

COMMUNITY TRAUMA AND THE IMPACT ON PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

When a distressing event or series of events occur in a shared community space, it can have a wide-reaching impact, even on those not directly affected. Your community has and is continuing to experience the shockwaves of traumatic events, and many of you will no doubt have been left with unanswered questions, troubling thoughts and strong emotions.

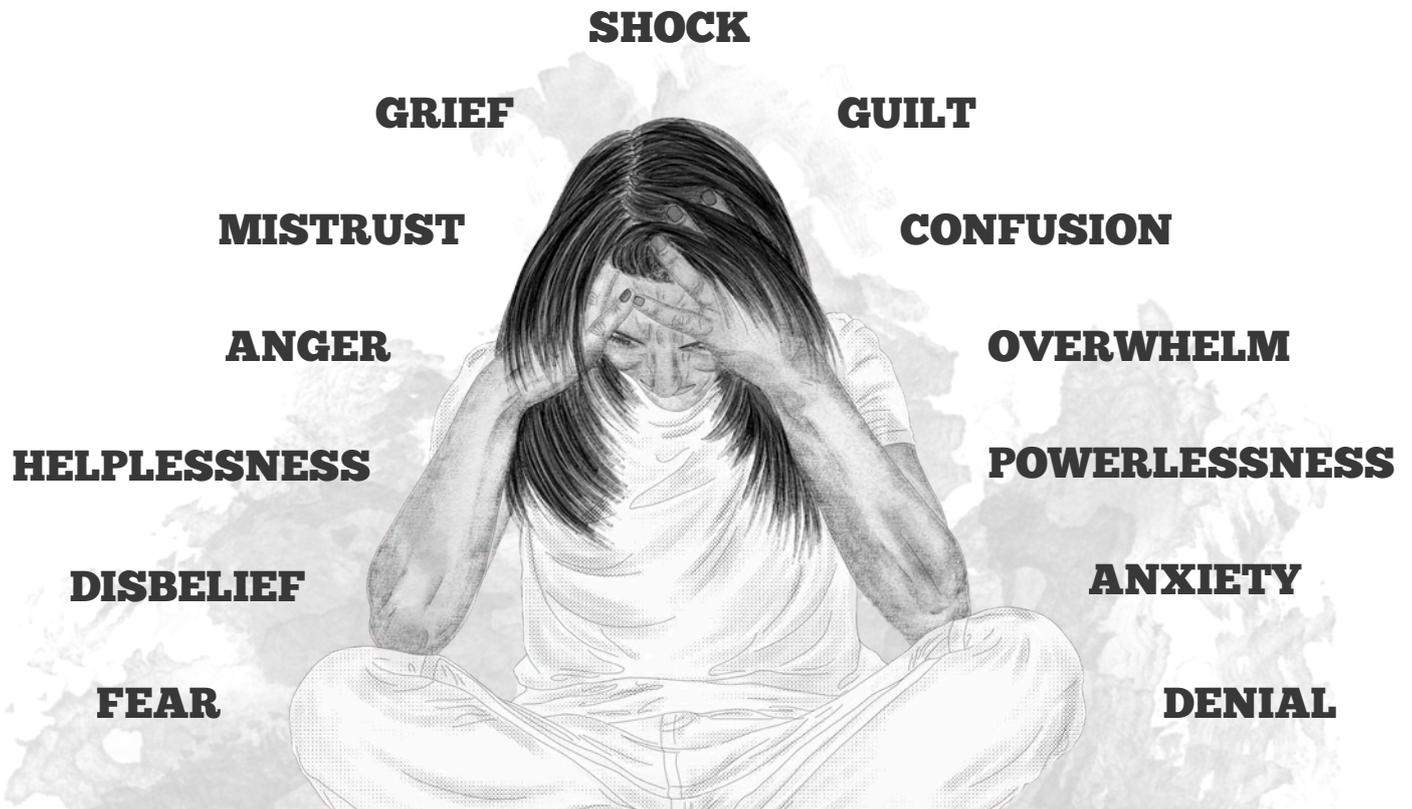
In response to this, we have created this resource which is specifically aimed at parents and caregivers within your community. The resource focusses on:

- Common responses to personal and community traumas
- How our bodies try to protect us from the impact of trauma
- How these 'survival responses' can impact on our relationships
- How we can support ourselves and each other
- When, where and how to seek additional support

IMPORTANT: This resource will not include any details of the events that have taken place.

