (Psychologist), Dr Yaser Al Nawashi (Mental Health Occupational Therapist), Ziyad Serhan (Educator and Consultant).

The screenshot shows a YouTube video player with the following content:

- Header:** YouTube logo, search bar, and microphone icon.
- Thumbnail:** A hallway with a flag on the left and a QR code in the center. Text on the thumbnail includes "100000 Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for School Communities" and "Healing Circles - Conducting Critical Incident Stress management circles in Schools amidst Global Crisis in Gaza".
- Main Content:**
  - Title:** Toolkit Launch: Conducting Healing Circles & Support Circles in Communities amidst Global Crisis
  - Subtitle:** Webinar | Saturday 13th January, 9.30 - 11.00am AEST | Free Online
  - Description:** Join us as we launch our toolkit on conducting healing circles and support circles for individuals and communities impacted by the global crisis in Gaza. We have invited experienced facilitators who specialize in trauma and crisis response to share their expertise and your ability to practically conduct healing circles and manage stress and trauma responses. Suitable for mental health professionals, counsellors, mental health first aiders, community and support workers.
  - QR Code:** A QR code with the text "SCAN ME" above it and "Scan to register" below it.
  - Speakers:**
    - Dr Yaser Al Nawashi, Mental Health Occupational Therapist
    - Basmah Kahil, Psychologist
    - Ziyad Serhan, Educator & Project Coordinator
    - Ola El-Hassan, Social Worker
- Video Player:** Shows a video of a hallway with a flag. The progress bar is at 0:20 / 1:12:15.
- Right Side:** A vertical stack of video thumbnails for participants: Yasser Muhammad, Ola El-Hassan, Basmah Kahil, Fiona V, and Amanda.
- Bottom:** Video title "Toolkit Launch 'Conducting Healing Circles & Support Circles in Communities amidst Global Crisis'", channel name "Shifa Project" (11 subscribers), and interaction buttons (Like, Comment, Share, Download, Clip, Save).

## ii. Conducting your Support Circles:

### Suggestion 1

#### Overview

The seven steps and phases guide the process, beginning with establishing a safe space for participants to share their experiences.

#### Phase 1: Introduction

Debriefing rules are explained, and participants and their roles in the crisis are identified

#### Phase 2: Fact Phase

Details of the event are given, and questions addressed.

#### Phase 3. Thought Phase

Participants are asked to share their thoughts and what they were thinking

#### Phase 4. Reaction Phase

Participants identify the most difficult part of the event for them and share their emotional responses

#### Phase 5. Symptom Phase

Evidence of distress and the effects of the incident are explored

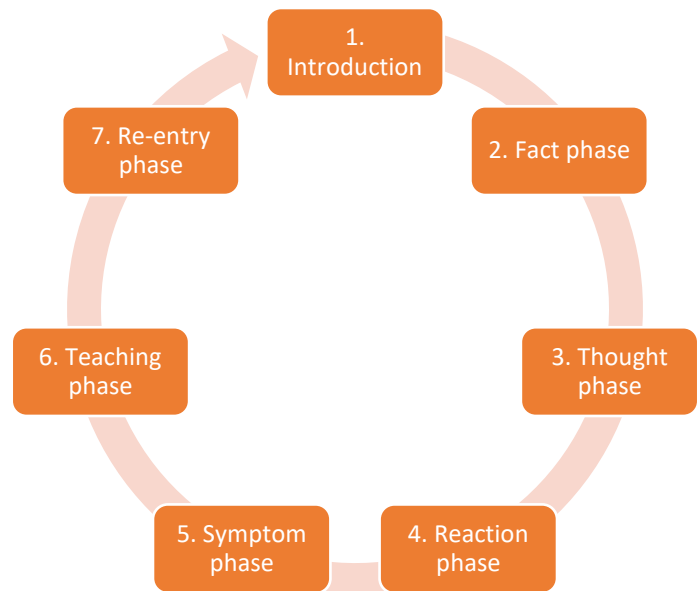
#### Phase 6. Teaching Phase

Trauma and stress information is shared, stress management techniques are introduced, finding meaning in the event

#### Phase 7. Re-Entry Phase

Summarizing period, addressing additional questions, and preparing for the future

Refer to page 13-15 in this toolkit for a more detailed and practical hand out, including suggested scripts, when conducting your support circle.



