

Trauma- informed media toolkit.

**CLIMATE
MEDIA
CENTRE**

2026

About this toolkit

Climate-induced disasters — including bushfires, floods, heatwaves, sea-level rise and storms — not only have a physical and material impact on our communities and environment, but are also deeply human experiences that can involve:

- Loss of loved ones, homes, culture and livelihoods;
- Displacement and disruption;
- Collective grief and ongoing psychological strain and distress;
- Feelings of injustice, abandonment and powerlessness;
- Fear around safety, overwhelm and uncertainty;
- Personal and collective grief connected with loss of loved ones, homes, culture and livelihoods;
- Economic insecurity, hardship and poverty;
- Exacerbate pre-existing, or cause the development of new, physical and mental health conditions such as PTSD;
- Chronic stress, strain and emotional distress;
- Feelings of injustice, abandonment and powerlessness.

For many people, these events involve experiences which can continue long after the immediate crisis has passed.

Journalists and media professionals play a critical role in shaping how these events are understood. The main needs in times of disaster that the media can support (that are aligned with psychological first aid principles) include accurate trustworthy information, access to support and resources, and elevating stories to support collective meaning making.

Responsible reporting can support dignity, healing and inform public action. Poorly handled reporting can unintentionally cause further harm or distress to people who have already experienced trauma.

This toolkit supports responsible, trauma-informed reporting on climatefuelled disasters and has been developed in consultation with people with lived experience, trauma specialists and media specialists as part of SACOSS's Disaster Ready Grant program, including Psychologists for a Safe Climate and Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action. The CMC thanks all who have contributed time and expertise to this guide.

It is designed for both reporters and communication professionals - so the relevance of some advice will depend on your profession.

Contents

Principles of trauma-informed	1
--------------------------------------	----------

Lived experience	2
-------------------------	----------

A checklist: For comms staff	3
-------------------------------------	----------

Before the interview	3
----------------------	---

During the Interview	5
----------------------	---

After the Interview	6
---------------------	---

A checklist: For journalists	7
-------------------------------------	----------

Before going live	7
-------------------	---

During the segment	7
--------------------	---

After the Interview	7
---------------------	---

Quick guide	8
--------------------	----------

Climate disaster reporting — checklist	8
--	---

Language guide	9
----------------	---

Image use	9
-----------	---

Support resources	10
-------------------	----

Glossary of Terms	11
-------------------	----

Principles of trauma-informed practice

All guidance in this toolkit is grounded in six key concepts:



Safety

physical and psychological safety in storytelling.



Trustworthiness

transparency, care and reliability.



Choice and control

restoring autonomy to survivors.



Collaboration

working with/alongside, not doing to.



Empowerment and hope

supporting agency and meaning



Respect for diversity

actively recognising and responding to the diverse needs, strengths and rights of First Nations peoples, older people, people with disability, CALD communities, women, children, and other priority groups.

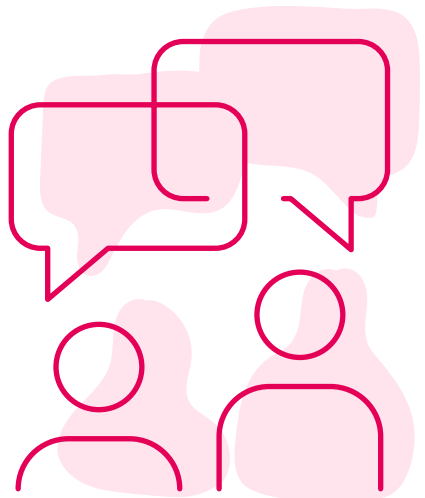
Lived experience wisdom

When done poorly, media engagement can feel extractive to people who have experienced a disaster. These insights reflect feedback from people who have experienced disasters and shared what respectful media engagement looks like.

Trauma-informed reporting means:

- Putting the person before the story
- Asking permission and negotiating boundaries
- Avoiding pressure to share more than feels safe
- Offering follow-up and continuity of care
- Being transparent about how stories will be edited and used
- Knowing what the local support resources are and sharing them

Small actions — like checking in afterwards or pausing to check in — can make a significant difference.



