

# Festival Well

promoting positive mental  
health and wellbeing for  
festival workers

## WHAT IS FESTIVAL WELL?

---

Festival Well is a practical, evidence-based guide for taking care of your mental health and wellbeing and supporting your mates in and out of festival seasons. Whether you work in festivals across the year or come and go seasonally, we hope you find Festival Well helpful.

For more information on any of the topics in Festival Well, visit [artswellbeingcollective.com.au](http://artswellbeingcollective.com.au)

## IS FESTIVAL WELL FOR ME?

---

If you're an individual working in festivals, are considering working in festivals, or are a person who organises festivals – Festival Well is for you! The strategies and tools are applicable to artists, creatives, producers, technicians, operational teams and service providers working in any capacity – volunteer, freelance, casually and part or full time in festivals.

Festival Well is not a comprehensive guide to every issue you might encounter and does not take the place of support and information from peak bodies, occupational health and safety practices, legal or medical advice, or relevant workplace policies and procedures.

Please note that the health and wellbeing advice contained in this publication is not a substitute for individualised professional advice, such as advice you may receive from your health or mental health care provider. Arts Centre Melbourne has taken all reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of material contained in this publication. You should always consult a suitably qualified professional before making any decisions that could affect you or others.

No matter what your role in the performing arts industry, it is expected that every company complies with the relevant awards and legislative requirements, and properly communicates rigorous and relevant policies and procedures to all company members.

Visit [worksafe.vic.gov.au/mental-health-safety-basics](http://worksafe.vic.gov.au/mental-health-safety-basics) for more information.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we meet, visit and perform, and pay our respect to Elders past and present.

## WHO DEVELOPED FESTIVAL WELL?

---

Festival Well is a resource of the Arts Wellbeing Collective, an initiative of Arts Centre Melbourne, with generous support from the Ron and Margaret Dobell Foundation. The content was reviewed and informed by many passionate performing arts workers from a range of roles, companies, and backgrounds who have shared their stories, ideas, and experiences.

### Ron and Margaret Dobell Foundation

The Ron and Margaret Dobell Foundation was born out of a genuine desire to nurture aspiring performing artists. These artists are our future performing arts professionals and audience members and will play an important part in Australian cultural life. The Ron and Margaret Dobell Foundation has been central in supporting the development of Festival Well and we thank them!

### Arts Centre Melbourne and Arts Wellbeing Collective

Arts Centre Melbourne is Australia's largest and busiest performing arts centre, whose purpose is to enrich the lives of Victorians – culturally, educationally, socially, and economically and to provide leadership in the promotion and development of the performing arts (Victorian Arts Centre Act 1979).

The Arts Wellbeing Collective is an Arts Centre Melbourne initiative that promotes positive mental health and wellbeing in the performing arts industry. Since the Pilot Program in 2017, the Arts Wellbeing Collective has grown rapidly to be a comprehensive, sector-wide program delivering resources, services and training.

### Chris Cheers

Chris Cheers is a psychologist, facilitator and lecturer based in Melbourne. Before training as a psychologist, Chris worked for arts organisations across Australia, developing a rich understanding of the industry. Chris Cheers Psychology specialises in providing mental health support and workshops to clients in the arts, performance and creative industries.

Chris is an endorsed Educational and Developmental Psychologist and also has expertise in supporting LGBTIQ+ clients across all ages. Chris has been a university Lecturer in Psychology since 2011 and is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Alcohol and Policy Research at La Trobe University.



### **Glenda Chi, WHY Discovery**

Glenda Chi is the Director and Purpose Coach at WHY Discovery, working with creative individuals, businesses and organisations in the arts and design sector. Glenda's work is focused on helping people discover their purpose and creating purpose-led strategies to shape lives and workplace cultures.

### **Romi Kupfer**

Romi Kupfer is a contemporary theatre maker, director and producer. Romi's practice has evolved since 2013 through practical experience collaborating with companies, artists and communities as well as theatre training. Romi holds a Bachelor of Performing Arts (Honours) from Monash University and a Masters of Directing for Performance from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

### **Dr Jane Miskovic-Wheatley**

Dr Jane Miskovic-Wheatley is a NIDA graduate in Directing, and currently works as a clinical psychologist who consults to companies such as Bell Shakespeare, Arts on Tour and CDP Theatre Producers. Jane is also the research stream lead for the InsideOut Institute for Eating Disorders, University of Sydney.

