



SHINE LAWYERS

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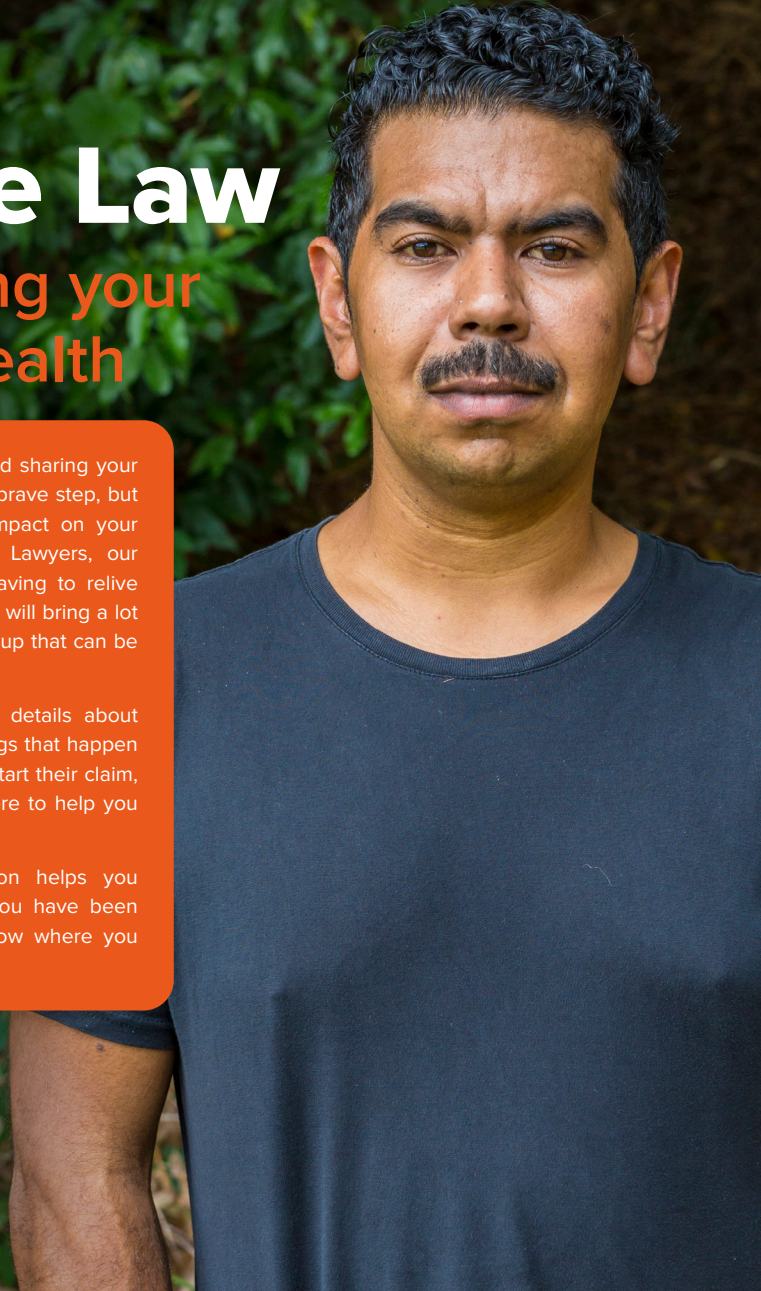
Abuse Law

Supporting your mental health

Dealing with your past and sharing your story is an important and brave step, but one that can have an impact on your mental health. At Shine Lawyers, our team understands that having to relive your traumatic experience will bring a lot of memories and feelings up that can be hard to manage.

This guide will give you details about some of the common things that happen to our clients when they start their claim, and how our team are here to help you through this tough time.

We hope this information helps you understand the trauma you have been through and lets you know where you can get help.





