

Support Through Natural Disasters

- Managers

Natural Disasters impact entire communities, including organisations, their employees and families. People may be forced to evacuate their homes, workplaces and leave cherished possessions behind as they turn their focus to survival. It is common to experience a range of intense emotions following a traumatic event like a natural disaster.

The immediate loss of control and personal safety is frightening and can lead to severe and acute shock, distress, and anxiety. People who have faced loss, injury, or even death from previous 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.

As a leader, here are some practical tips you can do to support your people:

- 1. Normalise reactions:** Accept that people will experience a range of emotions and that it is normal. Once the event is over, it doesn't mean people's feelings go away. Acknowledge their feelings and reassure people that their intense feelings are normal given the disaster.
- 2. Ask how you can help:** Ask if there's anything that you can do to assist employees or if there is anything they need? e.g. flexible hours, transport or belongings.
- 3. Do not catastrophise:** It is common to reflect on the "what ifs" or "what might have been" Do not speculate on how much worse it could have been. Avoid comparison of stories as each person has a right to their feelings.
- 4. Encourage people to talk** about their experience because keeping it inside isn't helpful - avoid reassurances such as "it could have been worse". It's common for people to want to escape their reality, they may deny or withdraw. They may need to delay their emotional response while focusing on survival or practical things, so check in regularly and gently.
- 5. Returning to work:** Having a sense of purpose and connection is essential to recovery and often work provides this, offer options such as flexible hours. The recovery process takes time, and there are often ups and downs, so plan for people to have setbacks. Each individual will be different and recover at their own pace.

As a leader, you play an important role and can directly support your people. Remind your people about their confidential EAP and wellbeing service. For further guidance, call our **Leader and Manager Support Hotline**. If you are in Australia please call on **1800 818 728** or if you are in **New Zealand**, please call us on **0800 327 669**.

