

Looking After Yourself

Support for Surf Life Savers ahead of the Bondi Beach attack commemoration and bravery award announcements

As we approach the one-year commemoration of the Bondi tragedy and bravery award notifications continue, many Surf Life Savers may notice thoughts, feelings, or reactions emerging or resurfacing.

Recent media coverage, commemoration activities, community conversations, and award announcements may bring memories of the day back into focus. For some people, these reminders may be expected. For others, they may come as a surprise.

If you find yourself experiencing a range of emotions at this time, it is important to know that these reactions are understandable and common.

Why this period might be challenging

The one-year Bondi Beach attack commemoration

Commemorations often act as significant milestones. They can prompt reflection on what happened, who was affected, and how the experience has shaped us over the past year. Even when people feel they have been coping well, commemorations can bring:

- Increased memories of the event
- Strong emotional reactions to reminders
- Changes in sleep or concentration
- Feelings of sadness, anger, anxiety, or grief
- Heightened alertness or feeling on edge
- A desire to avoid media coverage or conversations about the event

These responses are a normal human reaction to a significant and distressing experience.

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Bravery Award Notifications

Recognition following a traumatic event can evoke a wide range of emotions. While awards are intended to acknowledge acts of courage and service, the experience of receiving, not receiving, or waiting for news about an award can be emotionally complex.

For those who have received notification of a nomination or award, recognition may bring feelings of pride and gratitude. At the same time, it may also trigger discomfort, guilt, sadness, or self-doubt.

Some common thoughts include:

- "I was just doing what anyone would have done."
- "Others deserve this more than I do."
- "I don't feel brave."
- "I should have done more."
- "Why am I being recognised when others are not?"

For some people, public recognition may feel very different from their private experience of the event. Being described as brave or heroic can be difficult to reconcile with memories of fear, uncertainty, distress, or ongoing impacts from what occurred.

For those who have not received a nomination or notification, it is also common to experience feelings such as:

- Disappointment
- Frustration or anger
- Feeling overlooked or forgotten
- Questioning the value of their contribution
- Feeling hurt, betrayed or abandoned by a process they do not fully understand
- Relief if they did not want the public recognition

These reactions are understandable. They do not mean that someone is coping poorly, and they do not diminish the value of their contribution.

An important reminder about recognition

Bravery awards are designed to recognise particular actions that meet specific criteria.

They are not a measure of a person's worth, character, commitment, courage, professionalism, or overall contribution.

Many people played important and meaningful roles on that day. Not all contributions can be captured through formal recognition processes.

Whether you receive an award, do not receive an award, or are still awaiting information, your contribution and impact are not defined by recognition alone and your value is not determined by an award process.

Common reactions

People involved in significant incidents often experience mixed emotions. It is possible to feel several seemingly contradictory things at the same time.

You might feel:

- Proud and uncomfortable
- Grateful and guilty
- Recognised and undeserving
- Appreciated and distressed
- Angry and understanding
- Connected and isolated

All of these reactions can be normal. There is no "right" way to feel about either the anniversary or bravery award notifications.

Supporting each other

People will respond differently during this time.

Some may want to talk openly about their experience. Others may prefer not to discuss it.

Helpful ways to support fellow Surf Life Savers include:

- Checking in and asking how they are going
- Listening without judgement
- Avoiding comparisons about who did more or less on the day
- Respecting different perspectives about recognition and awards
- Recognising that everyone experienced the event differently
- Encouraging someone to seek support if they appear overwhelmed

Sometimes the most valuable support is simply reminding someone that they are not alone.

Support is available

Free, confidential support is available through the National Emergency Worker Support Service:

- Access up to 12 free sessions with a clinical psychologist
- Complete an online mental health check to understand what you're feeling right now
- Tips and strategies to support your wellbeing and recovery following a critical incident

Visit our website
nationalemergencyworkersupport.org.au

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