



**National
Psychotrauma
Centre**

**ARQ Centre of Expertise
for the Impact of Disasters
and Crises**

Guide to the 1977 Bovensmilde School Hostage Crisis

**Tools and context for healthcare professionals and (government)
institutions on acknowledging and supporting those affected**

Guide for Those Affected by the 1977 Bovensmilde School Hostage Crisis

“ The hostage crisis has had a profound impact on my life. Because of this, I have regularly been in contact with healthcare professionals. My experiences with them have been mixed. The first time I spoke with a professional was an unpleasant experience. I mentioned that I was still affected by the hostage crisis, but this was basically ignored. For me, it was actually very important. My courage immediately began to falter. The event simply did not matter.

A second experience, however, was positive. The professional allowed me to finish my sentences and did not interrupt me. I was also given space to express my emotions, and the professional asked follow-up questions. At that moment, I felt that someone understood how important this was to me. As a result, I had much more confidence in and hopeful expectations for my relationship with this professional.

I hope that all healthcare workers will give people the opportunity to talk about this event in a way that suits the individual involved. If someone allows you to tell your story and shows that they understand how important it is to you, that is incredibly valuable.

The account above comes from a formerly hostaged schoolchild. The individual gave permission for the story to be included in this guide. The individual hopes to demonstrate the importance of providing space and understanding for symptoms and concerns related to the hostage. The story illustrates how the school hostage can continue to affect daily life, even decades later. Every affected person experiences the consequences differently.

Acknowledgements

This guide was developed with the invaluable contributions of those affected by the Bovensmilde school hostage crisis. We are deeply grateful for their willingness to share their experiences. The authors would also like to thank the various healthcare professionals and experts who shared their practical experiences and recommendations. Finally, the authors are grateful to the EOGB Project Group and the Ministry of Justice and Security for their valuable input.

Colophon

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This guide was made by ARQ National Psychotrauma Centre. It was developed with the support of an advisory body consisting of former schoolchildren who had been held hostage in Bovensmilde, GGZ Drenthe, the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), Fysiotherapie Midden-Drenthe, Huisartsenpraktijk (General Practitioner/GP) Bovensmilde, and the Project Group Recognition and Reparation for Those Affected by the Bovensmilde Hostage Crisis (EOGB).

ISBN 9789078273318 | NUR 740



Ministerie van Justitie
en Veiligheid

This guide was commissioned by the Ministry
of Justice and Security as part of the EOGB
Recognition and Reparation Program.

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Introduction

On the 23rd of May 1977, the town of Bovensmilde was shook when the children and teachers of an elementary school were taken hostage in the school. More than one hundred children and five teachers were taken hostage by four armed men of south-Moluccan descent. The children and one teacher remained hostage for five days, while the remaining four teachers remained hostage for twenty days until the crisis was brought to an end by military intervention. On the first day, the children of Moluccan descent were sent home by the hostage-takers. The hostage crisis left a deep impression on many of those affected and shaped the course of their lives. Even today, some continue to experience psychosocial consequences, including symptoms related to PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).

After the hostage crisis, many affected individuals felt that they had not received sufficient support or recognition. With 'those affected', we refer not only to the children and teachers who were held hostage, but also the children of Moluccan descent who were sent home after the crisis began, as well as parents, relatives, and local residents. Initially, Bovensmilde was largely characterized by a culture of silence, partly as a result of government advice. As a consequence, many people felt unheard and misunderstood. Some had negative experiences in their interactions with healthcare professionals and government institutions. Repeatedly having to explain painful experiences was in itself experienced as a burden. For this reason, the report *The Silence Afterwards* (2025), written by the ARQ Centre of Expertise for the Impact of Disasters and Crises, recommended the development of a guide for healthcare workers and other professionals who work with people affected by the hostage crisis.

A guide can be seen as a practical document that discusses a topic and offers practical tips on how to address this topic. This guide is intended for professionals both inside and outside the healthcare system who may come into contact with those affected by the school hostage crisis. It provides context for the experience of the hostage-taking, without requiring those affected to explain or outline it themselves. For healthcare workers, this history is often unknown, while knowledge of the event and its aftermath can contribute to providing appropriate care and support. Language plays an important role. Appropriate wording, respectful communication, and an awareness of sensitivities can help people feel heard and understood. This can form the basis of a relationship of trust that makes effective aid and care possible. This guide aims to address as many aspects of the school hostage-taking as possible, based on the diverse experiences of those affected. However, in the interests of accessibility and clarity, not every perspective receives equal attention. This guide is intended as a practical resource and reflects the experiences of the majority of those affected. It may also be valuable to anyone seeking a better understanding of the potential consequences of a school hostage-taking and its impact on those affected.

This guide consists of four parts. The first part, *The Bovensmilde School Hostage Crisis in Context*, discusses the hostage crisis and its historical background. Understanding this context is important because the hostage crisis originated in historical discontent among part of the Moluccan community in the Netherlands and carried a political message.

The second part, *Experiences of the School Hostage Crisis*, focuses on the different perspectives and experiences of those involved. A distinction is made between the students who were taken hostage, students of Moluccan descent who were sent home at the beginning of the hostage-taking, teachers who were taken hostage, and relatives and people living in the surrounding area. Each of these groups and individuals experienced the hostage-taking in their own way. It is therefore important to consider these different perspectives.

The third part, *The Consequences of the School Hostage Crisis*, discusses the aftermath of the crisis, including PTSD. Attention is also given to the culture of silence, the impact on later life, the perceived lack of support and recognition, and the remembrance and commemoration of the school hostage-taking. This section contains important information about the impact of the hostage-taking on the wellbeing of those affected.

The fourth and final part, *Interacting with Those Affected by the School Hostage Crisis*, focuses on the sensitivities involved in discussing experiences related to the hostage crisis and offers practical recommendations for effective communication and support.

For readers with limited time, the summary at the end of each section provides the most important information. At the same time, it is important to recognize that no one can truly understand another person's perspective through summaries alone. Understanding begins with paying attention to the other person's story. For professionals who want to make a difference, taking the time to listen and showing genuine interest are the first steps towards recognition. This can have an impact on all subsequent interactions.

At the end of the guide, there are four appendices. Appendix A, *Support and care services for those affected*, provides an overview of the care and support arrangements available to those affected by the hostage-taking. Appendix B, *Terms and references*, provides an overview of key terms and a list of sources consulted. Appendix C, *Recommended reading and viewing*, provides a list of documentaries, books and articles offering further background and context. Appendix D, *Recovery initiatives*, provides an overview of government-led and citizen-led initiatives. The data and descriptions of how those affected experienced the hostage-taking, how they experienced its aftermath, and the extent to which they experienced difficulties later in life are largely drawn from the report *The Silence Afterwards* (2025).

Prologue

Traumatic events and PTSD

Life is never without risk, although people are not always aware of this. Sometimes people experience events so impactful that they can lead to serious psychological and physical symptoms. These experiences involve actual or threatened death, serious injury, or a violation of a person's physical integrity, such as in cases of (sexual) violence. Such experiences are referred to as potentially traumatic events. They are often accompanied by intense feelings of (life-threatening) danger and helplessness, as well as an acute awareness of one's own vulnerability or mortality. Experiencing potentially traumatic events is relatively common. Most people in The Netherlands (81.5%) are exposed to one or more of these events during their lifetime (Hoeboer et al., 2025). They may experience them directly, witness them, or encounter them through their profession or through people close to them.

Psychological trauma is an emotional or psychological response to a traumatic event that disrupts a person's normal processing and functioning. It can result from a wide range of experiences, including being held hostage. In many cases, symptoms following a traumatic event subside naturally over time. However, when these symptoms persist, they may indicate a chronic stress-related disorder, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; APA, 2022).

People with PTSD may experience symptoms such as:

- Intrusive memories or flashbacks;
- Feelings of tension, such as anxiety, anger, or an exaggerated startle response;
- Avoidance of places or other reminders associated with the traumatic event;
- Nightmares and sleep disturbances.

As a result of their traumatic experiences, people with PTSD often experience a significant loss of trust in others and in the belief that the world is safe and predictable. They are frequently on high alert for potential danger, become irritated more easily, and often have difficulties sleeping. This state of constant vigilance can be exhausting, and people with PTSD often have difficulty concentrating. Post-traumatic stress reactions during childhood can have long-term consequences, and chronic stress may lead to a variety of health problems.

People with PTSD often experience multiple symptoms at the same time. This is referred to as comorbidity. Post-traumatic stress reactions frequently occur alongside anxiety disorders, mood disorders, social and physical complaints, as well as sleep disorders. PTSD symptoms can also impair a person's ability to work and are associated with increased absence for health reasons. Not everyone develops PTSD, and people may also experience symptoms that do not fall within this diagnosis.

No one chooses to have PTSD. Traumatic symptoms can undermine both the mental health and overall well-being of those affected. Support from one's personal network (including at work), recognition of what has happened to them, and professional care are three key factors that contribute to coping with post-traumatic symptoms and disorders. Current treatment guidelines recommend starting with trauma-focused psychotherapy when treating PTSD. This form of treatment centers on discussions about the traumatic event between the affected individual and a therapist. The goal is to reduce the emotional intensity of the memories and lessen their impact on daily life. However, many people do not recover fully from PTSD, even after treatment.

