

# SANE AUSTRALIA

SANE Australia Online Peer Group

Date: 07/10/2021

**Topic:** Dealing with Upsetting News Content

**Description:** We can often want to keep up to date with current news and events, but sometimes what we see in the media can be upsetting, overwhelming, or even triggering. Join this conversation to talk together about how we can look after ourselves when managing our relationship with the media.

The Hams

Nite all

**Hi everyone! Welcome everyone to today's Peer Group Chat talking about dealing with upsetting news content! First, we'd like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands we are all joining this event from. We pay deep respect to the Elders of those Countries, past and present, and we further extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people joining this group tonight. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land. This is a new peer support service we are running! Because of this, we really value your thoughts on how it goes, so we will send a link to a short survey at the end of this chat for you to complete. While this survey is optional, it is a chance to provide feedback for us to improve our services. In case you might need to leave part way through the event, you can access the survey here**

Girasole (PSW)

**now:[https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW](https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW) Tonight, peer support workers @Girasole and @periwinklepixie will be facilitating a discussion around the topic of looking after our mental health when engaging with the**

media. Whether you have lived experience of complex mental health issues, you care for someone who does, or both- anyone can benefit from thinking about how we look after ourselves when we come across upsetting news. We'll be moving through a number of discussion questions tonight, and it's entirely up to you how much or how little you are comfortable with sharing. Some of the conversation could be heavy in nature as we may talk about our mental health struggles. @Otter, who moderates on the SANE Forums, is working behind the scenes to ensure our safety. If you're having any technical difficulties, please see our FAQ (<https://www.sane.org/peer-support/peer-group-chat/chat-faq#what-if-i-am-having-a-tough-time-and-need-immediate-support>). If you can't find an answer to your question there, please message @Otter directly. We're looking forward to creating a space where we can reflect and learn together and expand our ideas of how we can look after ourselves, managing media consumption! Lastly, just so you're aware, the transcript of this group will be made available for download afterwards on SANE's Peer Support website.

Hi there!

periwinklepixie (PSW)  
Welcome @s  
and @water :)

Hi everyone!  
Nice to have  
you here

Otter (Moderator)

We'll be starting the discussion shortly,  
and will just allow a bit more time for  
people to log on and  
join 😊 In the meantime, feel free to  
introduce yourselves if you like :)

Girasole (PSW)

**As we might be talking about our personal experiences of triggering content in the news, we'd like to share a reminder of our Safety Guideline so that the conversation can remain as safe and supportive for everyone as possible: "As language can be triggering or elicit a trauma response, out of respect for people with a lived experience, please do not publish content that contains graphic or specific details, or any descriptive account, of: - your or anyone else's medication or dosages eating disorder behaviours recommending diets, descriptive weight loss/gain strategies or any numbers relating to weight, BMI, clothing size, calories or exercise) - self-harm methods methods - sexual or physical abuse or any other content that others may find distressing or harmful in any way Thank you!**

Girasole (Peer Worker)

Ok, let's start the conversation for  
tonight! **What are your experiences with  
consuming media? Have you ever found  
yourself to be affected by big emotions or  
triggered by what you are exposed to?**

Girasole (Peer Worker)

i can get us rolling! The media can often bring up big feelings for me. Particularly when a topic that is personally relevant to me is popping up everywhere. I find it especially difficult when leaders and media people give their opinions on topics that affect me and people I care about and I think "is this how the world sees me?" I also find graphic images in the News and social media difficult to deal with, especially when shown on repeat. It's just hard to be reminded all the time of all the pain and suffering in the world.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

The Hams

Hi

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

Hi The Hams!  
Welcome! :)

For me, over the last year or so I've been tuning into a lot of covid-related news because I'm based in a city where there's been a lot of outbreaks. It's easy for that to get overwhelming. Sometimes I also look at what's happening in the news generally and can come across some upsetting things (like DV, SA) which can really affect my mood

**Girasole (PSW)**

I know this conversation can bring up big feeling so it's okay that we are all a bit quiet.  
haha  
It's a big topic that's for sure.  
:)

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

A couple of things I notice with regard to news are the following: - Mental health is a buzz term now. It's good that awareness is raised and that it's OK to not be ok. But I think sometimes it gets lost in the array of causes we are called to be aware of. There are so many causes these days. Sometimes it's just exhausting keeping up with it all - mental health is always referred to with regard to crime. Particularly severe mental health. - I used to see this a lot in my old job in the courts. Many people would apply for the mental health act but they probably were not diagnosed - this would then be reported in media. - covid has effected us all with mental health as well as the disease itself. But some of this is caused by hyper sensationalised coverage.