Community trauma, just like personal trauma, affects people in different ways and at different times. There is no right or wrong way to feel but bringing self-compassion and acceptance to the whole range of emotional responses you experience is a crucial step in your healing journey.

COMMON RESPONSES TO INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY TRAUMA



Parents may also find themselves thinking and questioning some of the following:

- How could this happen?
- **Why didn't I / you / they notice something?**
- Why didn't I / you act on the feeling that something wasn't right?
- **How could someone get away with this?**
- How can we trust anyone now?
- **Why did it have to be our child?**
- Will they remember?
- **Will we ever recover from this?**
- Could it have happened to my child too? How will I know?
- **I believe this didn't happen to our child?**
- Why do I feel so bad when it wasn't my child?

These thoughts and questions can be incredibly distressing, especially when answers are not readily available and we find ourselves replaying them over and over again. It is important to remember that this is how our brains try to make sense of and process what has happened, so whilst difficult **it is very normal.**

HOW OUR BODIES TRY TO PROTECT US FROM THE IMPACT OF DISTRESS AND TRAUMA

When we are faced with something frightening, distressing or traumatic our nervous system works to protect us from being overwhelmed by going into a fight, flight, freeze or collapse response. These responses are vital for our survival, both physically and emotionally. We may have one default response, or we may find ourselves responding differently at different times. How we respond is likely influenced by many factors including our own histories, the quality of our early relationships, whether we have experienced adversity or trauma ourselves and the support systems we have in place.

For many these responses are temporary and naturally ease over time as we begin to feel the threat and danger pass and a sense of safety return to us. Others may find themselves stuck in these patterns for longer and some may find they need additional support to recover.

As parents and care givers supporting each other through a shared painful experience can be a source of strength and bring us closer together. However, this is not always the case, and some couples and coparents will find themselves struggling with heightened conflict, or withdrawal from each other, especially when relating from their survival responses.

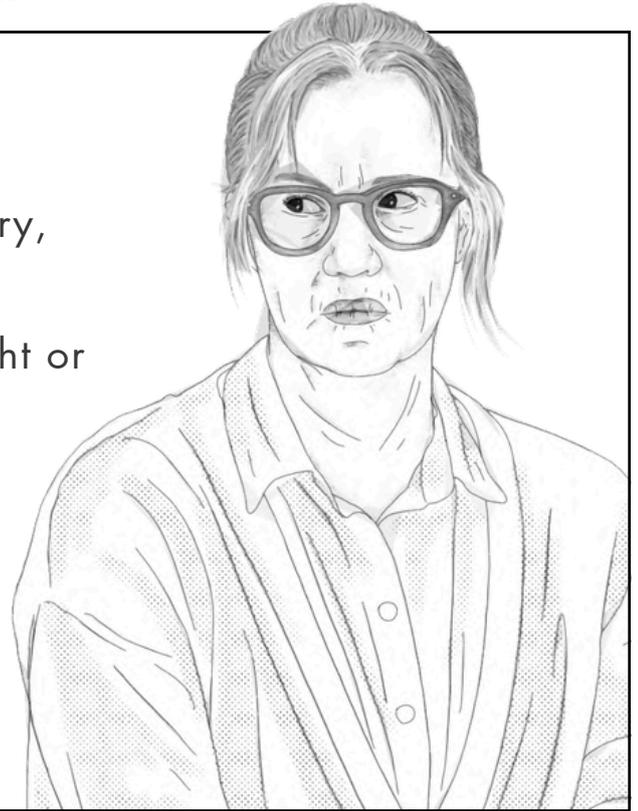


HOW OUR BODIES TRY TO PROTECT US FROM THE IMPACT OF DISTRESS AND TRAUMA (CONT)

Before we look at how our survival responses can impact on our relationships let's first look at what we might experience when each of the survival responses are 'switched on'.