The Bovensmilde school hostage crisis qualifies as a potentially traumatic event: it was unexpected, life-threatening, and frightening. Most of the hostages were young children and, because of their age, were particularly vulnerable to developing post-traumatic symptoms. The majority of those who were held hostage experienced few or no lasting effects, while a minority developed persistent symptoms. This illustrates that the same event can affect each individual in a very different way.

The Bovensmilde school hostage crisis in context

Part I. The Bovensmilde school hostage crisis in context

The first part of the guide focuses on the historical context and the 1977 school hostage crisis in Bovensmilde. Attention will be given to the historical background, the hostage-taking itself, and a timeline of the events. In this way, readers are provided with a comprehensive overview of the events and the broader context.

This section consists of the following components:

1. Historical background
2. The school hostage crisis
3. The end of the crisis
4. Timeline
5. Key information

1.1 Historical background

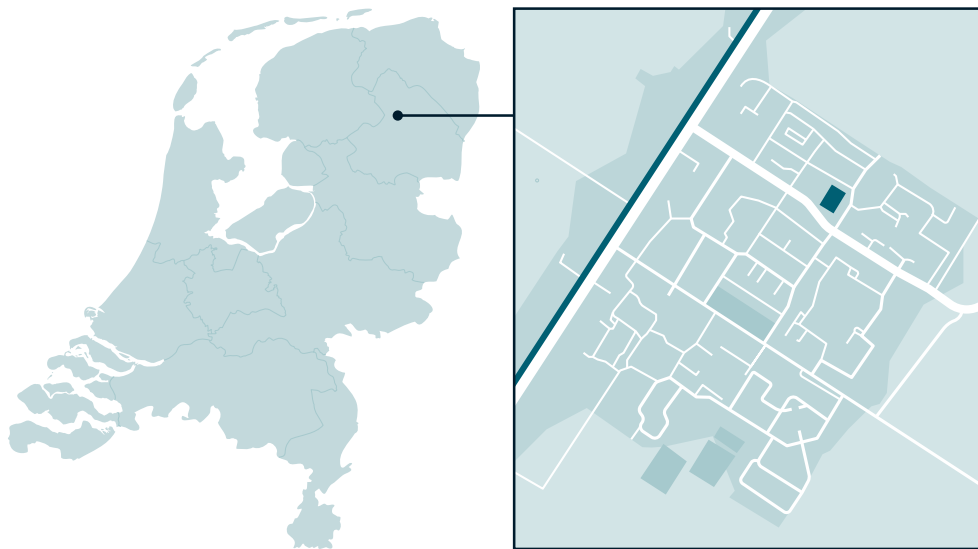
Bovensmilde is a town in the province of Drenthe. Originally established as a peat colony, the town has maintained a relatively small population to this day (currently just over 3,000 inhabitants). In general, people in Bovensmilde know one another, either personally or by appearance, yet the town is still large enough to allow for a certain degree of anonymity. In 1969, a Moluccan neighborhood was built in Bovensmilde. Located on the outskirts of the town, it was intended to house approximately 800 people of Moluccan descent. This was closely related to the history of the former Dutch East Indies.

The former Dutch East Indies (present-day Indonesia) was a Dutch colony until December 27th 1949. The Moluccas were part of this colony. During the Second World War, Moluccan soldiers serving in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (KNIL) fought alongside Dutch forces against the Japanese invasion. During the Indonesian War of Independence (1945–1949), many Moluccan soldiers fought alongside Dutch troops against the Indonesian independence movement. This choice would significantly complicate their position in independent Indonesia after the end of the conflict. Following Indonesia's independence, South Moluccan leaders

proclaimed their own independent state in 1950, the Republik Maluku Selatan (RMS). Indonesia did not acknowledge the RMS and sent military forces to the Moluccas. From Indonesia's perspective, the Moluccan soldiers were considered opponents because they had served in the Dutch KNIL. As a result, in 1951, the Dutch government decided, for their safety, to bring approximately 3,500 Moluccan KNIL soldiers and their families (approximately 12,500 people in total) to the Netherlands, with the understanding that this would be a temporary arrangement. It was also expected that the Dutch government would continue to support the establishment of an independent South Moluccan state. However, upon their arrival, the soldiers were immediately discharged from military service. Initially, they were not allowed to work, and later it became difficult for them to find employment. Many Moluccans lived in poor conditions and were initially housed in military barracks, former labor camps, the former Vught concentration camp, and the former Westerbork transit camp. Years later they were relocated to various Moluccan neighborhoods, including the Moluccan neighborhood in Bovensmilde. The Moluccans felt abandoned by both the Dutch government and Indonesia. The resulting disappointment and anger toward the Dutch government led to radicalization and protest actions within part of the Moluccan community.

In 1970, South Moluccan youths occupied the residence of the Indonesian ambassador in Wassenaar, resulting in the death of one police officer. In 1975, Moluccan youths hijacked a train near Wijster, during which the train driver and two passengers lost their lives. In 1977, new actions took place: the train hijacking at De Punt and the school hostage crisis in Bovensmilde.

Figure 1: Map of Bovensmilde showing the location of the school, indicated in dark green.



1.2 The school hostage crisis

On May 23rd 1977, four armed young men of South Moluccan descent took the public elementary school in Bovensmilde hostage. At around 9:00 a.m., they entered the school carrying weapons and informed those present that the school was being held hostage. Two former hostages later recalled that they had been sitting in a classroom circle when the hostage takers entered. At that time, over one hundred children and five teachers were present in the school. The windows were covered with newspapers, and the children and teachers were ordered to gather in the central hall. Approximately twenty children of Moluccan descent also attended the school. Some of them were present that day and were sent home by armed hostage takers. On the same day, a train near De Punt was also hijacked by eight armed men and one armed woman of Moluccan descent.

In response to the school hostage crisis, the school was surrounded that same day by military personnel from the Special Assistance Unit of the Marine Corps, and a crisis team was established by the Ministry of Justice and Security. A support center was also set up for the parents of the children. On the first day, the hostage takers announced their demands. They demanded the release of 21 convicted Dutch citizens of Moluccan descent, as well as safe passage for themselves. If their demands were not met, they threatened to blow up both the school and the train near De Punt. They set their ultimatum for Wednesday, May 25th at 2:00 p.m., two days after the hostage crisis had begun.

Out of sympathy, food and drinks were sent to the school from the Moluccan neighborhood from the first day. Members of the Moluccan community also came to the school to protest, believing that the hostage-taking had gone too far.

Throughout the hostage crisis, negotiators from the crisis team remained in contact with the hostage takers. However, these negotiations did not lead to any results. During the hostage crisis, the hostage takers pointed weapons at the children and threatened to throw a hand grenade. On the third day, the day of the ultimatum, several children were forced by the hostage takers to stand in front of the open windows and repeatedly shout the slogan, "Van Agt, we want to live!" At the time, Dries van Agt was the Minister of Justice. Through this slogan, the hostage takers hoped to pressure the Dutch government into meeting their demands. When the ultimatum expired at 2:00 p.m., nothing happened. The hostage takers then issued another ultimatum, which expired at 8:00 p.m. that same evening. Once again, nothing happened. Although the hostage takers did not carry out their threats, they continued to hold the children and the teachers captive.

One day later, several children became ill, partly because of poor hygiene conditions (for example, there were no shower facilities). On this fourth day, several sick students were released. When even more children became ill, the hostage takers decided to release all of the children on the fifth day. One teacher was also released at that time. The remaining four teachers continued to be held hostage.

Images of the school hostage crisis were broadcast on national and international television. Large numbers of journalists and camera crews gathered around the school, and the hostage crisis received extensive coverage in local and national newspapers and daily publications. The hostage crisis also attracted considerable political attention.

1.3 The end of the hostage crisis

After twenty days, the school hostage crisis came to an abrupt end. During the hostage crisis, the school building had been surrounded by police units and marines from the Special Assistance Unit of the armed forces. At 5:00 a.m. on the 11th of June, they stormed the building using armored vehicles. The hostage takers surrendered without violence, and the remaining captive teachers were freed. No one was killed during the operation. On the same day, the train hijacking at De Punt was also brought to an end. During that hijacking, two hostages and six hijackers lost their lives.

