

# Language is important!

What we say to and about young people has immediate and profound effects. Consider carefully the words you use to advocate for young people and educate those around you to know why some words are more empowering than others.



Trauma-Informed Language and Image Use Guide for Disaster Reporting: Risk, Response, Recovery, and Resilience (Australian and Youth Edition)

When reporting on disaster risk, response, recovery, and resilience, it is crucial to adopt a trauma-informed approach, particularly when targeting Australian readers and young people. Traumatic events can have a significant impact on individuals and communities, and media coverage plays a vital role in shaping public perceptions.

This guide aims to provide communication and media teams with evidence-based recommendations for using language and imagery that are respectful, accurate, and trauma-informed. The suggestions provided here are tailored to Australian readers and young audiences, taking into account their specific needs and sensitivities.

## General considerations

- **Empathy and sensitivity:** Approach the topic with empathy, sensitivity, and cultural awareness, recognising the diverse experiences of the Australian population, including first nation communities.
- **Age-appropriate information:** Adapt the language and content to suit the age group of young readers, ensuring information is clear, understandable, and free from unnecessary distressing details.
- **Resilience and strength:** Highlight stories of resilience, recovery, and community support to inspire and empower young people.
- **Trauma-sensitive resources:** Provide links to trauma-informed support resources and helplines specifically designed for young people affected by disasters.

## Language use

- **Clear and simple language:** Use plain language and avoid jargon to ensure information is accessible and understandable for young readers.

- **Empowering terminology:** Use positive and empowering language that fosters a sense of agency and resilience among young people.
- **Culturally sensitive language:** Be mindful of cultural sensitivity, particularly when referring to Indigenous communities and their unique experiences of disasters and recovery.
- **Avoid blame and judgment:** Refrain from blaming or shaming affected individuals or communities, as this can exacerbate trauma and stigmatization.
- **Trauma-informed terminology:** Familiarise yourself with trauma-informed terminology and use person-first language to focus on individuals' strengths and experiences rather than defining them solely by their trauma.

## Imagery and trigger warnings

- **Diverse representation:** Ensure images reflect the diversity of the Australian population, including different cultural backgrounds, ages, and abilities.
- **Positive and inspirational imagery:** Select images that portray resilience, community support, and positive coping strategies.
- **Youth-centric visuals:** Use images that resonate with young people and depict their experiences and perspectives during disaster response, recovery, and resilience-building efforts.
- **Avoid graphic or distressing imagery:** Avoid the use of graphic or distressing images that could retraumatise or upset viewers. Avoid using imagery depicting an active disaster, such as flames, floodwater, or smoke.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Be culturally sensitive in image selection, considering the cultural nuances and sensitivities of diverse Australian communities.

- **Consider providing trigger warnings for posts/articles containing graphic or distressing content.** Trigger warnings alert readers about potentially distressing content at the beginning of a post.

*If you would like someone else to talk with, you can call the Kids Helpline at any time on 1800 55 1800 or go to [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au). You can also contact headspace on 1800 650 890 or go to [ehheadspace.org.au](http://ehheadspace.org.au). or Lifeline Bushfire Support 131 114 or text 0477 131 114.*



# Language Guide: Key Terms for Youth Engagement and Disaster Resilience

## Youth

- Use 'youth' as an adjective in phrases like 'youth-led action' or 'youth-focused report.'
- Avoid using 'youths' as a noun, as it can have negative connotations.
- Use 'young people' as a more respectful way to refer to a group or cohort.
- YACVic defines young people as those aged 12-25 years.



## Engagement

- Be cautious when using 'engagement' to avoid creating an 'us and them' dynamic.
- Avoid implying that young people are 'disengaged'; consider that the issue may lie with the systems or activities.
- Aim for partnership rather than participation, focusing on creating an equal relationship.

## Participation

- 'Participation' is often overused, paternalistic, and hierarchical. However, it is based on human rights and citizenship and can be the best option in many cases.
- Some organisations aim to work towards partnership instead of participation.

## Co-design

- Co-design is a specific approach to participation that involves placing the consumer experience at the centre of solution design. It is done in partnership with those who have the power to make change.
- Learn more about co-design at <https://www.DesignKit.org/methods>.

## Pronouns

- Pronouns refer to people without using their names, such as 'he', 'she', or 'they'.
- Respect people's pronouns; never assume, always ask.
- Using correct pronouns is a basic way to show respect for gender identity.
- Understand that pronouns cannot always be determined by appearance.

## Flame-affected/fire-affected young people

- Some young people affected by fires prefer to use terms like 'flame-affected' or 'fire-affected' to avoid discussing specific details of their experience.
- Never force a young person to talk about their experiences, as it may be triggering.

- If they do share, be prepared to provide support or debriefing.

## Inclusiveness and inclusion

- Inclusiveness means ensuring that diverse youth cohorts feel safe, respected, and included.
- This includes disabled young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTIQ+ young people, and young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

## Diversity

- Each young person is unique, with different abilities, skills, talents, and experiences.
- They relate to others, perceive the world, and express thoughts and feelings in different ways.

## Empowerment and disempowerment

- The way adults involve and relate to young people can be empowering or disempowering.
- Ensure that every young person has a positive experience.
- Discrimination, harassment, and abuse based on culture, identity, or background can make young people feel disempowered and unsafe.
- Tailor supports to meet each young person's unique abilities and needs.

## Groups more likely to experience disempowerment.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including young people of colour
- Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer or asexual (LGBTIQ+)
- Disabled young people





# National Principles for Disaster Recovery

These principles complement the principles for community engagement in disaster recovery.

## Place the community at the centre

Effective community engagement is responsive, flexible and recognises the community as the central reference point for planning, implementing and measuring success in any engagement process. Inclusive, respectful and ethical relationships between engagement partners and the community must guide every stage of the engagement process.