Jane has experience as a large event specialist choreographer with extensive touring experience, and has worked on Pan American, Commonwealth and Olympic Games Ceremonies.

### **Dr Melissa Ree, Sleep Matters**

Dr Melissa Ree has a Masters and PhD in Clinical Psychology. Melissa specialises in the psychosocial management of adults with insomnia and sleep difficulties through evidence-based treatments such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

Melissa works in both clinical and research roles and is active in treatment, training, and research into the psychological aspects of insomnia, anxiety and depression and has published a number of papers and treatment protocols on the topic.

### **Annie Strauch, Performance Medicine**

Annie Strauch is the Director of Performance Medicine and is a passionate performance physiotherapist with extensive experience working with professional performers and athletes and is one of Australia's leading Vocal Physiotherapists. Annie holds both a Masters in Sports Physiotherapy and Masters in Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy and believes that every Performing Artist deserves bespoke attention and elite physiotherapy care.

Annie's passion for the Performing Arts developed on London's West End where she learnt much about the Performing Arts industry and the importance of Vocal Physiotherapy. She now manages the physical healthcare of many Australian touring shows, is the resident physiotherapist for the Melbourne Theatre Company and is passionate about bringing the Art and the Science together.

### **Melbourne Fringe Festival**

Melbourne Fringe Festival is an open access festival championing cultural democracy – art for anyone. Fringe celebrates freedom of artistic expression, taking voices from the margins and amplifying them across the city. Fringe embraces risk through an uncensored festival which supports anyone to participate.

Melbourne Fringe is a festival unlike any other. It takes place in theatres and galleries, but also in living rooms, in alleyways, in bookshops and libraries, in restaurants and cafes, in the backseat of cars – anywhere you can imagine. By pushing boundaries and illuminating new thoughts and ideas, Melbourne Fringe Festival transforms not only Melbourne's places but its people too. Not many come out the same way they go in.

### **RISING Festival**

Bringing together the Melbourne International Arts Festival and White Night into a brand new cultural happening, RISING is a new festival: a surge of art, music, performance and ceremony in the heart of Melbourne. Celebrating the rise of the full moon and the falling of night, the city is energised with large-scale installations, performance, and communal ritual; an open call to take part in the making of a new tradition for Melbourne.

## CONTENTS

---

<b>BEFORE THE FESTIVAL</b>	<b>5</b>
Setting the scene for success	
Know your why	5
Define success	6
Set boundaries	6
<b>DURING THE FESTIVAL</b>	<b>7</b>
Working with a mental health condition	7
Eat well	8
Drink well	9
Sleep well	10
Move well	11
Communication	12
<b>AFTER THE FESTIVAL</b>	<b>13</b>
Rest, connect, reflect	14
<b>HELPFUL RESOURCES</b>	<b>15</b>

## INTRODUCTION

---

Festivals can be fun, rewarding, and challenging. Coming together and delivering a wide range of events in a short period of time can bring the kind of highs that only come when a whole city, region or place is alive with art and entertainment, serendipitous connections, and a vibe that little else can replicate.

That said, the intensity of festival delivery, long hours, hectic schedules, unpredictability and last-minute changes, working with different people and companies with different needs, and even adjusting back to regular life post-festival can bring on significant stressors and lows. This rollercoaster of highs-and-lows can take their toll on your mental health and wellbeing.

Festival teams and collaborators often come together and part ways rapidly and there are significant fluctuations in intensity between long-term planning and developing work, and compressed delivery periods.

We know festivals have something special to offer – and that working across their peaks and troughs can have an impact on our wellbeing. The following guide does not replace what you already know, instead, we hope it builds on our collective strengths and offers ideas and techniques you might not have yet tried.

Ready? Let's jump in.

# BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

---



## Setting the scene for success

Festivals can be a bit of an adventure! Even if you have been working festivals for many years, having a 'map' on hand of who you are and what you want from the experience can help guide you through.

Common features of maps include:

- A way to determine direction (your values)
- A way to measure scale and distance (your personal definitions of success)
- A terrain and its edges (your boundaries)

Exploring these three areas can help build greater self-awareness – it's easier to find your way when you know what you value, what success means for you, and where your boundaries lie.

Let's explore this metaphor in a little more detail.



## Know your why

There are many types of meaning people can derive from working, creating, or performing in festivals. Being involved might represent a career opportunity; a way to gain financially or earn a wage; a way to build your experience or an audience; or myriad other reasons that differ from person to person. Regardless of what has brought you into a festival, knowing why you want to be involved and how this links to what you value in life can help keep you motivated and on track.