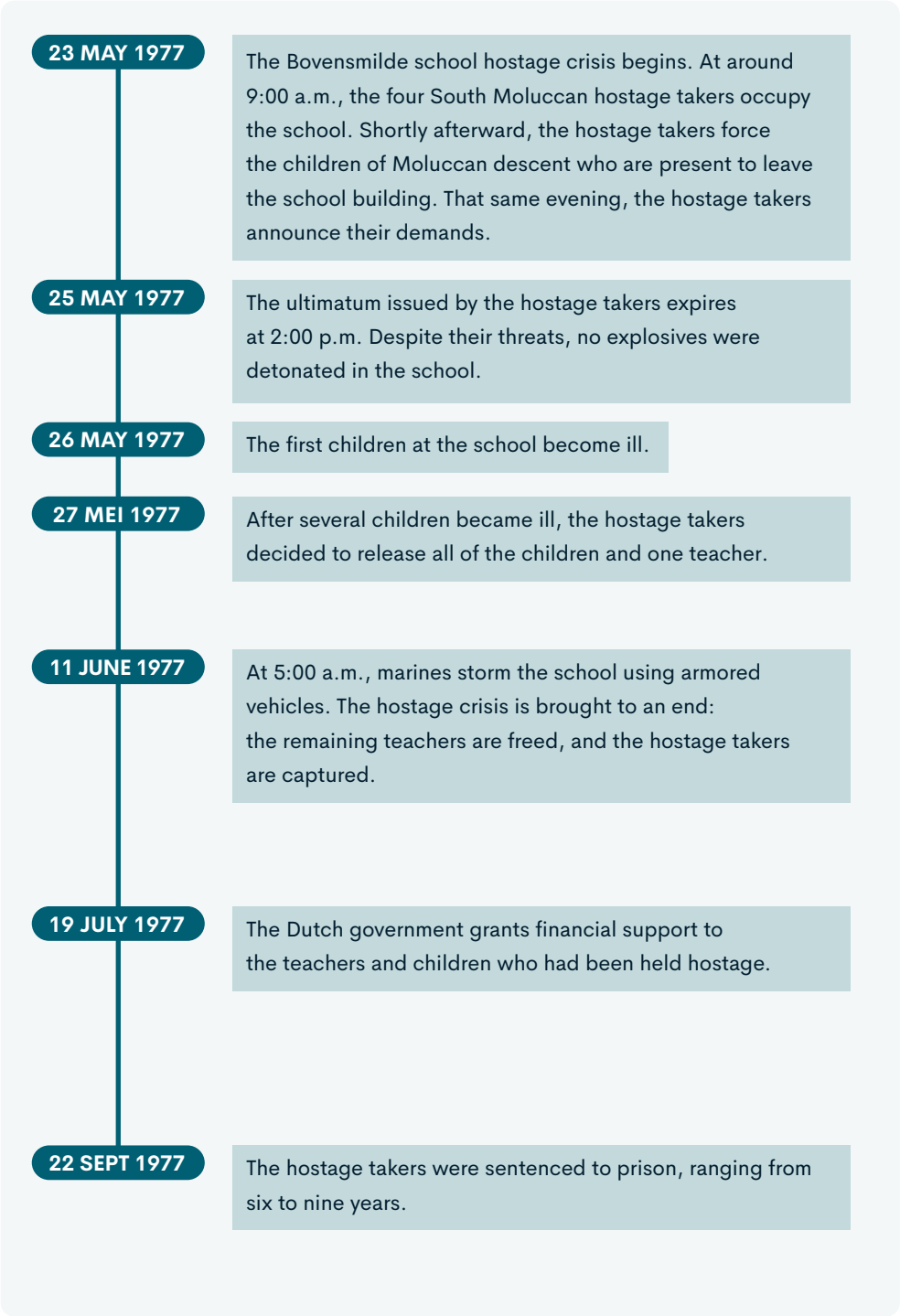
1.4 Timeline

The hostage crisis took place during May and June 1977. Important events also occurred after the crisis had ended. These events are presented in a timeline on the following page. Later in this guide, these subsequent events will be discussed in greater detail.

1.5 Key information

- The school hostage crisis in Bovensmilde began on May 23rd 1977. Approximately 100 children and 5 teachers were taken hostage by 4 hostage takers of Moluccan descent.
- On the fifth day, all of the children and one teacher were released. On the final, twentieth day, the remaining 4 teachers were released.
- The hostage crisis was brought to an end through the intervention of the marines. There were no injuries or fatalities.

Figure 2: Timeline of the Bovensmilde school hostage crisis



Experiences of the school hostage crisis

Part II. Experiences of the school hostage crisis

The school hostage crisis had a profound impact on the children and teachers who were present. The hostage crisis also had a significant impact on the community of Bovensmilde and beyond. This section focuses on the experiences associated with the school hostage crisis. Although the vast majority of those affected experienced the hostage crisis as a negative event, this does not necessarily apply to everyone in every respect. Individual experiences may differ. Therefore, in this section, as well as in the next, terms such as *some*, *a minority*, or *a large proportion* will frequently be used. It is always important to remember that there are different individual perspectives to these experiences.

There are several groups of people affected by the hostage crisis, namely:

- **Schoolchildren:** More than 100 children were present in the school building. The majority of these children were held hostage in the school for five days.
- **Schoolchildren of Moluccan descent:** At the start of the hostage crisis, a number of children of Moluccan descent were present in the school. Shortly after the hostage-taking began, they were forced to leave the school building.
- **Teachers:** Five teachers were present at the school during the hostage crisis. One of them was released on the fifth day of the hostage crisis. The other four teachers were held hostage until the end of the crisis.
- **Relatives:** Family members who experienced the hostage crisis from the outside. This group also includes partners and children. Although they generally did not experience the hostage crisis themselves, they did experience its impact through their affected partner or parent. A distinction can therefore be made between relatives at the time (parents, brothers, and sisters) and present-day relatives (partners and children).
- **Local residents:** Adults and children living near the elementary school where the hostage crisis took place who also experienced the events at close range.

Although these groups can be distinguished from one another, it is important to recognize that individual experiences – even within these groups – can vary considerably. This will be explored further in this section. It should be noted, however, that the majority of those affected, as many as 71% (as reported in the study *The Silence Afterwards*), experienced the hostage crisis as a (very) negative event.

This section consists of the following components:

- 1. Experiences and conditions within the school
- 2. Experiences immediately after the hostage crisis
- 3. A culture of silence
- 4. The school after the hostage crisis
- 5. Key information

2.1 Experiences and conditions within the school

The school in Bovensmilde was a small elementary school with only a few classrooms. At around 9:00 a.m., the children were sitting in circles in their classrooms, which was how the school week traditionally began every Monday morning. At that moment, the hostage takers entered the school. They were armed and some were dressed in military clothing. They instructed all children and teachers to gather in the assembly hall. In the assembly hall, the Moluccan children were separated from their classmates and released from the school.

Throughout the hostage crisis, all the windows of the school were covered with newspapers. As a result, the hostages had very little awareness of what was happening outside. They also had no means of communicating with the outside world. The school was surrounded by police officers, marines, and a crisis team. This crisis team remained in constant negotiations with the hostage takers.

During the hostage crisis, students and teachers were not allowed to leave the classrooms on their own, even, for instance, to go to the bathroom. They were only allowed to do so under armed supervision from the hostage takers. Washing also took place under armed supervision, with the hostage takers standing nearby in the same room. For many young children, this felt threatening and invasive to their privacy.

Because the windows had been covered the school became very warm, the toilets became dirty, and general hygiene deteriorated. People slept poorly and their immune system worsened. Eventually, many of the children became ill. It is possible that a contagious virus was also circulating in the school.

Many people experienced the situation in the school as frightening and tense. At one point, the hostage takers threatened to throw a hand grenade among the children. One hostage taker also aimed an unloaded pistol at several students and, as a joke, pulled the trigger. Although there were occasional opportunities for distraction, such as watching a cartoon on tv, there was above all a great deal of uncertainty. Some hostage takers were kinder toward the children than others. Some of those affected reported that one of the hostage takers looked after the well-being of the children and even sang children's songs to some of them, while another hostage taker was more inclined to threaten them with violence. As a result, children had very different experiences during the hostage crisis.

“ **Very little would have had to happen for something terrible to occur. You could feel that tension. That friday, which I believe was the final night, we were given air mattresses. I remember thinking: we’re not getting out of here anytime soon. Because when you’ve been sleeping on the floor for several nights and suddenly you’re given an air mattress, you know you’re going to be here for a while. Even going to the bathroom had to be done under the supervision of one of those people [a hostage taker]. You could simply feel that something wasn’t right and that it was a very distressing situation.**

~ Former child hostage

The teachers who were held hostage experienced the situation differently. During the hostage crisis, they tried to talk to and negotiate with the hostage takers in an effort to ensure that no harm would be done to the children. Several former teachers described feeling a strong sense of responsibility for the children's wellbeing during the hostage crisis, which contributed to a strong sense of solidarity among them. At the same time, the teachers also experienced intense feelings of helplessness. For example, they discussed among themselves what they could do if a hand grenade were to be thrown.

During the hostage crisis, many concerned parents gathered around the school. Emotions ran high, partly because of the public's familiarity with previous hostage crises involving Moluccans in 1970 and 1975. The police did not allow the parents to approach the school too closely, forcing them to watch from a distance. Feelings of helplessness and concern for their children's wellbeing led some parents to consider storming the school themselves. They were prevented from doing so by the authorities.

The school hostage crisis also had a profound impact on local residents. They experienced the hostage crisis at close range and witnessed both the events themselves and the high-running emotions surrounding the school.

2.2 Experiences immediately after the hostage crisis

On the fourth and fifth days, all of the children were released. Some children were first admitted to the hospital to recover from illness and exhaustion. Children who were not admitted to the hospital were allowed to return home. Many of those affected described their return home as a warm welcome and indicated that feelings of happiness about their return predominated within their families.

Following their release, the children underwent medical and psychological examinations. This process was coordinated by the CBOG (Central Policy and Support Group for the Aftercare of Former Hostages), which had been established one year earlier, in 1976. The CBOG deployed general practitioners, psychologists, social workers, and (child) psychiatrists for this purpose. During this aftercare program, the children and their parents were supported by social workers. Although there are reports indicating that healthcare professionals were present in the town, the majority of those affected reported that they experienced little or no support and did not see any healthcare professionals in Bovensmilde.

Between 1977 and 1979, scientific research was conducted into the health and needs of victims of hostage situations. However, the schoolchildren from Bovensmilde were largely excluded from follow-up research, amid concerns that participation might be too confronting for the children and could cause unrest in the community.