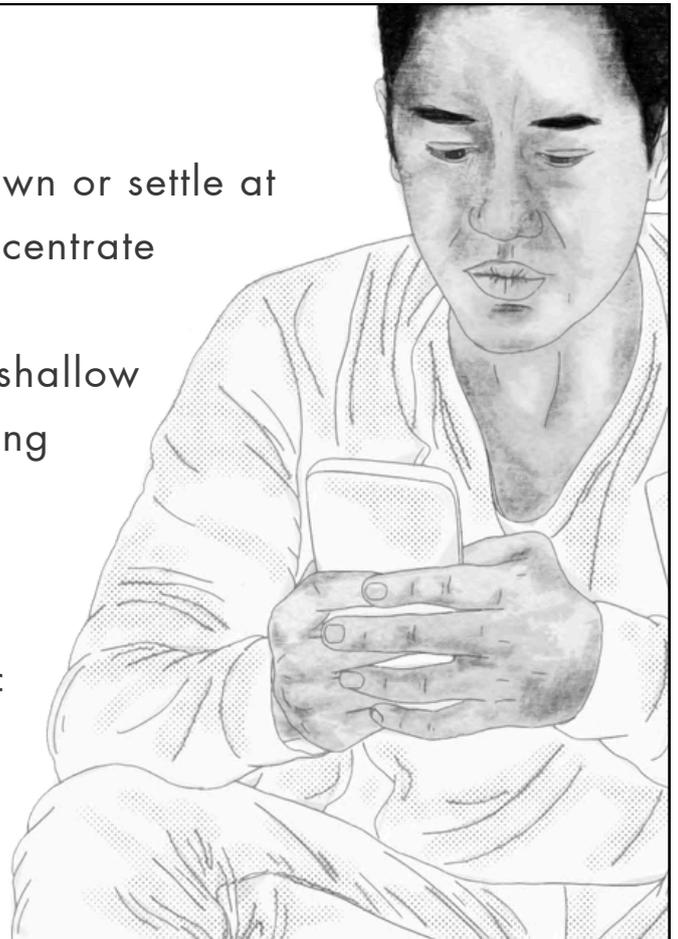
Fight

- In fight you may feel argumentative, angry, hostile, agitated, stressed, aggressive.
- You might notice that your body feels tight or tense – you may be clenching your jaw or holding your hands in fists.
- Your heart rate may be faster than usual, you may feel hot, and you may not recognise hunger or tiredness.
- You are on high alert, ready for action.



Flight

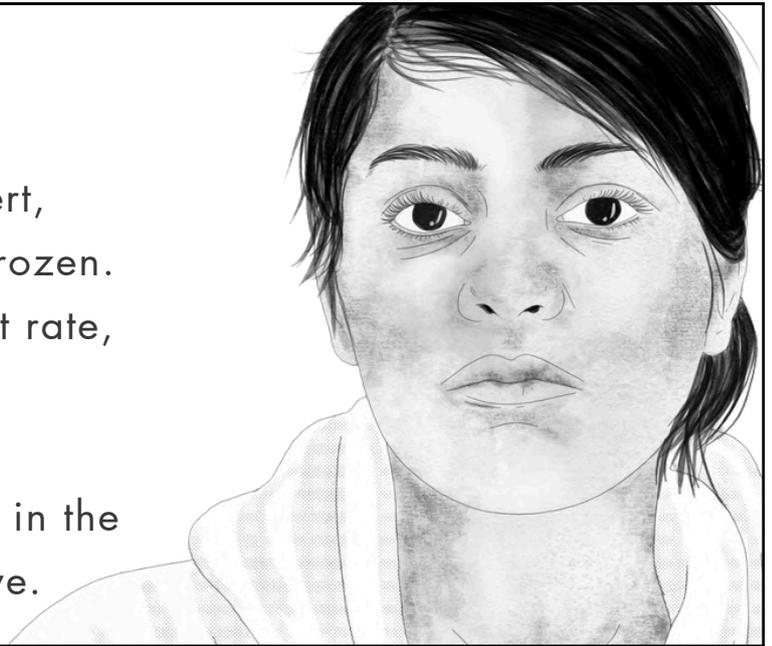
- In flight you might find it hard to sit down or settle at something, you may find it hard to concentrate and are easily distracted.
- You may also notice a fast heart rate, shallow breathing and have an overriding feeling or needing to get away, to escape, or even to run.
- This escape can be both physical and psychological so you may find yourself scrolling through social media, shopping, watching TV, or self-medicating through alcohol