To clarify your purpose, aims and objectives for a festival season try envisioning in detail the kind of 'ending' you want to achieve before you start. Questions that can help you 'find your why' include:

- What is the purpose of this festival? Who is it for? (If you've worked for the festival before, or long term, is there anything new or different this time around?)
- What needs is the festival/your show/your role meeting? What gaps is it filling?
- How does this festival/your show/your role make a difference to people?
- What kind of impact does the festival want to make? What impact do you want to make by being involved?
- How does being involved in this festival align with your personal/team values?
- What legacy does the festival want to leave? What legacy do you want to leave? (Note! this can be as simple as 'the people I worked with had fun'.)

If you are organising or presenting at a festival, consider discussing these questions in the lead up with your teams and collaborators.

If you are working or performing at a festival, consider using these questions as the basis for self-reflection or conversation: for example, by writing in a journal, by setting aside a little quiet time to think, or by talking them through with people in your life.

We often spend so much time focused on 'the how': how to get funding for our show or a wage in our pocket, how our show will look and be performed, how we'll juggle our various responsibilities, etc. that it can be easy to lose focus on 'the why.'

Returning to our 'why' works like a compass – it helps us know which way we are headed and provides clarity on how our festival-work aligns with our broader values, goals and needs.

# BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

---



## Define success

Defining success on your own terms, rather than by other people's ideas of what success is, is easier said than done! But doing so, even once in a while, can show you where you are and how far you have come. For success to be personally meaningful, it needs to link to your values and identity.

Taking time to reflect on your values and identity means you can connect your sense of success directly to what you, personally, care about. Doing so, you'll feel more fulfilled in your endeavors because you're living a life that's important and authentic for you.

It's important to make your own measures of success rather than relying on what you've been taught or think you should do or by measuring your success in comparison to other people. The fact is, we never really know another person's reality or truly understand how their circumstances and needs may differ from ours.

Defining success for yourself often involves investing time nourishing other aspects of your life and identity beyond your work. No matter what you do, remember that your art/work/job, is something you do, it's a part of who you are, but not all you do and all you are.

**Your successes as an artist or arts worker, or in a festival, are not the only things that define your value and worth.**

For many of us this can be challenging to think about, as often we have grown up in a world that defines us by our artistic practice, by our specific skillsets, or by our job title. Keeping a wider perspective on your work, and prioritising other important parts of your life beyond your work is very important for sustainable work practice and work/life balance.

It can seem simpler to focus on external measures (such as reviews, accolades, awards etc) when assessing if you succeeded in an endeavour. However, by bringing in your personal measures of success you add new things to aim for and gain access to more ways to succeed. Over time, it becomes easier to experience and savour your various successes because you are not just aiming to achieve one fixed thing.

Before you start working a festival, or in between festival seasons, why not have a think about what your personal measures of success might be? For example:

- Why is this opportunity meaningful to me?
- Why this festival, at this time, with these people?
- What do I hope to get from the experience?
- What can I learn? How can I grow? Who can I meet?
- What skills and connections can I deepen or build?



## Set boundaries

The final piece of the 'map' to explore is, of course, the terrain itself. Where are the paths to walk? Where are the edges to navigate? Which are the hills to climb?

Before a festival, or between festivals, try and take the time to define your relevant personal boundaries, for example:

- What hours will you be working?
- When will you check emails/messages, or when do you turn off or step away from work?
- What is your job within this project, and what is not your job?
- How can you set up your week to ensure self-care during the festival, such as eating well, getting some sleep and maintaining your important relationships?
- What supports do you have in place, and which can you set up for the festival period ahead of time?
- What do you need to feel and be well? How might working the festival impact this? What extra supports might you need during peak periods, or if you get ill or injured?

It's important to define boundaries for yourself and communicate them effectively to others. Talk with the people you will be working with about what you need to thrive in your role and plan out how you will communicate effectively when those boundaries are being crossed. For example; taking a break when working a long shift is not only important for sustainable practice, but also improves your performance on return.

# DURING THE FESTIVAL

---

## WORKING WITH A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

---



### Preparation is key

High intensity schedules and stress, poorer quality or less sleep, and disruptions to diet and other routines during festival seasons can all be factors that may impact your mental health or exacerbate existing mental health conditions. Awareness, planning and taking early action if feeling unwell, or experiencing changes, can mitigate and reduce these concerns and help keep you flourishing through the festival!