The schoolchildren of Moluccan descent received a separate support program that included psychological and educational assistance.

“ You were just a child, people around me used to say.
And children are resilient.

~ Former child hostage

Those affected look back on the period following the hostage crisis with mixed feelings. According to research, approximately half of those affected reported experiencing fear, stress, and a lack of understanding in the aftermath of the hostage crisis, as well as feelings of anger and a lack of recognition. A small proportion experienced the aftermath as a period of solidarity. In general, those affected experienced little or no support. The support that was experienced mainly came from family members, and some affected children also found support from their teachers.

The hostage crisis changed the atmosphere in Bovensmilde. Although the Moluccan neighborhood was located on the outskirts of the town, there had been good relations between Dutch and Moluccan residents before the events took place. After the hostage crisis, many residents experienced feelings of distrust and a tense atmosphere, which sometimes led to arguments and confrontations. This was also related to the fact that the Moluccan hostage takers themselves came from Bovensmilde. There were also police officers and riot police present in Bovensmilde for some time (particularly around the school), which caused some people to experience the area as a 'war zone'. In some locations, barbed wire fences had been installed.

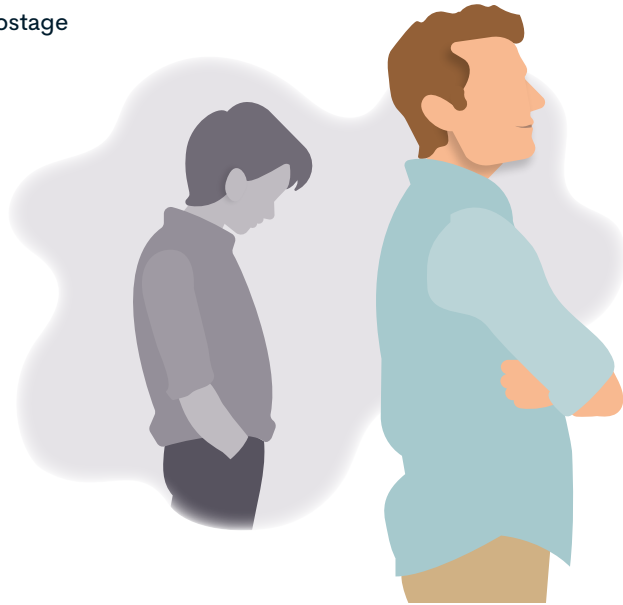
However, there were also attempts at reconciliation. Fifteen Moluccan residents sent a letter to the parents of the hostaged children, to express their sympathy and to initiate a dialogue.

2.3 A culture of silence

In many affected families, very little was said about the hostage crisis after the events had taken place. According to reports, some parents were instructed not to talk too much about the hostage crisis, to act as if everything was normal, and to regard the events as nothing more than a school trip that had gone wrong and got out of hand. This approach had been recommended by government authorities. The culture of silence was not limited to families. Very little was also said about the hostage crisis and its impact at school and within the wider community of Bovensmilde. Many of those affected hold government institutions responsible for not breaking this culture of silence at the time. However, this was not the case for everyone. There were also families in which the hostage crisis was discussed more openly.

“ They said that not talking about it was the best thing to do.

~ Former child hostage



From a professional perspective, the psychological consequences resulting from traumatic events were viewed differently in the 1970s and 1980s than they are today. The diagnosis of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) did not yet exist, which contributed to a culture in which it was less common to talk about traumatic experiences. PTSD was not officially included in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) until 1980, three years after the hostage crisis.

2.4 The school after the hostage crisis

After the hostage crisis the school was never used again. Many children and parents did not want to return to the school building because of the traumatic experiences associated with it. In addition, the school had been damaged during the marines' intervention with armored vehicles. As a result, in the period following the hostage crisis, the students attended classes in various school buildings and temporary classrooms in Bovensmilde and Assen. These frequent changes in school locations, combined with the presence of military personnel in the area, made this period both tense and overwhelming for many children. The old school was eventually demolished, and the site remained undeveloped for many years.

“ That was the central idea: we simply had to move on. Not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of the children, to resume things the way they had been before the hostage crisis.

~ Former teacher hostage

2.5 Key information

- During the hostage crisis, the atmosphere among the hostages inside the school was characterized by fear and tension. The windows were covered with newspapers, the hostage takers threatened with violence, and the conditions were poor.
- After the hostage crisis, the children were allowed to return home. Some underwent medical and psychological examinations and were admitted to the hospital. Only a small number of those affected actually encountered healthcare professionals in Bovensmilde.
- In many families and throughout Bovensmilde, there was generally a culture of silence. Very little was said about the events. This approach had been recommended by government authorities. As a result, many children felt that they received little support.
- After the hostage crisis, the atmosphere within the community was tense. There were confrontations between Dutch and Moluccan residents. The children attended a different, enclosed school under armed military protection. For many children, this made this period feel unsafe and threatening.

The consequences of the school hostage crisis

Part III.

The consequences of the school hostage crisis

“ I experience the consequences of the hostage crisis every day. The hostage crisis can still affect me deeply. They call it PTSD. Thoughts about the hostage crisis create tension. I don’t sleep well at night, which leaves me very tired during the day. Sometimes it overwhelms me at work, and I feel so bad that I have to go home.

I have seen doctors about this on several occasions. But I often have the feeling that they don’t really know how to help me, even though I have had to explain my story so many times. Sometimes they prescribe something, but it doesn’t help. And sometimes it seems as if some of my colleagues – not all of them, of course – don’t really understand where my symptoms come from. Sometimes it feels as though they are thinking: just get over it.

I often have to drag myself through the day because I don’t want to lose my job. It would really help me if my colleagues and supervisors understood where it all comes from. If they asked me what would help. I hope that people will come to understand what a hostage crisis can do to someone, even many years later.

The above account was provided by a formerly hostaged schoolchild. The individual gave permission for this story to be included in this guide. By sharing this experience, the individual hopes to demonstrate the importance of creating space and showing understanding for symptoms and difficulties related to the hostage crisis. This account illustrates how the school hostage crisis can continue to affect everyday life decades later. Every person affected experiences the consequences in their own way.

In the previous section, we explored the different ways in which those affected experienced the hostage crisis, including the immediate aftermath of the event, the culture of silence and the initial responses from government institutions. This chapter focuses on the psychosocial impact of the hostage crisis. We examine how the hostage crisis affected the mental and social well-being of those affected, and how post-traumatic symptoms, in turn, have influenced work and relationships later in life. The information presented here is derived from the study *The Silence Afterwards* [De Stille Achteraf] (2025). In addition, the chapter focuses on the different ways in which the hostage crisis continues to live on in the collective memory of the community and society through commemorations, memorials, and media attention. This chapter also addresses the financial support that was provided by the government.

This section consists of the following components:

1. The psychological consequences of the hostage crisis
2. The impact on later life
3. The impact of the culture of silence
4. Consequences for relatives
5. Lack of recognition
6. Financial support
7. Commemoration and remembrance
8. Initiatives by those affected
9. Media attention
10. Key information

3.1 The psychological consequences of the hostage crisis

Traumatic events, such as the school hostage crisis, can have a profound impact on those who have experienced them. Those affected may, for example, experience nightmares, hypervigilance, or difficulties regulating their emotions. These reactions are considered normal human responses. For most people, these symptoms disappear after several weeks. However, some individuals may continue to experience persistent symptoms. More information about the consequences of traumatic events and PTSD can be found in the prologue at the beginning of this guide.

The majority of those taken hostage experienced the crisis as stressful, frightening, and threatening. Many also felt a sense of incomprehension and anger about what had happened. The threat posed by weapons and the possibility of the school being blown up created a great deal of uncertainty. Some did not know whether they would survive or when the ordeal would end.

The 2025 study *The Silence Afterwards* found that approximately one-quarter of the interviewed individuals who had been affected likely met the criteria for a diagnosis of (C)PTSD (the “C” referring to complex PTSD). This indicates that, for some, the hostage crisis was a traumatic experience. These individuals reported a range of symptoms, including intrusive memories, nightmares, and avoidance of traumatic memories. Some also experienced difficulties regulating their emotions and establishing and maintaining social relationships.

“ I am much more on guard. I never walk into a room feeling completely relaxed. I am always focused on one thing: how can I get out? It is never truly relaxed; it has become a way of life. I do it without even realizing it, but I am always thinking about it.

~ Former child hostage

The lack of control and safety during the hostage crisis led some individuals to develop a strong need for structure and control later in life. Situations over which they have no control may be experienced as stressful and emotionally challenging. This may, for example, involve traveling by public transportation or visiting the town of Bovensmilde (for those who have moved away). For some, seeing images of the hostage crisis or hearing the slogan “*Van Agt, we want to live*” is unbearable. Feelings of tension and anxiety may also arise unexpectedly, for example while taking a shower, during a meeting at work, or in an unforeseen situation on the street.

The (continuous) tension reported by some individuals may be accompanied by physical symptoms related to stress, such as muscle tension, sleep problems, flu-like symptoms, physical and mental exhaustion, and feelings of depression. Some developed addictions to substances that helped numb their negative emotions. Not everyone experiences the symptoms described above. Psychotrauma can manifest itself in many ways. These symptoms may ultimately affect a person’s ability to perform their job and may even result in work disability.

