

# Psychosocial guidelines for temporary memorial management





# Contents.

When temporary memorials are likely to occur	4
Why temporary memorials are important	5
Management principles	7
<b>Guidelines</b>	
Access	9
Removal	10
Preservation	11
Support	12
Support for people working with temporary memorials	14
Basic checklist	15

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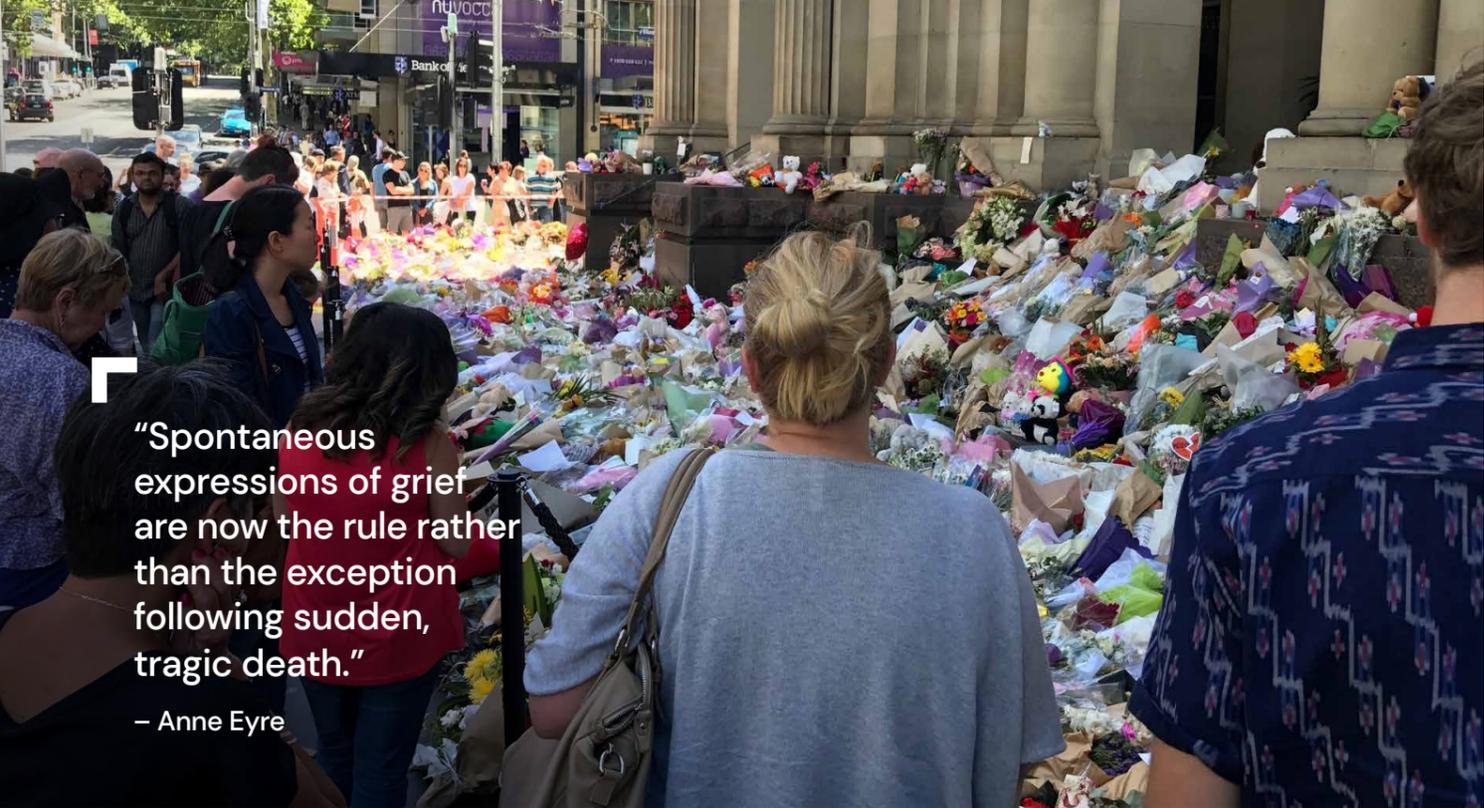
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Within this resource, the term 'emergency' is used and can apply to any form of emergency incident or disaster. Where the term 'disaster' is used, this is interchangeable to 'emergency' and connotations of one term over the other should not be made.