HOW OUR BODIES TRY TO PROTECT US FROM THE IMPACT OF DISTRESS AND TRAUMA (CONT)

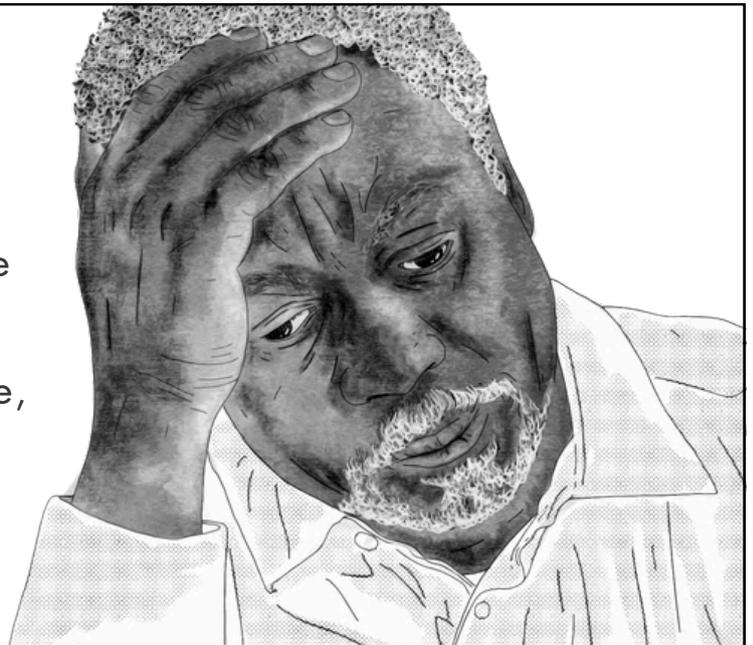
Freeze

- In Freeze you feel heightened, alert, hypervigilant to danger but also frozen.
- You may experience a faster heart rate, increased body temperature and decreased appetite.
- You are literally the rabbit caught in the headlights, unable to think or move.



Collapse

- In collapse you may feel numb, empty, foggy, confused and unable to move.
- You may notice a slowed heart rate, decreased body temperature.
- You may feel far away and as though the world is unreal.



From this we can see where some challenges may arise, imagine that you are relating from a shutdown collapsed response and your partner or co-parent is in full fight response.

Or how about if you were both in a fight response? It's suddenly easy to see how parents can begin to feel the burden of additional stress in their relationship.



WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER

The first step is to understand that differences in how we respond are completely normal.

Practice recognising when you are relating from your survival responses. Knowing and naming this can create enough distance to step out of the survival dance and back into connection.

Prioritise time together to talk about how you are feeling – honestly. Be present with each other, listen and remember you do not have to fix anything.

Don't minimise or dismiss your feelings. Trauma that happens in communities impacts everyone in that community. Your feelings are valid, whatever your experience.

Ask each other 'what do you need' and ask yourself 'what can I realistically give' respect that there will be times when we cannot give because you are either feel too full or too empty – be patient with yourselves and each other.

Gently, challenge your partner or co-parent if you hear them being self-critical, self-blaming or expressing feelings of guilt or shame. Remind each other that you are not to blame for what has happened.



