

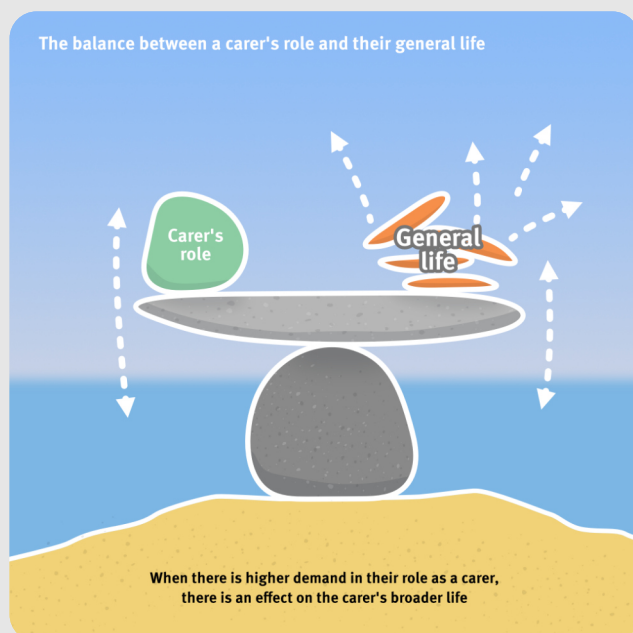
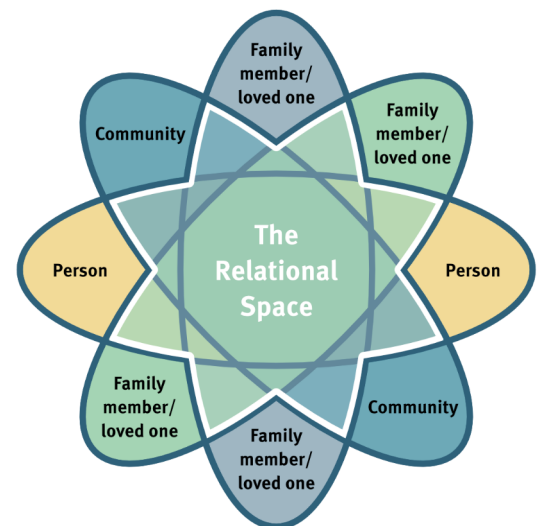
Understanding our own experiences and recovery journey when someone we care about is struggling with mental health distress

Recovery from mental health distress

Recovery from mental health distress involves more than overcoming mental health symptoms. Recovery is understood as a challenge, not just for the individual experiencing mental health distress, but for their family as well. The experiences of family members as they respond and adjust to the mental health crisis are described in the CHIME Recovery model (Connectedness, Hope & optimism, Identity, Meaning in life, Empowerment).

Recovery is not just personal, it's relational

Recovery from mental health distress is not something that happens within one person alone, it happens between people. It happens in our relationships. When someone in the family experiences a mental health crisis or is in distress, this impacts everyone in the family. Families can also experience a recovery process. Relational recovery recognises that all people, including families, significant others and friends, can be affected by the distress and have needs. Everybody's wellbeing matters.