“ Sometimes people came to me with symptoms related to stress. For example, they suffered from neck pain or headaches. Only later would they casually mention that they had also been held hostage. Sometimes those connections only become clear much later.

~ Physiotherapist

Less than half of those affected received professional help for psychological symptoms related to the hostage crisis, such as trauma-focused psychotherapy. Another group, slightly less than half, reported that they had not felt the need for professional help. The remaining small minority did feel a need for professional support but were either unable to find it or did not seek it.

Those who did receive professional help generally reported that it had been beneficial, for example in opening up about the traumatic events, coping with PTSD symptoms, and reducing feelings of anger and hatred. A small number indicated that professional support had not been helpful. One reason for this was that healthcare professionals did not always know how to work effectively with people who had been in a hostage situation.

“ On the one hand, it was because the healthcare system did not really know how to deal with it; on the other hand, it was because of my own distrust.

~ Former child hostage

Incidentally, a successful (effective) treatment does not mean that all symptoms simply disappear. Even after treatment, those affected may continue to experience significant residual symptoms. In addition, some individuals may experience a relapse over time, during which PTSD symptoms re-emerge. The fear of relapse can itself be distressing.

3.2 The Impact on later life

For many of those affected, the school hostage crisis remains a painful memory. Some continue to experience long-term symptoms that have also affected growing up, other life domains and later life events, such as maintaining relationships or functioning at work. The extent to which the hostage crisis has influenced these aspects of life is not always entirely clear. Many of those affected indicate that it is unclear to them to what extent the hostage crisis has influenced the course of their later lives, including life choices, career opportunities, and overall life satisfaction. This uncertainty is often experienced as difficult. For many, it has raised questions in regards to how they make sense of the world around them and how they view their personal identity.

“ Would I have been a different person if this had never happened?

~ Former child hostage

After completing elementary school, all those affected moved on to secondary education. Some wanted to leave their school years behind as quickly as possible. Since the hostage crisis, they had found it difficult to remain focused and motivated when it came to schoolwork. Others encountered difficulties during their further education. For example, they struggled to begin or complete a degree. However, this was not the case for everyone. Some individuals look back on their school and student years as a positive experience.

After their school years, a new phase of life began. Some entered into a relationship or started a career. Several mentioned that meeting a partner was a turning point in their lives and an important source of support. Others indicated that they had difficulty forming relationships and that the hostage crisis had damaged their ability to trust and form meaningful attachments. This at times also affected their role as parents, as they often experienced significant concerns about their children's safety. Some felt guilty that they were unable to be the parent they had hoped to be.

For others, the consequences of the hostage crisis are evident in their working lives. Fatigue or other trauma-related symptoms make it more difficult to perform their jobs. Especially in certain situations, such as working in dark or enclosed spaces. These issues prevented a number of affected schoolchildren from pursuing certain professions or performing specific types of work. Moreover, some former child hostages reported experiencing workplace conflicts related to difficulties with trust.

“It [the hostage crisis, ed.] destroyed a great deal, indirectly, through my own behavior. If the hostage crisis had never happened, I would have had a different job today. I’m quite certain of that.

~ Former child hostage

Co-workers and supervisors respond differently to the needs of those affected. Some, for example, felt poorly understood when they requested a modified work schedule or work adjustments to better cope with traumatic distress, while others find that their colleagues and supervisors show flexibility and understanding. The latter is important to help those affected by the school hostage crises to feel more supported. It also contributes to better functioning at work and greater job satisfaction.

Nevertheless, some individuals also view the hostage crisis as having had a positive impact on their lives. It serves as a source of inspiration, and urged those affected by the hostage to devote themselves, for example, to support vulnerable children. Their shared experiences helped form a sense of connection with their peers with the same experiences. Others indicated that overcoming the school hostage crisis and its consequences has made them feel stronger.

“I have discovered that I am very strong.

~ Former child hostage



3.3 The Impact of the culture of silence

The culture of silence discussed in the previous section affected many former child hostages at the time and had long-term consequences. For some, the lack of opportunities to talk about the hostage crisis resulted in a continued inability, even later in life, to discuss the subject openly or to find the words to express their experiences. The government’s advice not to talk about the events also caused significant trust issues: it gave them the feeling that their experiences were either not taken seriously or were considered unimportant. Some former hostages still find it difficult to discuss the hostage crisis because they were never allowed to talk about it or were never able to bring themselves to do so. This can hinder the processing of traumatic experiences.

3.4 Consequences for loved ones

For loved ones, such as relatives, friends and especially family members, the consequences of the hostage crisis were also clearly felt. For those who experienced the events at the time, the school hostage crisis had a profound impact. They did not know when their child, brother, or sister would return. Often, the atmosphere at home was tense. The days of the hostage crisis revolved around waiting, hoping, and gathering information. Parents waited outside the school for news. In desperation, some were even preparing to storm the building themselves. The release of the children therefore came as an enormous relief.

“Of course, it affected me at the time, but it’s been [well over] forty years now, and life goes on.

~ Parent of a former hostage

Although most family members no longer personally experience negative effects from the school hostage crisis involving their child or sibling, some parents struggled with its consequences. After the hostage crisis, they struggled with seeing its impact on their child while trying to support them as best they could. In doing so, they often put their own feelings aside. Some relatives still find it difficult to acknowledge their own feelings about the hostage crisis to others. They consider their own experiences to be secondary to those of the former hostages themselves. In some cases, the hostage crisis led to strained family relationships that continue to affect family dynamics to this day, causing contact to generate stress rather than provide support.

In particular, current partners indicate that the hostage crisis still plays a role in their daily lives. After leaving the parental home and entering into relationships, partners often became the people closest to those who had been held hostage and continue to provide an important source of emotional support. For some partners, it became apparent at an early stage of the relationship that their loved one had not fully processed the hostage crisis. They noticed symptoms such as reduced energy, persistent hypervigilance, but also difficulties with authority or maintaining social relationships.

“**Living with someone who is severely traumatized is complicated... Mood swings, depression, and psychotic episodes make it extremely difficult [to live together].**

~ Partner of a former hostage

As the annual memorial of the hostage crisis approaches, partners and children of former hostages often notice negative emotions such as irritability, sadness, or restlessness beginning to resurface. Loved ones can find it emotionally difficult to see their partner or parent in this state. They often wish for their loved one to live a life free from these symptoms. At times, it can be frustrating when a parent or partner is reluctant to talk about their feelings and experiences of the hostage crisis. Children of former hostages may also find it distressing to see their parent continue to struggle with its effects. It can be confronting for them to realize that they have never known their parent in good health and/or symptom free and wonder how this has impacted their parent-child bond. Everyday activities, such as playing a game of football together, can become challenging. On the other hand, many partners and children generally do not view the consequences of the hostage events experienced as problematic. The hostage crisis has become part of their lives and many former child hostages find considerable support at home, among friends and colleagues that allow them to discuss their experiences openly.

“**For many years, we have commemorated the school hostage crisis. We do that together, just the two of us, or with our children.**

~ Partner of a former hostage

Overall, most loved ones indicate that they are satisfied with their lives and do not feel a need for professional support. They also generally report being able to talk openly about the events.

3.5 Lack of support and recognition

Many of those affected indicate that they experienced insufficient support and recognition in the aftermath of the hostage crisis. Initially, this was associated with the limited availability and inadequate quality of aftercare services. Although psychosocial support was available in Bovensmilde, it did not reach most of the former child hostages, for example because some parents believed it was unnecessary.

Others were offered support but felt that it was insufficiently tailored to their needs as children. For some individuals, the feeling that they could not turn to healthcare professionals or that they were not understood by them reinforced the perception that their experiences and suffering as children were not being acknowledged. Another criticism directed at both the government and healthcare professionals was that parents received insufficient support, both for themselves and in learning how to best support their children. Many believe that the government did not respond appropriately either in the lead-up to or in the aftermath of the hostage crisis. The most important concern was the feeling that the government failed to communicate the seriousness of the hostage crisis adequately to the public. Even those who experienced few negative consequences themselves believe that the government fell short in its response. Although those affected generally recognize that knowledge of psychological trauma and the provision of psychosocial support were far less developed at the time and understand that this limited their options for adequate support and recognition, this awareness does not diminish their feelings of being misunderstood or disregarded. At home, at school, and among government officials and professionals, there was a prevailing belief that the impact of the hostage crisis on the children would be limited and that it was deemed best not to discuss what had happened. As a result, the former child hostages felt that their suffering and problems were not taken seriously.

“**Oh, they're just children. If you simply don't talk about it, they'll soon forget about it. Just tell them it was an unpleasant school trip.**

~ Former child hostage

In the professional support that some individuals sought later in life, these earlier experiences of misunderstanding often played a significant role. They led to feelings of distrust toward healthcare professionals and institutions. Others, however, experienced the support they received later in life as a valuable source of help. It showed them that there were also people who were willing to listen to their traumatic experiences. For some individuals, receiving an official diagnosis, such as PTSD, provided acknowledgment and recognition. Being able to talk about their experiences helped them express negative thoughts and emotions they had carried for many years.

“The suffering caused by these events is greatly underestimated by our government and public institutions. That hurts me deeply and affects me personally.