## Suggestion 2

### 1. Define the purpose and intention:

Clearly establish the purpose and intention of the healing circle. Whether it is for physical, emotional, or spiritual healing. Ensure participants are aligned and understand the objective.

**2. Create a safe and non-judgmental space:** Encourage open sharing, active listening, and respect for each person's unique experience, whilst emphasising that the circle is a non-judgmental space.

**3. Choose a suitable location:** Select a comfortable and tranquil space for the healing circle. Consider factors such as lighting, seating arrangements, and ambiance. Nature settings often work well for fostering a peaceful atmosphere

**4. Begin with an opening ceremony:** Commence the healing circle with an opening ceremony or ritual. This could include saying a prayer or dua, Quran recitation, lighting a candle, or bakhoora (incense), to set the intention and aid in creating a sacred space.

**5. Establish guidelines for sharing:** Set clear guidelines for sharing within the circle. Encourage active listening and request that participants speak from their own experiences and to refrain from interrupting or offering unsolicited advice. **Be mindful the group doesn't turn into a counselling session. Keep a watch on this and gently lead the participants back to the intended purpose of the group.**

**6. Provide a closing ceremony/or ritual:** End the healing circle with a closing ceremony or ritual that brings the collective energy back together. This could include gratitude or positive affirmation

cards, group meditation, reflect on ways we hold onto hope in times of difficulty or prayer and dua etc

**7. Offer Services and Support Counselling** for participants who express deeper emotional challenges that require further professional support and intervention. **Remind participants the circle is not a substitute for professional therapeutic support and intervention.**

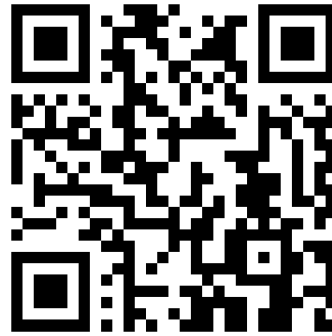
**8. Post Session Debriefing:** Setting up post-session debriefs for facilitators provide support, perspective, and opportunities for growth. They allow for reflection on facilitation skills, effectiveness of the circle, and ensure the emotional well-being as a facilitator. It can be done with the co-facilitator and/or a mental health professional.

**Disclaimer. These guidelines are not absolute and can be adapted to best suit the facilitator's expertise/experience, and unique needs and dynamics of the community's healing circle.**



### Request a facilitator to conduct a support circle for your community

Should you find it challenging to personally lead a support circle for your community, consider requesting a facilitator. Engaging a skilled facilitator can provide valuable assistance in conducting a support circle tailored to the unique needs of your community. Scan the QR code (right) or fill out the form [here](#)



### iii. Join our online Community of Practise

We invite everyone who has accessed this resource to join our Shifa Project Community platform, specifically designed for individuals who have not only utilized this toolkit but also intend to lead and facilitate support groups. The online community serves as a dynamic space for support, networking, and connection. As well, hosting regular reflective group practise sessions to support your wellbeing. By joining, you'll gain valuable insights, share experiences, and foster meaningful connections with like-minded educators and practitioners dedicated to the well-being of our community.

Join the group by scanning the QR code (left) or by clicking [here](#).

## Additional Resources

### Outline & Script for Running a Circle

Phase	Objective	Prompts and suggested script	Notes
<b>1. Introduction</b>	Debriefing rules are explained, and participants and their roles in the crisis are identified	<i>“Thank you for joining our debriefing circle today. Hopefully everyone will have some time to respond to the questions I will pose. Today there will be a lot of listening to each other. Please be supportive of other people’s sharing. You do not need to share. You can just listen. If you feel emotional during the session, there are boxes of tissues in the room. You can also leave the room and come back into the circle if you need to”</i>	Communicate that this is a structured process to explore how you have been impacted by the incident/ crisis.
<b>2. Fact Phase</b>	Details of the event are given and questions addressed.	<i>“What happened?”</i>	Try to obtain as many facts as you can prior to starting the debrief. This is the information you present to the group. Do not use your participants to share information unless it comes out organically as they’re sharing their thoughts or feelings in the next two phases.
<b>3. Thought Phase</b>	Participants are asked to share their thoughts and what they were thinking	<i>“Would anyone like to share their thoughts about the incident, or what they have been thinking?”</i> <i>“What are some of the things that you thought to yourself after the event?”</i>	Don’t single out anyone to contribute. Do give examples and encourage people to share thoughts.
<b>4. Reaction Phase</b>	Participants identify the most difficult part of the event for them and share their emotional responses	<i>“What has been the most difficult part of this incident for you?”</i> (insert roles of participants, E.g. teachers, students, young people)?	Examples could be: When I heard about the incident/ crisis... I was shocked, and saddened. I reacted, wondering how the victims were coping/surviving.