The information contained in this resource is designed to assist those working in a post emergency recovery situation. It necessarily contains information of a general nature that may not be appropriate in all situations.

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“Spontaneous expressions of grief are now the rule rather than the exception following sudden, tragic death.”

– Anne Eyre

## When temporary memorials are likely to occur

Following community level crisis events such as disasters, terrorist events and other critical incidents there can be a communal experience of fear, terror, loss or grief<sup>1</sup>. These events may shatter people’s fundamental sense of safety, order and security, leaving people feeling threatened and vulnerable<sup>2</sup>. “Unexpected, traumatic and horrific” events often disrupt the worldview or fundamental assumptions people have about their lives and communities<sup>3</sup>. People’s psychological and faith-based assumptions can be shattered and many people experience a crisis of meaning or purpose<sup>4</sup>.

The spontaneous expression of grief, such as the growth of temporary memorials and shrines, after crises is predictable post crisis behaviour<sup>5</sup>. As such, largescale spontaneous tributes and shrines are not uncommon after crisis and mass casualty events. In fact, they are seen as the rule rather than the exception following events that cause sudden and tragic death<sup>6</sup>.

Events that are likely to cause the occurrence and growth of large-scale temporary memorials include:

- Acts of terror
- Airplane and other transport accidents
- Death of notable, high profile people
- Events involving the death of children

1 Gortner, E.M. & Pennebaker, J.W., 2003. The archival anatomy of a disaster: Media coverage and community-wide health effects of the Texas A&M bonfire tragedy, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 22(5), pp. 580-603  
 2 Eyre, A., 2007. Community commemoration after disaster. In Rodriguez, H, Quarantelli EL & Dynes RR (Eds.), *Handbook of Disaster Research* (pp441-455) New York.  
 3 Sullender, R.S., 2010. Vicarious grieving and the media, *Pastoral Psychology*, vol. 59, pp191-200.  
 4 ibid

5 Eyre, A, 1999. In remembrance: Post disaster rituals and symbols, *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Spring 1999.  
 6 Eyre, A. 2007. op cit.

## Why temporary memorials are important

Post death rituals, such as participation in temporary memorialising, provide a safe space for the expression of individual and communal grief and can be an important step in the grieving process<sup>7</sup>. Spontaneous expression of loss, sorrow, grief and disbelief in the form of informal, temporary memorials, such as the ones in Paris after the 2015 terror attacks and Boston after the 2013 marathon bombing, often begin within hours of the public having knowledge of the disaster<sup>8</sup>. People feel the need to share their sorrow and acknowledge loss, even if they are not directly impacted by the event.

Post disaster rituals can provide people with an opportunity to express their shock, anger, disbelief, grief, and other emotions associated with the disaster. Without such opportunities, recovery and successful grieving can be hindered. Spontaneous expressions of grief, commemorative and memorial activities can assist in re-establishing feelings of control, social solidarity and belonging after collective crisis<sup>9</sup>. Temporary memorials may also assist communities in reclaiming the physical space where the crisis occurred and beginning the healing process for the community.



7 Eyre, A. 1999. op cit.  
 8 ibid

9 ibid



## Management principles<sup>10</sup>

- **Be inclusive**
- **Be supportive**
- **Be respectful**
- **Be consultative**
- **Plan removal**

### **Be inclusive**

Participation with temporary memorials can be helpful for individual and community healing after crisis events. At temporary memorials people will find others who are experiencing similar feelings and emotions. This shared experience normalises their feelings of sadness, loss and grief and can assist in re-establishing feelings of social solidarity and belonging<sup>11</sup>. It is important that all those who feel affected can access and participate with the memorial. Barriers to collective expression of shock, anger, disbelief, grief and other emotions can stall recovery and successful grieving<sup>12</sup>. Access and participation with the memorial should not be restricted to certain 'types' of people, such as only the bereaved. Temporary memorials should be open to anyone who wishes to visit.