The Hams

The Hams I tuned out of the media coverage on case numbers mid lockdown as there was no sign of things changing. The constant barrage of it made me exhausted. I tuned out

**periwinklepixie (PSW)** I agree @The Hams I find the association between mental health and the media so frustrating. And I definitely tuned out Covid news myself too. But early on I found myself consumed by it and unable to look away and it really took a toll. It's been touched on here just now, but what are some strategies we can use to engage with the media in a way that feels better for us? This could be the changing the types of things we engage with, limiting our media intake altogether, etc

**Girasole (PSW)**

**periwinklepixie (PSW)** Great question! I try to be aware of what media I consume. I try to view media that is a bit more balanced in its portrayals and a little more mindful about how they share about difficult topics. On social media, I tend to follow accounts that do challenge my views and perspectives but without being too confronting.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)** There have definitely been some times where I have taken a break from the media and social media though. What are some things you all try?

**periwinklepixie (PSW)** hey @frog  
Welcome!

frog Hello everyone.  
Better late than never!

**We were just chatting about some ways we cope with difficult media, like choosing what news we follow and limiting intake. Is there anything you'd like to add?**

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

I've found it really helpful to limit news when things are overwhelming - like when in a covid lockdown and I just need to focus on my own wellbeing and survival - I've realised I don't actually need to know the details of things in the news that don't affect my life, and that allows more space to just focus on getting through

**Girasole (PSW)**

**Our next question is a Community Question submitted to the group. This person asks: "How to set healthy boundaries with others when upsetting news content appears? Especially with the daily news stories about how many covid cases are there on a specific day? Are there any boundaries you have set with loved ones about talking about what they see in the media to you? How did this go?"**

**Girasole (PSW)**

I listen to long form podcasts and also debates. YouTube js great for that. More time to explore complex topics.

The Hams

A couple of times I have had to set some pretty clear boundaries with people in my life about talking about certain media topics I don't want to hear about. For example, there was lots of media coverage about George Pell's trial I had to ask everyone in their life not to even mention it to them. Someone I used to work with once said 'clearness is kindness' and I really think that applies to setting boundaries. So I tell everyone in my life, "I know this is a real hot topic right now, but I don't want to chat about it when we catch up, please". I have done this with knowing Covid case numbers too. I told my partner 'I just need to know what rules to follow so please fill me in on that but when it comes to case numbers and all the projections, I don't want to hear it'. This has definitely helped to preserve my own mental health.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

Sorry for the long message

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

I agree @The Hams I much prefer a podcast that allows me to explore a topic properly rather than just get a headline.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

My cousin said the same thing in a family zoom. Lol.

The Hams

Can we talk about something other than covid

It can help just to change the topic at times, in my experience Covid has been such an all-consuming story for so long sometimes people are needing to talk about more pleasant topics or needing a distraction more than they initially realize!

**Otter (Moderator)**

I found this really difficult during the Black Summer fires. My partner lives in an area directly affected and I got out just in time. When I got home, with extended family there, the tv was on all the time. One thing I do to manage my news intake/emotions is to avoid the visual - so I stick with text/radio. I had to ask them to leave it off. They looked at each other sideways, and me as if there was something wrong with me, but it was the right call.

frog

That's such a smart idea about avoiding visuals @frog! I'd not thought of being that clear about it before.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

Yeah visual news is hard to consume. Its entertainment and not information now

The Hams

**Another question for us to consider tonight: When talking about potentially upsetting topics, some media outlets, social media accounts, and individuals use content notes/warnings or trigger warnings. Do you find these to be helpful? What makes a good or bad/less helpful content warning for you?**

**Girasole (PSW)**

I appreciate the warnings - I feel like I can make a more informed choice about

frog

particular content. I hope it will get a bit more consistent/refined over time, but I think the trend is positive.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

Great point @frog It's so good to see them being used! I think content notes need to be specific to work well. So instead of saying "this may be upsetting to some viewers" which doesn't really help much, tell me what themes you will cover, for how long, how intensely and in what detail.

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

I'm curious, has anyone ever made a choice not to look at something due to a content note?

**Otter (Moderator)**

Yep - has certainly allowed me to flick channels at times when needed

The Hams

Personally I haven't. I remember at uni the topic of suicide came up in a philosophy lecture. My thoughts on this were that it would probably be nice, but for a topic like philosophy they usually say anything can be spoken about. I think at times it depends on context.

**Girasole (PSW)**

I find they can be helpful and important both for myself and for others. To me a less helpful content warning is one which is not specific - it might just say "trigger warning!" - But this doesn't tell us about what exact trigger/topic a reader could expect. A good content warning for me is specific - it says exactly what someone should expect (and therefore may want to avoid) - e.g. CSA, DV, coercive control, grief/loss, colonisation. Interesting point @The Hams! I definitely experienced similar things at University studying

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

Psychology where things about diagnoses that are very real to me were just reeled out in lectures like it should be expected.