## Understand the context

Effective community engagement requires partners to develop a strong understanding of the unique history, values, diversity, dynamics, strengths, priorities and needs of each community. It is also important to understand the environmental, political, or historical context that surrounds any hazard, emergency event or disaster.

## Recognise complexity

Effective community engagement considers the complex and dynamic nature of hazards, disaster risk and emergency events and the diverse identities, histories, composition, circumstances, strengths and needs of communities and community members. Because of this complexity, effective community engagement to build disaster resilience is an evolving process that requires ongoing investment.

## Work in partnership

Effective community engagement requires a planned and coordinated approach between the community and partners at every stage of the process. Potential issues arising from any imbalance in power, information or resources between the community and partners will be proactively managed during the process.

## Communicate respectfully and inclusively

Community engagement is built on effective communication between the community and partners that recognises the diverse strengths, needs, values and priorities of both community members and partners.

## Recognise and build capability.

Effective community engagement recognises, supports and builds on individual, community and organisational capability and capacity to reduce disaster risk and increase resilience.



# Key Terms for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander:** An Indigenous person of Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as such and is accepted by their community.
- **Agency:** The ability of individuals to make choices and decisions that have an impact within systemic structures.
- **Community:** A social group defined by shared characteristics or experiences such as location, culture, heritage, language, ethnicity, occupation, or interests.
- **Community development:** The practice and discipline aimed at strengthening and building resilience in communities through participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality, and social justice.
- **Co-design:** A participatory approach that involves incorporating the consumer experience in partnership with those who have the power to make change, placing it at the centre of solution design.
- **Disaster:** A serious disruption of the functioning of a community or society due to hazardous events, resulting in losses and impacts on human life, infrastructure, economy, and the environment.
- **Disability:** A condition that can be visible or non-visible, inherited or acquired, and temporary or permanent, impacting a person's daily activities, communication, and/or mobility.
- **Diversity:** Refers to the ways in which people differ based on age, cultural background, disability, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, and other characteristics.
- **Engagement:** The process of involving individuals or groups, avoiding an "us and them" dynamic, and ensuring meaningful participation.
- **Evaluation:** A structured analysis that gathers evidence to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, impact, and sustainability of an intervention or community engagement process.
- **Flame- or fire-affected:** Terms used by young people and local communities to describe their experiences without going into specific details of the impact of



flames or fire. It's important not to push individuals to discuss their experiences.

- **Inclusion:** Creating a society where individuals feel valued, respected, have access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute their perspectives and talents.
- **Indigenous:** Referring to the original inhabitants of a particular region or country, often associated with unique languages, knowledge systems, and cultural traditions.
- **Monitoring:** The continuous review and assessment of a community engagement process during its implementation to understand progress, make adjustments, and enhance effectiveness.
- **Participation:** A concept based on human rights and citizenship, although often overused and hierarchical. It involves involving individuals or groups in decision-making processes.
- **Pronouns:** Words referring to people (e.g., 'he', 'she', 'they') without using their names, which are important to respect and reflect someone's gender identity.
- **Resilience:** The ability of a system, community, or society to withstand, adapt to, and recover from the effects of hazards and disruptions.
- **Social inclusion:** Creating a society where individuals, regardless of their diversity, feel valued, respected, have access to opportunities, and can contribute to improving their lives and communities.
- **Survivor:** A term used to describe individuals who have overcome adversity or traumatic experiences and risen above the challenges they faced.
- **Victim:** A term used to describe individuals who have suffered from a crime, offense, or other negative circumstances, often carrying connotations of weakness and passivity.
- **Vulnerability:** Conditions influenced by physical, social, economic, and environmental factors that increase the susceptibility of individuals, communities, assets, or systems to the impacts of hazards.



*Please note that the provided definitions are based on the given text and may not cover all possible interpretations or contexts.*

# Australian Warning System

- The Australian Warning System (AWS) provides consistent warnings for emergencies like bushfires, floods, storms, extreme heat, and severe weather.
- The system aims to provide consistent messaging and calls to action regardless of the emergency or location.

The three warning levels are:

- **Advice:** An incident has started. There is no immediate danger. Stay up to date in case the situation changes.
- **Watch and Act:** There is a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.
- **Emergency Warning:** An Emergency Warning is the highest level of warning. You may be in danger and need to take action immediately. Any delay now puts your life at risk.



**Note:** The provided information has been condensed and formatted for a language guide. For more detailed explanations and additional resources, please refer to the original sources cited in the text.

Remember, this guide is designed to assist in creating trauma-informed disaster reporting specifically tailored to Australian readers and young people. Regularly update your knowledge on trauma research and engage with affected communities and youth organizations to ensure your reporting remains relevant and supportive.



## Resources and References

Australian Red Cross: Visit the Australian Red Cross website ([www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)) for trauma-informed disaster response and recovery resources.

Emerging Minds: Access resources from Emerging Minds ([www.emergingminds.com.au](http://www.emergingminds.com.au)), an organization dedicated to supporting the mental health of Australian children and young people.

Headspace: Refer to Headspace ([www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)) for mental health support specifically designed for young Australians.

Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet: Visit the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet website ([www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au)) for culturally appropriate resources on trauma and resilience in Indigenous communities.

[ACF615-Words-Matter-Resource-Portrait-v6.pdf \(childhood.org.au\)](#)

Warning Message Construction: Choosing your words - Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection Key considerations for writing effective warning messages <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/6252/guideline-warnings-choosing-your-words.pdf>

Keeping children and families in mind: Guidelines for media professionals reporting on disaster or community trauma events - <https://d2p3kdr0nr4o3z.cloudfront.net/content/uploads/2019/11/15101247/KEEPIN3.pdf>

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