### Medication

Talk with your GP, specialist, or psychiatrist before the peak times of the festival commence and get their advice on how to manage your medication while you're working the festival. The effectiveness of certain medicines follows the body clock, so interruption or reversal of the sleep/wake pattern can interfere with treatment.

If you need advice about medication while you're working festivals, especially if you are away from your normal supports, you can call 1300 MEDICINE (1300 633 424) from any state or territory between 9am and 5pm AEST (except NSW public holidays) or Nurse on Call (24/7 Victoria only) 1300 60 60 24.



### Seeing your psychologist or other specialist

Chat with them about whether you can continue having sessions while you're away at a festival and/or while managing a busy schedule via telehealth (to reduce time spent commuting).

Schedule a pre-festival session to consider stressors and triggers to feeling unwell and develop specific management strategies to implement while working during festival season.



### Sharing your story

Consider disclosing to at least one trusted person you will be working with, so you have someone to seek support from if needed.

If you work for a supportive organisation and feel comfortable sharing your mental health journey, talk to them about what you need. It can be worthwhile to share with company management, too, confirming that you are prepared for the festival season, and you have a management plan in place.

However, it is important to remember that there is no obligation for you to disclose any personal health or mental health information, this advice is just as a suggestion for your safety management plan.

You might need to be quite firm about your needs and boundaries. That's OK – your health is the most important thing.

# DURING THE FESTIVAL

---

## EAT AND DRINK WELL

Festival work can involve relentless time demands as well as a culture where people commonly rely on caffeine to get through and alcohol to wind down and celebrate. It can be a challenge to have a healthy relationship with caffeine and alcohol, to drink enough water, and to eat nutritious food, or even to remember to eat at all! It helps to be prepared, and to keep it simple.

---



### Preparing

**Identify your busiest time and work backwards to manage meal preparations.**

Working back from your busiest time, what can you do in the lead up to make eating nutritious meals as easy for yourself as possible? For example:

- Cook and freeze a bunch of filling meals
- Stock up on ingredients for easy-to-make recipes or with a range of pre-made meals
- Take healthy, filling snacks and a refillable water bottle with you

Investigate quick, healthy food options near where you will be working. Depending on your hours, check what's open late too.

If you don't have the financials for buying food out regularly, or the time to prepare in advance, look for low cost or free options like Hare Krishna restaurants, 'pay as you can' places, restaurants that have 'pre-purchased meal boards' available, as well as charities that run soup and food vans.

If possible for you, consider setting up a food delivery service to your home for your busiest time.



### Food

If you can, have breakfast. Try eating smaller amounts of high quality, nutritious food more often. Where possible, move away from sugar and towards protein and fibre.

Know yourself – if nerves or scheduling means you can't eat before a show or a bump in, figure out when to have your main meal. Experiment until you find your rhythm. Do eat when you can.

If eating late at night, try to avoid big servings and high fat meals. Aim for a small meal containing a complex carbohydrate with a quality protein source.

If eating on the run (while walking, driving, talking) slow down. Stop and sit, pull over momentarily, or end a phone call or meeting a couple of minutes early. Most people eat a full meal in 7-15 minutes. Can you give yourself that time to eat without rushing? If not, the scheduling may be too tight.



# DURING THE FESTIVAL

---

## EAT AND DRINK WELL



### Water

Drink water throughout the day and night. Carry a refillable water bottle with you if you can. Aim for 8 to 10 cups of water a day and increase your consumption in hot weather and when doing physical work.

Fruit and vegetables, hot and cold drinks, and other foods all contribute to water intake. A splash of lemon, or cordial, or drinking sparkling water can create variety.



### Caffeine

Everyone metabolises caffeine differently. In small amounts, it can make you feel refreshed and focused. In large amounts it can make you feel anxious, upset your digestion, and disrupt your sleep.

Aim to have your last caffeinated beverage at least six hours before bedtime. Exercise and/or eating a balanced meal can be as re-energising as caffeine, so if you are reaching for another coffee, consider a short burst of activity, or a meal instead.

Good alternatives include: green tea which contains a small amount of caffeine, so takes the edge off withdrawals; peppermint tea which promotes focus and alertness, and dandelion root tea which is a digestive, liver tonic and mild laxative.



### Alcohol

Space alcoholic drinks with soft drinks, non-alcoholic versions, juice or water, and consider alternating nights where you do drink with those where you don't (or where you drink less).