Me too  
@periwinklepixie

frog  
periwinklepixie (PSW) (PSW) re Psychology  
at uni - very clinical  
Particularly studying  
the unit "Abnormal  
Psychology" haha!

Girasole (PSW) **Sometimes it can be exhausting and upsetting if you are just trying to relax and unwind on social media and people are sharing news stories that are upsetting for you. It can be a shock and make us feel less safe online. What do you wish people knew or thought more about when they share news stories on social media?**

Otter (Moderator) That social media, like a lot of media, is usually geared towards grabbing our attention and immediate interest, and that this can often be a priority over careful reporting and sharing information

The Hams I find it's best to use social media sparingly. Usually if I'm interested in seeing stuff. I don't use it to relax or unwind unless it's certain comedy pages - like terrible maps - that is a hilarious Facebook page I recommend you view. Always good for a laugh. They just make silly content- like there is a map of Europe and it says "Tesla charging stations in 1347 AD" haha

periwinklepixie (PSW) I wish more people thought about the people on the other end of the screen when they share something. I feel like some people are so invested in showing that they care about issues affecting certain communities that they forget about how someone from that community may feel having their social media flooded with upsetting content.

periwinklepixie (PSW) Haha will have to check that out  
@The Hams !

frog



So true @Otter (Moderator) and I think that you're right @periwinklepixie (PSW) sometimes people share things they never would in person

**Girasole (PSW)**

I wish more people knew that some others are actively trying to avoid certain topics. So when they share something with no forewarning and therefore expose people to that topic, it can cause harm. This can be prevented by something as simple as using a content warning!

It would be great if there was a way to filter stuff out. Some of the advertising/seeking donations content really gets to me - things re animals. I love to support these organisations but I don't need disturbing content to convince me.

frog

That's so true @frog it can actually make it super off putting

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

**What are some things you find helpful when the media is upsetting and/or triggering? Maybe it's self-care or grounding techniques- what works for you?**

**Girasole (PSW)**

I think it's helpful for me to recognise when I'm being negatively impacted, and just stop reading. This can be hard because with certain news topics it's a bit like 'curiosity killed the cat' for me- I am curious and want to find out more. But stopping before I feel worse is important. Then that'd be a good point to try some grounding techniques to clear away tension, anxiety, or trauma.

**Girasole (PSW)**

Actually come to think of it - covid has become a political football. And something like that actually inflames me. So in that instance I just avoid it. Usually the headlines or the topics on news websites can be a content warning in its own right lol

The Hams

Shaz51

Hello

frog I get hooked sometimes  
too @Girasole (Peer  
Worker) , so much so  
that I have to physically  
get away - ideally outside  
- to break the spell!

**Otter (Moderator)**  
frog It can help me  
to do my own  
independent  
research or talk  
to people  
whose opinion I  
value or trust  
Good to see  
you @Shaz51

**periwinklepixie  
(PSW)**  
frog I LOVE Survivor which is always on after the Project and often when I turn it on the TV I will  
catch the last 30 seconds of an upsetting interview or news. There's no real way to prevent it  
without missing the start of Survivor and I'm not willing to do that! :P I personally always carry  
mints with me. I find the sharp taste of a mint helps to ground me and get back in my body  
when something might otherwise cause me to become triggered or dissociate.

frog Good to see  
you @Shaz51  
Haha  
@Shaz51  
couldn't tag  
then went  
twice - but  
seriously -  
very good to  
see you!

**periwinklepixie  
(PSW)**  
Frog Hey  
@Shaz51 just

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**  
realised you may have been late to the party due to the AEDT. Sorry about that! We were just chatting about things we do to help when we see something upsetting in the media.

The Hams  
Good to see ya my shaz

Shaz51  
that is correct @periwinklepixie (PSW)

**Girasole (PSW)**  
**Do you think the media could improve the way they report on upsetting news content? How would you like to see things change so we can all have the ability to engage with the media safely?**

frog  
I'm not very optimistic on that front because sensationalism sells

Shaz51  
yes @Girasole (Peer Worker)

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**  
I think this relates back to what @The Hams said about

representations of mental health  
and crime as well.

The Hams I actually think there's little we can do to change the media OTHER than act as a consumer of media and go elsewhere for our content. If we don't like something, don't feed the attention. I saw the film The Social Dilemma, it was about Facebook and one thing they spoke about was the "attention economy" and how this soaks up our attention and their entire algorithm is based on us tuning in. I avoid mass media like the plague. I only have Facebook and an anonymous twitter

**periwinklepixie (PSW)** I guess it's hard to imagine because like @frog said it is so ingrained in the media to sensationalise. But what would our ideal world look like?