~ Former child hostage

A proportion of the former hostages and their loved ones hold the Dutch government partly responsible for its treatment of the Moluccan community at the time, which they regard as one of the underlying factors that contributed to the hostage-taking. For this reason, many of those affected expressed a desire for a public apology from the government. In June 2026, Prime Minister Rob Jetten formally apologized on behalf of the Dutch government for the treatment of the first generation of Moluccans who arrived in the Netherlands. The apology was received differently among former hostages and their loved ones: some welcomed it, while others felt that their own needs for support and recognition had still not been adequately addressed by the government.

Some of those affected believe that insufficient attention has been paid to the long-term consequences of the hostage crisis and wish to raise greater awareness of the events and their impact within Dutch society. They feel that the hostage crisis has not been sufficiently incorporated into the Netherlands' collective memory and regard this as a missed opportunity, to shed light on an important and often overlooked aspect of the country's colonial past. They also believe it is important that attention be paid to the experiences of Moluccans in the Netherlands. Other former hostages and their loved ones, however, feel anger and distrust toward the Moluccan community. According to them, the Moluccan community did too little to condemn the actions of the hostage takers. For a third group of former hostages and their loved ones the hostage crisis belongs to the past. They regard the events as part of the past and feel little need to revisit these memories, preferring instead to focus on the future.

Regarding the municipality of Bovensmilde (now the municipality of Midden-Drenthe), a portion of those affected hold the municipality responsible for failing to take any initiative after the hostage crisis to promote healing or commemoration, for example through the establishment of a memorial or an annual commemoration. According to them, such initiatives had to come from those affected themselves.

Most of those affected indicate that they do not believe they would benefit from contact or reconciliation with the hostage takers. For a small number of individuals, however, such contact did occur over the years. These conversations helped them express the impact the hostage crisis had on their lives. Apologies from the hostage takers also helped some individuals come to terms with what had happened.

Within the Moluccan community, many condemned the hostage-taking, while others expressed understanding for the underlying grievances and the hostage-takers' desire to draw attention to what they regarded as historical injustices against their community. Regarding the need for reconciliation with the Moluccan community, many former hostages and their loved ones do not desire apologies from the Moluccan community. They do not hold the Moluccan community responsible for the hostage crisis. Others feel that sufficient apologies have already been offered by members of the Moluccan community. There are however also former hostages and their loved ones who do wish to receive apologies and who continue to feel angry about the attitude adopted by part of the Moluccan community. According to them, the Moluccan actions have not been condemned explicitly enough by the Moluccan community. For most of these former hostages, (visual) references to the struggle for an independent Moluccan state continue to evoke painful emotions, as they associate this struggle with the hostage crisis and the suffering they have experienced since.

3.6 Financial support

Following the recommendation of the CBOG (Central Policy and Support Group for the Aftercare of Former Hostages), the Dutch government provided what was referred to as a voluntary financial support payment to the hostages on 19 July 1977. The teachers received a payment of 3,000 Dutch guilders, while the children received 1,000 guilders. Many of the former hostages indicate that they view this financial support as a form of compensation intended to settle the matter on the part of the Dutch government. Some appreciated the financial support and also felt that they had received sufficient support following the hostage crisis. Others continue to express the need for more substantial financial support to compensate for missed (work and pension) opportunities and to cover the long-term health consequences they have experienced. According to them, the hostage crisis placed their families under financial strain at the time. In the years since, they were burdened with the financial health-care costs required to process the hostage crisis, they had fewer opportunities for education, personal development, and better-paid employment. They were more likely to experience mental health related work absence and disability, and less able to accumulate pension over the course of their working lives. According to those affected, this has not only disadvantaged them personally but has also affected their families. The study *The Silence Afterwards* (2025) recommended exploring what the government could do to financially support those affected. In response, the government investigated this issue and concluded that no separate financial support scheme could be established, given the statutory limitation period for applications for financial support through the Schadefonds Geweldsmisdrijven compensation fund under the existing legal framework. These applications would likely have only a limited chance of success. Consequently, the topic of financial support remains a sensitive topic for some of those affected by the school hostage crisis.

3.7 Commemoration and remembrance

On 14 March 2007, The School of Bovensmilde Foundation (*Stichting De school van Bovensmilde*) was established to enable those affected to support one another in coping with the aftermath of the hostage crisis. The first commemorative gathering took place on 23 June 2007. During this gathering some individuals affected by the hostage crisis indicated that they felt a need for a memorial place of remembrance, while others feared that a memorial would reopen old wounds and create further tensions between the Dutch and Moluccan communities in Bovensmilde.

“It may be that the event from the past still feels very present today because the two communities continue to live alongside one another.

~ Mental healthcare professional

Initiated by the residents of Bovensmilde, two memorials were erected in 2013 at the former location of the school. The two memorials have different meanings. One of them is a mosaic bench bearing the inscription “*We Want to Live Together.*” The mosaic tiles were placed by those affected themselves, together with residents from both communities in the town. The process of creating this memorial was both difficult and meaningful, representing a moment of connection between people. The other memorial consists of a pedestal featuring a Tahuri (a traditional Moluccan wind instrument made from a seashell) and a Tifa (a traditional Moluccan drum). This memorial pays tribute to the first generation of Moluccans in Bovensmilde. After several years, the mosaic memorial fell into disrepair, which many of those affected experienced as painful. Some hold the local government responsible for failing to maintain the memorial properly. The local government, the ministry, and experts have explored how the memorial could be restored.

In 2021, work began on the restoration of the memorial. The government later provided a financial contribution to make the memorial more sustainable in the long term (at least temporarily). In 2026, in consultation with the initiators of the existing memorial, it was decided that a new memorial shall be created at the site of the current one, building on what already exists. Its final design will be determined jointly by those affected, local residents, an artist, and the municipality.

“Unfortunately, the memorial is damaged. That is a real shame. Commemoration deserves something meaningful – something that will endure for a long time and do justice to everyone.

~ Relative of a former hostage

3.8 Initiatives by those affected

Some of those affected have taken the initiative to promote recovery and healing by organizing peer support groups, commemorative events, the memorial, and activities aimed at strengthening connections with the Moluccan community. These initiatives helped break the culture of silence and empowered those affected to reclaim their own stories. They have contributed to a greater understanding of each other's pain and, for some, have also facilitated the processing of traumatic symptoms. Some individuals have developed valuable personal relationships through these initiatives and continue to find support through their connections with other former hostages and loved ones.

3.9 Media attention

The school hostage crisis in Bovensmilde received attention both in the national and international media from the very first day (see Part I). In recent years, however, there has been renewed interest in the hostage crisis, for example through newspaper articles, documentaries, and news broadcasts. This renewed attention is related to parliamentary questions raised in 2022 that led to the establishment of the EOGB Project (Recognition and Reparation for Those Affected by the Bovensmilde Hostage Crisis) in 2024 and the publication of the study *The Silence Afterwards* in 2025 (on which this guide is based). Since then, various activities have been undertaken by the EOGB Project together with those affected by the school crisis to provide recognition and support. Appendix D includes two Dutch illustrations showing the initiatives that have been undertaken in recent years by both government agencies and citizens in relation to the school hostage crisis.

Since the Dutch government's official apology to the Moluccan community in June 2026, several news reports and interviews have appeared, including on WNL Vandaag (22 June 2026) and NPO Radio 1 (23 June 2026). Before that, former child hostages appeared in several media outlets to speak about their struggle for recognition, including in *Dagblad van het Noorden* (22 September 2025), on *RTV Drenthe* (28 September 2025), and on *RTL* (14 June 2026). In 2024, a book by Laurà Gerards, a former child hostage, was also published under the title *Belanda*. An overview of recent documentaries, books, and interviews can be found in Appendix C, *Reading and viewing recommendations*.

The renewed media attention may bring back old memories. For some, these may be painful memories that have not been discussed for many years. Not everyone welcomes the attention the hostage crisis receives; the way the events are portrayed in the media may not always correspond to how individuals experienced them themselves. Some people affected by the hostage crisis would prefer to leave it in the past.

In 2027, it will be 50 years since the school hostage crisis in Bovensmilde and the train hijacking at De Punt took place. As a result, renewed attention to these events is expected.

3.10 Key information

- Approximately one-quarter of the former child hostages met the criteria for a probable diagnosis of PTSD in 2025. They continue to suffer from nightmares, anxiety and other mental health issues.
- PTSD is associated with a range of comorbid psychological, physical, and social symptoms.
- Situations in which they have little control or in which unexpected events occur may be particularly challenging for those affected.
- Later in life, the hostage crisis may have affected the professional and social lives of those affected. For example, some individuals experience difficulties performing certain jobs or establishing and maintaining relationships.
- The hostage crisis has also had consequences for relatives. Parents, brothers, and sisters witnessed the impact the hostage crisis had on their loved ones. For present-day relatives, such as partners and children, the consequences of the hostage crisis continue to affect their relationships with the person who was directly affected.
- Many of those affected experienced a lack of support and recognition in the aftermath of the hostage crisis.
- The first commemorative gathering took place on 23 June 2007. In 2013, a memorial commemorating the hostage crisis was unveiled. Both initiatives were organized by former hostages and their loved ones.
- In recent years, the school hostage crisis has received renewed attention in various forms of media.

Supporting individuals affected by the Bovensmilde school hostage crisis

Part IV. Supporting individuals affected by the Bovensmilde school hostage crisis

Respectful and empathetic interactions can be of great significance for those affected. This fourth and final section of the guide focuses on ways in which professionals, both within and outside the healthcare sector, can discuss these events appropriately and on the issues that may require particular attention considering the experiences of those affected.