### **Be supportive**

Temporary memorials bring together a range of people, with a range of emotional experiences. Some people do not have their own informal support networks and draw upon the collective nature of temporary memorials to seek support. Skilled psychosocial support personnel should be in place to help them make sense of the experience.

### **Be respectful**

The practice of participating in temporary memorials does not suit everyone, however for those it does; it is a powerful and potentially healing experience. People working at, or involved in the removal or preservation of, the memorial must be respectful of those who choose to participate and mindful of how this experience can help others in managing their grief.

### **Be consultative**

Collective trauma events have wide reaching impacts. More people than those directly impacted will feel affected and wish to contribute to the memorial process. Failure to engage with a broad array of stakeholders could lead to negative outcomes in future permanent memorial processes and hinder community healing. Good engagement can start while temporary memorials are in place.

### **Plan removal**

The psychosocial implications of handling memorial items poorly or inappropriately can be significant and have potentially negative outcomes. The removal process needs to be thoughtful, considered and appropriate. Preplanning, while a memorial is still in place, is recommended to allow appropriate removal arrangements to be determined.

<sup>10</sup> Whitton, S. 2018. Post disaster temporary memorialising: psychosocial considerations for disaster managers. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, vol.33 (1).  
<sup>11</sup> Eyre, A., 1999. In remembrance: Post disaster rituals and symbols, *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Spring 1999  
<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*



## Guidelines<sup>13,14</sup>

The following are some brief practical considerations for those who may have to work with temporary memorials. This guidance is by no means exhaustive.

### Access

After disaster and human caused crisis events where there is a communal or shared experience of fear, grief and loss, temporary memorials are likely to appear. It is important temporary memorials are allowed to 'grow' and that people are able to participate in contributing to the memorial. Visiting or contributing to temporary memorials can be an important part of healing for people affected by the crisis<sup>15</sup>.

#### Do

- Assume temporary / spontaneous memorialising will occur after certain types of crisis events and start to plan the management of the memorial.
- Allow memorial to 'grow'.
- Enable access for people who have been injured.
- Enable access for people with children.
- The safe access to the temporary memorial site is important for all people, including those who may require special assistance.
- Allow people who live or work nearby to take ownership of the memorial if they wish.
- Consider if crowd management measures are required. Temporary memorials can grow quite large and attract many visitors.

#### Don't

- Try to prevent memorialising behaviour.
- Restrict access to temporary memorials, if the location is unsafe try to move to another community identified space.
- Restrict access to certain groups or individuals e.g., only the bereaved or survivors, dignitaries, politicians etc.
- Unnecessarily contain temporary memorials to one location over another.

<sup>13</sup> Whitton, S. 2018. op cit.

<sup>14</sup> Whitton, S. 2016. Exploring the role of memorialising in disaster recovery. Winston Churchill Memorial Trust.

<sup>15</sup> Whitton, S. 2016. op cit.

## Removal

The nature of temporary memorials means they will be required to be removed. This will likely be driven by the location and the weather<sup>16</sup>. However, there is no specific timeline for removal of temporary memorials. These factors will be specific to the event. Sometimes temporary memorials grow very quickly, and parts of the memorial may effect access to buildings, thoroughfares etc. This may mean that part of the memorial may need to be moved. Moving and removal requires thoughtful planning.

### Do

- Consider the upcoming weather forecast when determining how long the memorial should remain in place.
- Consult with affected community before moving/removing memorial.
- If those directly affected wish to visit the memorial but are unable to in the immediate future, consider whether it is feasible to move the memorial to a more protected location, or leave in place longer.
- The affected community may wish to preserve the memorial, this can include mulching organic matter and keeping and archiving the notes, cards and objects.
- Consider who will be responsible for removing the memorial.
- Consider having a respected, neutral community group, e.g. Red Cross, local volunteer Firefighters, Rotary etc. conduct the removal of the memorial.
- Items and objects left at memorials hold much emotional worth. Any moving/removal of memorial objects/items should be done in a respectful manner.
- Leave a sign/plaque telling future visitors to the site what has been done with the memorial. Include contact details if available.
- Consider a variety of communication methods to explain what will happen with the memorial to the public.
- Some communities may wish to archive memorial items in community/library archives or items may be given to the bereaved and survivors.