I've noticed that online news articles these days are often including more links to support services and counselling lines, which is great. I'd like to see that continue, and particularly to include topic-specific services (e.g. Griefline for grief and loss, Blue Knot for adult survivors of childhood trauma, etc). This, and more (and improved) content warnings. I guess all of this would involve journalists needing a bit of a shift in how they report, generally- needing to be even more aware of the potential negative mental health impacts of their work.

**Girasole (PSW)** Maybe there's a need for some industry-wide training/professional development on the matter  
**periwinklepixie (PSW)** I think it's also about shifting the culture beyond getting reactions and clicks,

frog I feel the same @The Hams we can take our attention and/or money elsewhere

The Hams @periwinklepixie (PSW) I think it would start with accepting that people will always disagree on things, but this should be a basis of discrimination or harassment. Life is hard and I think it is made easier by realistic views on how we can navigate the complexities of life. But I believe a but of empathy goes a long way. And also that we should listen to others. I mean to hate to say it because it's obvious but maybe society needs a refresh idk

The Hams That is a thesis for a phd I think haha  
@periwinklepixie (PSW)

**Okay, as we start to wind up for the evening  
- Have you learned anything helpful from others' experiences here tonight that you might be able to apply in your own life? If yes, what was it that you took away? 😊**

**Girasole (PSW)**

Good points @The Hams , social media mobs can be very scary

frog

hugs @The Hams@frog

Shaz51

I think I've learned that I'm not alone with my views on media. Sometimes my dad jokes about me being too cynical about media for my age (28) but I believe this cynicism about the media is actually vested in hope for something better. But its good to see many others here feel the same about it.

The Hams

Onya  
Shazzo :)

The Hams

I really like the attention economy reminder. Although the mass media, and social media are concentrated in the hands of some powerful, money oriented organisations, we can still take an active role in what we support, even by our presence or absence on various platforms.

frog

I like what @The Hams said about not using social media to relax or unwind - that's something I can definitely try and take away for myself I also like @Otter (Moderator)'s idea of changing your environment or going outside when you're upset by or dwelling on some upsetting news

**Girasole (PSW)**

Shaz51

I agree  
@Otter  
(Moderator)

The Hams

I once heard someone say we should be willing to pay for journalism content but then I thought... why would I wanna pay for ads lol

**Otter (Moderator)**

I've immediately subscribed to Terrible Maps

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

I think this conversation has really given me a lot to think about. I particularly like @frog 's point about choosing what type of media to enagge with. Sometimes I really need a break from visuals.

frog

I don't subscribe to news organisations, but I do occasionally donate to some in the hope that independent media survives

The Hams

Nice! @Otter (Moderator) haha

**Girasole (PSW)**

**Tonight's topic could have brought up some uncomfortable feelings as we talked about upsetting experiences with the media. Would some self-care be helpful for you after we finish? If so, what might you do? 😊**

The Hams  
**periwinklepixie (PSW)**

Very much so @frog my amphibious friend

The Hams  
My cat has been trying to type to you all all night so I think I will give him some extra special attention :P Thank you everyone for your company this evening. It was Very interesting to hear from you all. I bid thee goodnight :)

Shaz51  
awwwwwwww  
@periwinklepixie (PSW)

frog  
I actually feel quite encouraged. Time for some zzz

[We'd like to invite you to complete a survey reflecting on your experience in this Peer Group Chat- we'd love to hear any feedback you may have. It will only take a few minutes to complete. :\) Please click this link: https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW](https://sane.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5uUF0sHJRKQ6wyW)

**Girasole (PSW)**

**Otter (Moderator)**  
Thanks everyone - you're all super smart and lovely, loved hearing your thoughts and experiences!

Here are some further resources on dealing with upsetting news content you might like to have a look at: “Coping with distressing news events” <https://www.sane.org/information-stories/the-sane-blog/wellbeing/coping-with-shocking-news-events> “Taking care of yourself (or a loved one) when sexual abuse makes the headlines” - <https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/how-to-cope-with-reading-traumatic-triggering-news/10849940> ‘The Happy Newspaper’: An Instagram account with a possible subscription service for happier news stories: <https://www.instagram.com/thehappynewspaper/?hl=en>

**Girasole (PSW)**

Shaz51  
ha ha me too  
ZZZZZZZZzzzzzzzzzz  
@frog

**periwinklepixie (PSW)**  
Personally, I really recommend the Happy Newspaper! Lots of super cute news stories. :)

**periwinklepixie  
(PSW)**

The other ones are  
good too thought ;)

[Thank you for joining, and we hope you enjoyed the conversation! It was a great chat tonight :\) If you'd like to be informed when our next Peer Group Chat will be taking place, you can sign up to our mailing list here https://www.sane.org/peer-support/peer-group-chat. You can also ask a question for our next topic, which will be talking about Caring for yourself when caring for someone else, and you can read the transcripts of all our previous topics too 😊](https://www.sane.org/peer-support/peer-group-chat)

**Girasole (PSW)**