Wind-down without alcohol, at least some of the time: e.g. check what else is open late such as ice cream shops, cafes, comedy clubs, and focus on shared experiences and conversations.

It is never too late to seek help if you'd like to change your relationship with alcohol. Directline is a useful first place to seek information and support: [directline.org.au](https://directline.org.au)



### A note for festival organisers

If you are the festival organiser, think about ways you can support healthy eating and drinking in your teams. Can you:

- Provide access to fridges, microwaves and safe food storage areas?
- Provide healthy snacks and/or meals?
- Provide access to private, comfortable spaces to eat and drink for staff and performers? (remembering that some people do not feel comfortable eating in front of others)
- Provide information about healthy and low-cost meals available near venues, including places that are open early and late?
- Explicitly allow people to eat and drink during meetings and briefings?
- Create schedules that allow for proper breaks between commitments?
- Rotate staff, especially those in fixed positions, to allow people to look after their own needs, including eating, drinking, resting and toilet breaks?
- Reduce harm from alcohol by creating a non-stigmatising culture that respects and enables people's choices around alcohol?
- Offer quality non-alcoholic beverages at special events, celebrations, and as opening/closing night gifts?
- Create opportunities to wind-down at the end of shifts and/or at the end of the festival that are not centred on alcohol?
- Create times and modes of celebration that everyone can take part in at the same time?

# DURING THE FESTIVAL

---

## SLEEP WELL

Working in festivals can present unique challenges for healthy sleep. Unusual work hours, workload pressures, touring, needing to be awake or asleep at varied times, working or attending functions at night, jet lag, and difficulty winding down are just some of the factors that can impact our ability to get the restorative sleep we need to function at our best.

The good news is, there are some simple strategies for addressing common sleep challenges that may come up while working festivals. Don't feel like you need to try all the strategies at once. Try choosing one or two to work on for a couple of weeks, with the aim of creating the conditions that are conducive to falling sleep: *being sleepy and being relaxed*.

---



### Rituals and routines

During a festival, daily rituals and routines can be important ways to stay grounded. Before the festival, try to predict your upcoming workload and times of work. Allocate 'work' and 'rest' hours accordingly. Remember, your plan might need to be flexible!

Keep up physical and mental activity, even on days without work. This will help you get sleepy when your festival bedtime rolls around and assist you in maintaining a sleep routine. Develop a wind down routine between 'work' and 'rest' hours. Choose something calm and relaxing that represents the end of work for the day.

Here are some ideas for winding down activities that can help support restful sleep. Experiment with what feels right for you! Remember the focus is on behaviour which supports the transition from the heightened focus and energy of a show/shift, to become present and connected to yourself.

1

### Slow down

Wind down to the parasympathetic system (rest and digest). Focus on ten slow, deep breaths and some stretching. Move more slowly, speak more softly, remember to rest your voice.

2

### Process

Empty the brain: process the day through 15 minutes of writing. Reflect on how the day went, ensure you focus not only on what you need to work on, but also on the parts that went well. Research shows that ending every journal entry with something you are grateful for can have a positive impact on your mental health.

3

### De-role

Have a shower and imagine the day washing off you. Get back into 'home mode' by engaging with 'you stuff' - for example, listen to your favourite music or eat your favourite food.

4

### Re-connect

Call friends and family. Connect with people outside of the festival bubble.

5

### Move your body

Spend some time moving your body outside in nature every day. Carve out time to engage in regular vigorous exercise every week such as brisk walking, swimming, jogging, dancing, cycling etc.



### Elevated nerves

If a big performance or bump in or busy day of back-to-back commitments is on the horizon, it is normal to find yourself a little more wound up than usual. If this feeling is present at bedtime, you may have difficulty sleeping. Some things that can help:

**Re-frame your nerves as excitement:** your body is preparing you to perform at a high level. Your attention is primed, your blood is flowing, you are thinking about what you need to do. The sensations are the same when we are excited! Taking your arousal symptoms as excitement rather than as anxiety can help you interpret your feelings differently.

**Keep it in perspective:** it is common to overestimate the impact of sleep deprivation on work performance. The occasional sleepless night might not feel great, but this feeling does not necessarily translate into inferior performance at work.

**Remember you are resilient:** one poor night's sleep here and there will have minimal effect if a good sleep routine is generally in place. Most often your sleep will bounce back the night after.

If poor sleep persists, and you or other people are at risk of accidents or injury because of fatigue, do take this seriously – many times a short nap, or a change to your schedule for a day or so to allow you to rest can make a huge difference in how refreshed you feel.