### Don't

- Try to encourage or interfere with temporary memorials or remove them too early.
- Disregard the emotional connection the community will have with the memorial.
- Restrict communication about moving/removal plans to the directly affected.
- Remove temporary memorials with little or no prior communication with the community.

## Preservation

Many communities choose to preserve temporary memorials. Preserving items left at temporary memorials can serve as a record of the community's response to the crisis. There are a number of practical and management challenges associated with this. Preservation efforts will require a coordinated effort and it is likely that an agency or a group of agencies working together will need to take responsibility for the process. Preservations of temporary memorial items can be expensive.

### Do

- Start thinking about potential preservation of the memorial. Who or what organisation will be responsible for this?
- Consult with the affected community about archiving / preservation of memorial items. There may be particular items, e.g. photographs or personal belongings that they may wish to retrieve from the memorial site.
- Determining who 'owns' the memorial items or who is responsible to the property the memorial is located on is important to ensure no conflict arises.
- Consider what will be kept and what will need to be disposed of such as organic matter.
- Consider where the items will be stored and whether they will be accessible to the affected community if they wish to access them.
- Memorial items such as stuffed toys, paper and cardboard do not survive well for long when exposed to the elements. They will need to be cleaned and properly processed before being added to any pre-existing community archives.
- Determine whether there are local storage companies that could provide pro bono storage services.
- Consider local or regional companies that could assist with cleaning, preservation and digitisation of memorial items.
- Consider that the media are likely to be very interested in covering the removal and preservation of memorial items

### Don't

- Make decisions on preservation without input from the affected community.
- Assume preservation will or will not occur.
- Interfere with community efforts to preserve items. Where possible communities should be allowed to take ownership of the memorial.
- Dispose of items without consultation / permission.

16 *ibid.*

## Support

Temporary memorials can become important sites of connection, hope and recovery. Family members, survivors and people injured in the event may want to visit the memorial. Provision of psychosocial support is recommended<sup>17</sup>.

This includes for people:

- directly affected by the crisis event,
- visiting the temporary memorial site,
- working at the temporary memorial site,
- those involved in the removal of temporary memorial items
- those involved in the preservation of temporary memorial items
- those providing psychosocial support in relation to the crisis.

Many people will be involved with temporary memorials, in a number of ways. It is important to consider all the different stakeholders involved when making decisions.

### Do

- If visitors are exhibiting signs of extreme distress, consider locating psychosocial support personnel/ volunteers at the site to provide support and assistance. This should include spiritual and secular support.
- Consider whether survivors, families of the deceased or people injured may want to visit the memorial. This may need to be facilitated if the memorial has grown quite large and getting lots of visitors.
- Visits by families of the deceased, survivors, people injured should be accompanied by psychosocial support where appropriate.
- Brief visitors on media presence if necessary.
- During visit consider restricting access/crowd control measures if necessary.

### Don't

- Forget about the emotional impact of working with temporary memorials may have on staff.
- Force psychosocial support on people attending the memorial. Most people won't need it.
- Restrict support to only people directly affected by the crisis event.



<sup>17</sup> Whitton, S. 2016. op cit.



## Support for people working with temporary memorials



People who work to preserve the memorial, such as city archivists, are:

- not usually involved in recovery planning;
- unlikely to have experience working with emotive materials;
- unlikely to have experience working with, or supporting, people experiencing distress<sup>18</sup>.

Self care workshops and stress management sessions may be useful for people working to preserve the memorial.

