

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## about *Redress WA*

**Announcement of the *Redress WA* scheme has raised questions for many of the potential applicants. We hope the responses below will help in answering some of these questions.**

***Just the thought of looking into the redress scheme raises very strong feelings for me. What's going on?***

This is a common, and normal, reaction to the process of recalling painful memories. The recent publicity about child abuse in State care is also likely to have prompted memories of upsetting events in your own childhood.

Sometimes, people may think they have 'gotten over' the effects of a traumatic childhood, but find that their emotions have been hidden just below the surface. It is helpful to understand that these feelings are a normal response to reminders of early trauma and that you can deal with them. These feelings were developed when you were young and vulnerable and that they don't need to continue to impact on your life now.

***I have been experiencing other unexplained reactions since I heard about Redress WA. Is this normal?***

People often have a number of different reactions when they think about distressing memories that they have avoided thinking about for a long time, and their day-to-day lives can be affected in various ways. For example, you might feel a little withdrawn and find that you avoid talking about the things that are upsetting you. Some people describe feeling 'jumpy' or angry for no obvious reason, have trouble sleeping, or difficulty concentrating. These reactions can be accompanied by anxiety, depression, physical pain and/or unexplained illnesses.

Older people often recall distressing childhood events more vividly than they did in the past, and reminders — in the form of thoughts, memories and dreams — sometimes become repetitive and intrusive. People also commonly experience a confusing mixture of sadness, anger, and shame. You may find that you are drinking or smoking more than usual or using other medications as a way to blunt these reactions, however this in turn causes other problems, and is best dealt with early on. Recognising why you are seeking to avoid traumatic memories is an important first step towards gaining control over them.

***I am worried about having to tell my story. I think this might make me feel worse and won't change anything for the better. Is this true?***

It is true that telling your story can be an upsetting experience in the short term. However, it would be a shame to let the fear of temporary upset prevent you from receiving due recognition of your past pain. Support is available to help you with telling your story, and can be accessed from CBERS Redress Service (CRS) and other service providers on the *Redress WA* support panel. Also, you do not have to have any direct contact with the *Redress WA* assessors if you don't want to.

You may have spent many years trying not to deal with your childhood experiences. Maybe you have successfully avoided them by keeping busy with family, working hard, or by avoiding relationships. Or you may have used substances to blunt your feelings. However, these strategies haven't made the feelings go away or stopped them from welling up at the first possible chance. Although the thought of telling your story might be scary, it is a positive step towards gaining mastery over your feelings rather than trying to avoid them.

***I don't want to tell my family and friends about my application to Redress WA and I don't want to tell them about how I am feeling. Is this okay?***

It is entirely up to you whether or not to discuss your application with anyone, and it is useful to consider several factors when making this decision. Firstly, is it likely to be helpful to discuss things with the people you trust? In the past, you may have tried to 'protect' your family by not talking about painful memories, however deciding to share your feelings with them often has a number of benefits. Your family and friends can be a great source of support and encouragement, they can actively assist you, they can help you learn about things like symptoms and treatments and can provide a listening ear.

Secondly, the people closest to you are likely to notice that something is going on for you during the Redress process, and may be worried about you. They may even feel they have done something wrong, and need to be reassured that this is not the case. Often people find that talking to family or trusted friends about their good and bad childhood experiences strengthens the relationship and brings them closer.

**CBERS Redress Service (CRS) The Edmund Rice Institute 24 High Street Fremantle WA 6160  
FREECALL: 1800-621-805 TEL: (08) 9433-3644 EMAIL: cbersredress@inet.net.au**

Remember too that family and friends may be relieved to understand the reasons for many of your reactions in the past and are likely to want to help in any way they can. However, you are in charge of your Redress process, and only you can decide if talking to others is likely to help.

***I don't want to keep retelling my story to counsellors, doctors and others. How can I avoid this?***

Again, you don't have to tell anyone what you are doing, but it may be important for your doctor or other health professional to know that you are going through a stressful time. Briefly stating that you are applying for the *Redress WA* scheme may be enough for them to gain some understanding of the pressures you are under, and of course you are not obliged to discuss any personal details. Alternatively, we can give you a postcard-size information card that explains the *Redress WA* scheme, which you can give to doctors and other health professionals. You can also refer them to CBERS Redress Service for further general information about the redress scheme or, if really necessary, you can give them permission to speak with us about your specific situation. However, we will not provide specific details of your situation to anyone without your written permission.

***I don't want people to think I am unstable because of my past, and I worry that some people will think that applying for Redress WA implies this. What can I say to them about this?***

The two levels of payment under the scheme are designed to recognise that children harmed in State care experienced varying impacts later in life. Applying for *Redress WA* does not imply that you are unstable, mentally ill, or even that you experienced problems in your adult life. However, when anyone, especially a child, experiences overwhelming events it is likely (though not automatic) that they will suffer a traumatic reaction, especially if they don't receive support at the time. Such events can include removal from the family, major car accidents, illnesses or other life events such as abuse and neglect. Depending on circumstances, some people will overcome the reactions fairly quickly but for others one major event or many smaller events can create a set of lasting psychological reactions. These do not make you mentally ill but they can seriously impact on your capacity to manage relationships, work and social situations.

***What kind of help can I get?***

CBERS Redress Service (CRS) and other *Redress WA* support services can provide various types of assistance. We can help with determining whether you are eligible for the redress scheme, assist in documenting your story, and help you complete your application form.

If you would like additional support, we can also offer a counselling service for you and your family or supporters. Good counselling can be a great help in lessening unpleasant reactions to thinking about the past, and in dealing with longer-standing problems that may have developed in response to traumatic and abusive childhood experiences. The past cannot be changed or forgotten but it can be viewed differently when you examine it as an adult.

Counsellors at CBERS and now CBERS Redress Service have considerable experience in working with people who were harmed in out-of-home care, and are familiar with the issues faced by ex-residents and other care leavers.

***What will happen if I decide to get counselling?***

The counselling process varies according to what the individual wants to achieve and the goals that they identify. If you decide to continue with counselling, it may include working through some or all areas of a five point plan:

- Using information to acknowledge and understand your reactions, any diagnosis that may be relevant, what treatment options are available and what might be expected on the road to recovery.
- Learning some stress management techniques and strategies. Learning ways to manage your emotional reactions and behaviours, and stabilising your personal situation.
- Considering properly prescribed and managed medications to help alleviate symptoms of distress.
- Working through the memories at your own pace and with an adult's understanding in a safe environment. Understanding and reflecting on the meaning of the events in the whole of your life.
- Understanding that recovery is possible but can be a long slow process which may require lifestyle adjustments, ongoing support, and a lot of effort on your part.

For further information, or to make an appointment, contact CBERS Redress Service during office hours, or leave a message on the answering machine and we will return your call.

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**EMAIL: [cbersredress@iinet.net.au](mailto:cbersredress@iinet.net.au)**