After the festival is over, aim to return to the day/night sleep rhythm that suits you. It may be helpful to consider what your optimal rise time is based on the typical demands of your day and rise at a regular time to meet these demands.

# DURING THE FESTIVAL

---

## MOVE WELL

Different roles at a festival require different kinds of movement. If you know you have a festival coming up (or if you work festivals year-round), check in with your body regularly. Within your own capabilities, needs, and limits ask yourself:

- Am I feeling able to create, perform and work with the energies required?
- Are there other supports I may need through periods of greater intensity that I can set up in advance?
- Is my working environment set up as ergonomically as possible?
- Do I have appropriate relevant clothing, such as decent shoes?

If you are working in a highly physical role, it can be a good idea to plan ahead, increase your activity level gradually and if helpful, consider seeking professional help to provide you with a specific exercise plan.

If you are performing, make warming up and cooling down an integral part of your routine. This allows you to not only learn the neuromuscular patterns required for your show but also allows you to connect with your company and colleagues (for a safe show!).

Aim to complete a RAMP warm up and a five minute cool down.

**Raise:** raise your heart rate. Get hot and sweaty.

**Activate:** activate the muscles you will need for your specific activity.

**Mobilise:** move through your body range of motion.

**Potentiate:** get specific. Do movements that you are going to do in your show.

If you sustain an injury, try not to ignore it or push through it – seek medical assistance. Try to avoid alcohol and self-medicating. Alcohol perpetuates inflammation and inhibits your processing and you may create more issues working (or socialising) on it because 'it is not hurting'. Adrenaline also may create a false sense of wellness so waiting for your adrenaline to settle is important to gauge the full situation of your injury.

If you have control over the direction, design or technical aspects of a show, think about ways you can support healthy movement for yourself and the people around you.

Can you:

- Rigorously maintain occupational health and safety requirements?
- Adequately resource events and provide appropriate equipment to enable good manual handling?
- Create sets/props that can be bumped in easily which are not awkward (or can be broken down into more manageable components)
- Schedule warm up and cool-down time for performers and for people engaging in heavy lifting or manual handling tasks?
- Ensure work-sites are adequately lit and well-ventilated?
- Create choreography, costumes, cues and direction that are safe and sustainable for your cast and crew?
- Role-model good self-care practices such as resting and taking sufficient breaks, seeking help when we need it and supporting others to do the same?

If your role requires you to be on your feet all day, wear comfortable shoes that provide you support; alternate your weight between feet (try to avoid sinking into your hip); keep your knees soft (try to avoid locking them back); maintain an awareness of your core; and keep moving if you can (avoid standing in the same spot or in the same position for long periods).

The following simple exercises keep your body moving:

- Shoulder rolls
- Neck stretches
- Calf stretches
- Upper body mobility

# DURING THE FESTIVAL

## COMMUNICATION

Open communication is key to good working relationships, and actions speak as loudly as words. All of us have a role to play in creating the culture of the festival that we want to see.

The sense of energy and urgency during a festival, and the differing needs and communication styles of the many different stakeholders involved, can lead to issues and misunderstandings. When people are tired or stretched, emotions can run high and our interpersonal and communication skills can start to be negatively impacted.

When things get challenging during a festival, connect back to the common goals of your team-mates and the festival and remember that all members of a festival team are needed to create the outcomes we seek. Each element and role are totally interconnected. We do this together. By harnessing this ability to step back, you gain perspective. You are part of something bigger than you, and knowing this can help you find meaning and stay solutions-focussed when you are faced with major setbacks and challenges that are beyond your control.

Issues in communication often underlie and exacerbate tensions and conflict. Which is why working on our own communication skills can have far reaching benefits for any team we join. Here are some questions to ask yourself to indicate if you are having issues in communication at any time:

- Am I avoiding conflict?
- Am I minimising negative information to avoid provoking a reaction?
- Am I hesitant to share my concerns as I think they will cause confrontation?
- Am I keeping my concerns to myself or sharing with my manager and other agencies?
- Am I relieved when there is no answer on the phone?
- Am I taking on more responsibilities or a greater workload to avoid talking about an issue?

Although conflict can feel hard, avoiding conversations about what's not working for you may lead to even more difficult issues in the future. Change comes from being willing to be uncomfortable – and this includes positive change!

What happens if you try to view conflict as a way to make things get better, rather than as something to avoid?