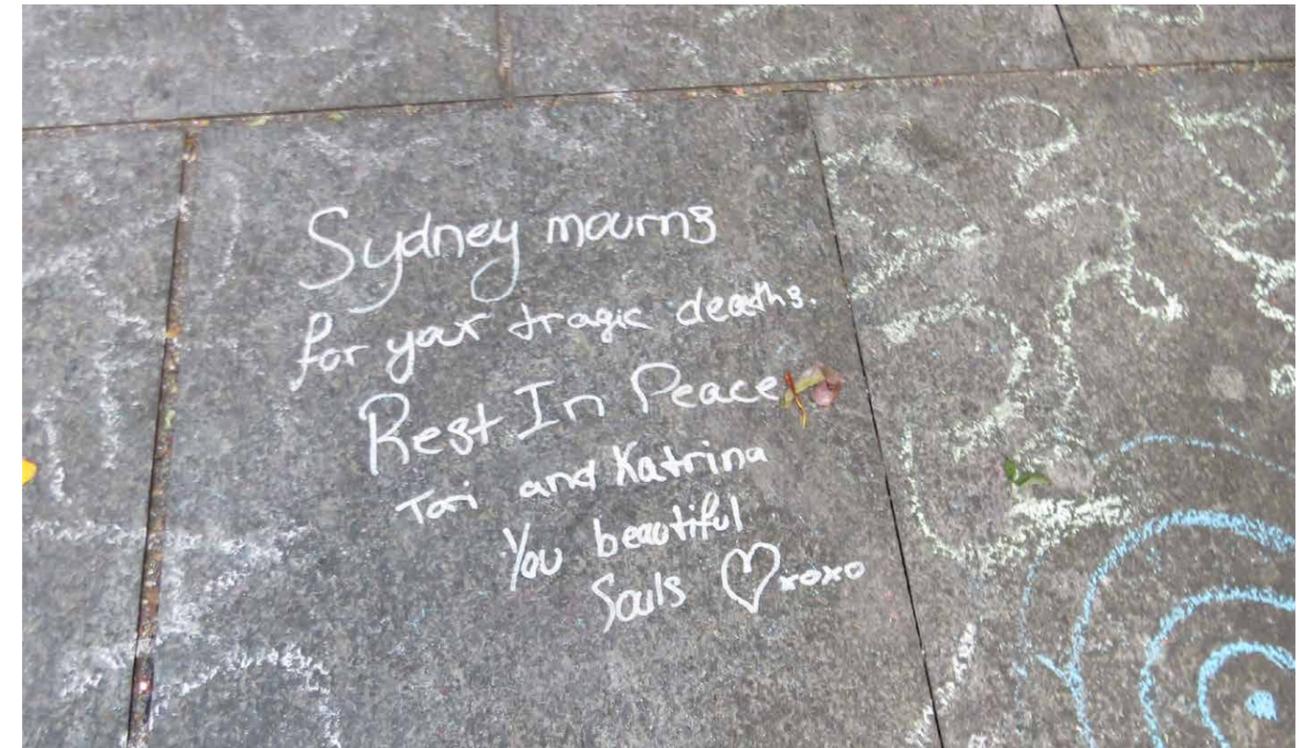
The media may wish to document the preservation process, including interviewing people doing the work. Staff should consider if they are comfortable with this and think about personal boundaries they may need to put in place.

18 Whitton, S. 2016. op cit.

## Basic checklist

The following are key considerations if you are currently faced with managing a temporary memorial.

- Allow memorial to 'grow' and start planning removal early.
- Consult with families of victims, survivors and affected people as much as possible.
- Consider access to the memorial. Is it safe and accessible for those who wish to visit?
- If moving the memorial is required, carefully consider where the memorial is moved to. It should be close by.
- Consider psychosocial support for people attending the temporary memorial. Multi-faith and secular support should be provided where possible.
- Have a plan for removing the memorial.
- Determine if memorial items will be kept or preserved and who needs to be consulted about this.
- Communicate your plan through the media.
- Think about who is most appropriate to participate in moving / removal of the memorial.
- Consider psychosocial support for personnel involved in removal and preservation of memorial material.
- Refrain from committing to timelines around the development of a permanent memorial. This should be considered in close consultation with people affected by the crisis.



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