



## Support through a natural disaster

Australia is no stranger to natural disasters, e.g. bushfires, droughts, cyclones and floods. These events impact entire communities and the disruption to daily life can be significant. People may be forced to evacuate their homes and workplaces, and leave cherished possessions behind as they focus on survival and loved ones. It is common to experience a range of intense emotions following a traumatic event like a natural disaster. The immediate loss of control and threat to personal safety is frightening, can lead to severe and acute shock, distress, and anxiety. People who have faced potential loss, injury, or even death, from natural disasters will experience a range of feelings immediately, weeks and even months later. The memories and associated fear that a similar event will reoccur can be long lasting.

It's common to experience a range of intense and sometimes confusing emotions, such as: numbness/emptiness, anxiety, fear, sadness, guilt, regret, anger or relief.

These emotional responses are normal responses to an abnormal event.

### Self-help strategies

Traumatic events impact on people in different ways. You may experience sleeping difficulties, have difficulty concentrating or experience symptoms of anxiety. Be prepared for some disturbances. It may take a few days for the acute responses to pass.

There are some simple things you can do:

- Prepare yourself to be anxious or scared when you think about what happened.
- Acknowledge your emotions and share them with people you trust.
- Keep in touch with your friends, family and colleagues.
- Be patient with yourself; reassure yourself you can get through this.
- Keep to your normal routines as much as possible.
- Physical exercise is helpful, in addition to eating regular, healthy meals.
- Use deep breathing and relaxation techniques if you feel tense and anxious or to assist with sleep disturbances.
- Allow yourself some personal space and acknowledge that you have been through a difficult time.

### Avoid things that don't help

- Overuse of alcohol, coffee and other stimulants.
- Working to excess or keeping yourself so busy you have no time to relax and do the things you enjoy.
- Withdrawing and isolating yourself from others.
- Keeping your thoughts and feelings bottled up, instead of talking about what you are experiencing.
- Dwelling on negative thoughts.
- Making important life decisions during recovery from a traumatic event.





### Tips for family and friends

- Having your loved one or friend involved in a traumatic event can have an impact on you as well. It is often difficult to know how you can help. You can provide valuable support by just being there to listen with empathy and without judgment.
- Don't take it personally if they don't want to talk. Remind them you are there if they change their mind.
- Try to give them space and time to recover in their own way.
- Their reactions may be confusing to you, understand that it is a difficult time and acute reactions to a traumatic event may be powerful. It is unhelpful at these times to say things like; 'It could have been worse.' or "You are lucky".

You may, at some point following the event, wish to speak confidentially with a counsellor who will understand your emotional response, who will listen without judgment, offer information, and assist you with strategies to minimise the negative impact of the event.

Seeking counselling is not a sign of weakness. Counselling can help significantly in the recovery process following a traumatic event in your life.

Contact **AccessEAP on 1800 818 728** to book an appointment.