<b>5. Symptom Phase</b>	Evidence of distress and the effects of the incident are explored	<i>“How do you think people/some of us may be responding to the effects of the incident?”</i>	Go through common symptoms of grief, loss, and trauma. The purpose is to normalize emotions and somatic reactions to the trauma. Be mindful of the developmental stage of participants (E.g., reactions in children might be different to reactions in adults) Explore vicarious trauma for participants not directly exposed or impacted.
<b>6. Teaching Phase</b>	Trauma and stress information is shared, stress management techniques are introduced, finding meaning in the event	<i>“What strategies have you been using to cope with this incident?”</i> <i>“What strategies have you employed in your classroom with other students to deal with this situation?”</i> <i>“What has been the observation of (students/ teacher/ community members) behaviour so far?”</i> <i>“What strategies have been used and suggested with them so far?”</i>	You might also cover what can be done to manage wellbeing for individuals directly and vicariously affected. Speak about referrals for community members to get more support, E.g., counselling services.
<b>7. Re-entry Phase</b>	Summarizing period, addressing additional questions, and preparing for the future	<i>“What can the organisation do to show support affected community members right now?”</i> <i>“How can we support families directly impacted by the crisis?”</i>	Sharing examples of what has been done so far. E.g., Attending protests, speaking about feelings with friends, activism, gardening, supporting charity groups, sending flowers, offering Juma prayer especially for XX. You can ask the group for the group to share ideas.

## Vocabulary list for Sensation

**TABLE 10.1. Vocabulary for Sensation**

achy	clenched	faint	itchy	puffy	tense
airy	congested	flaccid	jerky	quaking	thick
bloated	constricted	fluid	jumbly	quivery	tight
blocked	cool	flushed	knotted	radiation	tight skin
breathless	cold	flutter	light	sharp	tingly
bubbly	damp	fluttery	moist	shivery	tremble
burning	dense	fuzzy	nauseous	shudder	twitchy
buzzy	dizzy	goose-bumps	numb	sore	vibration
chills	dull	heavy	paralyzed	stiff	warm
churn	electric	hollow	pins and needles	suffocating	weak
clammy	energized	hot	prickly	sweaty	wobbly

Adapted from Ogden (1997, 1998). Reproduced with permission.

## Vocabulary list for Emotion

**TABLE 10.2. Vocabulary for Emotion**

afraid	dejected	fearful	humble	mortified	speechless
alarmed	delighted	frightened	indignant	nervous	spiteful
amazed	depressed	furious	infatuated	outraged	startled
angry	despairing	glad	infuriated	panicky	stressed
annoyed	devastated	gleeful	intimidated	passionate	stunned
anxious	disappointed	grateful	irate	pitiful	stupefied
ashamed	disgraced	grieved	irritated	remorseful	terrified
bitter	disgusted	grim	joyful	revolted	threatened
cheerful	distressed	happy	joyful	sad	thrilled
compassionate	downhearted	hateful	jubilant	satisfied	timid
complacent	embarrassed	helpless	loathing	scornful	uneasy
confused	empathic	hopeless	lonely	shocked	unhappy
contrary	enraged	horrified	loving	sickened	vindictive
crabby	enthralled	hostile	miserable	somber	wonderful
crestfallen	exhilarated	humiliated	morose	sorrowful	worried

co-active.  
Powerful Questions

Powerful questions are provocative queries that put a halt to evasion and confusion. By asking the powerful question, the coach invites the client to clarity, action, and discovery at a whole new level. As you can see from the following examples, these generally are open-ended questions that create greater possibility for expanded learning and fresh perspective.