Trauma-informed process checklist - comms staff

Before the interview



Checklist

1. Clarify the media format
2. Set realistic expectations
3. Support safety and comfort
4. Use language carefully

1. Clarify the media format

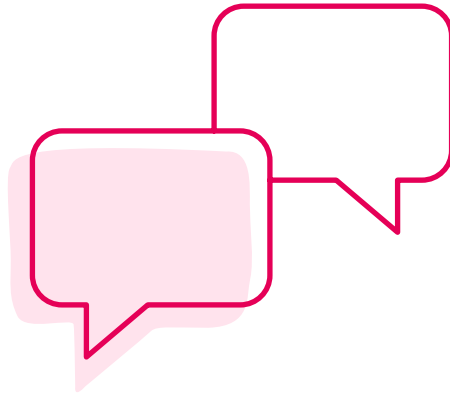
Explain whether the interview will be:

- Print
- Radio
- Television
- Digital/social video

Be clear about what the spokesperson can expect, including whether you can share drafts or quotes for their sign off.

2. Set realistic expectations

A long interview may result in only a small quote. This is not a reflection of the spokesperson or the value of their story. Be clear and upfront about media processes (eg. ability to check quotes for accuracy), and expected outcomes.



3. Support safety and comfort

Ask up front:

- What would help you feel comfortable?
- Would you like a support person nearby?
- What time and place feels safest?
- If you are unsure, we can take time to discuss options

Agree on a **pause signal** if they need a break.

4. Use language carefully

Some terms can feel minimising or triggering. Ask what language feels right for them. Be cautious of words like:

- “victim”
- “recovery”
- “resilience”

Terms like these often impose external narratives, minimize the ongoing nature of trauma, or place the burden of healing entirely on the individual, rather than on systemic change. While intended to empower, these terms can sometimes feel limiting, isolating, or inaccurate to some people who have experienced a disaster. Ask people which terms feel right for them.

During the Interview



Checklist

1. **Consent is ongoing**
2. **Negotiate boundaries**
3. **Watch for signs of distress**
4. **Bring humanity, not transaction**

1. Consent is ongoing

Check in repeatedly:

"If at any point you feel uncomfortable or want to stop, please let me know."

2. Negotiate boundaries

Ask upfront:

- Are there topics you don't want to discuss?
- Are there questions you'd prefer not to be asked?

3. Watch for signs of distress

Some people may not show any outward signs of distress, but signals that can indicate stress or trauma are:

- Withdrawal, going quiet, seeming distracted
- Tears, shaking or rocking or appearing visibly agitation
- Raising their voice, expressing anger

If you notice this:

- Acknowledge gently
- Offer a break
- Ask what they need

Never assume — always check. Be aware of the time and emotional effort it takes for people to appear in media when they have survived a climate disaster and be respectful of their time.

Also be aware that just because someone has opened up about a personal story on one topic, don't assume that means all topics are up for discussion.

4. Bring humanity, not transaction

Professionalism matters — but people who have witnessed or experienced a disaster want to feel met as human beings, not content.

After the Interview



Checklist

1. Don't disappear
2. Be transparent about limits of control
3. Sharing coverage can be triggering

1. Don't disappear

Follow up after the interview:

"Is it okay if I check in tomorrow?"

Provide a contact number if distress arises later.

2. Be transparent about limits of control

Explain clearly:

- The journalist controls final edits
- Quotes may be shortened
- Publication timing may change
- When the story will appear

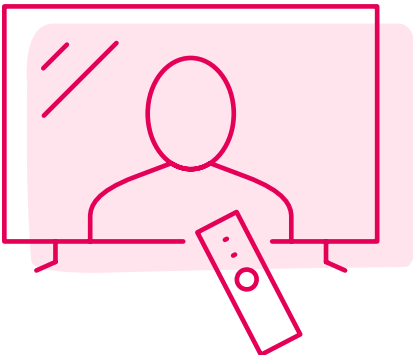
Transparency enhances trust and being valued.

3. Sharing coverage can be triggering

When sending published stories, ask:

- How did you feel seeing this?
- Do you need referral to support?

Acknowledge everyone reacts differently and there is no right or wrong way to respond.



For journalists - trauma-informed on-air practice

Before going live

- Confirm consent and explain the format clearly, and simply
- Offer choice about topics and language – and stick to any agreed boundaries.

During the segment

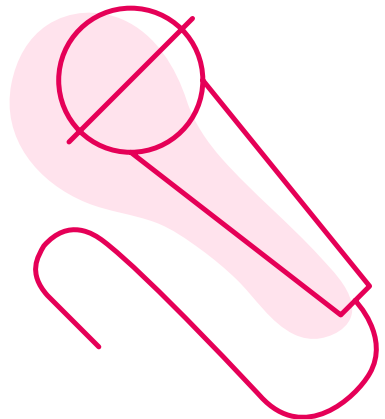
- Avoid sensationalism or graphic detail
- Watch for distress; be prepared to end the interview early.