If you're avoiding productive conflict, you are also avoiding the possible positive change that can come from difficult conversations. Try and keep these ideas in mind when having conversations to move through conflict and disagreement:

- Speak in an even, calm tone of voice and keep an eye on your body language
- Stay curious and don't make assumptions.
- Challenge yourself to become more attached to getting to a good outcome, rather than getting your preferred outcome.

Aim to first listen, then problem solve by:

- Defining the problem clearly and collaboratively so everyone is on the same page.
  - ~ Defining shared goals
  - ~ Generating a range of solutions
  - ~ Choosing the solution that best meets the shared goals.
  - ~ Show understanding by paraphrasing back what you've heard.

If there are external forces affecting your ability to do your work, find a time to talk to people you work with about what is happening for you. Use "I" statements rather than "You" or "We" statements.

Try to focus on behaviour and avoid personal judgements. Be as specific as possible. For example, rather than, "You are just not fitting in with the team," try, "At rehearsal today I noticed you weren't speaking as much as the others, is there something going on that I can support you with?"

Pay attention to your own behaviour and adjust if needed – are your words, tone, body language and actions supporting the culture you want to see? Or undermining it?



# AFTER THE FESTIVAL

---

## REST, CONNECT, REFLECT

Many of us who have worked or performed/presented at festivals well know the period of loss, low mood, exhaustion or emptiness that can come once the festival is over. Our bodies and minds seek homeostasis, which means that the 'crash' or 'low' is a normal reaction to the energy expenditure and extreme highs a festival can bring. It's also helpful to keep in mind that in response to the low mood, the happiness will soon return. No mood is final.

Working in festivals often comes with instability as the nature of the work is often cyclic or seasonal. This cyclic pattern can affect our mood as well as we ride the ups and downs of festival life. When a crash or low period occurs, try and grab hold of things that ground you. What grounds us will vary from person to person, but will be things that help you feel like yourself, present, and embodied. Whatever works for you, prioritise it and do it consistently.

Following values, connections and activities that are important to you outside of the arts will be key. And ironically, maintaining connection to things outside of the arts, will go a long way to giving you the personal stability to keep a career in the arts possible.

---

### Top tips for dealing with the Post Festival period:



#### Prioritise rest

Rest is radical. Try and plan for the 'come down' after a show. Book in what works for you to rest and renew.

Although there can be pressures in the arts to move right onto the next thing, try to step back and rather than focus on the risk of not working, think about the risk of burn out.

Remember just because you can't rest a lot, doesn't mean you shouldn't rest at all. And taking the time now, will be vital for maintaining capacity to continue to be creative and maintain your health and wellbeing.

Try not to view rest as competing with your practice, but rather as the thing that will be the reason you can continue to create and work.



#### Listen to your emotions

After the end of a festival there can be emotions of anxiety, relief, fear of never working again, fatigue, joy, pride, gratitude, loneliness.

Try to let your first response to these emotions be, 'Why does this make sense?'

All these emotions are a normal response to transition and loss. It's ok to sometimes do things to distract from these feelings, but when you are ready, it can also be useful to breathe and allow space to feel and process these emotions.

Take a 'time in' to connect to whatever subtle sensations in the body (tension, tightness, warmth, tingling) are letting you know emotions like sadness, anger, or fear are there. Trying to stay open to experiencing difficult feelings can help you accept, process, and release them.



#### Find helpful rituals

Keep in mind that endings can feel strange, it takes conscious effort to move your mind toward something new, especially when you have been fully absorbed in one thing for an extended period.

There is no right way to process loss so give yourself permission to process the grief of transition. Remember loss is a necessary part of change.

Rituals can be important to help you psychologically move on. This might include a journal entry about the experience, where you write the story of your festival, with a beginning, a middle and an end, or a different ritual that is personally meaningful for you.

Try to choose a narrative that centres your experience and one that you feel ok carrying as part of your personal history.



#### Navigate your sensory load

Often after festivals there can be an intense shift from a high social and sensory stimulating environment, to one of isolation and low stimulus.

Whilst for some this quiet can be rejuvenating (especially those on the introverted end of the spectrum), for others this can feel like an emptiness that needs to be filled.

Try and resist the urge to view this space as a void that must be filled, as it may lead to putting time and energy toward activities and people who do not serve you in the long term.

For example, it is normal to be drawn to fill the gap with screens, especially social media.