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Trauma impact and symptoms

After a traumatic or stressful scenario, it is very common to experience a variety of mental or physical symptoms after the event. These symptoms can occur in a variety of ways, and different people will experience different symptoms. You may experience all, or some of the following:

Emotional and mental

- Anxiety and depression
- Irritability, restlessness, outbursts of anger or rage
- Worrying or intrusive thoughts of the trauma
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks – feeling like the trauma is happening now
- Tendency to isolate and keep to yourself
- Feelings of detachment
- Feeling like a burden to other people
- Feeling numb or finding it hard to know what you feel
- Feeling on edge
- Finding it very hard to trust people
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Feelings of self-blame, guilt, shame and being dirty

Physical

- Aches and pains like headaches, back aches, stomach aches
- Sudden sweating and/or heart palpitations
- Changes in sleep patterns, appetite, interest in sex
- Constipation or diarrhoea
- Easily startled by noise or unexpected touch
- Gets sick with illnesses more easily
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs to forget and numb the pain

Managing anxiety & panic attacks

Anxiety and panic attacks can be a very scary experience, especially if you're experiencing one for the first time. Here are five points to focus on if you need some ways to manage through a stressful episode:

- **Mindfulness:** Focusing on the present moment when our brain is taking us to a different time or place in our lives. Recognise that you are going back in time and focus on physical sensation to keep you in the present moment, like digging your feet into the ground or feeling the texture of your pants under your hands.
- **Relaxation:** Consciously tense and relax your muscles, focus on somewhere safe and restful, perhaps a place, or activity you enjoy. Remind yourself of the positive people and support you have around you.
- **Monitor:** Keep checking in on your level of anxiety, how are you feeling at this very moment? If 10 is the worst and 0 is the least, be aware of your level and watch the level go down as you calm yourself.
- **Breathing:** Breathe in to a count of three, hold for a second and then breathe out to a count of three.
- **Getting it out:** Writing things down and creating art can be things that makes you feel better and calmer. Sometimes there may be someone you trust that you can talk to about how you are feeling without talking about the things that happened. This can be enough to feel a little bit better.

Tips to sleep better

Sleep is an important factor when it comes to your physical and mental wellbeing. Often, after experiencing abuse you can develop poor sleeping patterns which could become even worse when you start reliving and sharing what happened to you.

It is important to try and create healthy habits that will help you get a good night sleep, below are some recommended tips that you may find helpful:

- **Train and stay active:** Taking naps all day long can lead to more difficulties sleeping at night. Create a list of things you can do during the day that will keep you busy for most of the day.
- **Prepare yourself before going to bed:** Even though it will be different than home, establishing a new routine helps the body wind down and move into sleep mode. Regular pre-sleep activities can include reading, stretching, and meditation.
- **Reduce noise and light:** Consider alternatives that might be possible in the housing area such as eye-shades or ear-plugs. Even reversing the pillow end of the bunk or rigging a towel curtain may help block out distracting light.
- **Do not do upsetting things right before bed:** E.g. reading paperwork or discussing anything that is distressing. Give yourself 30 minutes before bedtime in the evening as your worry time. Write down your worrying thoughts.
- **Use relaxation and distraction exercises when in bed:** Visualise sleepy, relaxing things or places. Try to focus on calm breathing that will help you fall asleep. Count the cell corners or tiles on the wall.
- **If you still have trouble sleeping, don't fight it:** Don't get mad at yourself, don't focus on how badly you need sleep, or start thinking about everything you have to do the next day. Decide that lying quietly will at least rest your body and you won't fade by missing a few nights sleep.



Accessing help

Shine's Mental Health Team

Our Abuse Law team have in-house support people. If you want someone to chat about how you are feeling just ask your lawyer and then can refer you. Our support team can assist with:



Discussing mental health supports available.



Help on difficult phone calls with lawyers.



Support phone calls to clients who are incarcerated. As well as support letters for criminal matters.



Providing emotional support before and after medical appointments and settlement conferences.

Support Hotlines

There are support counselling services available if you would like to speak to someone about your situation.

1800RESPECT
NATIONAL DOMESTIC FAMILY AND
SEXUAL VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE

1800 737 732

blueknot
supporting recovery from complex trauma

1300 657 380

Lifeline
AUSTRALIA

13 11 14

13 YARN

13 92 76

Pastoral care

Some prisons provide access to chaplains which may someone you may speak to about the things you are finding hard.

13 11 99
shine.com.au

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