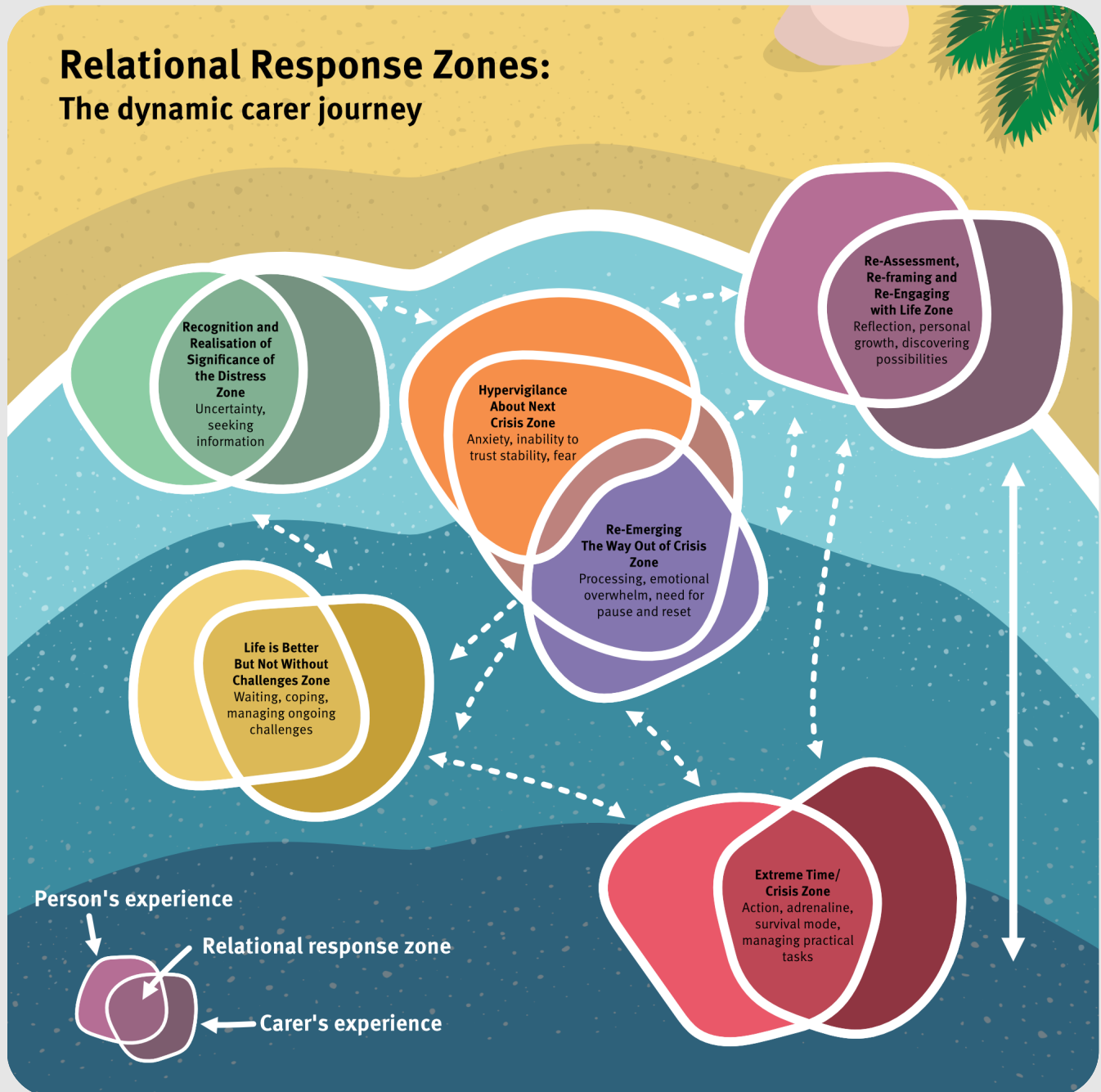


Recovery experiences of families, significant others and friends

It can be difficult to balance supporting someone else with looking after your own needs. Family, carers and social networks have their own recovery experiences, which are different from the person they support and sometimes the two can be in tension. Many family and carers describe their support role as a "doing" role. But focusing on their own wellbeing (or recovery) asks them to be in a "feeling" space. It's hard to focus on feeling while also "doing" the work of supporting someone experiencing mental health distress.

Relational response zones – a way to understand families' experiences over time

Families' experiences are closely connected to those of the person they support, and the intensity of the support provided changes depending on what is happening for the person supported. When someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, providing support (the doing) can become intense. During these times there may be little room for families and carers to focus on their own recovery (feeling/being). It is when the crisis abates that many people start to have space to reflect, process, and attend to their wellbeing and recovery. The term Relational Response Zones can be used to capture the experiences of families/carers and reflect the changes in relationship dynamics, support roles and recovery needs.



Carer recovery - Ebbs and Flows

"The tide comes in, the tide goes out, the tide comes in, the tide goes out, it goes. [...] Sometimes the tide comes in a lot higher and other times it comes in lower [...] Sometimes it is going out and leaves everything exposed and raw, in other words, out of your control. It is never the same tide."

Families' Perception of Consumer Experience

Distress emerges	Crisis period	Re-emerging	Life is better	Re-engaging with life
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Relational Response Zones

Recognition and Realisation of Significance of the Distress	Extreme Time/ Crisis	Hypervigilance About Next Crisis	Re-Emerging	Life is Better But Not Without Challenges	Re-assessment, Re-framing and Re-engaging with Life
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Zone Characteristics

- Time of uncertainty - Important when distress first emerges, but later in the journey may merge with the experience of crisis	- A period of doing and supporting the person - Little space for own life and recovery - Disruption of the social network as a whole	- Unable to let go of fear and worries - Trauma response	- Emotions and feelings are raw - Moving from Reactive to Responsive (Doing/thinking) - Relational healing in a social network - Readjusting (own lives, citizenship, work and relationships)	- Waiting space - Weariness - Loss of hope - We can do everything right, but things are still out of our control	Thinking and feeling space
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Possible Supports

Information and psychoeducation	- Practical support and help to manage the crisis - Guidance to work out what to do next - If present, support in carrying out a prepared crisis plan	- A safe space to process what has been happening and how to safely let go of hypervigilance. - Start the healing from the trauma - Support relational healing with the person and their social network - Practical support to re-engage with life, family and work	- A supportive space to talk and hold what is unbearable - Moving into a feeling space to re-integrate experience and trauma - Breathing spaces - Reconnecting and rediscovering parts of our own lives - Practical supports to re-engage with life, family and work	- A safe space to explore and integrate the experience of trauma - Re-adjust and re-engage with own life - Reconnecting and rediscovering parts of our own lives - Practical supports to re-engage with life, family and work
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This resource summarises the following peer reviewed research paper:

Wyder, M., Bland, R., & Jonas, R. (2025). Relational recovery journey: understanding the evolving roles of families supporting those in mental health distress. *Advances in Mental Health*, 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/18387357.2025.2557483>.

Suggested citation

Wyder, M; Bland, R; Jonas, R (2026) Understanding our own experiences and recovery journey when someone we care about is struggling with Mental Health Distress, Metro South Addiction and Mental Health Services. Brisbane, QLD, Australia.