4.1 Practical guidance and tips for supportive conversations

The following suggestions help professionals communicate with those affected in a respectful and understanding manner. These points should not be considered rules or formal guidelines. Rather, they should be seen as suggestions or conversation starters that facilitate communication and strengthen the relationship.

Ask whether the person is comfortable talking about the hostage crisis

Many people affected by the hostage crisis are not accustomed to talking about their personal experiences or may find the subject emotionally difficult and uncomfortable. Others, however, are able to talk about the school hostage crisis more easily. It can be difficult to determine whether someone is open to discussing the subject.

To avoid overlooking an individual's preference to either discuss or avoid the topic, it can be helpful to ask directly whether they would like to talk about their experiences. Questions such as *"Do you feel comfortable talking about the school hostage crisis?"* or *"Would you find it helpful to spend some time discussing the school hostage crisis?"* can be useful.

If the person indicates that they would like to talk about it, it is important to provide sufficient time and space for the conversation and not to move on too quickly. Avoid minimizing their experiences by making comments such as *"It happened such a long time ago."* Instead, acknowledge that emotional reactions, even many years later, are understandable.

Prioritize the individual experience

People affected by the school hostage crisis experienced the event in very different ways. Some continue to struggle with its consequences, while others rarely think about it anymore. Although people may experience the same event, each individual may respond to it differently. For this reason, the individual's personal experience should always take precedence. Give people the opportunity to describe, in their own words, how they experienced the hostage crisis and its consequences. Avoid minimizing the significance or severity of their experiences, take them seriously, and refrain from making value judgments about their story. Ask about what they have experienced and discuss together what the desired next steps might be and what goals they hope to achieve. For some, this may involve reducing symptoms, while others may simply want to return to work and function normally again. A helpful question might be: *"What would you consider a meaningful goal to work toward?"*

Ask about the family situation

Every family responded differently to the hostage crisis. In some families, little or nothing was said about the events, while other families were more open about discussing the events. The typically pragmatic and reserved culture often associated with the province of Drenthe may also have influenced the extent to which the hostage crisis was (and is) discussed. For many people, the initial response at home and within their immediate social environment was particularly important. For some, this was the first moment at which they experienced a lack of recognition. As a professional, you might ask whether someone felt they had enough opportunity throughout their life to talk about the hostage crisis.

It is also important to consider the person's current family situation. Strained or weakened family relationships may be related to the consequences of the hostage crisis and to the lack of perceived support and understanding experienced both in the past and in the present. For some individuals, this may remain a sensitive topic.

Take childhood experiences seriously

During the hostage crisis, approximately one-third of the students were between five and eight years of age, while the remaining two-thirds were between nine and twelve years old. At the time, it was widely believed that young children would not fully understand how serious the hostage crisis was or, if they were affected by it, that they would recover quickly. Today, it is well established that young children are particularly vulnerable. Many years later, it has become clear that many former child hostages still remember the events vividly. Acknowledging the credibility of their childhood experiences serves as an important form of recognition that may have been absent in the past. Simply acknowledging that children are more vulnerable than adults can already be meaningful and supportive for those affected.

Be clear, transparent, and follow through on commitments

While transparency and honesty are important principles in care and service provision generally, they may be particularly important for individuals affected by the school hostage crisis. Some have had negative experiences with healthcare professionals and government institutions in the aftermath of the hostage crisis. Long waiting times, unclear procedures, or the abrupt termination of contact and support have led some of those affected by the school hostage crisis to feel that they were not being taken seriously. For example, during conversations with healthcare professionals, some encountered a lack of understanding or felt that professionals moved on too quickly from the impact of the hostage crisis, without sufficiently exploring or acknowledging its significance. As a result, they became distrustful and experienced barriers in seeking help or reaching out, despite suffering from serious mental health problems.

It can be helpful for those affected when you clearly explain what they can expect. For example, when they can get back in touch, when they can expect to receive results, or how the care or support process works. Establishing realistic expectations is particularly important.

As a healthcare or other professional, you may sometimes be constrained by specific responsibilities or regulations, even when you would like to do more to help someone. This may also apply to employees of the Employee Insurance Agency (UWV), who may be unable to offer more support than existing regulations permit. In such situations, it can be helpful to communicate these limitations in a clear yet empathetic manner.

Always be clear about agreements, remain transparent throughout the process, and consistently follow through on any commitments you make. For example, an overwhelming number of emails or documents without clear guidance can be difficult for those affected to navigate.

“We’re afraid that we’ll receive some help for a while, and then you will abandon us, leaving us on our own once again.”

~ Former child hostage

It may also be helpful to ask whether someone has had previous experiences with healthcare professionals or with your organization and what those experiences were like. Although some individuals may never have sought care or support before, others may already have had past experiences with healthcare professionals and institutions. It is also important to ask what the individual needs from you as a healthcare professional.

Although this may differ from one person to another, several topics can generally be considered *do's* and *don'ts* when speaking with individuals affected by the hostage crisis.

It may be helpful to ask or say things such as:

- ✓ *Do you feel comfortable talking about the hostage crisis?*
- ✓ *What does the hostage crisis mean to you today?*
- ✓ *What challenges are you currently facing?*
- ✓ *May I ask how the hostage crisis was discussed within your family in the past?*
- ✓ *How can I support you? What do you need from me?*

It is generally advisable to avoid questions or comments such as:

- ✗ *It happened such a long time ago.*
- ✗ *At least it ended well.*
- ✗ *But you were so young at the time.*
- ✗ *Have you actually been diagnosed?*

Be mindful of potential triggers

The school hostage crisis had a profound impact on many of those affected. As a result, certain situations or stimuli may still remind them of the hostage crisis. For example, some people still find it difficult to be in dark rooms because these remind them of the school, where the windows had been covered with newspapers. A helicopter flying overhead may remind someone of the police and news helicopters that were present during the hostage crisis and trigger unwanted and intrusive memories. For others, seeing individuals with a Moluccan appearance or a darker skin tone may unintentionally remind them of the hostage takers. The former hostages explicitly emphasize that these unwanted trauma triggers have nothing to do with the individuals concerned.

Be aware of the time of year. For some people, the months of May and June carry a particular emotional significance because they coincide with the period during which the school hostage crisis took place. As a result, those affected may experience increased levels of tension during these months. Questions about reconciliation or pressure to pursue reconciliation may also feel unwelcome to some individuals. During conversations, it is therefore important to remain aware of possible triggers. If someone appears to be affected by them, ask about their experience and, if appropriate, offer them the opportunity to step out of the room for a moment or to take a break.

Although this differs from person to person, possible triggers may include:

- Dark, enclosed spaces;
- Helicopters flying overhead or police cars driving past;
- Armed military personnel or police officers;
- The days or months (May and June) related to the hostage crisis;
- Commemorations that are directly or indirectly related to the hostage crisis or to Moluccan actions;
- Apologies, recognition initiatives, or financial support schemes for other groups affected by traumatic events.

It is important to give individuals the opportunity to indicate what constitutes a trigger for them personally. By paying attention to these triggers, it may be possible to avoid them. Questions such as *"Is there anything that you find particularly helpful or, on the contrary, particularly uncomfortable?"* or *"Is there anything I can do to make you feel more comfortable?"* may be useful.

This is different within the context of psychotrauma treatment, where revisiting the traumatic event in a controlled and safe environment is an important part of the therapeutic process. As part of good clinical practice, healthcare professionals providing trauma-focused treatment (should) clearly explain the rationale for revisiting these memories and discuss with the individual how this can be approached in a way that feels safe and manageable.

Also consider the person's life after the hostage crisis

By 2027, 50 years will have passed since the school hostage crisis. As a result, those affected have experienced many other significant life events since then. The hostage crisis may also have influenced or led to later life events (such as divorce due to trauma-related relational strain or job loss due to trauma-related health issues). These later life events may also have affected an individual's well-being. These later experiences may also have changed how former hostages view and make sense of the hostage crisis. It can therefore be helpful to consider this broader life context as well.

Appendix A – Support and care services for those affected

For individuals affected by traumatic events, such as the Bovensmilde school hostage crisis, a wide range of support and care services is now available. For some, this may involve specialized psychotrauma treatment, while others may benefit more from social work services or peer support. This appendix provides an overview of where those affected can seek help and outlines the support services and care arrangements available to them.

As of spring 2027, a dedicated support center will be available for those affected and their relatives. Until this support center becomes operational, anyone can contact ARQ's dedicated contact point at +31 (0)88 33 05 399, available on weekdays from 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The municipality of Midden-Drenthe and the Project Group Recognition and Reparation for Those Affected by the Bovensmilde Hostage Crisis (EOGB) organize frequent peer support meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity for participants to share experiences, listen to one another, and ask questions in a safe environment.

When signs of trauma-related symptoms are present, those affected can contact their general practitioner for a referral. This will initiate a diagnostic process to determine which symptoms are present and what type of support is most appropriate. In cases where PTSD is diagnosed, specialized treatment is available. The support center can also assist in identifying appropriate referral options.

In addition, Victim Support Netherlands (Slachtofferhulp Nederland) offers free legal, practical, and emotional support to victims.

Finally, the Social Support Act (Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning, Wmo) may also serve as a source of assistance. Through the Wmo, municipalities can provide support to people in their homes when they require it.

Appendix B – Terms and references

This appendix provides further explanations of the key terms used throughout this guide. It is followed by a list of the sources consulted.