# AFTER THE FESTIVAL

---

## REST, CONNECT, REFLECT

Whilst screens give temporary distraction, what might go unnoticed is the impact that social media feeds may be having on your sense of wellbeing and self. These feeds often don't present diverse body shapes, appearances, or abilities, but rather present certain body shapes and abilities as the ideal. This can impact the way we view ourselves and encourage unhelpful comparison.

Another example may be being drawn to risky behaviour or harmful use of alcohol and other drugs – remember that your body is trying to 'keep up' with the demands you have been placing on it and a sudden down shift to a more sedate pace may feel threatening, dull or like depression – while it may feel uncomfortable to go from high pace, high pressure to low pace, low pressure times, try to navigate these without artificially simulating the 'highs'.



### Reconnect with your people

Try to reconnect to family and friends from within and outside the arts world.

Talking to people not associated with the festival can offer new perspectives and challenge unhelpful self-talk or comparison that can happen when alone or surrounded solely by other festival workers post-festival.



### Reconnect with your self

Imagine you are a compassionate friend and write a letter to yourself reflecting on the festival. This means focusing on what you did well and the enormous amount of work you put into the festival, but also on what you have learnt and can work on. Make sure to use a voice that is kind and helpful.

Make time every day for things you enjoy (this can be as little as 10-15 minutes for positive impact on mood and energy). Come back to your regular routines of rest, exercise and social connection.

Take some time to reset your body and to 'come back to yourself' through movement. This will allow you to manage any physical niggles or issues that may have accumulated during the festival and to settle your central nervous system (which may have been on high alert).

Consider:

- Walking daily (aim for a brisk 30-minute walk outside)
- Engaging in a high intensity physical activity you enjoy (dancing, swimming, running, climbing etc.)
- Participating in a class you enjoy (yoga, tai-chi, barre, improv) to move physically and focus your mind
- Seeing a qualified remedial massage therapist or myotherapist
- Having adequate sleep and rest to catch up on any sleep debt
- Fuelling your body with nutritious food and minimizing your alcohol intake (good for the body and brain)



### Debrief with yourself / your collaborators

Reflect back on your personal/team definitions of success. Avoid comparison. Remember you get to decide how you choose to define success.

Take some time after a festival to debrief with your colleagues or with a trusted person in your life. A helpful structure can be to allow each person to answer the following:

- What is something I/we did well?
- What is something I/we can learn from?
- What is something I/we would like to keep? What is something I/we will leave behind?
- What is a favourite memory of the festival I am taking with me?
- What am I grateful for?

# HELP AND OTHER RESOURCES

---

It is ok to ask for help. If you, or someone you know is having a rough time, don't carry on alone.

## Ask for help and accept it.

Free, confidential mental health support is available 24/7. Remember, support is for prevention as much as it is for crisis. Don't ever worry that you're not distressed or upset 'enough'. Navigating festivals can be tough, and we're only human.

Many festivals have a range of supports available for staff, artists and collaborators (for example: mental health first aiders, employee assistance programs etc.). Get curious about what structures, guidelines and processes are available that can help you and use them. Ask for help from a professional, a peer, colleague, employer, company manager, stage manager, supervisor, mentor, friend.

Speak to your GP about options available to you for mental health support.

If you are worried about someone, ask if they are ok, and if you are still concerned, stay with them and connect them with other supports. If you feel like you are in crisis, reach out and do not be alone.

If you or someone you know is at immediate risk of harm to themselves or others, please contact the Emergency Services on 000.

---

## Helpful support services

Support Act Wellbeing Helpline: 1800 959 500 (24/7)

First Nations Support: 1800 959 500 (Option 3)

Manager Support Hotline: 1800 818 728

BeyondBlue: 1300 22 4636 (24/7)

Lifeline: 13 11 14 (24/7)

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 (24/7)

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

QLife (LGBTQI): 1800 184 527 (3pm to midnight)

Mensline: 1300 789 978 (24/7)

Griefline: 1300 845 745 (12pm to 3am)

DirectLine (alcohol and drug counselling) 1800 888 236

Gambling Help: 1800 858 858 (24/7)

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800 (24/7)

WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service: 1800 136 089

National Relay Service is available for people who are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment. Chat options are also available.

Visit [artswellbeingcollective.com.au/get-help](https://artswellbeingcollective.com.au/get-help) for more information.

People who do not use English as their first language can get free translation support from the Translating and Interpreting Service [tsinational.gov.au](https://tisinational.gov.au)

[artswellbeingcollective.com.au](http://artswellbeingcollective.com.au)



Supported by