After the Interview

- Follow up with care
- Provide support contacts.



Remember: dignity first, consent always.



Quick guide

Climate disaster reporting — checklist

Consent is ongoing. No surprises. Dignity first.



Do

Ask permission and negotiate boundaries

Use survivor-centred language (see below)

Offer breaks and ongoing consent

Follow up with care

Be transparent about story use



Don't

Treat people as props or content

Sensationalise grief or trauma

Assume “resilience” framing helps

Disappear immediately after someone shares pain

Reuse someone’s story without consent



Language guide

Ask survivors what wording feels right — language is personal.

 Be careful with
Victim
Natural disaster
Apocalyptic framing
"They lost everything"

 TRy
Person affected / Survivor
Climate-fuelled disaster or extreme weather event or name the disaster, eg. flood
Clear, accurate risk language
"They are rebuilding after major loss"

Image use

 Avoid
Images of homes in the process of burning down
Imagery of burnt out vehicles
Photos of important cultural sites on fire
Using images of people and places without explicit consent

 Use Instead
Community members working together to assist people
Images of emergency services people assisting
More abstract images, eg smoke on the horizon
Images that are not easily identifiable (avoid people's faces, houses that can be identified easily etc)

Support resources

Have support contacts available if needed:



Lifeline

ph. 13 11 14

Lifeline Bushfire Recovery

ph. 13 HELP (13 43 57)



Beyond Blue

ph. 1300 22 4636



13 YARN

ph. 13 92 76



MensLine Australia

ph. 1300 789 978



Kids Helpline

ph. 1800 55 1800 (for young people 5-25)



Bushfire Survivors for Climate Action

Lived Experience Guide



Psychology for a Safe Climate

Climate Cafe

Climate-aware Practitioner Directory

Glossary of Terms

Climate-fuelled disaster

Extreme weather events (e.g. bushfires, floods, heatwaves, storms) intensified by climate change, impacting people, communities, and environments.

Trauma-informed practice

An approach that recognises the widespread impact of trauma and prioritises safety, dignity, consent, and wellbeing in all interactions and storytelling.

Re-traumatisation

When media coverage or interactions unintentionally trigger distress by reminding individuals of past traumatic experiences.

Survivor

A person who has experienced a disaster or trauma; preferred over "victim" as it recognises agency and resilience.

Survivor-centred reporting

A storytelling approach that prioritises the needs, boundaries, and wellbeing of people affected, rather than the demands of the story.

Psychological safety

Creating conditions where individuals feel emotionally secure, respected, and able to participate without fear of harm or distress.

Physical safety

Ensuring the environment and circumstances of engagement do not pose physical risk or discomfort.

Trustworthiness

Being transparent, reliable, and clear about processes (e.g. how stories will be used, edited, and published).

Choice and control

Ensuring individuals have agency over what they share, how they share it, and their level of participation.

Collaboration

Working with survivors as partners in storytelling rather than treating them as subjects.

Empowerment

Supporting individuals to feel heard, valued, and in control of their narrative.

Respect for diversity

Acknowledging and valuing cultural, emotional, and contextual differences in how people experience and express trauma.

Collective grief

Shared emotional response within a community following a disaster or loss.

Displacement

Being forced to leave one's home or community due to a disaster.

Consent (ongoing consent)

Continuous, active agreement to participate, with the ability to withdraw or change boundaries at any time.

Boundaries

Limits set by individuals about what topics, questions, or details they are comfortable discussing.

Triggering language/content

Words, images, or framing that may provoke distress or traumatic memories.

Sensationalism

Exaggerating or dramatizing events (often focusing on shock or grief) in ways that can harm or exploit those affected.

Apocalyptic framing

Overly dramatic or catastrophic language that can create fear or distort understanding of risk.

Extractive storytelling

Media practices that take stories from individuals without giving care, context, or benefit back to them.

Continuity of care

Ongoing support and follow-up after an interview or media interaction.

Pause signal

A pre-agreed cue allowing an interviewee to stop or take a break during an interaction.

Distress signals

Observable signs (e.g. withdrawal, agitation, tears, anger, numbness) indicating someone may be overwhelmed.

Transparency (in media)

Clearly communicating what will happen to a story, including editing, publication, and limitations.

Dignity-first approach

Prioritising respect, humanity, and wellbeing over the demands of storytelling or content production.

Content warning

A notice that alerts audiences to potentially distressing material.



Speak with us.

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