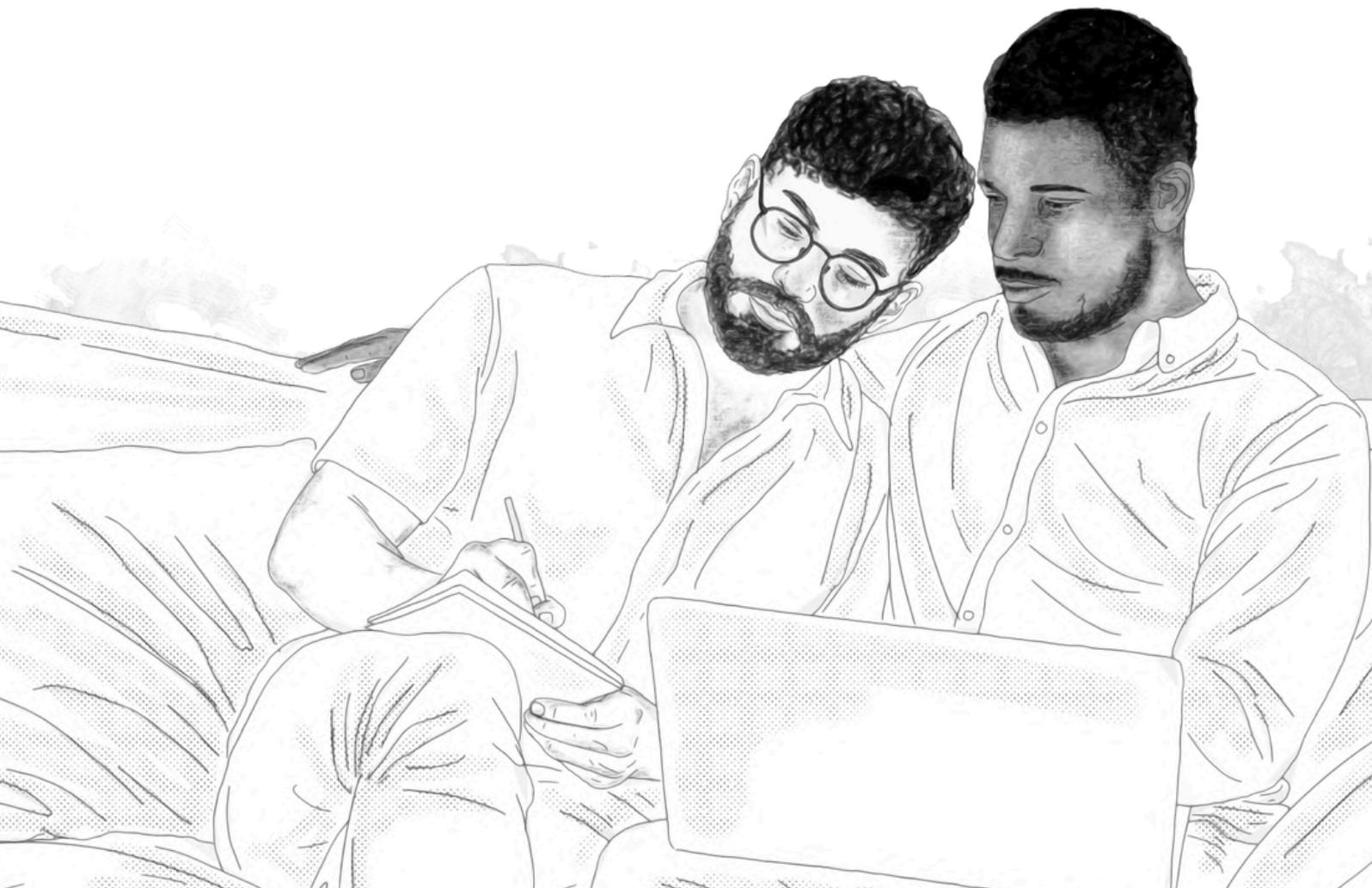
WHAT YOU CAN DO TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER (CONT)

Allow yourselves time to adjust - this is a process.

Maintain small rituals of connection – cook and eat together, watch a movie, go for a walk together. These small things remind us that our partnership is still intact, even in times of stress.

Ensure that you both get enough rest, living with trauma can be exhausting so make sure that you are taking breaks and getting enough sleep.