**Anticipation**

- What is possible?
- What if it works out exactly as you want it to?
- What is the dream?
- What is exciting to you about this?
- What is the urge? What does your intuition tell you?

**Assessment**

- What do you make of it?
- What do you think is best?
- How does it look to you?
- How do you feel about it?
- What resonates for you?

**Clarification**

- What do you mean?
- What does it feel like?
- What is the part that is not yet clear?
- Can you say more?
- What do you want?

**Elaboration**

- Can you tell me more?
- What else?
- What other ideas/thoughts/feelings do you have about it?

**Evaluation**

- What is the opportunity here?
- What is the challenge?
- How does this fit with your plans/way of life/values?
- What do you think that means?
- What is your assessment?

**Example**

- What is an example?
- For instance?
- Like what?
- Such as?
- What would it look like?

**Exploration**

- What is here that you want to explore?
- What part of the situation have you not yet explored?
- What other angles can you think of?
- What is just one more possibility?
- What are your other options?

**For Instance**

- If you could do it over again, what would you do differently?
- If it had been you, what would you have done?
- How else could a person handle this?
- If you could do anything you wanted, what would you do?

**Fun as Perspective**

- What does fun mean to you?
- What was humorous about the situation?
- How can you make this more fun?
- How do you want it to be?
- If you were to teach people how to have fun, what would you say?

**History**

- What caused it?
- What led up to it?
- What have you tried so far?
- What do you make of it all?

continued >>



## Additional resources

- Mental Health & Community Support Directory: services and organisations offering support for people experiencing distress or hardship because of local and international events that affect our lives, loved ones and communities  
[www.supportdirectory.au](http://www.supportdirectory.au)
- Support for people during times of international conflict [toolkit](#)
- Supporting children, young people and families during an international crisis [booklet](#)
- [Be You Beyond Self-Care Educator Wellbeing Guide](#): Be You guide goes beyond self-care strategies, supporting leaders and Action Teams to create environments where all educators can thrive.
- [APA Trauma fact sheets](#): coping with the trauma of war in the Middle East
- [Red Cross Psychological First Aid e-booklet](#): is an approach to helping people affected by an emergency, disaster or traumatic event. It includes basic principles of support to.
- [Facilitator's Handbook: Supporting wellbeing and resilience in children before, during and after a natural disaster](#)
- [Webinar- Be You In Focus: Supporting recovery after trauma](#)
- [Free natural disaster resources – American School Counsellor Association](#)

## Further support

- Mindwise Health and Wellbeing (Free Psychological Counselling including Telehealth services) | Phone: (02) 8733 3169 // 0477 118 184
- Smiling Minds – NZF | Phone: 1300 663 729
- Hayat line - Mission of Hope | Phone: 1300 993 398
- Centre for Muslim Wellbeing Navigator | Phone: 0472 668 010
- Transcultural Mental Health Line | Phone: 1800 648 911

## Acknowledgements



Centre for  
Muslim  
Wellbeing



NASIHAH  
CONSULTING

We acknowledge the Centre for Muslim Wellbeing and Consultant Psychologist Monique Toohey of Nasihah Consulting Group. With profound gratitude, we acknowledge the invaluable insights and expertise contributed by Monique Toohey, whose guidance has been instrumental in shaping this resource.

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- Ola Elhassan
- Basmah Kahil
- Monique Toohey



Co-authored in partnership with EducAid Australia, this resource aims to provide comprehensive support for the psychological and spiritual well-being of individuals and communities. Their dedication to education and well-being has greatly enriched the content and impact of this toolkit.



We acknowledge the access and use of artificial intelligence technology in the assistance of creating this toolkit which enhanced the efficiency and provided valuable insights and guidance.

**Disclaimer:** These suggestions are not exhaustive and can be expanded upon. This is an evolving document which will continue to be updated and improved. Email [shifaproject1@gmail.com](mailto:shifaproject1@gmail.com) with any suggestions and feedback. They serve as a starting point to support our community during these challenging times. We acknowledge the potential for inaccuracies and imperfections in the guidance provided and humbly request understanding and forgiveness from our community for any errors or omissions. We are committed to serving with sincerity and remain open to feedback and improvement God-willing.