Glossary

CBOG

An abbreviation for the Central Policy and Support Group for the Aftercare of Former Hostages (*Centrale Beleids- en Ondersteuningsgroep nazorg van ex-gevangenen*). The CBOG was established in 1976 and functioned as a government-appointed committee responsible for coordinating psychosocial support for former hostages.

Crisis team

When the hostage crisis began, the Ministry of Justice established a crisis team. The team consisted of Prime Minister Joop den Uyl, Minister of Justice Dries van Agt, and Minister of the Interior Wim de Gaay Fortman.

Dries van Agt

From 19 December 1977 to 4 November 1982, Dries van Agt served as Prime Minister of the Netherlands. During the school hostage crisis, Van Agt was the Minister of Justice. During the hostage crisis, the hostage takers appealed directly to him by forcing the children to shout his name from the school windows.

KNIL

An abbreviation for the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (*Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger*). Many Moluccans served in the KNIL and fought against Japanese forces. In 1951, Moluccan KNIL soldiers and their families were transferred to the Netherlands with the expectation that their stay would be temporary. However, they were discharged from military service and ended up living in isolated residential settlements.

Marines

A specialized unit of the Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, which is part of the Dutch Armed Forces. This unit specialized in counterterrorism operations and hostage rescue missions.

Riot Police

The riot police is a specialized police unit, responsible for preventing and responding to disturbances of public order. During the hostage crisis, the riot police was deployed.

Ministry of Justice

The government ministry responsible for the administration and enforcement of the rule of law. The Moluccan hostage takers appealed to the ministry because they held it responsible for the imprisonment of 21 Dutch citizens of Moluccan descent.

Moluccas

The term Moluccas refers to an archipelago that is now part of Indonesia and was formerly part of the Dutch East Indies, then under Dutch colonial rule.

Moluccan neighborhood

When the Moluccans arrived in the Netherlands, in the early part of the 1950-ies, they were housed in military barracks, former labor camps, the former Vught concentration camp, and the Westerbork transit camp. Beginning in 1960, the Dutch government started constructing Moluccan neighborhoods because living conditions in the so-called residential settlements were poor and the Moluccans' stay in the Netherlands was proving to last longer than originally anticipated. The Moluccan neighborhood in Bovensmilde was built in 1969.

Memorial

In 2013, two memorials were erected at the site of the former school. One was a mosaic bench created by those affected by the hostage crisis, while the other was a pedestal featuring a traditional Moluccan Tahuri and a Tifa.

PTSD

An abbreviation for posttraumatic stress disorder. Since 1980, PTSD has been an officially recognized diagnosis referring to the psychological consequences people may experience as a result of traumatic events.

RMS

An abbreviation for Republik Maluku Selatan (Republic of South Maluku). The RMS was proclaimed on 25 April 1950. It sought independence from Indonesia but was never recognized by the Indonesian government.

The De Punt train hijacking

On 23 May 1977, the same day as the school hostage crisis, eight armed men and one armed woman of Moluccan descent hijacked a train near De Punt and took 55 people hostage. They demanded an independent Republic of South Maluku and the release of 21 South Moluccan prisoners. After three weeks, marines ended the hijacking by force, resulting in the deaths of eight people (two hostages and six hijackers).

UWV

UWV is the abbreviation for the Employee Insurance Agency (*Uitvoeringsinstituut Werknemers-verzekeringen*). The UWV is a Dutch government agency responsible for administering benefits for people who are temporarily or permanently unable to work, such as unemployment benefits (WW), work disability benefits (WIA), and sickness benefits (Ziektewet). In addition, the UWV assists people in finding employment and is responsible for ensuring the proper implementation of the Dutch social security system.

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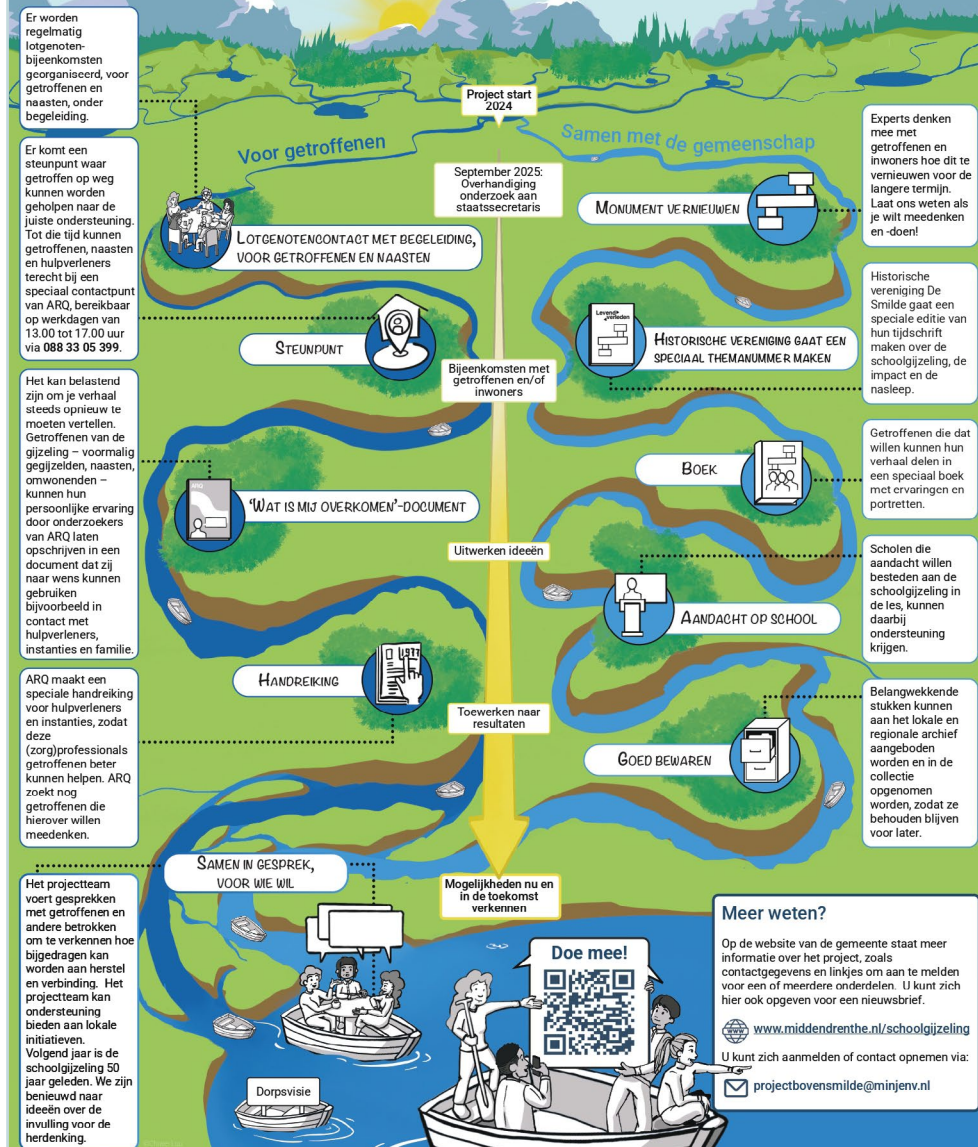
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Erkenning en ondersteuning van getroffen en inwoners Bovensmilde

Wat hebben we samen gedaan?

In mei 1977 werden leerlingen en leraren van de lagere school in Bovensmilde gegijzeld. In 2006 vragen oud-leerlingen hier aandacht voor. Het veld waar de school stond, wordt op initiatief van getroffen en inwoners ingericht en er komt een gedenksteen. In 2022 vragen andere oud-leerlingen aandacht voor de blijvende gevolgen

van de schoolgijzeling. Gemeente en ministeries gaan hiermee aan de slag. Er wordt onderzoek gedaan door traumaexperts van ARQ en er worden tal van gesprekken gevoerd met getroffen en inwoners van Bovensmilde. Op basis daarvan zijn we aan de slag gegaan met de volgende zaken:



Guide to the 1977 Bovensmilde School Hostage Crisis

Tools and context for healthcare professionals and (government) institutions on acknowledging and supporting those affected

On 23 May 1977, four hostage-takers forcibly took control of an elementary school in Bovensmilde. More than one hundred children and five teachers were held captive for several days. After the hostage crisis, there was little discussion within most families or the wider community about what had happened and how it had affected the former hostages and others involved. This contributed to what many of those affected describe as a long-lasting culture of silence surrounding the hostage crisis. At the time, many of those affected felt that they had received insufficient emotional support. Fifty years later a substantial proportion of those affected continue to struggle with the mental health consequences of the school hostage crisis, as well as a perceived lack of recognition for what happened to them and the inadequate care and support they received in its aftermath.

Meaningful and appropriate engagement with healthcare providers, other professionals, and government agencies can play an important role in supporting those affected. Yet many healthcare providers and other professionals are no longer familiar with the Bovensmilde school hostage crisis, its long-term consequences, or the historical and social sensitivities surrounding the events. This guide provides healthcare providers and other professionals with practical information and guidance to support those affected in a careful and considerate manner. Particular attention is given to recognition, interpersonal and trauma-informed communication, and a person-centered approach.

This guide was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and Security as part of the Recognition and Recovery Process for Those Affected by the Bovensmilde Hostage Crisis (EOGB). It was developed in close collaboration with those affected, healthcare professionals and other experts, and the EOGB Project group.