If you still find yourselves regularly relating from these survival responses see if you can slow things down, you might find it useful to practice some grounding techniques. [Click here to explore and download our free resources which you may find useful.](#)



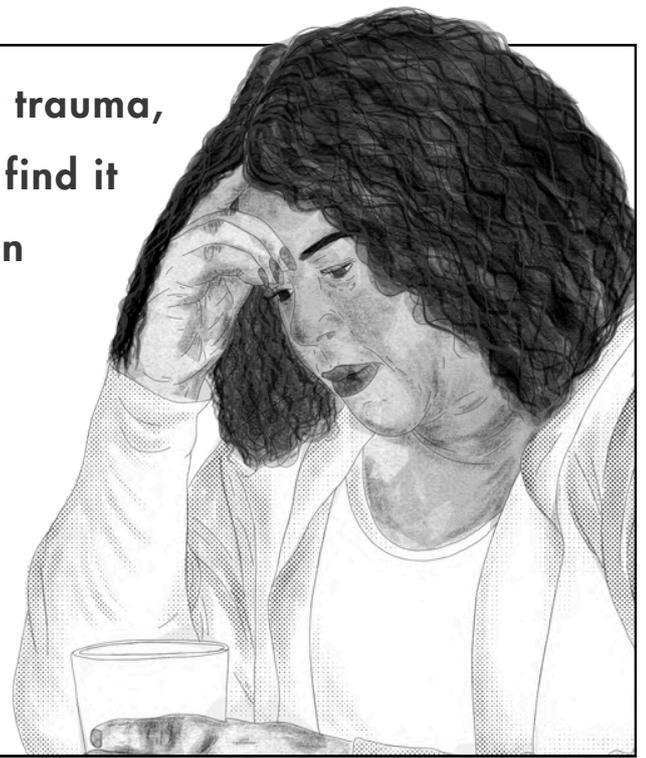
SEEKING SUPPORT

Reaching out to others doesn't mean sharing everything with everyone. You might want to start with one trusted friend or family member who you feel will be able to support you, without feeling overwhelmed by either their own emotions or yours. Equally there may be someone else, in your community who is less connected to you, perhaps someone from a group you belong to or if you are part of a faith community someone attached to this.



Those who have experienced a community trauma, either directly or indirectly can sometimes find it difficult to seek support and there are often very legitimate reasons for this.

This can lead to withdrawal from friends, family and the community. If you feel this applies to you, please click here to take a look at our resource: [Reducing Barriers: Seeking Support](#)



Additional support can come from a variety of sources. If you don't feel ready to reach out to others, you could try some of the ideas below which can help soothe the nervous system and restore, even if only fleetingly, a sense of calm

- Having a massage or holistic healing session
- Going for a walk in nature and really giving yourself time to connect with what is around you
- Listening to music that calms you or empowers you
- Doing something physical that can help you feel more in your body; stretches, yoga, dancing, running, swimming - whatever helps you to feel more connected and alive.
- Do something creative – cooking, painting, drawing, sculpting. Remember this doesn't have to be a masterpiece, the process alone can be incredibly helpful but for those who feel they 'are not good at art' try mindful colouring, paint by numbers or a jigsaw puzzle
- Doing things that give you a sense of mastery – this can really help us to feel capable and in control.

SEEKING PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

If you notice any of the following, you might want to think about seeking professional support:

- You continue to feel impacted with little or no improvement
- You are feeling worse with time, not better
- You are consistently feeling low, anxious or depressed
- You have lost interest in things that used to bring you joy
- You have little motivation and find day to day tasks more challenging
- You often feel overwhelmed by your feelings
- You feel you can't talk to anyone / you feel alone and isolated
- Your relationships are no longer satisfying
- You are noticing memories or flashbacks connected to past traumas

In these instances, you can:

- Speak with your GP
- Self-fund a local therapist who has knowledge and experience in working with trauma
- Access the Beacon House daily helpline, therapy and resources – all free of charge to you. (Beacon House is completely independent from Partou and your information will not be shared with them). Please get in touch with us by phone – 01444 413 949 or email – admin@beaconhouse.org.uk.

Moving Forward

It is important to remember that you, and your community have experienced and continue to experience the impact of a significant trauma. Healing does not happen overnight, but with support, understanding and care families and communities can recover – together – one step at a time.

